2012 Chancellor's Principal Conference
Session: Supporting Teacher Development Using Danielson's Framework for Teaching
Office of Teacher Effectiveness, Division of Talent, Labor & Innovation

Vignette #1: Co-observation with an outsider to strengthen school leader practice

Strategy: Co-observe classroom instruction with an outside observer to increase skill and accuracy in using the Danielson *Framework* and to identify "blind spots"—things an outsider may bring into focus that may be overlooked by "insiders."

Background: High School Y is a large, comprehensive high school serving 2,500 students in grades 9-12. Its population is comprised of 13% black, 25% Hispanic, 52% white, 7% Asian, and 1% other students. 6% of its students are English language learners, and 18% are students with disabilities.

Three years ago, HS Y implemented a school-wide writing program to support independent writing such as note-taking, outlining, using conjunctions, and citing sources. Since implementing this program, the school has seen gains in writing across its student population, with greater gains for English language learners and students with disabilities. The principal and AP at the center of this vignette are both committed to this writing program; they attribute their gains in student outcomes to it and see it as a crucial tool in successful Common Core implementation.

The dilemma: In November, the principal of HS Y showed a video to her entire cabinet and asked them to identify the levels of practice they observed in the priority competencies[1] of the Danielson *Framework.* She found that despite having been through the same professional development on the *Framework*, they were not in agreement with each other; many of them also deviated from the master score that had accompanied the video she used.[2] The principal asked her Talent Coach[3] to help ensure that her administrative team had a shared understanding of the *Framework* so they could begin to develop that understanding with their teaching staff as well.

Using co-observation to build common understandings and see practice anew: As part of the school's participation in the 2011-12 Talent Management Pilot, the principal and APs were expected to observe each teacher in the school at least six times during the course of the year and to conduct regular co-observations of teachers together. The Talent Coach would join these sessions to facilitate a discussion of the evidence the school leaders collected and the level of performance they had observed. The coach would also help them consider what feedback and next steps they might discuss with the teacher who was observed, as well as the next steps for the observers.

During one such series of observations in the social studies department, the school-based observers (the principal and two APs) noted some of the teacher's strong practice in aspects of Domain 3: Instruction, in part because of the solid implementation of the writing program components they had seen in the lesson. The

[1] The 2011-12 priority competencies from Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* were 1e—Designing Coherent Instruction, 2b—Establishing a Culture for Learning, 2d—Managing Student Behavior, 3b—Questioning and Discussion Techniques, 3c—Engaging Students in Learning, and 3d—Using Assessment in Instruction.
[2] See "Teacher Effectiveness Resources in ARIS Learn" in the conference resources packet to find similar resources.
[3] Schools in the 2011-12 Talent Management Pilot were provided with a Talent Coach to support their implementation of the Teacher Effectiveness model. Other schools have had network achievement coaches, mentors, principals from other schools or other partners serve as outside co-observers.

school-based team provided evidence that the teacher used the valued writing program to argue that the teacher's practice was effective in cognitively engaging students and using good questioning and discussion techniques. During the debrief, one of the APs began to reflect more on the quality of discussion by calling to the group's attention some evidence that most conversation in the classroom was not really discussion but teacher-to-student exchanges, with students providing very brief answers. The coach then asked the school-based observers to identify how the teacher's use of specific strategies had led to deeper cognitive engagement for students. The group realized that while the writing program was helping students develop important skills, it wasn't addressing everything students needed—the group had allowed the effective use of the program to stand in for effective practice more broadly. The administration had to help teachers pose questions that cognitively challenged students and encouraged students to respond to each other and to build on each other's thinking. As they discussed next steps for the teacher whom they had observed, they also identified the next steps for the social studies department as a whole. They discussed possible strategies and agreed that introducing Accountable Talk sentence stems could move the practice they had just observed forward and would benefit students in all social studies classes.

Taking action: At the next social studies departmental professional development session, the AP shared her realization about the need to focus more on rigor and introduced her staff to Accountable Talk strategies. She asked them to select the five stems that were most aligned with the writing program already underway. Teachers were also given time to plan how they would introduce these stems to students and sustain using them in their classroom practice.

