

There was also some effective clarifying and support of ideas in all three. One pattern of concern we noticed was that in all three conversations, the second student to talk posed his or her own idea rather than building up the first idea posed. They could have asked or helped clarify or support this first idea, but they posed their own idea instead. This effectively shifted the focus and built on to a second idea, leaving the first behind, and possibly, frustrating the students who posed them.

PROTOCOL FOR ANALYZING ACADEMIC CONVERSATIONS

This might help you better analyze student conversations, whether you are analyzing alone or with a group of teachers. After each section title, there are guiding questions, notes, and even some sentence starters to help spark reflective thinking and discussion. We encourage you to try this protocol as a way to use student work to improve conversation-based instruction. It is an alternative to analysis procedures that examine just one student artifact at a time. Teams look for patterns and trends across the group of students. Professional learning community (PLC) members suggest instructional strategies to address areas of need. Then the group reconvenes to notice if the new instruction has impacted student learning. This entire process is completed in cycles, always with the overarching inquiry question in mind.

- I. **Pose an Inquiry Question:** This question format can be “How can I improve (some aspect of student conversations), evidenced by (one or more types of evidence), by (using a certain strategy or approach)?”
- II. **Clarify Expectations:** What learning do I want/expect students’ conversations to show? Starters: I assume . . . I expect to see . . . I wonder . . . Some possibilities for learning that this data may present . . .
- III. **Observe Patterns & Trends:** What are the general trends observed? Starters: Just the facts—“I observe that . . . Some patterns/trends that I notice . . . I counted . . . The percentage of . . . I’m surprised that I see . . .” (Avoid inferential terms such as “Because . . . Therefore . . . It seems . . . However . . .”)
- IV. **Make Interpretations:** What can we interpret and infer about student learning from the data? Starters: “I believe the data suggests _____ because . . . Perhaps _____ is causing the pattern of . . . I think the students need . . .”
- V. **Ask Questions about the Data:** Usually, questions arise related to interpretations, such as “Why did these students do this? What can I still do to improve in this area? Is this data consistent and significant enough to change how I teach?”

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VI. **Plan Solutions:** What are the implications for instruction and assessment? Starters: “We could try . . . because . . . This strategy or assessment would be most effective for this group . . . because . . .”

VII. **Plan What to Do and Bring for the Next Meeting:** If this is a PLC that works together on the inquiry question (which we highly recommend), then as a group you can decide what artifacts, evidence, and information would be most helpful for the next meeting. This also helps clarify what to do in the classroom to come up with such evidence or information. Two big questions: What are we going to teach? and how? (Possible formats: We could teach the same way and assess the same way; use different teaching practices and bring in the same assessment, or bring different types of assessments for the same teaching practice.) What student work are we going to bring to the next collaboration? What else will we do before the next meeting to improve in this area and help answer our question (e.g., conduct peer observations, read books and resources, attend trainings, have someone model a practice)?

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ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING: PEER AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

Many teachers and students have discovered the power of peer and self-assessment. This allows students to take more ownership over their learning and development of conversation skills and content understandings. You and your students can modify portions of the COAT to create student-friendly peer and self-assessment tools. You may start with a tool focused on nonverbal and listening skills. Then you add another tool focused on clarifying and supporting, and so on. Some teachers have triads meet during which one student is the coach who uses a tool to observe and provide feedback for the other two talking. Then they switch roles. Some samples of these tools are provided on the following pages.

These sample tools can be adapted by teachers for different developmental levels and language proficiencies.