

Understanding Current Literacy Challenges



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Sherry St. Clair is the founder of Reflective Learning LLC, an educational consulting agency based in Kentucky. Her organization works with schools around the world, creating specialized training and coaching services for school administrators and educators. She holds a master's degree in Instructional Leadership, as well as a Rank I in Instructional Supervision.

Sherry has served as a Senior Consultant for the International Center for Leadership in Education and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. As an international consultant, Sherry draws from her rich experience at various levels of public education—teaching elementary school, being an administrator in a high school of 1,300 students, working as a state consultant, and creating and facilitating virtual courses. Sherry is a highly regarded national speaker and consultant, providing educational agencies with expertise in the areas of instructional leadership, effective classroom practices, classroom walkthroughs, effective use of data and guidance on how to create structures for successful classroom coaching. Coaching schools to best meet the needs of all students is Sherry's passion.

Sherry is a contributing author to Effective Instructional Strategies Volume 2 published by the International Center for Leadership in Education and 100 No-Nonsense Things that All Teachers Should Stop Doing. She has published numerous professional learning activity guides and facilitated webinar series focused on leadership and effective instructional practices. Additionally, Sherry developed virtual instructional workshops for the CTE Technical Assistance Center of New York. In partnership with the Successful Practices Network, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and The School Superintendent Association (AASA), Sherry has recently been a part of bringing innovative practices to scale. Her publication, Coaching Redefined: A Guide to Leading Meaningful Instructional Growth, was released in June of 2019. Her new book focused on instructional growth will be released later this year.

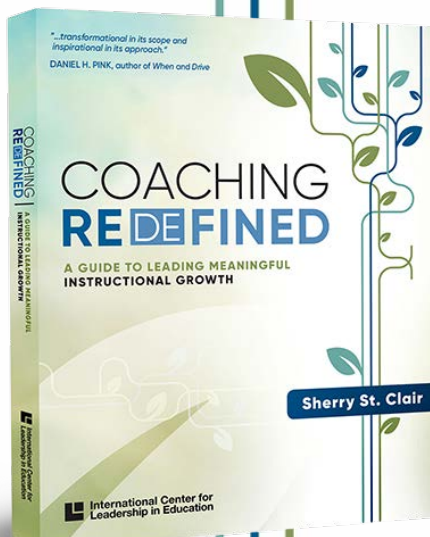
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Listening Tour Questions



Questions to ask teachers about themselves:

- What are your strengths as a teacher?
- In what ways would you like to grow professionally? What, if anything, has stood in the way of your professional growth and ability to meet goals?
- How can we improve learning for your students?
- How do you hear the voices of your students in your classroom?
- How do you know students are learning in your classroom?
- What has been the most meaningful professional learning experience you've had? Why was it so meaningful to you? How did it help you change instruction?
- Have you been involved in coaching before, and how did you come to get involved in it? What did you think of the experience? How do you feel about having a coach now? (This series of questions will require extra reassurance that the more honest teachers are in their answers, the more they will get out of their experience with you.)
- Is there anything else you feel I should know to help me serve you best as your coach?

Questions to ask teachers about school culture:

- What do you feel is the greatest strength of the school?
- Do you feel your school is growing, evolving, and improving?
- What aspect of the school needs to grow the most and why?
- How do you hear the voices of students in the school?
- How do you hear the voices of parents and the community in the school?
- Is equity important in your school? If so, how is it addressed?
- How do you feel the school prepares students for careers and college?
- How do you feel supported in your professional growth and development? Who or what is most supportive?
- How do you feel about the demands currently placed on you and your colleagues? Are they reasonable or do they feel impossible to meet? Please explain.
- Would you describe the school as one that sticks with a few initiatives or one that cycles through many initiatives? Please explain.
- What resources are you most grateful to have? What resources do you wish you had?

Listening Tour Questions

Continued from previous page

Questions to ask students about their learning:

- Do your classes feel hard to you? If they are hard, what makes them hard? If they are easy, what makes them easy?
- Do you know why you're learning what you're learning?
- Do you think what you are learning will be helpful to you in your future, while you're still in school, and after you've graduated?
- Do you feel that your school values and rewards academics or sports or both? Or something else?
- Are your learning successes celebrated? If so, how?
- When you are in a class where you are having fun, being challenged, and learning a lot, what about the class makes it so engaging?
- When you are bored in school, why are you bored?

Questions to ask students about school culture:

- What makes you most proud to be a student at this school?
- If you could change something about the school, what would it be?
- Do you think that the school tries to give the same opportunities to all different kinds of students? Why?
- When students have ideas, do you feel that the adults in your school are open to hearing and considering them?