Challenges: During teacher observations, the AP began listening not only for the stems, but also for greater student-to-student discussion and meaningful accountable talk. She observed that use of the stems was uneven from class to class. In some cases, she heard students using stems in their partner conversations and in making connections to their classmates' contributions to class discussion. In other classes, she found that teachers weren't using them at all. In her follow-up discussions with these teachers, she learned that some were focused on covering their content and felt that the Accountable Talk stems were too time-consuming. Others expressed frustration with the *Framework* and the number of initiatives they were expected to incorporate simultaneously.

The AP met individually with the teachers who hadn't used the stems and acknowledged that they were being asked to take on a lot more this year, but reminded them that it was going to make a difference for their students. She also looked at their curriculum and asked them to identify the skills their students struggled with. Based on these conversations, the AP and teachers selected one or two of the stems that were most relevant to each teacher's context that they would work on implementing.

Growth and impact: Through leveraging both the instructional expertise and the outsider vantage point the coach brought, the leadership of HS Y was able to surface gaps in teacher practice, in part through gaining a deeper awareness of their own blind spots. They were able to use that insight to inform the professional development they provided and the expectations they established for their teachers. Cycles of observation helped the AP follow up on professional development and provide feedback to teachers more consistently.

In follow-up co-observations, both the AP and the coach have noted that students have increased their use of Accountable Talk across the department, in both special education and general education classes. In April, the cabinet viewed another video together and was in agreement with the master score 65% of the time, as opposed to 40% in the fall. Additionally, the cumulative observation data from the social studies department indicates that teacher practice is gradually improving, with several teachers more consistently demonstrating effective practice in instruction.

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Vignette #2: One high-leverage focal point drives the work forward

Strategy: Identify one high-leverage "chiropractic" change that aligns multiple initiatives (like vertebrae along the spine), so that the greatest movement is possible.

Background: High School A serves over 400 students in grades 9-12. The student population is comprised of 85% black, 12% Hispanic, 1% white, and 1% Asian students. 4% of students are English language learners, and 13% are students with disabilities.

The dilemma: As HS A prepared to implement the citywide instructional expectations for 2011-2012, they sought a way to focus their work so that they could implement these initiatives well to advance student learning. They were concerned that although Regents pass rates were increasing, only 10% of their students had earned a high enough grade on the English Regents to be exempt from remedial coursework at CUNY. The principal thought that implementing a series of initiatives would create confusion and not yield the results her students needed. She wanted to focus her staff on one change that would not only improve instructional practice and increase student outcomes, but would also help them implement the Danielson *Framework for Teaching,* address the Common Core standards and help their students become college and career ready.

Identifying a high-leverage focus: To decide what the big change was going to be, the leadership team examined a range of data:

- **Prior Quality Reviews—**Feedback in the school's 2010-11 QR report focused on the need for the school to develop practices that would "deepen student-driven reflection and produce more examples of evidence of meta-cognition."
- **Progress Reports and Regents results—**These results indicated that the school needed to move beyond a focus on basic skills and ensure that students could meet a more ambitious goal than merely passing state assessments.
- **Student work—**Inquiry work in the fall indicated that a key gap that needed to be addressed was in making arguments and supporting them with evidence.
- **Classroom observations—**As the school leadership team conducted observations of classroom practice using the Danielson *Framework*, they observed that Questioning and Discussion Techniques was one of the weakest areas of practice across the school.
- **Feedback from teachers—**In a faculty conference, teachers told the leadership team that they believed students should question everything (a school-wide goal), but did not know how to achieve this in their classrooms.

Once gaps in student work and teacher practice were identified, the leadership team and teachers agreed that increasing the cognitive demand of the questions they posed to students and encouraging students to raise questions themselves would help improve students' ability to develop and defend arguments. The staff and administration agreed that their school-wide focus would be on the Danielson competency Questioning and Discussion Techniques (3b), which the school saw as a key lever to improve students' ability to make and defend arguments, raise the overall rigor of instruction and support the Common Core units they were developing as part of the citywide instructional expectations.

