

Looking Collaboratively at Student Work

“To be a teacher in the right sense is to be a learner. Instruction begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner, put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he understands and in the way he understands it.” - Soren Kierkegaard

1. What is it?

Looking Collaboratively at Student Work is a structured conversation where teachers use student work as a vehicle for learning and problem solving. During regular meetings, teachers use a protocol or structure to efficiently focus the discussion on the qualities of the student work. First considering what the work reveals about the student and the issues he/she cares about and then second to reflect on the relationship between the teacher’s goals and the student perspective. The process enables participants to collaboratively share and develop new ideas about the child as a learner, the learning environment, curriculum, and teaching. The conversation usually takes between 30 minutes and 60 minutes. There are four roles in the conversation: Facilitator, Presenting Educator, Documenter, and Participant. Roles rotate for each meeting so that all teachers take turns in each role. The last step of the conversation is for each person in the group to state what they learned from the conversation or what their next action step will be. Unlike other meetings and professional development that may or may not be relevant to a teacher’s current practice, the expectation for Looking Collaboratively at Student Work is that every teacher will benefit from this conversation every time.

Goals for the short thoughtful conversation might be:

- understand how students are developing,
- see the results of instruction,
- determine needed curriculum revisions,
- develop useful assessments (sometimes common assessments),
- determine teacher responses to student diversity (including instructional supports and extensions)
- plan ways to help students increase the quality of their work, and/or
- organize teacher work to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of instruction, assessment, and curriculum.

All teacher teams (grade level, department, vertical, or other groupings) will benefit from looking collaboratively at student work on a regular basis.

2. Why is this important?

Looking at Student Work builds our capacity to improve student learning, strengthen instructional practices, and support professional growth. Teachers use classroom and other data to learn from and with each other through observations and reflective conversations. The process helps teachers to document observations, discussions and practices for continued reflection and planning.

Outcomes of consistently looking at student work:

- Confirms that instructional practices reflect school goals and outcomes
- Enables teachers to understand what students know and are able to do
- Provides a structure to align curriculum with the school’s learning goals and common core standards
- Offers data to assess academic growth over time
- Supports teachers in designing instructional practices to reach all students

3. What does this look like?

Looking Collaboratively at Student Work has Six Steps.

1. Getting Started

Facilitator opens the conversation and the Presenting Educator shares a question and related student work. *Presenting educator listens to the conversation until Step 5 without speaking or answering questions.*

2. Describing the Student Work

Participants literally describe what they see. By carefully “reading” the work, participants make visible the complexity without judgments.

3. Interpreting the Student Work

Participants take on the perspective of the student to think about what the student is working on. The child’s purpose, audience, thoughts, understandings, intellectual interests, strengths, struggles, and working process are considered. Children may be working on several problems/tasks in different ways.

4. Implications for Classroom Practice

Participants brainstorm potential next steps in response to the presenting educator’s question.

5. Interesting and Useful

Presenting educator shares what was interesting and useful from the conversation.

6. Reflections

All members of the group take turns in a circle describing what they learned from the conversation and/or their next step. The group reflects on the process considering accomplishments and pluses and wishes for future conversations. Plans for next time are confirmed by participants rotating roles and confirming a date for the next Looking Collaboratively at Student Work conversation.

This process is based on the *Collaborative Assessment Conference* that was developed in 1988 by Steve Seidel and colleagues at Harvard’s Project Zero to help teachers develop a deeper understanding of the student who created the work, of that student’s interests and strengths, and of the teaching/learning environment.

4. **What do supports and extensions look like to meet the needs of diverse learners?**

There are opportunities in each step of the Looking Collaboratively at Student Work conversation for teachers to develop common understandings and practices around differentiate instruction. The presenting educator might focus the conversation by posing a question related to supports and extensions. For example, he/she might bring two diverse pieces of student work and ask the question, "How can I accelerate both of these learners?" In the observations where teachers are describing what they see in the student work, participants look specifically for supports and extensions that students are using to complete the task. Learner needs and strengths may be uncovered when teachers take on the perspective of the student. During the brainstorm of implications for classroom practice, participants should consider the diversity of learners by including ideas about useful supports and extensions to increase the effectiveness of the task that generated the student work. Each teacher could decide to take away one idea about supports and extension that they will implement with students and share at the next meeting. So, the conversation may be focused on meeting diverse learner needs or participants may simply take a moment to note and think about what came up in the conversation that would assist them in providing supports and extensions for learners.

5. **More Resources:**

Web sites

Looking at Student Work. <http://www.lasw.org/>

Coalition of Essential Schools. *Looking Collaboratively at Student Work: An Essential Toolkit* <http://www.essentialschools.org/resources/60#7>

Books

Blythe, T., Allen, D. Powell, B. (1999). *Looking Together at Student Work: A Companion Guide to Assessing Student Learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Full text available through Google Books:

<http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3S5dNcYmTasC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=looking+at+student+work&ots=gM5s0NAEku&sig=M2BmZCkW3wPWTmVwGsjLi8WZEGM#v=onepage&q&f=false>

McDonald, J., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., McDonald, E. (2007). *The Power of Protocols: An Educator's Guide to Better Practice*, 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College.

Articles

Warren, J., Little, M., Curry, M. and Kafka, J. "Looking at Student Work for Teacher Learning, Teacher Community, and School Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 85, No. 3, November 2003, pp. 184-192.

http://www.nsrharmony.org/Warren_Little_et_al_2003.pdf

Dunne, D. W. (2000). *Teachers learn from looking together at student work*. *Education World* (on-line magazine). Retrieved July 30, 2006 from

<http://www4.uwm.edu/Org/mmp/PDFs/Bedford-Hollinger-Huinker-WTM06.pdf>

6. **Connections to the Quality Review Rubric:**

1.1 c) Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data so that individual and groups of students, including the lowest and highest achieving students, special education students, and English Language Learners are challenged and engaged.

1.2 a) Across classrooms teaching practices are aligned to the curriculum and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how student learn best that is informed by discussions at the team and school level.

2.2 a) Teams of teaches and individual teacher use or create assessments that offer a clear portrait of student mastery of the school's chosen key standards and curricula providing meaningful and actionable feedback on the effectiveness of classroom level, curricular, and instructional decisions.

2.2 c) Teams of teaches and individual teaches develop expertise in selecting and/or designing assessments to gather and analyze classroom level data (e.g. student work, diagnostic assessments, projects) to supplement summative and Periodic Assessment data, create a picture of individual students' strengths and areas of need, and differentiate instructional strategies.

3.2 a) Individual teachers and teacher teams use data to set annual and interim goals for groups of students for whom they are responsible (e.g. class, grade level, department, special needs students, English language learners)

3.2b) Individual teachers and teacher teams effectively and consistently analyze data to identify which students need additional supports and extensions, and set differentiated annual and interim learning goals for those students to accelerate their learning so all students are on a path to mastery of standards in the curriculum and fulfilling their potential

3.2 c) Team and classroom level goals have leveraged changes in classroom practice to accelerate student learning

4.2 b) Teacher teams systematically analyze student assessment data, student work, and key elements of teacher work, resulting in adjustments to curriculum, instruction, assessments and resource allocation to improve learning outcomes for students they share or on whom they are focused

5.2 a) School leaders and faculty have structures in place to regularly evaluate and adjust assessment and grading practices, with a focus on building alignment and coherence between what students need to know and be able to do, what is taught, and how teachers assess what students have learned; school leadership and targeted teams have begun planning to integrate the expectations of the evolving state standards into assessment practices