National School Reform Faculty

Harmony Education Center

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Some Guidelines for Learning From Student Work

From HORACE*, November 1996, p.2.*

In "Learning from Student Work," Eric Buchovecky of the ATLAS Communities project has described a collaborative process adapted from the work of Mark Driscoll at Education Development Center and that of Steve Seidel and others at Harvard University's Project Zero. The piece lays out useful reminders for how participants can stay focused on the evidence before them and on listening to multiple perspectives, rather than getting bogged down in assumptions or evaluations. Those norms are summarized with the author's permission here:

When looking for evidence of students thinking:
- Stay focused on the evidence that is present in the work.
- Look openly and broadly; don't let your expectations cloud your vision
- Look for patterns in the evidence that provide clues to how and what the student was thinking.

When listening to colleagues' thinking:
- Listen without judging.
- Tune in to differences in perspective.
- Use controversy as an opportunity to explore and understand each other's perspectives.
- Focus on understanding where different interpretations come from.
- Make your own thinking clear to others.
- Be patient and persistent.

When reflecting on your thinking:
- Ask yourself, "Why do I see this student work in this way?
- What does this tell me about what is important to me?"
- Look for patterns in your own thinking.
- Tune in to the questions that the student work and your colleagues' comments raise for you.
- Compare what you see and what you think about the student work with what you do in the classroom.

When you reflect on the process of looking at student work:
- What did you see in this student's work that was interesting or surprising?
- What did you learn about how this student thinks and learns?
- What about the process helped you see and learn these things?
- What did you learn from listening to your colleagues that was interesting or surprising?
- What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?
- How can you make use of your colleagues' perspectives?
- What questions about teaching and assessment did looking at this student's work raise for you?
- How can you pursue these questions further?
- Are there things you would like to try in your classroom as a result of looking at the student's work?

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group® and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty website at www.nsrfharmony.org.