Taking action: In response to identified needs, the principal researched strategies that would help both teachers and students ask better questions. At their November staff meeting, she introduced a strategy called the *Questioning Formulation Technique (QFT),* which teaches students to pose their own questions to support their learning of content. The leadership team, with input from teachers, also established a set of expectations for all teachers:

- Questions must be written into lesson plans;
- Teachers must use essential questions to focus units and lessons;
- Follow-up questions are crucial to good discussion, so they must be a focus for feedback; and
- Observations must capture the questions students are asking; these questions provide insight into the level of rigor in the lesson as well as the level of student engagement. They also serve as an indicator of how well the teacher is using QFT.

Challenges: One significant challenge was keeping the focus and momentum on questioning. Some teachers thought they did ask good questions and facilitated good discussion and resisted making the suggested changes, particularly trying the new strategy. Others became discouraged when they didn't see immediate results in their observation feedback. In addition, observers found it difficult to reinforce the strategy and the shared expectations because the QFT strategy was not an everyday practice and they still needed to address other competencies. Another dilemma they faced was that the *Framework* didn't name the practices they were highlighting explicitly, which posed some difficulties in debrief conversations and in interpreting practice, especially when teachers pushed back on the interpretation of the rubric.

To make the connections clearer, they dedicated PD time to mapping their expectations and QFT to the *Framework*. They identified the indicators on the rubric for 3b that were addressed by QFT, the use of Essential Questions and the focus on follow-up questions. This helped teachers and administrators develop a common understanding of what effective teaching practice was in their school and made their school-wide initiative and goals fit coherently with their work in the Talent Management Pilot. It also helped teachers see how to get to "Highly Effective" through the use of QFT, helping to reduce some frustration and resistance. Taking time to link professional expectations to the rubric and to clarify what effective practice meant helped recharge teachers and administrators as they hit the mid-year. The leadership team reinforced this work by making these connections explicit, using low-inference observations to inform their feedback and referencing the rubric and their mapping when they gave feedback to teachers.

Growth: The school began this initiative with two goals: to strengthen teacher practice in Questioning and Discussion Techniques and to improve student skills in developing arguments. There is evidence that they are making progress in both areas. As part of the Talent Management Pilot, HS A tracks teacher observations by competency. They have noted that the average score across the staff on Questioning and Discussion Techniques has increased considerably, with all teachers showing gains and 15% of teachers who began as "Developing" now regularly demonstrating "Effective" practice on 3b. Though they do not yet have summative data on how their students are doing in response to improved teacher practice, teachers report that they are seeing improvement in student development of argument between the baseline assessment they analyzed in the fall and their last round of analysis of student work in May. They hope to see increased scores on the essay portions of the US, Global and English Regents exams this June.

Vignette #3: Making Time for Observations and Feedback[4]

Strategy: Organize your own time so that you can prioritize observing and providing feedback to teachers as an essential element of your weekly schedule.

Background: This middle school serves 372 students and is comprised of 29% black, 69% Hispanic, 1% white, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 23% English language learners, and 21% students with disabilities.

The dilemma: The principal featured in this vignette sought to build a feedback-rich culture in which administrators are instructional leaders who share accountability with teachers for student achievement. Though the principal wants her administrators to be instructional leaders, she found that the demands on school administrators are great and that it was very difficult for them to consistently get into classrooms and take time to provide high-quality feedback to their teachers. Below are excerpts from an interview explaining how this principal found the time for her administrative team to be instructional leaders.

Q: How do you manage your schedule to find time to observe classroom instruction?

A: As a leadership team, it has always been our goal to be in classrooms regularly. However, this year, we made an organizational shift that has helped us prioritize classroom observations. Every administrator now schedules at least two coaching days (sometimes three) and three office days in their weekly calendars. We have found that by using our calendars to schedule coaching days we are more able to ensure uninterrupted time for instructional coaching. On a coaching day, we identify the teachers we plan to visit and spend almost the entire day outside of the office. On those days, we also schedule when we will do any kind of necessary paperwork such as checking in with the secretary or checking e-mail, but the rest of the day is spent observing teachers or providing feedback to teachers, whether it is written feedback or an oral follow-up from a prior visit to their classroom.

