

Looking at Student Work For Teacher Learning, Teacher Community, and School Reform

Teachers are usually alone when they examine student work and think about student performance. The authors describe several projects that have enabled teachers to leave the isolation of their own classrooms and think together about student work in the broader contexts of school improvement and professional development.

BY JUDITH WARREN LITTLE, MARYL GEARHART, MARNIE CURRY, AND JUDITH KAFKA

IN 1995, WHEN the California Center for School Restructuring convened teams from nearly 150 elementary and secondary schools to examine the progress of local school reform and its impact on student achievement, it employed the slogan “Examining student work for what matters most.”¹ The precise meaning of the slogan was left open for school teams to define. For some, it meant assembling and examining school-level achievement data. For others, it meant using rubrics to assess student essays, projects, or portfolios. For still others, it meant considering samples of student work for their instructional implications or inviting a panel of students to speak about their opportunities to learn.

The years that have passed since that conference testify to a growing conviction that there is something important to be learned by giving close attention to students’ experience and students’ actual work. Reform advocates, professional developers, school accreditation agencies, teacher networks, and researchers have increasingly en-

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gaged teachers in looking together at samples of student work or analyzing classroom performance.² Indeed, “looking at student work” has become the organizing theme of one website (www.lasw.org) and a prominent component of several others.³ It forms a major activity of professional conferences, professional development programs, and reform projects.

One might reasonably ask, “What’s new about teachers looking at student work?” Teachers examine artifacts produced by students all the time. They read, review, grade, and celebrate student work every day. However, they do so most often on their own, possibly in conference with a student or parent, but almost always in isolation from colleagues.

In recent years, organizations engaged in professional development and school reform have begun bringing teachers together to do *collectively* what they generally do alone: that is, look at student work and think about students’ performance in the classroom. In addition to evaluating a teacher’s instructional relationships with individual students, the purpose of these collaborative efforts is to foster teacher learning, support for professional community, and the pursuit of school reform.

These organizations have also focused on introducing these practices into the *ongoing work of schools*. In this

regard, they have ventured into difficult terrain. It was one thing for California's restructuring schools to gather once a year at a conference to examine student work. It is quite another to transform long-standing workplace traditions of privacy and non-interference by asking teachers to put the work of their own students on the table for others to consider and discuss.

We have recently completed a two-year study that responds directly to this growing interest in looking at stu-

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dent work. In reviewing published descriptions and studies, we discovered a wide range of purposes and practices subsumed under the broad descriptive term "looking at student work." The good news for advocates of these practices is that there is emerging evidence that some versions of looking at student work yield benefits for teaching and learning.⁴ However, the available research gives little sense of how any demonstrated benefits might in fact be achieved.⁵ While there are promising precedents, the literature offers few specifics regarding the actual practices that teachers employ in looking at student work. Our project attempted to make some headway on that problem.

Through case studies of teacher groups working with three nationally recognized organizations — Harvard Project Zero, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and the Academy for Educational Development — we sought to identify specific practices employed by teachers who come together to examine student work in the context of broader programs of school improvement and school-based professional development.⁶ Each of the three organizations has accumulated a track record of school-based or district-based professional development or school improvement activity. Each has developed a distinctive approach to looking at student work that reflects the organization's history and particular interests.

The "Evidence Project," developed by Harvard Project Zero, was premised on the idea that student work offers a window into children's thinking and learning, and so teachers' collaborative reviews of that work constitute a "significant model of school improvement from within."⁷ With its commitment to fostering student learning and creativity, Project Zero viewed the Evidence Project as an opportunity to organize time and space so that teachers could

interweave individual inquiry with collegial conversations about teaching and learning — always keeping the student at the center of the conversation. Toward that end, project staff members developed structured discussion guides ("protocols") and a project manual to help teachers organize discussion of student work in relation to a question of interest defined by the presenting teacher. Teacher groups varied in the way they organized their activity and in how they made use of the project protocols.

