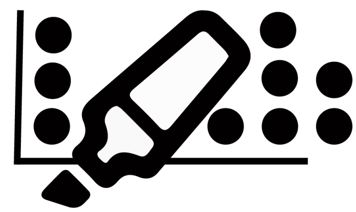
Mentoring Practice: ANALYZING STUDENT WORK TOGETHER

What is this practice?

Analyzing student work together involves you and your teacher candidate systematically looking at artifacts from students to unpack patterns in students' understandings or experiences, and determine how to respond instructionally. There are many kinds of work you might examine together, including but not limited to written explanations or problem sets, responses to test questions, exit slips where students comment on their learning or participation, and others.

Why is it important?



By regularly engaging in this kind of formative assessment—examining and acting on insights from student artifacts—instruction becomes more meaningful and tailored to the understandings and experiences of your specific students. Further, engaging in formative assessment with TCs can help them develop their own professional vision of what to look for in student work and varied possibilities for responding instructionally.

Tips for doing this practice effectively

Analysis of student work is most meaningful when you and the TC work together ahead of time to decide 1) what artifacts to look at, 2) for what purposes, and 3) what you might specifically look *for* in such artifacts. For example, imagine that partway through the year, you notice that some students are interacting more productively than others in their small groups. In talking with your TC, you decide to draft a short exit ticket for students to complete individually after group work, to reflect on how they participated in work with their peers and the degree to which they felt like their contributions were valued. Together, you plan to look at the exit tickets for general trends (e.g., how many students feel their contributions are valued, how these students report participating in groups, etc.), with special attention to groups where some students give very different responses from their peers. Remember that your TC will be learning about various forms of assessment in their coursework and can be a resource in design, implementation, and analysis.

Carve out some time to talk together about patterns or groupings in student artifacts—this need not be long (see our student work discussion protocol). Work together to (or have your TC) sort responses into similar piles or arrange them along a continuum, in ways that seem meaningful, given the nature of the artifacts and your purposes for looking at them. Here are a few tips to consider:

- Look for particular kinds of patterns in student responses. One pattern is an ***unexpected trend***—this is where many students responded to instruction in a surprising way. It signals perhaps that a learning situation did not present students with an opportunity to process ideas in the ways you anticipated. Another pattern to pay attention to is a

relationship where groups of students, perhaps who share similar characteristics, perform similarly on a feature of the task or question. For instance, in an example from a high school science classroom, several English Language Learners drew sophisticated models of air pressure during small group work, but during whole class discussions, they did not verbalize their thinking to others.

- Look carefully at artifacts from a range of students—students who are performing above, at, or below average in class. Attending to a full range of students' written work provides a foundation for systematically addressing how groups of students are learning. For example, a teacher we worked with found that students who were underperforming had difficulty writing scientific conclusions not because they comprehended the task differently than their peers, but because they were unsure of how to respond to feedback from a few weeks earlier. The teacher realized she had to support these students in using her feedback more productively.
- Make use of rubrics and other tools that call attention to what students *are* doing and different paths to understanding, rather than primarily making judgments about whether students' responses are correct or incorrect. "Partial understandings" from students may take several forms. Perhaps a student is familiar with a scientific idea, but uses it in the wrong context. Perhaps a student understands part but not all of an idea. Or perhaps they can engage in a mathematical practice (like modeling or making an argument) when instructed, but aren't sure how to apply this practice in a new situation. Identifying partial understandings can help shape instructional responses.

Finally, discuss how your instruction might shift as a result of what you see. Perhaps this will involve changing how you scaffold activities, or design group work. Maybe it will involve closer attention to particular students. This is something that the TC can help with—being another set of eyes and being available to support students with specific needs.

Where to start?

Start with small chunks of student work (e.g., a 3-5 sentence response to an explanation-type question asked on a quiz) or other easily collectable yet meaningful data (e.g., student feedback on class routines).

Summing up

- Determine with your TC 1) what artifacts to look at, 2) for what purposes, and 3) what you might specifically look for in such artifacts
- It helps to examine artifacts from a range of students whose academic performances vary
- Work together to sort responses into similar piles or to arrange them along a continuum, in ways that seem meaningful; if you are looking at subject matter learning, pay attention to "partial understandings" that students might exhibit
- Discuss how your instruction might shift as a result of what you see