On office days, we map out our priorities to ensure we get everything done that would normally sneak into our coaching days. We are trying to be strategic about our "to do" lists—prioritizing what is most important and making sure we get that done. On our office days, we still also schedule teacher meetings to discuss classroom observations. In other words, we are in our offices that day, but we have instructional conversations as well as doing the work that may hinder our coaching days.

One tactic I use on my coaching days is I set an "out of office" reply on my email that states, "I will be checking email at 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.," so that people know that I will get back to them, but I am not available at that moment. Each month we also rotate who provides feedback to non-certificated staff. For example, this month, one AP is providing feedback to paraprofessionals, one AP is providing feedback to enrichment teachers, and I am providing feedback to office staff. This way all staff is receiving consistent feedback throughout the year from each person in our leadership cabinet (administrators).

[4] This vignette is excerpted from a resource in ARIS Learn on Providing Teacher Feedback.

Q: What does your observation schedule look like?

A: In our school, we are organized by department and by grade. Each administrator has a department and grade that he/she is in charge of; some have two. I ask my assistant principals to prioritize their classroom visits with their departments over their grades so that they can understand the instructional needs of the department. Then, secondarily, the APs will visit classrooms and provide feedback to teachers on their grade-level team. As the principal, my responsibility is to observe and coach teachers who are up for tenure, at-risk teachers that may have a U-rating from the year before and brand-new teachers.

Administrators generally visit a classroom for 10-20 minutes, and we try to be very strategic about when we visit the classroom. For example, if the teacher is working on developing his/her "share-out" at the end of a lesson, then I would visit at the end of class. We provide written or oral feedback to teachers within 24 hours of the observation.

We also have cycles where we do formal observations. This year, we are using a new format for our formal observation template, based on the Charlotte Danielson rubric, which is much quicker to use. I am able to complete a formal observation cycle (pre-observation, observation and post-observation meeting) and have feedback to the teacher within a week of his/her pre-observation meeting. Using this new format, we expect to complete at least four formal observations for each teacher this year.

Although this is not a classroom observation, we also do unit reviews with teachers. Teachers meet with their administrative contacts before starting each unit. We review their units with them and coach the teachers to apply key questions about instructional design to their unit plans. This provides an opportunity to "observe" teachers' planning and preparation.

Impact: Through making classroom observation and follow-up with teachers a priority, this leadership team has been able to raise the level of instruction in their school. The time this team commits to observing and talking with teachers expresses how much they value the work teachers do. These frequent and ongoing conversations with teachers have also helped foster a professional learning community amongst the staff and a school-wide culture committed to learning.

Vignette #4: Building a Common Understanding of What High-quality Teaching Looks Like

Strategy: Build a shared understanding through the use of teacher-directed inter-visitation.

Background: PS B serves 284 students in grades K-5. The school population is comprised of 75% black, 25% Latino and 1% Asian students. 5% of students are English language learners, and 10% are students with disabilities. The principal profiled is a new principal.

The dilemma: At the beginning of this school year, the principal asked her teachers to take an optional self-assessment[5] in ARIS Learn to inform the school's conversation on teacher practice. She noticed that many of her teachers assessed their own practice to be weaker in some areas than she believed it to be, and stronger in other areas than she believed it to be.[6] When she started her frequent informal observations, she realized that teachers' self-assessments were not always aligned to the instructional practices she saw in classrooms. During the follow-up feedback sessions, some teachers were concerned by the principal's feedback that their practice was weaker in particular competencies than the teachers had perceived it to be. They felt that they were good teachers, had always been told they were good teachers, and were suspicious of a new principal and new system that suggested otherwise. She needed to find a way to engage teachers in conversations to improve practice while easing defensiveness and resistance.