In its project, Building School Capacity to Improve Student Learning, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) sought to "build the capacity of school faculties to improve the quality of instruction in middle-grades schools, through a continuous, comprehensive, and critical review of student work."⁸ Teachers in minischool grade-level teams constructed interdisciplinary "learning goals" to guide the ways they considered student work. As teams reviewed student work in relation to their learning goals, they considered the assignment, the lesson plan, and often the school's performance standards as well. Along with promoting team reviews of student work, AED also helped schools and districts embed reviews of student work in school-level self-assessments. In cross-school or cross-district meetings, teachers examined portfolios of student work from other schools, looking for evidence that students were meeting those schools' learning goals.

Instructional Improvement Through Inquiry and Collaboration is a project of the Coalition of Essential Schools that builds on existing elements of its whole-school reform model — the 10 principles of whole-school reform, critical friends groups, and the cycle of inquiry — to focus teacher communities on inquiry into teaching and learning. Coalition staff members envisioned that inquiry and collaboration would entail systematic attention to student work and to such artifacts of teacher work as lesson plans, assignments, classroom videotapes, and peer observations. In some contexts, teacher inquiry was integrated into the work of existing critical friends groups or teacher teams; in other contexts, new groups were created. At most sites, teachers were introduced to a range of protocols to help structure their discussion of student or teacher work.⁹ Consistent with the Coalition's commitment to local interpretation of its principles and mission, there were regional and school differences in the design and implementation of the project.

We focused our study on teachers' practices of looking at student work, while also taking note of how those practices fit with each project's broader aims and with other activities at each school site. Overall, we visited seven schools, but eventually we focused on four sites: an elementary

school affiliated with Harvard Project Zero; a middle school working with the Academy for Educational Development; and two high schools, one in each of the two participating regions of the Coalition of Essential Schools. We made multiple visits to each site, talking with participants and observing them at work together. Video recordings, copies of student work, protocol guidelines, and agendas provided evidence of local practice. Interviews with teachers, administrators, and project staff members helped us determine the meaning and value of those practices in the eyes of various participants and stakeholders. Our charge was to see what we could learn from these projects about “looking at student work” as a resource for instructional improvement, while recognizing that the projects also encompassed a wider range of purposes and strategies.¹⁰

COMMON ELEMENTS OF PRACTICE

In our investigation, we attempted to capture how “looking at student work” took place in each school and how the various approaches created opportunities for teacher learning. Despite differences in philosophy, practice, and local contexts, the projects and sites shared three common elements.

Bringing teachers together to focus on student learning and teaching practice. Teachers get together for many reasons over the course of a school year, but rarely are they invited to look closely together at evidence of student learning. Thus a significant contribution of these projects was to organize occasions when talk about student learning and teaching practice formed the primary agenda. Gradually, these learning-focused conversations would become embedded in the schools’ structures, schedules, relationships, and habits.

Teachers at each site reserved time and space in their regular work schedule for the meetings we observed. However, as one teacher emphasized, “There aren’t too many schools that will set aside that time.” The efforts of the projects to create and sustain groups with schedules and routines led to conversations about teaching and learning that took place in the course of ongoing school work. Between meetings, teachers reported reflecting on prior meetings “through a different eye” and thinking about “how I am going to present this” at the next meeting. It may seem a truism, but what these projects demonstrated is that, if teachers are to engage together in the tough work of instructional improvement, the school must organize for it.

Getting student work on the table and into the conversation. Numerous published testimonials attest to the value of having teachers come together to talk about their

work. In most of these accounts, the materials on the table, if any, represent teachers' work in the form of instructional materials, lesson plans, or, occasionally, videotapes of classroom activity. There are few precedents for placing student work on the table in any systematic and serious way or for engaging in a conversation about student learning and thinking. These projects instituted structured events that helped create the expectation that there would be student work to look at and that time would be set aside to discuss it. As one teacher explained, looking at student work "made me more aware of the work I was looking at. Before, if I looked at something, I would say, 'Oh, that's good,' or 'Yeah, that meets the standard.' But now, I can go into more detail with it, and I learned that through this."

