Mara Krechevsky · Ben Mardell
Melissa Rivard · Daniel Wilson
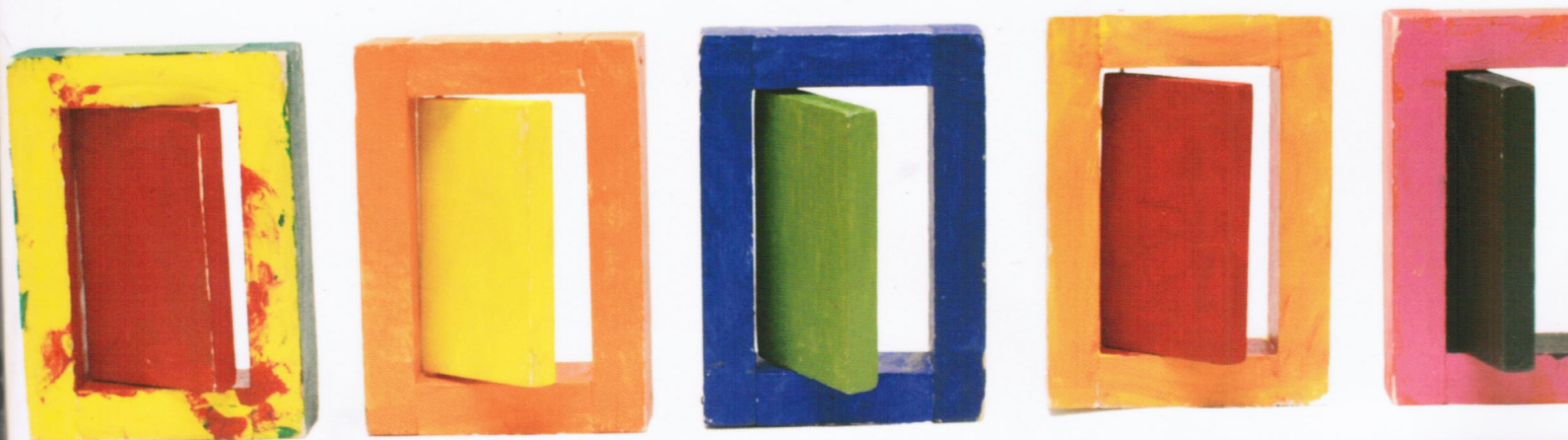**Researchers from Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education**

PreK–12

Visible Learners

PROMOTING **REGGIO-INSPIRED** APPROACHES IN ALL SCHOOLS

Cover design by Michael Cook
Cover image: Copyright © 2013 by Melissa Rivard

The names of the teachers and many of the students have not been changed, though in a few cases pseudonyms are used for students.

7 DESIGNING AND FACILITATING ADULT STUDY GROUPS

Even if you are committed to creating an adult study group to look at documentation of student learning, it can be hard to know where to start. This tool identifies key features to consider when launching adult study groups. It also includes a sample agenda and discussion protocol for looking at documentation of student learning.

Who This tool is most useful for administrators, professional development providers, or teacher leaders who facilitate adult study groups such as classroom teams, grade-level colleagues, members of an academic department, or colleagues from different schools.

How Consider the following elements when forming adult study groups.

Group Size and Composition
Determine size of the group (ideally four to eight participants) and criteria for group membership depending on your goal (e.g., interest in the topic, similarity or diversity of grade level or subject matter, or variety of perspectives).

Length and Frequency of Meetings
Decide on length and frequency of meetings—ideally at least forty-five to sixty minutes and once or twice a month.

Rotation Schedule
Create a rotation schedule in which one to two individuals or teams share documentation at each meeting.

Documentation Guidelines
Propose guidelines for selecting and sharing documentation:

- Ask participants to identify a focus question about teaching and learning to guide their inquiry (see tool 12 in chapter 13). Although posing a question about teaching and learning often helps to focus the collection and selection of documentation, sometimes teachers prefer to document in a more open-ended fashion to see what emerges (see tool 13 in chapter 13).
- Put your documentation into an easily shareable format such as PowerPoint or video that can be shown on a laptop or projected, or make copies of text and images for the entire group to look at. Video clips should be fewer than five minutes and, ideally, viewed twice. Written documents should be able to be read in three to five minutes.
- Keep context brief (two to three minutes).
- Choose a protocol or thinking routine for discussing the documentation.

