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Teacher Quality

Using Student Work to Ensure High Quality Teaching

THE ISSUE

All students have the right to be taught by competent teachers who have a clear understanding of how students learn and who have been provided with the appropriate resources of instructional materials and on-going professional development. Certainly, educational leaders have the responsibility to provide teachers with tangible support that will lead to improvements in their teaching.

The move to standards-based education (SBE) has led to a shift in our assumptions about the role of teachers and students, as SBE holds students, teachers and schools accountable for results. Students are held accountable for their work through multiple measures of performance, while teachers are held accountable for the quality of student work and the continuous improvement in student performance.

In addition, Massachusetts has taken significant steps to implement rigorous standards-based teaching and learning and to hold students, teachers, and administrators accountable. For example, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks establish the standards for student learning and performance, while the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) measures student knowledge and skills. Additionally, the "Principles of Effective Teaching" can be used to guide teacher supervision and evaluation, which, in turn, assists teachers in the improvement of their effectiveness in the classroom.

Current models of supervision and evaluation de-emphasize the role of the evaluator as an observer and, instead, emphasize the role of the teacher as a reflective practitioner.

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The mission of the Massachusetts Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is to promote quality teaching and learning in Massachusetts by fostering instructional and curriculum leadership in and among all educators.

QUESTIONS

As we think about the issue of high quality teaching and models of supervision and evaluation, MASCD poses some questions that educators need to resolve. MASCD believes that an on-going focus on student results leads to continuous improvement in teaching.

1. Should the quality of student work and the growth in student performance serve as one way to judge teacher performance?

We need to define what is meant by *quality*. What are the standards for student performance? How do we measure growth in performance and what are the exemplars of quality work? Should we hold teachers accountable when students fail to demonstrate growth in learning? Teachers should have a clear understanding of what students need to know and be able to do, as well as a clear plan for gathering evidence of student learning.

2. How can student work be used to shape teacher performance?

On-going discussions by teachers about their students' work can provide teachers important information about the results of their instruction.

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Central to these models is the importance of continuous improvement - both for the student and the teacher - because teachers must reflect on their work from a variety of perspectives if they expect to continually modify what they do and what they ask students to do. Collaboration, teaming, self-reflection, peer review, mentoring, and coaching are critical components of professional development efforts to improve teaching. Schools that foster a culture structured around results and continuous improvement offer the capacity to enhance student achievement and teacher professional growth.

Through the support of efforts to improve curriculum and instructional leadership, MASCD is committed to the improvement of teaching and learning. In this issue of *FOCUS*, we present and discuss practices that MASCD believes will successfully contribute to an effective model of supervision and evaluation that promotes teacher reflection on student performance and achievement.

When teachers reflect on what and how students learn and modify their instruction accordingly, better teaching and learning occur. Such feedback can serve as an effective tool for teacher improvement. What can we learn from the results of a particular assessment or the examples of student work? What evidence do we have that students understand what has been taught? What teaching strategies contribute to successful learning and understanding? What impact does the inclusion of student work have on the process of supervision and evaluation?

3. Should varying approaches to teacher supervision be employed at different stages in a teacher's career? And, if so, when is it most appropriate for a teacher to reflect on student work?

The professional needs of teachers vary considerably, but teachers at all stages need to feel supported as they work and grow professionally. Mentoring and coaching are critical elements of professional growth and development. Ultimately, each teacher needs to become self-reflective about his/her work. How can we help teachers reach that goal through student work? Do we first need to teach mentors and coaches how to use discussions and reflections on student work as a technique of professional development? How many of our schools currently have veteran teachers formally using the examination of student work to reflect on their teaching? How often does it occur? What do the elements and procedures of this type of professional development look like in practice? Are there more ways than one to examine student work? Are some ways better than others?

4. What conditions should exist in schools in order to allow the use of student work as the basis for judgments about teacher performance?

