

Key Results Walk-through Debriefing Notes – Science Department November 2004

Focus Question: What is the evidence that students are actively engaged in learning?

This was the first of three key results walk-throughs that provide constructive feedback as we make our journey toward our goal of supporting effective and rewarding learning for all students in the school's science department.

The walk-through team was comprised of on campus and off-campus invited LBUSD personnel representing site-level administrators, counselors, and district level curriculum leaders who visited 10 out of 14 science classrooms.

The following comments summarize the debrief of evidence, questions and suggestions for next steps that address the focus question as it relates to the three components of the science department's professional development plan.

- **Implementing Standards-Based Practice**

- ***How are most students able to articulate the lesson concept/objective?***

Having a highly visible and clearly written lesson objective with a congruent proving behavior aligned with the standards, agenda and instructional activities helps to focus and sustain student attention for intentional involvement and articulation of what they are expected to know and be able to do.

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – In most classes, standards-based instruction and learning was observed. Content standards, objectives, essential questions and instructional activities were aligned. A few classes required students to copy the objective written on the board. When questioned, most students could articulate some aspect of their learning. For example, students could state what they were learning, restate the objective in their own word or knew where to look to find the objective if they could not state it. In one class, students were expected to demonstrate their conceptual learning at the end of the lesson by writing a five-sentence paragraph.

Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Question – Although an objective and some form of the standards were present, the proving behavior for the objective in most classrooms was either incongruent or missing. It was too early in the visitation for students in a few classes to be able to articulate the lesson concept. Most students in the remaining classes visited could state the task for learning and what they were learning but could not explain how they would know that they had learned or why they were learning the specific concept.

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- ***How are most students responding to checks for understanding?***

Using a variety of covert and overt participation strategies to reach all students allows students and teacher to monitor understanding and adjust their learning.

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – Checks for understanding were observed in most classes. In a few classes, strategies were used to reach all students. Students were expected to turn and talk to their neighbor, write responses and turn and talk, write responses on white boards and show their work to the teacher and peers, wait and think before responding and respond when randomly called upon rather than raising one’s hand to volunteer the answer. Higher level questioning to probe student understanding and challenge thinking was observed in three classes. For example, students were asked to clarify, justify or give further explanation of their responses. Some students were observed questioning each other to clarify directions of a task. In two classes, student participation was timed with the expectation that the responses would be checked. In one class, students were expected to work in groups, select a concept from the standard and teach the concept to the class. Student were observed in once class using a rubric to assess each other’s work.

Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Questions – There was a lack of opportunity in most classes for the observers to see the use of intentional, effective and consistent checks of understanding. Some checks for understanding did not address most students and were less effective than others. It was not apparent to the observers that interventions were in place to support struggling learners with their attempts to make meaning of the content and in turn be able to express their learning. Some checks for understanding were ignored or not acknowledged by students. In one class, the intent for overt or covert checks for understanding throughout the lesson was not apparent.

- ***How are students held accountable to remain on task?***

Student disengagement will severely limit learning. Specific structures and strategies must be in place to restore engagement when disengagement occurs.

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – Very few students were noted as being off task and returned to the task when prompted by the teacher or peers.

Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Question – None cited.

- **Integrating Content Literacy**

Embedding vocabulary development, reading and writing strategies at strategic points in lesson design and instruction facilitates student access to the learning and maximizes understanding of academic content.

How are Cornell Notes being used?

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – In some classes there was evidence of consistent use of Cornell Notes.

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Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Question – The consistent use of Cornell Notes was not observed in all classes. Although most students were familiar with the format of Cornell Notes, the routine use of the Cornell note taking method was not apparent to the observers. When questioned, student responses showed a lack of understanding of the importance of note taking and what effective notes should look like. Some student examples of notes were incomplete or not legible. It was not clear how students used their notes beyond taking notes as directed. Most examples of notes were not in students’ own works. Examples of effective and functional notes were not displayed in the classroom.

- ***Do students understand and use content vocabulary accurately?***

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – One class had a word wall in the form of a graphic organizer to guide student thinking during the unit. Students were giving verbal responses using the discipline’s content vocabulary. When questioned, a few students showed accurate understanding of terminology. One class made concept maps to show connections between vocabulary terms. Some had vocabulary notes or cards to support their understanding.

Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Question - In one class, students were expected to look up and copy definitions from the text or glossary. There was no evidence that the students were expected to process their understand of the definitions using additional strategies to promote student understanding of the terms. When asked, some students could not correctly pronounce terms or knew what the terms in the lesson meant. There was no opportunity on this walk-through to discern the level of understanding of the content vocabulary or to observe how vocabulary strategies were used to support student vocabulary development and understanding.

- ***What are students reading, writing, and talking about relative to the lesson concept?***

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – Students were observed formulating meaning of the lesson concept in a variety of ways. In some classes, students were reading text, writing notes, recording data in a lab, assessing their work, using graphic organizer, drawing pictures, problem solving, and discussing ideas around the lesson concept.

Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Question – In one class, students were expected to read and write but no given an opportunity to stop and talk with each other, question and share what they were learning. Most students do not know how to formulate effective questions to drive and sustain their learning.

- **Creating a Learning-Center Environment**

A learning-centered environment fosters learning for both teacher and students. Teachers can learn from their students everything they need to know about instruction. Use of data and high expectations for students informs instruction and creates interests and opportunities to motivate students.

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- *How are students working together to make meaning of the lesson concept?*

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – In all classes, the seating is arranged for students to work in groups. In most classes, students are expected to work in groups. Students were engaged in problem solving, explaining to their neighbor, responding to each other's questions. The conversations observed among students were task related.

Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Question – No observations cited.

- *Are students giving more than a few word answers to questions? Are they supporting their thinking with evidence and a line of reasoning?*

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – In one class in particular, students were given time and opportunity to develop their responses to teacher questions. Students commented on other peer responses and restated their position with reasons for their thinking.

Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Question – No observations were cited in other classes in support of the focus question.

- *Does posted work demonstrate different levels of student thinking?*

Team Feedback: Support of the Focus Question – In some classes, current graded student work was posted. In a few classes, there was a variety of student work posted. Comments were written on a few samples of posted work. Some comments were instructional to guide what constitutes proficiency and beyond proficient work. A generic rubric was posted next to student work in one class.

Team Feedback: Lack of Support of the Focus Question – Rubrics were not posted in all classes. One class had posted work with no variation in the grading.

Next Steps

- Focus on writing clear objectives with congruent proving behavior that can be assessed during the class.
- Instruct student on how to take functional notes that will facilitate and support their learning. Help students to learn how to use their notes.
- Design and use rubrics to improve the quality of student work.
- Embed content literacy strategies in lessons and instruction.
- Continue to implement effective strategies for checks for understanding.
- Model what you want students to be able to do.
- Use professional development opportunities and one-on-one coaching to help refine practice.

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