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Structuring the conversation. A distinctive feature of these projects was the extent to which they promoted the use of "protocols" — procedural steps and guidelines — to organize discussions and structure participation. Designated facilitators helped participants make productive use of the protocol formats.¹¹ Although the projects and the individual teacher groups varied in which protocols they used and how they used them, the protocols shared some central design features.¹²

First, the protocols used by these organizations were designed to interrupt or slow down teachers' usual responses to student work (to evaluate and grade it), and to stimulate an open-minded but focused examination of what that work can tell teachers about student understanding and teaching practice. To this end, some protocol guidelines constrained presenters from supplying background information about an assignment, the students, or the presenter's own intentions. Facilitators using such protocols often reminded participants to refrain from making judgments and to concentrate on describing what they saw in the student work and on posing questions.¹³

In addition, the protocols structured participation in ways that deliberately departed from the flow of ordinary conversation. They determined when presenters had the floor, when presenters listened while others conversed, and when the entire group could engage in open discus-

sion. They structured the discussion through a series of timed phases or segments, and they focused the conversation in each phase by inviting talk of a particular sort — for example, phases devoted to "describing the work" (without judging it) and then to "interpreting the work" in one protocol or to "clarifying questions" in another.

Finally, protocols explicitly organized opportunities for participants to raise questions, issues, and dilemmas triggered by examples of student work. They also provided teachers an opportunity to give and receive feedback. According to one published summary, "A protocol creates a structure that makes it safe to ask challenging questions of each other."¹⁴ For example, the Tuning Protocol used by some teachers at Coalition schools provided for both "warm" and "cool" feedback, and the Modified Collaborative Assessment Conference used by teachers in Project Zero groups required that the presenter remain silent in one phase as colleagues posed questions about the student work.

Together, these elements of design — bringing teachers together, introducing student work, and structuring conversation — were meant to afford certain opportunities for teacher learning, the creation of a professional community, and the pursuit of school reform. Yet we know that design and intent do not fully account for actual practice. Educators have long been familiar with the term "mutual adaptation," coined in the 1970s to account for the ways in which both innovative programs (ideas, purposes, strategies) and their users change in the actual process of implementation.¹⁵ We expected to develop useful insights from looking closely at how the ideas and tools developed by the three national organizations were actually taken up by participating schools and teachers.

BEYOND A SLOGAN: UNPACKING PRACTICE

To deepen our understanding of what looking at student work entailed at each site, we paid close attention to what the participants said and did with one another in their meetings and to what they shared with us in interviews. We unpacked practice by looking for the ways in which participants' talk and their use of structured protocols worked to "open up" or "close off" opportunities to delve deeply into questions of student learning or teaching practice. We developed an understanding of how specific practices and resources helped to direct teachers' close attention to student work and to open up discussions of teaching and learning. However, we also gained an appreciation for some of the challenges that teachers, administrators, and partner organizations confront in making "looking at student work" an integral and productive component

of collaborative professional development or reform activity in a school.

To take one example, Shelby, a high school health/science teacher, provided two samples of a persuasive essay she had assigned as the culminating project for a mental health unit on violence and violence prevention. Shelby was not satisfied that the essays had captured what she had hoped her students would learn from the unit. Her colleagues in the meeting, representing a wide range of subject fields, had all participated in professional development aimed at strengthening “writing across the curriculum.” In examining the student essays, they began to realize that they had an incomplete grasp of what it meant for students to produce a persuasive essay — and for teachers to assign and assess one. A math teacher mused, “What comes to mind is how well do the students understand what is meant by a ‘persuasive essay?’” Seconds later, she added, “because I’m not clear what is meant by a persuasive essay.” Those dual themes — what students understand and what the teachers understand as a “persuasive essay” — were picked up throughout the discussion, culminating in this exchange:

English teacher: Do you think maybe the kids didn’t get it?

Shelby: Do you think maybe the *teacher* didn’t get it?! [Laughter]

In their 40-minute discussion of the two essays, both Shelby and her colleagues gained new insight into the students’ writing and their own instructional practice while also reinforcing a spirit of mutual support and community.

In this example and in others we observed, certain practices and conditions helped to focus attention on the student work and to deepen the discussion of teaching and learning.

