An English Department Collaborates to Measure Student Growth in Writing to Text

Presenters: Kelly Swiatlowski, Damon Douglas
District(s): Belchertown, Berkshire Hills, Gill-Montague, Hadley, Northampton, South Hadley

Best Practice Description:
Our district requested that members of the faculty volunteer to work together as a cross-departmental team and participate in a workshop to learn about the state regulations and recommendations pertaining to DDM’s. Working together, representatives from the English, History, and Special Education departments created a pilot performance assessment and grading rubric for the Common Core requirement on “Writing to Text.”

We returned to our school and spoke to our respective departments, and the entire teaching staff to share with them what we learned about DDM requirements, and to get feedback from the large group on the assessment we created.

After the administration of the first performance assessment in a ninth grade ELA classroom, we made revisions to the rubric in order to make it a more effective assessment tool. We then created a second pilot performance assessment and administered it in order to measure student growth, relative to the first pilot test.

Over the next month, we will come together as a small group to score this assessment in order to check for consistency of scoring and alignment of expectations. Revisions to rubrics and tasks will continue as needed to guarantee best practice in the future.

Collaboration is an underlying component of our small school—everyone wants everyone else to do well, and this culture is supported by our principal.

Strategies:
To collaborate effectively, we need significant blocks of time for common planning.

Collaborative Strategies:
- Openness to revision
- Freedom to disagree
- Strive to compromise or arrive at consensus

Collaboration works best when it starts as a small group model, and includes revisions based on discussions with larger sub-sets of groupings. For instance from our cross-departmental small group, members brought the work back to our individual departments for discussion and modification, then shared with the entire school, then went back to small group model and repeated the process.

Who is involved?
- ELA Teachers: Kelly Swiatlowski, Lori Vaz, Tamatha Waldron
- Special Education Teacher: Virginia Bilz
- History Teacher: Leny Jo Captein
- CES facilitator: Damon Douglas
How is the work structured?

• Became knowledgeable of the law and its requirements for educator evaluation.
• Started with a high-quality model of a DDM “Writing to Text” task and adapted it in order to suit a specific group of students (9th grade ELA).
• Created the rubric, and with the guidance from the consultant, streamlined it to measure skills specific to the “Writing to Text” objective, in order to make showing growth a realistic possibility.
• Piloted the task and rubric, came together to align scoring and determine an anchor paper for “High,” “Middle,” and “Low,” achievement.
• Revised the performance assessment and the rubric in order to create a more effective second performance assessment.
• Administered the second performance assessment.
• Will once again come together in order to ensure scoring consistency, determine student growth as related to educator evaluation, and revise tasks and rubrics as necessary.

Next steps?

• We will continue to aim for consistency in scoring, which requires us to practice as small groups.
• We will need to develop additional tasks for other courses. As a department we teach eleven more courses, so additional performance measures will be required at each level.
• We need more time to work on the department level in order to create consistent measures; some would like to use portfolio-based assessments, or the pre-test/post-test model.

Contact Person

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