Teachers need to feel equally comfortable with a discussion about student performance and a discussion of effective teaching strategies. How do we have conversations about student performance that lead to improvements in teaching practice? What are the elements of school climate that promote an emphasis on reflective teaching? School climate is an important variable in the success of student performance. Schools that emphasize collaboration, teaming, collegiality, and reflective teaching are more apt to develop the

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THE LOCAL PERSPECTIVE: A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL FOR MASSACHUSETTS

Schools in Massachusetts are expected to develop a comprehensive model for supervision and evaluation to improve teacher quality. MASCD supports and believes that teacher supervision and evaluation models should sustain and support the continued development of practitioners. The comprehensive supervision and evaluation system is composed of many interacting elements that complement and reinforce one another. Together, these elements contribute to a culture of continuous improvement of teaching and guard against ineffective instruction.

A comprehensive supervision and evaluation system includes:

- Measuring a teacher's performance against comprehensive standards and holding the teacher accountable to meet these standards,
- Structuring supervision and evaluation as a component of a professional growth cycle,
- Gathering information on a teacher's performance from multiple sources that demonstrates the principles of effective teaching,
- Using student results in a responsible way to inform the assessment of a teacher's performance,
- Highlighting narrative-based evaluation that avoids or minimizes ranking, rating, and scoring,
- Training administrators thoroughly who are responsible for supervision and evaluation,
- Evaluating the evaluator on his/her ability to evaluate and supervise,
- Discriminating between teaching that "meets standards" from teaching that "does not meet" standards.

Educators may wish to consider whether the district's evaluation process includes the following:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ A four year evaluation/professional development cycle ❑ An alternative to the four-year evaluation cycle if the supervisor determines that there are concerns about a teacher's performance ❑ Clearly defined categories and indicators of effective teaching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ The use of a variety of data sources by the supervisor to insure a comprehensive understanding of the teacher's work – lesson plans, student work, interaction with others, activities, and other data provided by the teacher and structured conferences ❑ Classroom visits/observations ❑ Conferences |
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conditions necessary for teachers to feel comfortable about discussing and sharing their students' work. There needs to be an expectation that teachers are self-reflective about teaching and the student work that results. What models of professional development promote productive reflection on student work?

5. Can a focus on the use of student work as a measure of teacher performance lead to an improvement in student achievement?

We need to agree on the exemplars of quality student work so that teachers can be taught to analyze student work in order to determine ways to improve instruction. When teachers view the growth in student performance as their responsibility, teachers need to align lessons and student work with curriculum frameworks and assessment. Teachers will also need to design work for students that is engaging and satisfying and that results in student learning.

FOCUSING IN: LOOKING AT STUDENT WORK

While there has been much debate about student performance as a measure of a teacher's competence, it is hard to argue that looking at student work is a function already engaged in by teachers. This function can be expanded as a way to improve a teacher's repertoire. As educators develop models of supervision and evaluation built around the use of student work, MASCD suggests two resources. One such model is the Annenberg Institute's LASW. The other comes from the work of Phil Schlechty and provides guidelines for designing tasks to engage students.

Looking at Student Work (LASW) is a project of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Check the web site, www.lasw.org for ways in which teachers:

- look together at student work,
- focus on small samples of student work,
- reflect on important questions about teaching and learning, and
- use structures and guidelines ("protocols") for looking at and talking about student work.

An example is the "tuning protocol" where teachers bring a student paper or a video of a student's performance and discuss it with a group of colleagues, starting with a description, followed by a focusing question, discussion, feedback, reflection and debriefing.



Guidelines for Creating Tasks That Will Engage Students

Work Focus

Focus on a product or performance of significance to them.

Work Expectations

Tell students exactly what is expected of them, and how your expectations relate to something about which they care.

Work Culture

Create a classroom culture where students can try tasks without fear.

Work Visibility

Make student work more available for parents, teachers, and fellow students to see.

Work Independence

Permit, encourage, and support opportunities for students to work interdependently with others.

Work Novelty

Continually expose students to new and different ways of doing things.

Work Choice

Give students choices in what they do to learn.

Work Authenticity

Give tasks that are meaningful, natural, and consequential.