1. *Flexible, creative use of tools for local purposes.* Each of the organizations in our study introduced processes, tools, and roles to help teachers build community and focus their conversations on student learning and teaching practice. The resources they created or selected were designed with certain key features and certain built-in constraints to enable particular things to happen. In many groups, teachers were attentive to the intended steps and phases of the protocols they used, remarking on those moments when they departed from the guidelines in some way (“I don’t want to be judgmental, but I see . . .”).

However, the more sustained and lively conversations about student work occurred when groups took a flexible, creative approach to the tools and crafted them to their

own purposes. Teachers made choices to employ one protocol rather than another in accordance with their interests; they adjusted the suggested time limitations to accommodate an unfolding conversation; they sometimes ignored the prohibition against “judging” the student work in order to pursue a compelling question or dilemma.

2. *Ability to exploit subject expertise and examine subject issues.* Any piece of student work is student work in a subject area — literature, mathematics, art, science, history, photography, and so on. What teachers made of a given piece of work — the accomplishments or creativity they recognized, the struggles they detected — reflected their own conceptions of the subject area and of what it means to learn and teach it. Subject-related resources worked in some unexpected ways in these groups. Sometimes, a teacher’s lack of familiarity with a subject area forced others to explain basic concepts and rationales in a way they otherwise would not have done — recall that it was the *math* teacher in Shelby’s group who first focused the group’s attention on what it meant to write a persuasive essay. On the other hand, the participants were able to pursue this issue because they shared some common subject-related interests and because at least some members had relevant expertise and experience. Thus it was the English teacher in Shelby’s group who particularly helped the group to capitalize on the math teacher’s question. The teachers in our case groups were well aware of the benefits of common interests and participant resources. As a teacher remarked at another site, “The nice part about the group is we’re all focused on writing, so when I see a problem in a piece of student work, they may give me concrete examples of what they did to help *me* in my teaching.”

None of these groups came together with the explicit aim of pursuing professional development in a particular subject area. Their purposes were broader (a general concern for enhancing professional community and supporting instructional improvement), and they typically considered student work from several subject areas. Yet we are persuaded that explicit attention to the subject content of any given piece of student work and to related questions of student learning and teaching practice was an important contributor to what a group was able to accomplish by “looking at student work.”¹⁶

3. *A balance between comfort and challenge.* Recent literature describes “teacher learning communities” as those in which teachers develop the capacities to pose tough questions, challenge assumptions, and even disagree openly over matters of practice while cultivating trust and mutual support.¹⁷ Such capacities, it appears, develop only gradually. Shared inquiry into student learning and teaching prac-

tice runs against the grain of typical professional talk and counter to the prevailing norms of non-interference, privacy, and harmony.

In these projects, protocols and process guidelines worked to get a conversation started and to focus it on evidence of student learning. Such procedural tools gave participants permission to make observations about student work, to raise issues and questions, or to suggest implications for teaching practice. Yet more important than the tools was the human element at work — a facilitator who sought to open up a question or persist with a difficult point, a presenter who invited feedback by being self-critical or disclosing problems openly, a participant who took the risk to broach a controversial topic. We found the most generative conversations in the places where teachers actively invited challenge — for example, by being self-critical as in “This lesson didn’t fly” or by introducing a provocative question such as “Do you think the kids didn’t get it?”

4. *Facilitation to build a group and deepen a conversation.* A balance between comfort and challenge, when we found it, was the product of strategic and skilled leadership. Protocols and guidelines — tools for structuring conversation — have some power to help groups get past cultural norms of privacy and non-interference, but by themselves they won’t bear the burden of cultural change in schools and in teachers’ professional relationships. When we saw evidence of group norms built on open discussion, constructive questioning, and critique, we saw individuals taking the initiative to establish a different kind of conversation — one in which people could push on ideas and practices while still being respectful toward one another.

