

Vignettes of Co-constructing Criteria

Cleveland Heights/University Heights City Schools, Ohio

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A group of 15 teachers, coaches and principals from the Cleveland Heights/University Heights City Schools in Ohio participated at the Anne Davies' 2009 July Institute on Vancouver Island. Other district staff also attended Anne's Atlanta (GA) Conference last year. These professionals from all levels – elementary, middle and high school – continue to meet regularly to share their progress with regard to implementing the assessment strategies and approaches. At their most recent (December 09) meeting, they presented multiple stories of how co-creating criteria has impacted their practice. Following are five vignettes from those teachers, coaches and a principal that illustrate how this classroom assessment strategy has increased learning for both students and educators in Cleveland Heights.

Beth Rae, Instructional Coach
Roxboro Elementary School

We began our “Co-Constructing Criteria” journey with a 4th grade class at Roxboro Elementary School. The instructional coach met with the classroom teacher to decide what they'd like to co-construct about! The teacher wanted all of her students to be able to write a friendly letter, so they decided to co-construct criteria on that topic. The teacher and the coach decided ahead of time what they wanted the students to eventually construct so that the teacher could add her “two cents worth” when the students were finished. It was decided that the coach would teach the lesson and that the teacher would eventually try one on her own. The coach and the teacher worked hard to make this lesson a success as it would be the first time that the coach had taught this concept. The principal asked permission to video record the lesson so that we could share with other staff members.

The coach designed a lesson that started with teaching the concept of co-constructing criteria and what it meant. She then showed the kids her learning intention in the form of an “I can” statement which read: *“I can co-construct criteria for a friendly letter. This*

means that we all work together to decide what a good friendly letter looks like. It also means that I know how to get the A!"

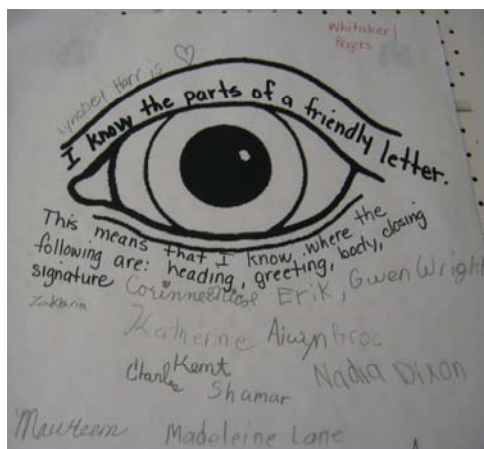
The coach asked the students to recite the learning intention and to remember it because later she would be asking them for feedback on how well she taught the lesson. Then students were asked to brainstorm all of the different things that Mrs.

Whitaker thinks is important to a good friendly letter. They worked in teams and came up with over 40 different details. The coach read each one and categorized them as they went. The coach had already decided on the topics so it was easy to do the categorization.

When they were done, they created a T-chart that listed the criteria and the details for the criteria. The teacher added to the list until everyone agreed that this was going to work for them.

Criteria (Categories)	Details (specifics)
Parts	• Date (Heading) • Greeting - start of Dear • Body - indent • Closing • Signature
Neatness	• neat • skip lines
Caps-Periods-spelling	• Grammar
Interesting	• Voice • sent. clarity • main idea • detail • descriptive word • staying on track • Topic sent. • word choice • good ideas
Make it long!	

The coach went back to the original learning intention and polled the class as to whether they felt that they learned how to get the 'A' from Mrs. Whitaker. They all heartily agreed!



The students then wrote their friendly letters using the criteria created by the class. They talked about how they used the criteria to assess their own work. Students who were proficient signed an "I know the parts of a friendly letter" poster. The principal took photos of students as they enjoyed their success!

Kristen Abdow, Instructional Coach/Title I Teacher
Gearity Professional Development School

Since the beginning of the school year, the teachers at Gearity Elementary school have started their journey toward understanding Assessment *for* Learning (AFL). Educators are currently discussing AFL through a book study within staff meetings. This is a “getting-to-know-you” year where they can take their time to read *Leading the Way to Making Classroom Assessment Work* (Davies et al., 2008) along with trying new AFL strategies – without feeling overwhelmed. Although they are novices, the staff has made great leaps in their understanding and practice, and are very excited about how AFL involves students in their own learning.

