

The Stories That Student Art Tells: Examining Student Work as a Strategy for Arts Advocacy

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Student work offers compelling evidence in support of the claim that the arts play an essential role in high quality education—something that arts educators have believed for a long time. To convey this belief to those outside of the arts classroom, we must be able to effectively communicate about what teaching and learning in the arts looks like. One strategy to deepen understanding about the values of arts education is to collaboratively examine student art work.

To examine student work with others, a protocol is often followed. A protocol is a set of presentations, observations, discussions, and reflections that focus on the examination of student work. Think of a protocol for examining student work as an art critique, yet an art critique that is structured and facilitated. Many different protocols for examining student work have been developed for various purposes (see References). The following protocol uses standards to guide the assessment of student performance and to inform further instruction in the classroom.

Protocols for examining student work are typically used in professional development activities for small groups of teachers, but are also used as a means for schools to invite the participation of parents and community members. In each instance, participants share and learn about arts education in a respectful and accountable way. By inviting those outside the arts classroom to participate in the examination of authentic student art, we can demonstrate in a powerful and concrete way how students develop creatively and intellectually through the arts.

A Protocol for Examining Student Work

A. Presentation (15 minutes)

The presenting teacher chooses a sample of student work to share with a small group of teachers, parents, or community members. The student work should show rich evidence of student learning. Identify the sample as a work-in-progress, a final piece, or documentation of a performance.

1. What should students know and be able to do? (standards)
Identify the one or two standards that describe what you wanted students to know and be able to do as a result of the assignment.
2. What does good student work look like? (assessment)
Share your standards-based assessment tool criteria, benchmarks, and exemplars.
3. Which example(s) of student work show(s) evidence of student performance? (student work)
Share copies of your student work sample and any supporting evidence (i.e., anecdotal notes, teacher, or student journals, etc.)

4. What were students asked to do? (activity)

Clearly describe the activity that students were asked to do. Any relevant conditions of performance should be described (i.e., age of student?; how much time was given for the assignment?; did students work independently or in groups?); were revisions made?; etc.)

B. Examination (15 minutes)

1. What story does the work tell?

Take some time to look deeply at the student work. Record your observations, comments, and questions that come up as you look. *Try to describe without evaluating or interpreting the art.* Participants should share these initial observations.

2. How good is good enough?

Look at the work again using your scoring rubric or other assessment tool to assess the student's performance. Look specifically for evidence that your selected standard(s) have been addressed. How can you tell how well the student understood and synthesized the knowledge, skills, and concepts addressed in the standard(s)? Discuss your findings with your peers.

C. Reflection (15 minutes)

1. How can your analysis guide further instruction?

Discuss what your analysis of the student work has told you about this student's learning and classroom instruction. What action will you take back into the classroom based on the analysis (i.e., revise instruction; re-teach a particular concept or skill; revise the assessment tool; discover a new direction.)?

2. Was the protocol useful?

Reflect on the process and adapt it to better fit your needs when necessary. Also, reflect on the type and quality of your observations and comments. As with any process, your skills get better with practice, and even better when reflected upon.

References

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