

## **Interpreting Student Work to Inform Instruction**

### **Overview of interpreting student work to inform instruction**

Teachers regularly analyze student work, including classwork, homework, and assessments, to inform instruction. They identify individual students' strengths and areas for growth and look for patterns in student thinking and capability across groups. To do this, they determine and apply criteria to student work, making sure to maintain broad conceptions of competence; analyze work against those criteria, guarding against bias and deficit-based interpretations; and then make inferences about what students know and can do. Teachers plan instructional responses to what they learn from analyzing student work, making decisions about where and what kind of additional or differentiated instruction is required.

### **Advancing justice through interpreting student work to inform instruction**

Teachers' interpretations of student work and the instructional decisions made as a result of those interpretations directly impact students' opportunities to learn and to develop academic identities. Interpreting student work enables teachers to appropriately challenge students. Misinterpretation of students' capabilities can perpetuate the denial of ambitious instruction to historically underserved groups. With this in mind, teachers must interpret student work in terms of student competence, seeking evidence of what they know and are able to do. Teachers must also identify what students seem not yet able to do, to plan instruction and supports that will enable students to thrive. Doing so requires teachers to monitor both their interpretations of student work for distortion or bias, and the efficacy of the assessments and assignments they are using to ensure that they are not impediments to students developing and demonstrating competence in a content area.



## Decomposition of interpreting student work to inform instruction

*Table 1: Areas of Work and Techniques for Interpreting Student Work to Inform Instruction*

| Areas of work for interpreting student work to inform instruction | Techniques for interpreting student work to inform instruction                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| Reviewing or developing criteria for analysis                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind yourself of the task/assignment features.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Review what competencies the task enables students to demonstrate with regard to the learning goals.</li> <li>◦ Review for barriers or biases (e.g., related to race, gender, class, language).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Review (or develop if necessary) criteria for evaluating the work.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Explicitly name what counts as evidence of understanding or skill.</li> <li>◦ Identify factors not salient to the focal skill or understanding (e.g., handwriting, spelling, fact error in mathematics).</li> <li>◦ Ensure that criteria are not based on narrow understandings of the content, or personal preference (e.g., conventional algorithms, a single interpretation of a text).</li> <li>◦ Consider how data collected from this analysis will be used (e.g., to learn about individual student competence, to see patterns across the class).</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Applying criteria to student work                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply the criteria to individual examples of student work, ignoring non-salient factors.</li> <li>• Note whether and how the student work demonstrates the relevant competencies, keeping track of useful examples.</li> <li>• Recognize valid novel or non-standard approaches and revise criteria or definition of competence accordingly.</li> <li>• Note any indications that the task was not clear or did not allow students to demonstrate competence.</li> <li>• Consider whether various ways of knowing and doing are accounted for as criteria are applied.</li> <li>• Consider and note the ways patterns of bias might affect the application of criteria.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |



| Areas of work for interpreting student work to inform instruction | Techniques for interpreting student work to inform instruction                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| Articulating inferences                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe relevant features of the student work sample (e.g., strengths, weaknesses, areas for growth, areas of misunderstanding, novel ideas).</li> <li>• Double check conclusions about the student's competence, looking closely at the amount and quality of available evidence.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consider other plausible interpretations.</li> <li>○ Check for the influence of personal preference or style, societal biases, teacher-student relationship, or factors that may be influencing one's interpretations of student work.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Check inferences for overgeneralizations based on limited evidence (e.g., overstatement of students' skill or understanding).</li> <li>• Consider how the design or implementation of the task might have affected student work.</li> </ul>                                                                                                      |
| Examining patterns and determining next steps                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking across a relevant batch of student work (e.g., from a class, or from all classes at a particular grade or level), identify common patterns in strengths, areas for growth, areas of misunderstanding, novel ideas.</li> <li>• Double-check conclusions about patterns in student work by, for example, counting the number of times a specific example of student thinking or misconception appears.</li> <li>• With patterns in mind, look back and look ahead.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consider how instruction offered prior to the assignment might have impacted students' performance.</li> <li>○ Consider instructional approaches to responding to specific patterns, including areas for additional instruction or a different instructional approach, opportunities to accelerate instruction, or possibilities for differentiating instruction for different groups of students.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