Teachers are beginning to implement AFL strategies within their classrooms and work with their students to co-construct criteria. It is amazing to see all the charts hanging in the classrooms and to observe the students and teachers referring to them. Colleagues are constantly discussing what they have done in their classrooms and some are modeling their successful strategies for co-constructing criteria. Most are amazed at how their instruction is becoming more rigorous as their students help create the criteria and take responsibility for their own learning. Because teachers are more aware of where students are, they can better individualize their instruction for their students.

Our goal at Gearity is to build lifelong learners. We feel we are definitely on our way towards this goal using assessment *for* learning. The teachers are eager to learn more so they can take their students to the next step. Our journey has just begun!

Stacy Stuhldreher, Principal
Beth Gobieski, Instructional Coach
Joi Mahoney-Curry, 3rd Grade Teacher
Oxford Elementary School

In order to institute the great things we learned in Atlanta, we have completed two activities that involved co-constructing criteria with the students. First, we gave the students two essential questions to think about: *Why is it important to know what to do in case of an emergency?* and *What information do you need to know if you are reporting an emergency?* (We liked this topic because the fall time change had just occurred and around this time, most people change the batteries in their smoke detectors.)

We posted the essential questions and the students began to give responses. Most students at this point were unable to fully answer the questions. For example, some could not identify their home address or telephone number. As we proceeded, we prompted them to think about whether they had changed the batteries at home in their smoke detectors. Then we asked the students what they would do if there was a fire at their home, and whether they had an escape route. Most did not know what to do. So, at this point in the lesson, students agreed that having a fire escape plan was important. As an initial assignment, we asked the students to go home and talk to their families about fire safety and to create a plan for exiting their home in case of an emergency.

A letter was drafted informing the parents of the project and students came back and verbally shared the conversations they had with their families. Keeping in mind the essential questions, we asked the students if they thought it would be helpful to create a plan for home so their family could review it, and what they thought their fire escape plan should include. We used their ideas to create a rubric as a class. Each child received the rubric that he or she had co-constructed and a copy was posted on the sample board. The rubric included the levels of their house, arrows showing direction, a map key, directions written in words, an alternative plan, and a meeting place outside of the house.

Sample plans, which had been created previously by the teacher, were presented to the class. As each sample was read out, students used their rubric to determine if the plan had all the criteria they required. The first three plans were intentionally lacking some aspects of the rubric. The students were able to determine what was missing very quickly due to the fact they had created the rubric. (This was awesome!) Finally, a fourth sample was presented that contained all variables and was posted on the bulletin board.

This sample plan displayed the process with corrections at each stage, and students were able to use the sample on the board as their guide. The students used the rubric to create their own fire escape plans. They shared them and checked them over with a partner using their own rubric. They took notes on their rubric, stating the missing variables they needed to add to their plans. Students then went back and made corrections and finally were able to share their plans with the class and turn the plans in for a grade. Obviously, this process took some time, but the students enjoyed the project. We are now planning to use the same method for a social studies activity!

Karen Heinsbergen, Program Specialist Literacy K-12

Terri McGeary, 8th Grade Mathematics Teacher

Monticello Middle School

During a staff meeting with 46 teachers, we co-constructed criteria around the qualities of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting focused on examining student work. To establish a common experience, we watched a portion of a video in which teachers, a coach, and a principal were examining student work. The stage was set by asking participants to record notes based on this question: *What is important for a quality PLC meeting whose goal is to analyze student work?*

While viewing the video, each person recorded ideas on individual post-it notes. At tables, ideas were shared among 3–5 people. As an entire staff, we then recorded the ideas on a large screen and together reorganized them according to similarities. Labels

were then created to describe each set of ideas. In this way, we built a common set of criteria for use by all in the building. We also reviewed the steps of co-constructing criteria, reminding teachers that we had co-constructed norms at the beginning of the school year, and that this strategy can be used with students.

