

Memorandum

November 1, 2005

To: Jeff
From: Mark
Re.: Conference Summary & Related Reflections

Thank you for the opportunity to observe your morning mathematics class, focusing on Area of Performance 3 in the *Framework for Effective Teaching: Creating and Maintaining an Effective Environment for Student Learning*. This memorandum is to reflect on strengths of your work in this Area, opportunities for improvement, and other thoughts that we developed through this work. For the post-observation conference I provided you with a script of 20+ minutes of the lesson, a map of your circulation pattern during partner work times, and a coded compilation of your verbal interactions with students during the work times.

Considering the lesson in terms of the six themes of this Area of Performance, you identified three as areas of particular strength, specifically:

- Sustaining caring, respectful relationships with all students, teaching them the skills of collaboration and conflict mediation;
- Promoting students' sense of responsibility to the group and taking leadership initiative; &
- Using classroom routines that sustain all students' engagement in learning.

Sustaining caring, respectful relationships with all students, teaching them the skills of collaboration and conflict mediation. Over the last two years you and your teaching partner have made a collaborative commitment to apply the methods of *Kagan Cooperative Learning* and *Adaptive Schools'* tools for collaboration in every class, as the foundation for relationship-building with and among your students. These methods were evident in this observation. The desks are organized in groups to support cooperative learning strategies. You made use of shoulder partners, as well as the student roles of go getter and timekeeper. You also made use of collaboration tools such as: show, don't say; minute fingers; "*what questions do you have?*"; PAG-PAU; and 30 second speeches. Charting practices from the Adaptive Schools toolkit are also evident in your classroom. Each of these specific items seems to serve as resources for supporting positive relationships and promoting student responsibility.

Further, you identified the Discussion Starters that are posted in your classroom as serving two purposes: (1) teaching students to engage one another in content-based discourse such as the partner speeches in this lesson, and (2) teaching students the tools of collaboration and shared-problem solving that extend their participation in the building's Quality School initiative. Finally, you cited the personal conversations that you engaged in with students as they transitioned back to the Sharing Area at mid-lesson as an example of the ways that you connect with students on a personal level.

Promoting students' sense of responsibility to the group and taking leadership initiative. You expressed interest in how the everyday use of cooperative learning strategies serves this end. Every team of students has decided on operational roles for each member: we witnessed the roles of *go getter* and *timekeeper* in this lesson.

I noted two instances in which you provided multi-step instructions to the teams, setting them up to complete multi-step investigation work. In both cases you provided the input in both spoken and visual formats, using visual prompts that remained posted for the students throughout the activity. In both instances, you also used the collaborative strategy of Process-as-Given, Process-as-Understood (PAG-PAU) to check students' readiness to proceed. It is clear that such direction-giving is conducive to students' taking responsibility for their engagement in relatively complex learning tasks, providing you with increased time to circulate and offer facilitative coaching "from the side."

Using classroom routines that sustain all students' engagement in learning. Once again, you reflected on the importance of the partner and team structures of the Kagan approach in focusing all students on learning, and in supporting your capacity to observe on- versus off-task behavior in time to re-direct with additional support when needed.

Related to this focus, you asked that I gather data on your circulation throughout the room during work times. You are interested in checking that you are not missing students – excelling ones, struggling ones, or those in the midrange. Using a diagram showing the placement of the groups of desks in your room, I recorded your circulation pattern during the three work periods in this class. The pattern shows that you paused at every group at least once in each of the work periods. In the two longer periods, you paused at every group at least twice.

I also recorded your behavior during your pauses – coded as observing, advising, inquiring, or responding. You are intent on shifting away from giving advice toward using inquiry as a way to encourage students' thinking, planning, and shifting direction. You noticed a predominance of observing, inquiring, and responding to students' questions, with the frequency of advising being the lowest of the four. You recalled the incidents of advising, however, and expressed interest that you seem to be engaging in this method with students who struggle more than others to master content. While you express understanding of why you use advising with these students – they may need such guidance more than others, you are focusing on developing inquiry skills to fit these students' needs so that they experience opportunities to develop their capacities as independent learners.

On the other hand, you identified the theme of using class time effectively so all students have time to complete learning activities, student engagement is consistent, and students self assess work and time on-task as an important area for growth on your part. In the case of the mathematics lab lesson that I observed, your expectation was that all of the groups would have completed the tasks that you modeled in the Sharing Area, yet it was not to be. I appreciate your reflections on a transition process that you are in as you live into inquiry-based teaching and learning. While your earlier teaching might be seen as more efficient in terms of coverage, the outcomes that you are pursuing now seem importantly supported by posing the questions that support students in constructing understanding of important concepts and practices. A concomitant realization is that "coverage" is more limited. Thank you for sharing your reflections about your experience in shifting from breadth toward depth.

Thank you once again for this opportunity. Please let me know what questions you have questions about any of the remarks in this Conference Summary.