Work Knowledge

Arrange information and knowledge in clear, accessible ways, and in ways that let students use the information and knowledge to address tasks that are important to them.

Work Substance

Assign work that helps students to attain rich and profound knowledge.

The above is a condensed version of comments made by Phil Schlechty (*10 Qualities of Student Work*) that appears along with his interview published by the National Staff Development Council, *The Educators Examined* (Summer 1998), [Journal of Staff Development](http://www.middleweb.com/schlechty.html). Referenced on <http://www.middleweb.com/schlechty.html>

BROADENING THE FOCUS: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

School districts across the country focus on student work as one component of a comprehensive model for supervision and evaluation. MASCD has contacted two districts that utilize student work in teacher supervision and evaluation. The use of student work as part of teacher supervision and evaluation is only one of many elements in the process. In the summary below student work is highlighted in order to indicate its value to the whole enterprise.

Both school systems described below provide a comprehensive handbook with forms and rubrics so that teachers can see how the parts are articulated and what is expected of them and their supervisors.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MD) have developed an evaluation system (2001) designed to “elevate learning results for all students...by improving the teaching of all teachers, not some.”

The system supports and contributes to a culture of continuous improvement and includes as one of the components of teacher growth the use of student results from state tests, departmental exams, class tests, written papers, quizzes and project work as data to modify practice. “Teachers set quantifiable learning outcomes for students and hold the students and themselves accountable for meeting those objectives...a teacher’s analysis of student results is an integral part of a teacher’s final evaluation summary.” Also included in the analysis are the numbers of students who are promoted or those who are at risk who show they are now focused and learning, as well as student attendance.

- Student and parent surveys are part of the annual professional growth cycle and become part of the teacher’s portfolio.
- Teacher portfolios contain cumulative data sets of student results from year to year so the teacher can analyze them for patterns and set priorities for improvement.
- Training is provided to both evaluators and teachers on how to use student results data.

Coventry Public Schools’ (RI) evaluation system (September 2000) is “governed by what the individual does every day...and allows for multiple forms of assessment in documenting competency and growth...of which student performance is one form. It is reflective of the actual work of teachers...to improve the craft and the practice of the profession.”

The process is based as much as possible on a body of research that seeks to identify principles of effective practice and classroom organization, which maximize student learning and promote student engagement.

- Teachers videotape and analyzing a learning experience.
- Teachers develop a professional portfolio, which may contain ... student work samples, homework assignments, lab projects, journals, assessment [results], collaborative projects, [and] letters from parents. This question must be answered: *Is there evidence that the teacher uses assessment outcomes for instructional planning?*
- The quality of teacher writing is judged using the Rhode Island writing evaluation rubric.

For more information contact the Coventry Public Schools, 401-822-9400

For more information, go to www.mcps.k12.md.us

CRITICAL TERMS

We include these partly because they are used in discussion about supervision and evaluation; but, more importantly, because they represent practices which figure prominently in current thinking about the topic.

Coaching / Peer Consultation

Process of one teacher assisting another to look objectively at his/her own teaching in terms of whether or not it is producing the intended results. Coaching is data oriented. The coach makes observations and gives objective feedback that both participants discuss and assess.

Collaboration

Opportunities that schools create for teachers to meet together and engage in self-study and improvement of their practice. Study groups, school and department meetings, and workshops all provide opportunities for collaboration.

Continuous Improvement

Steady progress in student learning that occurs when teachers use data from the analysis of student work to make their teaching more helpful to the student. Continuous improvement may also refer to the progress teachers make in their teaching practice through the use of data.

Data-Driven Decision Making

The process of making decisions based on a variety of carefully-identified data collected and analyzed over time. The types of data selected will depend upon the improvement target, which may be broadly defined district or school improvement, or more narrowly focused individual student, teacher, or program improvement.

Learning Communities

Groups of teachers who regularly engage in the study of their practice and, as a result, increase the range of strategies they know, and how they are able to teach students. School leaders have the responsibility to create and sustain learning communities.