Shelby’s group provides a case in point. One teacher recalled that “the first few months, we were not dealing with tough issues. Everyone was very polite.” However, the group’s leader persistently and explicitly linked their conversations about teacher practice to the “bottom line” of improving student achievement. During meetings, she routinely called attention to the goal of looking at student work “to improve student achievement — to use that cycle of inquiry to try strategies and change student achievement levels.” Participants who volunteered to guide a protocol used the guidelines to clarify how the protocol supported the group’s broader aims:

So let’s go to interpreting the student work. [Reading] “In this period, we want to make sense of what the student is doing and why. Try to find as many different interpretations as possible and evaluate them against the kind and quality of evidence.” So we want to “try to infer what was the student think-

ing, what does the student understand and not understand, and what was the student most interested in. How does the student interpret the assignment?”

At the same time, the group’s leader worked to build a climate of consistent support. She met with participants between meetings to help them think about what student work they would bring to the next meeting and what protocol would best help them achieve their own purposes. And she emphasized the role of humor in the group, remarking:

We do a lot of laughing in my group. It makes it easier for people to bring hard things to the table because we’re not blaming the person who is bringing the hard thing. In some groups, teachers would hold back because “they’ll think I’m a horrible teacher” — but not in my group.

Over time, participants grew more comfortable in dealing with the “tough issues.” Shelby sums up:

I look forward to getting a chance to present. And it doesn’t intimidate me anymore to question whether I even know what a persuasive essay is and whether I have enough knowledge to try and communicate it to the students, because I don’t know. I think that’s what makes a person a good teacher, when you don’t think you know everything and you’re willing to open up and trying to understand it better.

THREE DILEMMAS IN MAKING THE MOST OF LOOKING AT STUDENT WORK

Putting student work on the table did not ensure whether or how it would be taken up in conversation. In Shelby’s case, teachers devoted close attention to the two student essays as they worked to define precisely how the writings had fallen short of Shelby’s expectations. When they eventually turned to a discussion of instruction, they were able to frame their suggestions in ways that linked directly to the problems of student learning reflected in the student work. Their efforts to link issues of teaching and learning were aided by a group leader who combined expertise in facilitation with many years of experience as an English teacher and by participants who treated looking at student work as a central part of their activities each time they met.

Even with the aid of facilitation and protocol guidelines, these practices take time and effort to introduce. We observed occasions when teachers took only limited advantage of student work that had been introduced, devoting

relatively little time and attention to the evidence of student understanding that it could offer. There were many variations to this pattern. At one site, teachers talked regularly about instruction and students' responses to classroom activities, but without actually bringing student work for others to examine. At other sites, teachers routinely made student work available, but they moved away from examining the content in detail as they turned to more general issues regarding class performance ("You would be amazed at how even the lowest students are trying to compare and contrast and analyze") or to questions about instruction ("What did you ask the students to write?"). How do we explain these often brief and often tentative approaches to looking at student work? We suggest three explanations, each with implications for practice.

1. *Concern for personal comfort and collegial relationships.* In crucial ways, any student work on the table is also the teacher's work: it results from an assignment the teacher has given and reflects the fruits of the teacher's instruction. It was no surprise then that teachers at our sites treated looking at student work as delicate business that risked "overstepping boundaries." Teachers were conscious of the need to affirm one another's intentions and competence and of the risk of offending or hurting feelings. On occasion, teachers responded to their colleagues' questions about student work by justifying their own teaching practice. Although the tone was often joking ("My turn to defend myself!"), the substance was serious.

2. *Scarce time, many interests.* Teachers seek to make the most of the scarce time they have together. Their talk in meetings reflected the strong impulse to turn the talk to wide-ranging issues of teaching practice, using the student work as a point of departure for discussion of curriculum, instruction, or assessment. Some teachers pointed out that the student work alone was not sufficient as a resource for the broad questions or issues they wished to raise. For example, one teacher brought a single example of a student essay for the group to examine but also wanted the opportunity to talk more generally about the progress of her entire class. ("I really wanted to show you more pieces. There's a big chunk of students in my class that had difficulty with that.") Yet we wondered whether the impulse to talk about *teaching* might have been better served by sustaining closer and longer attention to the available evidence of student *learning*.

