

Expanding the Work of Examining Student Work at Maria Teresa Mirabal

At MS 319, **Maria Teresa Mirabal Middle School**, the teacher leader team is using their second year as a team to build on the projects they began during their first year and expand the number of teachers participating. The investment of time and focus is leading to deeper collaboration and learning by both the teachers and the students.

Last year, **Johanny Valdez** and **Wyatt Knaster**, two math teachers who also took on teacher leader roles, expanded on the school's existing Student Learning Inquiry Process to examine student work with their Teacher Team Leader (TTL) **Rossana Bermudez**. The teacher leader team recognized the growth in their practices as a result of using this protocol and worked with **Principal Ysidro Abreu** to expand the protocol school-wide for the 2014-15 school year.

As Ms. Valdez explains, "Previously, we had conversations [about student work], but we created greater structure for our time through the Student Learning Inquiry Process protocol. At the end of the 2013-14 school year we shared the results of our work with Mr. Abreu, and he empowered our teacher teams to formalize the process and expand this work school-wide through our Monday study groups this year."

What does the Student Learning Inquiry Process Look Like at Maria Teresa Mirabal?

About Maria Teresa Mirabal Middle School

- **Number of Students: 608**
- **Grades Served: 6, 7, 8**
- **Teacher Incentive Fund school**
- **4 Peer Instructional Coaches**
- **4 Demonstrations Teachers**



Teacher Leaders Allison Fedele and Shannon Taylor analyze student work

Teacher leaders **Allison Fedele** and **Shannon Taylor** provided insight into what the Student Learning Inquiry Process Protocol looks like across the grade-level teams.

"The teachers are divided by grade level and subject area, and in those meetings they look at student work. We focus on one task or strategy and look at work from students at different levels of progress towards mastery." says Ms. Fedele.

Ms. Taylor adds, "We typically bring in portfolio tasks because we know that all the students have done that work. It's a common task, with a common objective – so we have something familiar to anchor to. Then we analyze the work to identify what the common misconceptions were and why the students may have struggled with that specific piece."

Examining and discussing student work is one element of the Student Learning Inquiry Process – the teachers use that data to co-plan mini-lessons and explore new strategies to address the underlying misconceptions that are evident in their students' work.

Ms. Fedele tracks the data across grades and content areas by compiling the notes from each grade level team. This also includes online links to the mini-lessons developed by the team and student work samples from the beginning of the inquiry and after re-teaching the targeted skill. The work is available to the teams through a shared folder and they post their (anonymized) findings on a bulletin board, "Teachers spend a lot of time doing this and we want to showcase the work that our students have done. It's good for our students to see that we take their work into consideration, we reflect about what we need to reteach."

What is the benefit of building a protocol?

As Ms. Fedele explains, closely analyzing student work with colleagues can have a profound impact on teaching and learning: "With my own students, I will sometimes say, 'I think I know what they are getting at... I will infer what they are trying to say.' When Shannon looks at that student's work she has a fresh set of eyes – she is more objective and has new ideas to consider. I may think I know what a student is trying to say, but when someone else looks at their writing – those connections aren't

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evident. So it makes me focus more on finding those elements objectively, not what I think a student will do, but how I know they have met the task's objective."

The teacher leaders agree that using a protocol keeps them all on track: "Without it, we can start to overanalyze and drift away from the objective." Both Mr. Knaster and Ms. Taylor reinforced that using the Student Learning Inquiry Process provides the teams with a common vision.

"The protocol gives us that common language – what is it that we are looking for? What is the indicator that the students met the objective?" says Ms. Taylor. "Before we even begin to analyze the work we discuss what the indicators are that will tell us the students met the objective so we are *all* clear. We aren't just talking about the student work; we're also talking about teaching practice.

She provided two key tips for teams looking to formalize a process for team review of student work:

- 1) **Establish a common language.** "Get really clear about what the team wants to accomplish as a group."
- 2) **Set up norms and expectations for the group and hold each other to that standard.** "We did this as a school and reinforce it through the work of the teacher leaders."

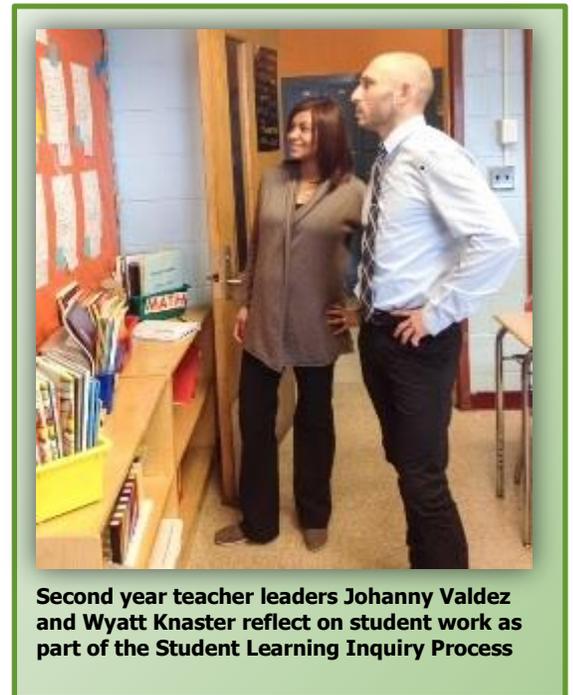
How does the Student Learning Inquiry Process benefit teaching and learning?

Ms. Valdez reflects, "The collaboration is the most important part of this process – having my colleagues there to go through the actual inquiry and analysis with me. I use the information [learned through the analysis] to create student groups – re-teaching my students with the targeted mini-lessons we create as a team, with tasks designed specifically for the student greatly helps."

Through the Student Learning Inquiry Process, the information learned about individuals and groups of students is used to plan for differentiation and student grouping. This is a trend among the teachers at Maria Teresa Mirabal. As Mr. Knaster shared, "I was able to rearrange my pull out groups and scatter them across days to support students with specific needs that I am identifying through the analysis of their work."

This strategic use of grouping is also evident when he meets with his full class, "I am always thinking about how I am grouping my students, reflecting on the data I have. Two students with the same quiz score may have totally different misconceptions, so I may look for students who "get it" and spread them out to partner with students who need support as a resource."

The teams are transparent with their students about why they are going back to target certain skills and concepts. Ms. Taylor notes that talking with the students about the process models being a good learner for her students, "I think it is good for students to know that it's a process and we are going through it too. I can say to the students, 'After looking at the work I recognized ... so we are going to take another look - that's my job.' This gives the students the opportunity to revise their work and reflect on what they did differently. They are able to look back and say, 'This is what I see now and this is how I fixed it.' They are learning to reflect and persevere."



Have you had an "Aha!" moment while analyzing student work with your colleagues? Tell us about how you are using what you've learned to fuel teaching and learning this year and how you plan to build on it next year.

Email teacherleadership@schools.nyc.gov.