Questions to ask parents/guardians about their child's learning:

- Is your child's learning rigorous, where rigor can be defined as requiring complex and deep modes of thinking (e.g., analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information; creating new ideas, concepts, solutions, etc.)? If yes, what makes it rigorous?
- How relevant is your child's learning to her future? Please explain.
- How is your child academically supported at school?
- Is your child engaged in school?
- Is your child learning interpersonal/social-emotional skills and today's career skills? If yes, how are these skills taught, and which ones are taught?

Listening Tour Questions

Continued from previous page

Questions to ask parents/guardians about school culture:

- Do you feel that your voice and input are wanted, solicited, valued, and heard at the school, and how?
- Can you think of a time something at the school was changed because of parent feedback?
- Would you describe the school as one that is eager and open to changing instruction and programs as college, career, and technology demands change?
- How does the school communicate with you, and how often? What are they communicating? Are there ways they could communicate more effectively with you?
- Does the school give equal opportunity to all students? Does the school seem to value equity? If not, what makes you say this?
- Does the school show it cares about your child's emotional well-being? If yes, how do they show this?
- Do you feel the school values and rewards academics? Sports? Something else? How, and how often?
- What makes you most proud to send your child to this school?
- If you could improve one thing about the school, what would it be?
- Is there anything else you feel is important for me to know?

Questions to ask community members about the school:

- In your experience, are school graduates prepared for careers?
- Do graduates show the necessary academic and technical skills for success in careers? If yes, how?
- Do graduates possess the interpersonal/social-emotional and professional skills for success in careers? If not, what are they lacking?
- Are current and past students polite and well behaved in the community? Do they show a sense of social responsibility?
- In general, do you feel confident handing over your community to the school's next generation of graduates? If so, why? If not, why not?
- In your experience, does school leadership show a sincere concern for the achievement and wellbeing of its students and their capacity to be productive members of your community?
- If you have ever tried to engage with school leadership to bring forth improvement and change, do you generally find them open to ideas and collaboration?

Most Valuable Career Skills by 2025

Per the annual World Economic Forum report, the most valuable career skills by 2025 will be the following 10 skills:

- 1. Analytical thinking and innovation:** In order to find creative solutions, you review new and possibly complicated information, examine that information to ensure it's factual, use reasoning skills to determine if the information follows a logical pattern and determine causes and effects.
- 2. Active learning and learning strategies:** Utilizing strategies that work best for you, active learning requires you to evaluate what you know, understand what you need to know and have the initiative to learn that information through various means.
- 3. Complex problem solving:** To solve complex problems requires being able to identify the problem, evaluate all pertinent information and factors, consider a range of possible solutions, think critically through different solution options and their potential outcomes, and then make a judgment as to which solution to select. A series of skills go into complex problem solving, including observation skills, analysis, creativity, innovative thinking, evaluation, perseverance, and resilience, to name some.
- 4. Critical thinking and analysis:** To think critically is to think deeply. Critical thinking requires that you first suspend judgment to evaluate all related factors and perspectives as objectively as possible. It entails taking time to think through what you might not be considering or yet seeing. Reason, logic, and judgment are all used to analyze and evaluate information to, ultimately, probe far beyond the surface of the matter at hand.
- 5. Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility:** Through self-management, you are able to develop coping mechanisms to overcome and adapt to challenges in a healthy manner. By strengthening the five pillars of resistance- self-awareness, mindfulness, self-care, positive relationship and purpose -you can be more emotionally, mentally and behaviorally flexible and adjust to both the internal and external demands.

6. **Creativity, originality and initiative:** To be creative is to imagine something new from the information and data available. Creativity emerges from a capacity to view the world differently, connect seemingly disconnected dots, and unearth unseen patterns to conceive something new. To be creative is to apply critical thinking and empathy to imagine experiences, ideas, and things from other perspectives. With your creative skills, you take the initiative to make something original.
7. **Leadership and social influence:** Through the use of leadership skills-trustworthiness, reliability, organization skills, interpersonal and social skills- you are able to maximize the efforts of those around you towards the accomplishment of a common goal.
8. **Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation:** In a logical way, you are able to understand the problem and move from a hypothesis to a conclusion. You use information to solve complex problems and generate logical and potential solutions.
9. **Technology, design and programming:** Utilizing a combination of text, graphics and style elements, you are able to logically and purposefully create new technologies.
10. **Technology use, monitoring, and control:** technologies Remotely, you are able to monitor and manage technology to ensure it is working properly at all times. If it is not working properly, you are able to utilize problem-solving skills in order to fix it.