Project organizers emphasized that looking at student work serves as just one strategy in a broader agenda of teacher development, support for teacher community, and the pursuit of school reform. Their point is certainly an important one, but it also underscores the multiple demands on

teachers' time and attention and the problem of tradeoffs that teachers must make when they sit down together to look at student work.

3. *Uncertainty about what to highlight in "looking at" student work.* The collaborative practice of looking at student work is different in important respects from the familiar experience of reviewing student work independently in the classroom. The protocols supply one way of dealing with the unfamiliarity, helping teachers get a fresh look at student work and at the same time refrain from making premature judgments. Still, in many ways, the teachers in our study were uncertain as to how to make their conversations a productive enterprise. Two aspects of this uncertainty stood out in particular.

First, teachers had the unfamiliar task of deciding what work to bring for others to look at. Unlike formal programs of professional development in which student work may take the form of crafted and polished "cases,"¹⁸ the student work in these projects traveled directly from the classroom of participating teachers to the meeting in which it was discussed. The teachers had to decide — often quickly, given the exigencies of their daily workloads — which student work would best serve their own purposes and those of the group: One piece or many? Work showing student mastery or work displaying student struggles? Work linked to curriculum in other classrooms or just their own? Each selection represented a tradeoff, and no selection could serve all purposes fully.

Second, the participants then had the additional task of figuring out what to say about the student work in the time allotted, given their own multiple interests and diverse backgrounds. Many of the protocols we followed required that the presenter refrain from supplying introductory background or context regarding the students who produced the work, the assignment the students had been given, or the instructional strategies the teacher had employed. Participants were asked to begin by describing what they saw in the work while refraining from judgments about its quality. However, the task of "just describing" the work, and doing so in a way that would stimulate productive discussion, turned out to be complicated. Furthermore, the teachers almost invariably displayed what we termed a "quest for context." For example, when given the opportunity to pose questions, they focused on precisely those points of context that the presenter had been asked to withhold: "Is this the first draft?" "Is this related to a story that the children read in class?" "Were they instructed to underline the first sentence?" "Why did you choose this piece, this student's work?"

In some respects, these dilemmas may be resolved with the simple passage of time, as groups gain familiarity and

facility with particular procedures. Persistence matters, and some tradeoffs remain inevitable. However, we argue that groups would also benefit from tackling the dilemmas head on, reserving time to reflect on the assumptions underlying a given protocol or process and the degree to which it provides a fit with the participants' own purposes and resources.


CONCLUSION

The slogan "Examining student work for what matters most," coined nearly a decade ago, implied a promise that systematic, collective attention to student work would help to advance school-based teacher development and school reform. "Looking at student work" has emerged as a practice with growing appeal and potential importance but with few strong roots or traditions in schools.

The value of looking at student work resides in its potential for bringing *students* more consistently and explicitly into deliberations among teachers. Looking at student work has the potential to expand teachers' opportunity to learn, to cultivate a professional community that is both willing and able to inquire into practice, and to focus school-based teacher conversations directly on the improvement of teaching and learning. These are benefits worth pursuing. To secure these benefits will entail organization, leadership, and persistence. The projects we studied illuminate some strategic possibilities available to schools and thus expand our supply of promising supports for teacher learning and school reform. They also suggest that a slogan is but a starting point.

1. For a summary report on the California School Restructuring Program, see Judith Warren Little and Rena Dorph, *Lessons About Comprehensive School Reform: California's School Restructuring Demonstration Program* (Berkeley: Graduate School of Education, University of California, 1998).
2. Joseph P. McDonald, "Students' Work and Teachers' Learning," in Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller, eds., *Teachers Caught in the Action: Professional Development That Matters* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), pp. 209-35; Steve Seidel, "Wondering to Be Done: The Collaborative Assessment Conference," in David Allen, ed., *Assessing Student Learning: From Grading to Understanding* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), pp. 21-39; and Judith Warren Little, "Organizing Schools for Teacher Learning," in Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes, eds., *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Teaching and Policy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), pp. 233-62.
3. See, for example, www.essentialschools.org; www.annenberginstitute.org; <http://scs.aed.org/rsw>; www.pz.harvard.edu/research/evidence.htm; and www.edtrust.org.
4. For a review of five programmatic approaches and corresponding bodies of research, see Judith Warren Little, Maryl Gearhart, Marnie Curry, and Judith Kafka, "'Looking at Student Work' for Teacher Learning and School Reform," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 2002.
5. For exceptions, see Cynthia L. Greenleaf and Ruth Schoenbach, *Close Readings: A Study of Key Issues in the Use of Literacy Learning Cases for the Professional Development of Secondary Teachers: Final Report to the Spencer and MacArthur Foundations* (Oakland, Calif.: Strategic Literacy