Professional Growth Cycle / Developmental Stages of Teaching

The developmental stages in a teacher's career range from novice through experienced. As described by Charlotte Danielson and Thomas McGreal, novice teachers are engaged in intense learning of basic teaching skills; experienced teachers have control of their teaching and can devote attention to refining their skills; and experienced, but struggling teachers need to renew themselves in terms of current practice.

Self-Reflection / Reflective Teaching

Analysis of one's own practice as a teacher. The self-reflective teacher regularly looks at the links among objectives, learning activities, and student results to determine whether or not his/her teaching is producing the desired outcomes. This ongoing process is used to improve teaching.

Standards-Based Education (SBE)

An approach to education in which standards, or expected student learning, are the driving force behind curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In SBE, both students and teachers are held accountable for progress made toward reaching standards. Teachers are expected to collect data about students' learning and use it to improve instruction.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The following list of citations is condensed from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform's *Looking at Student Work Project* web site, http://www.lasw.org/resources_books.html

Allen, D. (Ed.). (1998). *Assessing Student Learning*. New York: Teacher College Press.

Barr, M. (2000). *Looking at Student Work: a Window into the Classroom*. Video

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Danielson, C. and T.L. McGreal. (2000). *Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA

Graham, B. & Fahey, K. (1999). "School Leaders Look at Student Work." Published in *Educational Leadership*. <http://www.ascd.org/frameedlead.htm> Vol.56, No.6, March 1999, pp.25-27.

Richardson, J. (February 2001). "Student Work at the Core of Teacher Learning." *Results Newsletter*. <http://www.nsd.c.org/library/studentwork.htm> published by the National Staff Development Council.

MASCD RESPONDS

As a professional organization committed to the improvement of education in Massachusetts, MASCD advocates for practices that ensure high standards for teacher quality. MASCD believes that models of evaluation and supervision that incorporate opportunities for teachers to reflect on student work contribute to the overall improvement of teaching and learning.

MASCD continues to support the improvement of education through high quality programs and services to educators and schools that help teachers reflect on their practice, learn new skills and develop new programs designed to improve student performance. There are promising practices in Massachusetts, practices which need to be validated and shared with other educators in the Commonwealth.

MASCD believes that the ideas presented in this issue of *FOCUS* should serve as the framework for discussion about quality teaching in Massachusetts. MASCD advocates for the inclusion of these ideas into statewide policy decisions about teacher evaluation and supervision and recommends that local school districts include teacher reflection on student work in their models of supervision and evaluation.

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www.mascd.org

The Massachusetts Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, an affiliate of the international Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, is a membership organization serving educators in all roles, at all levels.

MASCD provides professional development programs that address such topics as leadership, curriculum development, instruction and assessment. Activities include the Northeast ASCD Affiliate Conference in Boston each December and upcoming institutes, conferences, and courses on Differentiated Instruction, *Understanding By Design*, *America in the World*, and *Texts and Techniques for Social Studies and English Language Arts*. The Association sponsors the new MSSAA - Teachers²¹ - MASCD Leadership Licensure Program (LLP) to license supervisors/directors and principals/assistant principals in Massachusetts. Information on the LLP is posted at www.mascd.org/LLP.html

The Association also works toward the improvement of instructional practice through the publication of position papers, books and newsletters. *Perspectives* quarterly newsletter provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and best practices and updates on new developments in education. *FOCUS* is an informational publication designed to influence policy and practice. *MASCD Speaks* communicates the Association's position on policy questions. MASCD books include *Using State Frameworks to Develop Quality Curricula for Massachusetts Schools*, *Beyond Technology...Learning from the Wired Curriculum*, and *Teaching...A Career, A Profession*. *Beyond Technology* and *Teaching* have received the ASCD Best Special Publication Award.

MASCD is governed by a Board of Directors and maintains standing and ad hoc committees. Educators and friends of education are invited to join the Association and to serve on one of the MASCD committees. In addition to receiving publications and discounts on programs and books, members may join the MASCD curriculum listserv to engage in dialogue on curriculum and instruction with colleagues in similar roles. www.mascd.org contains information on MASCD programs, products and services.