Group Norms

With the group, identify group norms such as the following:
- Start and end on time
- Ensure equal participation (go-arounds can be useful here)
- Rotate roles such as note taking, time keeping, facilitating, and monitoring norms

Notes

Think about how to capture what the group is learning for its own use or for sharing with others.

Sample Meeting Agenda (Thirty to Thirty-Five Minutes)

- Review meeting goals, group norms, agenda, and notes or highlights from the last meeting. (two minutes)
- Participants give brief classroom updates since last meeting. (three to five minutes)
- Presenter provides brief context. (three minutes)
- Group asks presenter clarifying questions. (two minutes)
- Group looks at documentation in silence. (three to five minutes)
- Group responds to following questions while presenter is silent. (ten to twelve minutes)
  - What do you see or hear in the documentation? Point to what makes you say that.
  - What questions does the documentation raise? (Presenter does not answer questions.)
  - What are the implications for teaching and learning and next steps for the presenter?
- Presenter shares his or her take-aways. (two minutes)
- Group members jot down at least one idea to use in their own classrooms and share ideas with the group. (four minutes)
- Debrief protocol and thank presenter. (one minute)

Variations and Extensions

- Presenters may prefer to name one or two questions when giving a brief context for more specific group feedback.
- Experiment with different amounts of time for looking at the work and the protocol as a whole. What do you notice when you spend more or less time with the protocol?
- The following is another possible set of discussion questions for when the group responds. Identify two or three focus questions in the following that one or more of the group is most interested in exploring.

What Are Students Learning and Understanding?

- What are the key concepts or skills the students are working on?
- What evidence do you see of student learning?

How Is the Group Learning?

- How do the interactions or conversations among students help them learn or make learning more difficult? (Consider size and composition of the group, the language and strategies used, the roles students take, and what they choose to share with each other.)
- When does one person's thinking seem to affect the thinking of another or the whole group?
- What does the documentation suggest about creating better conditions (physical space, time, materials, nature of the task, etc.) for learning in groups?

Where Do You Go Next?

- What might you try next to deepen or extend students' thinking or learning?
- What might be the value of sharing some or all of this documentation and perhaps your own reflections with the students? What might you select and how might you frame it?
- What is still puzzling or interesting to you after viewing the documentation?

Tools 8 through 10 provide other discussion protocols from which to choose. You can also visit www.makinglearningvisibleresources.org or www.schoolreforminitiative.org for additional options.

If You Only Have Five Minutes . . .

- Start a routine of sharing a short video clip or other example of student documentation at the beginning of staff meetings.
- Start staff meetings with five minutes in which anyone can ask for help with a dilemma and get quick feedback or brainstorming.
- Invite a colleague into your classroom when something unusual is going on.
- Display documentation in the teachers' room over the course of a week with a note asking colleagues to share what they see, think, or wonder on sticky notes.

12 BEGINNING TO DOCUMENT THROUGH INTENTIONAL INQUIRY

There are many ways to get started with documentation. Some teachers begin by identifying a question about learning they want to explore. Others wait until a classroom need arises that can be addressed by documentation. Still others decide to cast a wide net and observe or videotape a session without a particular purpose in mind, just to see what of interest emerges. Regardless of how you start, it is important to be clear in your own mind about why you are documenting and what you want to learn from it. Tools 12 and 13 describe two different ways to start documenting—one more intentional and one more exploratory. (Tool 1 in chapter 11 and tool 8 in chapter 12 suggest additional ways to become familiar with documentation.)

Who The choosing-a-question protocol[1] is useful for teachers formulating a question about individual and group learning to guide their documentation.

How The protocol can be used by a small or large group. Allow at least thirty to forty minutes; however, in larger groups the discussion may take longer.

- Decide if you want to identify a shared question. Questions can be developed individually, with partners, or as a whole group. (three minutes)
- Consider the following criteria for each candidate question (ten to fifteen minutes). Is your question
    - Connected to supporting individual and group learning?
    - Connected to your own educational values and interests?
    - Related to your school's mission or educational values?
    - Likely to be of interest and value to other educators?
    - Related to a topic that students could help you investigate?
    - A manageable size (e.g., grounded in something you already do in the classroom)?
    - Aesthetically pleasing to you and others (e.g., succinct, inspiring)?
- Write your question on chart paper. The group shares thoughts about the question in relation to these criteria (except the connection to your educational values and interests) and you remain silent. (fifteen to twenty minutes)
- Presenter shares main take-aways. (one to two minutes)
- Facilitator thanks the presenter(s).
- Repeat this process for each question in your group.
- Debrief the protocol. (two minutes)