Initiative, WestEd, 2001); Elham Kazemi and Megan Loef Franke, "Using Student Work to Support Professional Development in Elementary Mathematics," Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, Seattle, April 2003.

6. We have identified the three organizations and projects by name, but we have employed pseudonyms for all participating individuals and school sites.
7. Harvard Project Zero, "The Evidence Project: Proposal Narrative: Proposal to the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund," 1998, p. 1. See also Steve Seidel et al., *The Evidence Process: A Collaborative Approach to Understanding and Improving Teaching and Learning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Project Zero, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, 2001).
8. Academy for Educational Development, "Reviewing Student Work/Improving Student Achievement: Proposal to the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund," 1998, p. 1.
9. Coalition of Essential Schools, "Instructional Improvement Through Inquiry and Collaboration: Proposal to the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund," 1998. See also Lindsay Claire Matsumura and Joan Rector Steinberg, *Collaborative, School-Based Professional Development Settings for Teachers: Implementation and Links to Improving the Quality of Classroom Practice and Student Learning* (Los Angeles: National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, UCLA, 2001); and Bill Nave, *Critical Friends Groups: Their Impact on Students, Teachers, and Schools: Results of a Two-Year Qualitative Study of the National School Reform Faculty Program* (Providence, R.I.: Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2000).
10. For a more extended analysis of how local approaches to looking at student work affect teachers' opportunities to learn, see Maryl Gearhart, Judith Warren Little, Judith Kafka, and Marnie Curry, "Looking at Student Work: Locating Opportunities for Teacher Learning in the Context of Practice," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 2002.
11. One site relied exclusively on members of the group to facilitate protocol-based discussions; other sites also used teachers to facilitate, sometimes supplemented by external facilitators or coaches. Summary descriptions of specific protocols may be found at www.lasw.org.
12. These protocols evolved during the project. Current versions may or may not have the identical features.
13. Not all protocols are designed to help participants withhold judgment. In approaches oriented explicitly toward standards implementation, protocols may be designed to structure an assessment of student work in relationship to specific tasks and standards. For example, see the approach advocated by the Education Trust (www.edtrust.org).
14. www.lasw.org.
15. The term "mutual adaptation" was coined by Paul Berman and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, Volume VIII: Implementing and Sustaining Innovations* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1978). Researchers in fields ranging from cognitive science to anthropology similarly show how individuals and groups "appropriate" innovative designs to suit particular purposes and contexts.
16. Most of the available research focuses on subject-specific professional development activity. In one recent study, researchers found that teachers were able to derive more insights from student work as they began to devote very close attention to its details and to link the student work to their own classroom observations and conversations with students (Kazemi and Franke, op. cit.). For an example of a subject-specific protocol for looking at student work, see the "Protocol for Looking at Student Work in Reading Apprenticeship Classrooms," developed by the Strategic Literacy Initiative, WestEd. You can contact the Strategic Literacy Initiative at 510/302-4245.
17. See, for example, Christopher M. Clark, ed., *Talking Shop: Authentic Conversation and Teacher Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001); Pam Grossman, Sam Wineburg, and Stephen Woolworth, "Toward a Theory of Teacher Community," *Teachers College Record*, vol. 103, 2001, pp. 942-1012; and Milbrey W. McLaughlin and Joan E. Talbert, *Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
18. See, for example, Carne Barnett, "Mathematics Teaching Cases as a Catalyst for Informed Strategic Inquiry," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 14, 1998, pp. 81-93. 

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