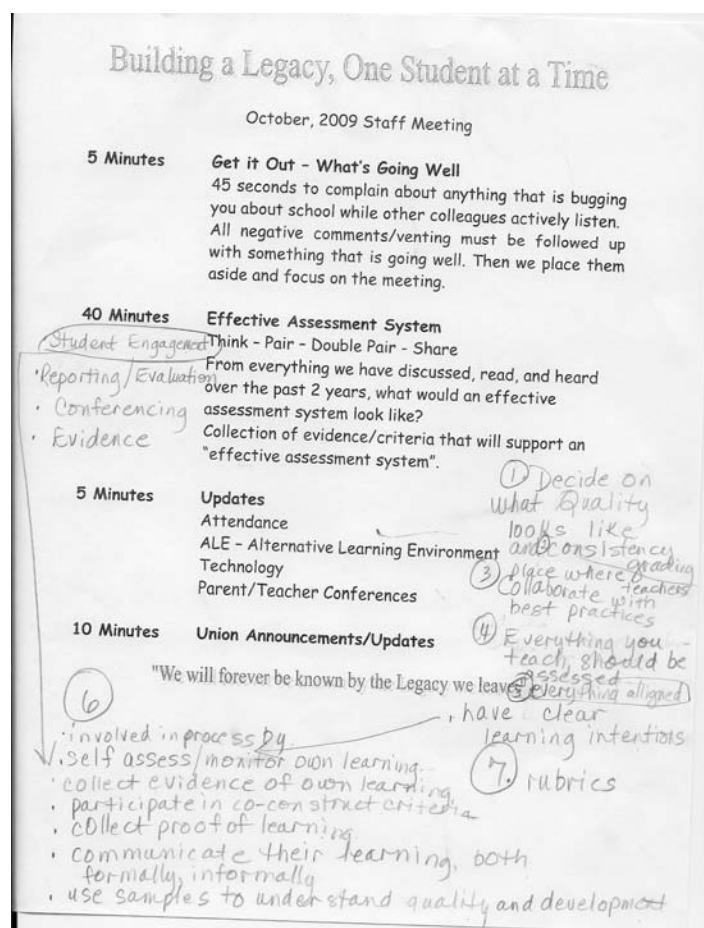
What is important for a quality PLC meeting when the goal is to analyze student work?	
Observations:	Open and accepting of ideas (Feedback) Constructive feedback (feedback) Non-judgmental (Feedback and professionalism) Respect each other (professionalism) Common goal - single focus of student work (goal) Content knowledge (content) Knew students - (all)
Characteristics	Details
Feedback	Constructive Non-judgmental Open and accepting of ideas Includes next step for this student
Professionalism	Non-judgmental Respect each other Keep student confidentiality
Goal	Common goal Single focus of student work Exclude student behavior
Content	Content knowledge Student learning history is shared

Both observations and teachers' reflection pieces made it obvious that the PLCs were working differently. Observations included an increased level of openness, more frequent non-judgmental comments, more focused conversation, and a heightened awareness around the need to retain student privacy. Responses included action steps identifying how teachers will adapt this work for use in future PLC meetings. The positive responses supported the fact that co-constructing criteria is beneficial.

In the past, we would not have established expectations for the PLC work, and we would have just allotted time to "do the work." The problem with just jumping into the experience is that without established criteria, everyone has a different belief of what it means to meet and discuss student work. If time (our enemy) had permitted, we think it would have been beneficial to have had a small group model the use of the protocol live and then provide descriptive feedback with regards to our agreed-upon criteria.

**Diana Tuggey, Professional Development Coach
Cleveland Heights High School**

As the professional development coach for five small schools at the Cleveland Heights High School, I routinely have the opportunity to share the concepts and strategies that I learned and refined at the July Institute with Anne Davies. I'm finding that co-creating criteria is something that solves so many dilemmas for both teachers and school leaders. Most of my examples are with individual teachers and the topics for co-creating criteria range from *What does an effective individual reading time look like?* to *Now that we have been in school for almost half a year, what changes with regard to our classroom norms should we make to have a positive learning climate?* I will share a more detailed example involving a particular small school at the high school.



Over the last two years, the teacher leader and principal for this small school have led their staff through many professional development sessions focused on formative assessment, grading, book studies, etc., and were not seeing much transfer to their teachers' instructional practice. The teacher leader met with me about this and I suggested that they lead their staff through co-creating criteria for: *What does an effective assessment system look like for our school?* They completed that task at their school's next professional learning community meeting.

From there, they narrowed their focus to three areas and collaboratively created a rubric listing the details for their plan. Leadership then asked their staff to use the rubric and individually rate themselves and write individual goals focused on the school's three areas. The principal subsequently scheduled ongoing meetings to follow up with staff.

I've noticed a renewed and increased energy for both the teachers and leadership around all the key components of effective assessment.