Visible Learning^{plus} 250+ Influences on Student Achievement

STUDENT	ES
Prior knowledge and background	
Field independence	0.68
Non-standard dialect use	-0.29
Piagetian programs	1.28
Prior ability	0.94
Prior achievement	0.55
Relating creativity to achievement	0.40
Relations of high school to university achievement	0.60
Relations of high school achievement to career performance	0.38
Self-reported grades	1.33
Working memory strength	0.57
Beliefs, attitudes and dispositions	
Attitude to content domains	0.35
Concentration/persistence/ engagement	0.56
Grit/incremental vs. entity thinking	0.25
Mindfulness	0.29
Morning vs. evening	0.12
Perceived task value	0.46
Positive ethnic self-identity	0.12
Positive self-concept	0.41
Self-efficacy	0.92
Stereotype threat	0.33
Student personality attributes	0.26
Motivational approach, orientation	
Achieving motivation and approach	0.44
Boredom	-0.49
Deep motivation and approach	0.69
Depression	-0.36
Lack of stress	0.17
Mastery goals	0.06
Motivation	0.42
Performance goals	-0.01
Reducing anxiety	0.42
Surface motivation and approach	-0.11
Physical influences	
ADHD	-0.90
ADHD – treatment with drugs	0.32
Breastfeeding	0.04
Deafness	-0.61
Exercise/relaxation	0.26
Gender on achievement	0.08
Lack of illness	0.26
Lack of sleep	-0.05
Full compared to pre-term/low birth weight	0.57
Relative age within a class	0.45

CURRICULA	ES
Reading, writing and the arts	
Comprehensive instructional programs for teachers	0.72
Comprehension programs	0.47
Drama/arts programs	0.38
Exposure to reading	0.43
Music programs	0.37
Phonics instruction	0.70
Repeated reading programs	0.75
Second/third chance programs	0.53
Sentence combining programs	0.15
Spelling programs	0.58
Visual-perception programs	0.55
Vocabulary programs	0.62
Whole language approach	0.06
Writing programs	0.45
Math and sciences	
Manipulative materials on math	0.30
Mathematics programs	0.59
Science programs	0.48
Use of calculators	0.27
Other curricula programs	
Bilingual programs	0.36
Career interventions	0.38
Chess instruction	0.34
Conceptual change programs	0.99
Creativity programs	0.62
Diversity courses	0.09
Extra-curricula programs	0.20
Integrated curricula programs	0.47
Juvenile delinquent programs	0.12
Motivation/character programs	0.34
Outdoor/adventure programs	0.43
Perceptual-motor programs	0.08
Play programs	0.50
Social skills programs	0.39
Tactile stimulation programs	0.58

HOME	ES
Family structure	
Adopted vs non-adopted care	0.25
Engaged vs disengaged fathers	0.20
Intact (two-parent) families	0.23
Other family structure	0.16
Home environment	
Corporal punishment in the home	-0.33
Early years' interventions	0.44
Home visiting	0.29
Moving between schools	-0.34
Parental autonomy support	0.15
Parental involvement	0.50
Parental military deployment	-0.16
Positive family/home dynamics	0.52
Television	-0.18
Family resources	
Family on welfare/state aid	-0.12
Non-immigrant background	0.01
Parental employment	0.03
Socio-economic status	0.52

SCHOOL	ES
Leadership	
Collective teacher efficacy	1.57
Principals/school leaders	0.32
School climate	0.32
School resourcing	
External accountability systems	0.31
Finances	0.21
Types of school	
Charter schools	0.09
Religious schools	0.24
Single-sex schools	0.08
Summer school	0.23
Summer vacation effect	-0.02
School compositional effects	
College halls of residence	0.05
Desegregation	0.28
Diverse student body	0.10
Middle schools' interventions	0.08
Out-of-school curricula experiences	0.26
School choice programs	0.12
School size (600-900 students at secondary)	0.43
Other school factors	
Counseling effects	0.35
Generalized school effects	0.48
Modifying school calendars/timetables	0.09
Pre-school programs	0.28
Suspension/expelling students	-0.20

The Visible Learning research synthesises findings from **1,400** meta-analyses of **80,000** studies involving **300** million students, into what works best in education.

Key for rating

- Potential to considerably accelerate student achievement
- Potential to accelerate student achievement
- Likely to have positive impact on student achievement
- Likely to have small positive impact on student achievement
- Likely to have a negative impact on student achievement

ES Effect size calculated using Cohen's *d*



Visible Learning^{plus} 250+ Influences on Student Achievement

CLASSROOM	ES
Classroom composition effects	
Detracking	0.09
Mainstreaming/inclusion	0.27
Multi-grade/age classes	0.04
Open vs. traditional classrooms	0.01
Reducing class size	0.21
Retention (holding students back)	-0.32
Small group learning	0.47
Tracking/streaming	0.12
Within class grouping	0.18
School curricula for gifted students	
Ability grouping for gifted students	0.30
Acceleration programs	0.68
Enrichment programs	0.53
Classroom influences	
Background music	0.10
Behavioral intervention programs	0.62
Classroom management	0.35
Cognitive behavioral programs	0.29
Decreasing disruptive behavior	0.34
Mentoring	0.12
Positive peer influences	0.53
Strong classroom cohesion	0.44
Students feeling disliked	-0.19

