

Protocol for Looking at Student Work: Quality Work Lens

Why does Quality Matter?

“When a student completes her schooling and moves into adult life, she will be judged not by her ability to perform on tests of basic skills, but by the quality of her character and the quality of her work. When do we expect young people to develop the passion and skills to do work of quality if we do not support this sharply and deeply in school?”

For students and teachers, excellence is built through an ongoing process of examining models of strong student work, and examining their own work, to create a shared vision of what we are aiming for: what constitutes quality. For teachers, this process informs instruction and planning; for students, it promotes critical thinking, creativity and craftsmanship.”

Ron Berger, EL Education

Quality Work*

- Aligns with or exceeds grade level academic standards
- Reflects application of content knowledge and success (aka backpack) skill/s to new contexts
- Is done with care and precision with attention to accuracy, detail and aesthetics
- Requires multiple revisions (drafts, rehearsals) based on critique from others
- Demonstrates original, creative thinking of students - authentic personal voice or ideas rather than simply showing students can follow directions or fill in blanks
- Uses formats and standards from the professional world rather than artificial school formats (i.e students create a book review for *teenreads* rather than a book report for the teacher.)
- Connects academic standards and backpack skills with real-world issues, controversies and/or local people/places
- The work matters to the student and ideally contributes to a larger community as well.
- Created for and shared with an audience beyond the classroom.
- Connects ideas to broader frames and concepts
- Challenges students to create knowledge rather than receive it

*This description is intended to provide a common vision as we use student work to improve teaching and learning. Not all descriptors must be present for a piece of work to be considered high quality. They are meant to act as a starting point for developing a shared understanding of quality.

Adapted from *Attributes of High Quality Student Work*, EL Education and *Looking at Student Work: Deeper Learning Lens*, High Tech High

The Protocol

Norms:

- Share the air.
- Build on strengths in the work. We have a tendency to jump to “what’s missing;” we don’t want to operate from a deficit model.
- Focus on the work. Resist the urge to spend time lamenting the information we do not have. What can we learn from what we do have?

Steps to Follow:

1. Examine student work samples (5 minutes)

Participants look closely at the work, asking themselves “What strikes me about this work? How does this work exemplify quality? What questions does it raise for me? What would make it align more closely to the Quality Work descriptors?” Participants take notes based on these questions.

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER: It’s NOT about the teacher or about the students who created this work. Look at the work as if it is a photograph in a museum: we may know a bit about the photographer, but it is the work itself that speaks to us.

2. Pair/share (3 minutes)

Turn to a neighbor. What strikes you about this work?

3. Rounds (25 minutes)

For each round, there will be *one minute of silent reflection* so that participants may gather their thoughts. Then we will “whip” around the circle, each answering the question for that round. *You may pass or acknowledge that someone made the same point you were thinking about.*

Round 1: (5 minutes)

- Reflection
- **What strikes you about this work?**

Round 2: (5 minutes)

- Reflection
- **Where do you see evidence of the Quality Work descriptors?**

Round 3: (5 minutes)

- Reflection
- **In looking at the work, what questions are raised for you?**

Round 4: (5 minutes)

- Reflection
- **How might this work become more closely aligned to the grade level curriculum (map) / standards? Suggestions?**

4. Closing the Loop (5 minutes)

Participants reflect on the discussion and *share one take-a-way about how this conversation could inform their practice*: What is an idea that struck you? A possible next step? A lingering question?

5. Debrief (10 minutes)

The purpose of the debrief is to help us deconstruct the process, so that we can get better at having these conversations in the future. *Resist the urge to turn the debrief back into a discussion of the student work*. Some guiding questions:

- Was there a moment when someone in the group pushed your thinking?
- What suggestions do you have about how to improve this process?
- How might you use a process like this in your own context?

Tips for Protocol Facilitators

Be courageous and confident ~ strong facilitation is the key to having successful dialogue about our work and is appreciated by everyone in the group.

Stick to the time for each section ~ use a timer to keep track, or ask a volunteer to help.

Uphold the norms ~ if the norms are violated, gently remind the group of the norms and the purpose they serve: 1) to help us dig deep into a piece of work and deepen our own understanding of what quality work "looks" like and 2) to ensure an equity of voices, so that diverse perspectives on the work can surface.

Keep the group focused on the protocol and the work, redirecting the conversation when necessary ~ if someone tells a seemingly disconnected story or offers a comment not grounded in the work itself, gently ask them to return to what they see in the work. You can also encourage participants to write thoughts down that they may want to contribute to the discussion portion.

Resist the urge to skip the Debrief, and always Close of the Loop ~ the Debrief is a crucial way to deconstruct the conversation and improve the quality of our dialogue w/colleagues over time. *Closing of the Loop* ensures that everyone leaves with a next step to guide their own evolving practice.