Examining the problem and identifying solutions: The principal needed to find a way to start a meaningful dialogue about teaching practice with her staff. The initial introduction to frequent cycles of observation had not gone well. Even though the observations and feedback were formative and were not going to be used in evaluation, the conversations about teacher practice were still difficult and teachers were now anxious about her entering their classrooms. The teachers were not accustomed to targeted and evidence-based feedback and were feeling vulnerable. The principal needed to change the tone and feel of these observations and needed to work collaboratively with her teachers to develop a shared understanding of good practice. She thought that if teachers felt they were co-constructors and co-developers of school-wide systems, then they would use the *Framework* as a professional development tool, feel less threatened, and be more willing to work with her to improve practice across the school. She thought that having teachers observe each other through inter-visitations might be the right entry point and made this proposal at one of their weekly PD sessions.

Challenges: The proposal that teachers observe each other received a mixed response from the staff. Some teachers were uncomfortable with the prospect that their supervisor would be observing them more than they had in the past and bristled at the thought of still more observations, even from peers. They also pointed out that they didn't have time because grade teams had the same schedules, and they needed their professional periods for planning. The principal realized that she needed to create a way to examine teacher practice as a community without it seeming threatening. She also needed to support this process without taking precious planning and preparation time from them.

[5] See "Teacher Effectiveness Resources in ARIS Learn" in the Principal Conference resource guide for more information on accessing these tools.
[6] Principals cannot access an individual teacher's self-assessment unless the teacher chooses to share it. However, principals can view a composite of all of their teachers' self-assessments if more than five teachers have completed one.

Taking action: The principal developed a program that focused on examining the general level of practice in the school using Danielson's *Framework* without focusing on an individual teacher. She framed the program as a way to gather evidence of what good instruction looked like in their school, at the grade band level. Each participating teacher would observe a colleague at least once and be observed once. Observers would only collect evidence of what they saw and heard during the observation, with no interpretation (low-inference observations). They would review their evidence as a group and identify examples of good practice as well as areas where the team might need to do more work. To address challenges around time, she agreed to arrange coverages for participating teachers.

The K-2 teacher team was willing to try it and identified two days the following week when they agreed they would open their classrooms to peer observers. The principal arranged coverages for participating teachers to observe at least one lesson of a peer over the course of two days. On the third day, the principal facilitated a teacher debrief meeting with all the participating teachers. To guide the discussion, she developed a protocol that focused on the evidence they collected and where it aligned to the Danielson *Framework*. The protocol also insisted that when sharing evidence, participants use phrases like "the teacher" instead of names, to emphasize that the discussion was not about individual practice but about their collective work. In their debrief, teachers took turns sharing examples of low-inference evidence that they had collected for each competency. Then, they examined their collected examples against the rubric and noted that their practice did not always reach the level they wanted. They also noted practices that did align to more effective practice on the rubric. By the end of the session, the teachers concluded that Questioning and Discussion Techniques (3b) was an area where their practice was most consistently in need of improvement, regardless of grade level or content area. Teachers and the principal agreed that they needed more intensive work on this competency. The teachers also acknowledged that the inter-visitation experience had been very helpful and that they wanted to continue these cycles as part of their school-based professional development.

Based on the findings of the inter-visitations, the principal arranged for a network-led PD session focused on Questioning and Discussion Techniques. During this session, teachers examined a series of resources, including:

- A questioning techniques handout ("right here," "look deep" and "I wonder" questions);
- A "Questioning Techniques with Texts" template; and
- A Common Core overview on how to lead high-level, text-based discussions.

Teachers discussed what evidence for 3b these strategies would generate and began to plan how they would use them in their teaching. Following this session, the K-2 team participated in another round of inter-visitations, only this time they focused exclusively on Questioning and Discussion Techniques (3b). They co-created a note-taking template on 3b with the following categories:

- "Students initiate higher-order questions";
- "Students extend the discussion"; and
- "Students invite comments from their classmates."

Once the inter-visitations were conducted, the teachers met the following day to debrief using the protocol they had used in the first session. Two teachers facilitated this meeting without administrative oversight and met with the principal afterward to discuss what they had learned and what they felt was the next step.

Growth and impact: The purpose of the inter-visitation program was to help teachers thoughtfully examine practice and to build a common understanding of the *Framework*. The staff made significant progress in this area. They also were able to move away from resistance and resentment toward more collaborative ownership of teacher practice and a deeper and shared understanding of the *Framework*.