TEACHER	ES
Teacher attributes	
Average teacher effects	0.32
Teacher clarity	0.75
Teacher credibility	0.90
Teacher estimates of achievement	1.29
Teacher expectations	0.43
Teacher personality attributes	0.23
Teacher performance pay	0.05
Teacher verbal ability	0.22
Teacher-student interactions	
Student rating of quality of teaching	0.50
Teachers not labeling students	0.61
Teacher-student relationships	0.52
Teacher education	
Initial teacher training programs	0.12
Micro-teaching/video review of lessons	0.88
Professional development programs	0.41
Teacher subject matter knowledge	0.11

TEACHING: Focus on student learning strategies	ES
Strategies emphasizing student meta-cognitive/self-regulated learning	
Elaboration and organization	0.75
Elaborative interrogation	0.42
Evaluation and reflection	0.75
Meta-cognitive strategies	0.60
Help seeking	0.72
Self-regulation strategies	0.52
Self-verbalization and self-questioning	0.55
Strategy monitoring	0.58
Transfer strategies	0.86
Student-focused interventions	
Aptitude/treatment interactions	0.19
Individualized instruction	0.23
Matching style of learning	0.31
Student-centered teaching	0.36
Student control over learning	0.02
Strategies emphasizing student perspectives in learning	
Peer tutoring	0.53
Volunteer tutors	0.26
Learning strategies	
Deliberate practice	0.79
Effort	0.77
Imagery	0.45
Interleaved practice	0.21
Mnemonics	0.76
Note taking	0.50
Outlining and transforming	0.66
Practice testing	0.54
Record keeping	0.52
Rehearsal and memorization	0.73
Spaced vs. mass practice	0.60
Strategy to integrate with prior knowledge	0.93
Study skills	0.46
Summarization	0.79
Teaching test taking and coaching	0.30
Time on task	0.49
Underlining and highlighting	0.50

TEACHING: Focus on teaching/instructional strategies	ES
Strategies emphasizing learning intentions	
Appropriately challenging goals	0.59
Behavioral organizers	0.42
Clear goal intentions	0.48
Cognitive task analysis	1.29
Concept mapping	0.64
Goal commitment	0.40
Learning goals vs. no goals	0.68
Learning hierarchies-based approach	0.19
Planning and prediction	0.76
Setting standards for self-judgement	0.62
Strategies emphasizing success criteria	
Mastery learning	0.57
Worked examples	0.37
Strategies emphasizing feedback	
Classroom discussion	0.82
Different types of testing	0.12
Feedback	0.70
Providing formative evaluation	0.48
Questioning	0.48
Response to intervention	1.29
Teaching/instructional strategies	
Adjunct aids	0.32
Collaborative learning	0.34
Competitive vs. individualistic learning	0.24
Cooperative learning	0.40
Cooperative vs. competitive learning	0.53
Cooperative vs. individualistic learning	0.55
Direct instruction	0.60
Discovery-based teaching	0.21
Explicit teaching strategies	0.57
Humor	0.04
Inductive teaching	0.44
Inquiry-based teaching	0.40
Jigsaw method	1.20
Philosophy in schools	0.43
Problem-based learning	0.26
Problem-solving teaching	0.68
Reciprocal teaching	0.74
Scaffolding	0.82
Teaching communication skills and strategies	0.43

TEACHING: Focus on implementation method	ES
Implementations using technologies	
Clickers	0.22
Gaming/simulations	0.35
Information communications technology (ICT)	0.47
Intelligent tutoring systems	0.48
Interactive video methods	0.54
Mobile phones	0.37
One-on-one laptops	0.16
Online and digital tools	0.29
Programmed instruction	0.23
Technology in distance education	0.01
Technology in mathematics	0.33
Technology in other subjects	0.55
Technology in reading/literacy	0.29
Technology in science	0.23
Technology in small groups	0.21
Technology in writing	0.42
Technology with college students	0.42
Technology with elementary students	0.44
Technology with high school students	0.30
Technology with learning needs students	0.57
Use of PowerPoint	0.26
Visual/audio-visual methods	0.22
Web-based learning	0.18
Implementations using out-of-school learning	
After-school programs	0.40
Distance education	0.13
Home-school programs	0.16
Homework	0.29
Service learning	0.58
Implementations that emphasize school-wide teaching strategies	
Co- or team teaching	0.19
Interventions for students with learning needs	0.77
Student support programs – college	0.21
Teaching creative thinking	0.34
Whole-school improvement programs	0.28

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