**Collaborative Analysis of Student Work**

(An example of the teacher team’s dialogue.)

Background

Sue: *I’m a bit frustrated with Nika these days. He was progressing nicely, as you have seen in previous papers. Prior to the paper we are going to analyze today, I taught the students how to write a cause and effect paper. I shared examples and the scoring rubric. We applied the rubric to both strong and weak papers and talked about the differences. Next, I had students write a short cause and effect paper based on an article we read in class. This was practice prior to the assignment that produced the work sample I’m sharing with you today. I had the students do peer editing prior to my reviewing the papers. Nika scored a 3 out of 4 in all areas of the rubric which was quite good.*

*Last week I started the unit on westward expansion. I introduced the students to the meaning of Manifest Destin. Before further study, I asked students to “Predict a major effect of the westward expansion achieved during Manifest Destiny.” I used the same cause and effect rubric that I used for the other assignment. Students had about 15 minutes in class to start it. They had two days to finish it at home.* *I’m really frustrated with the quality and content in Nika’s paper.*

Observation

Sue is not at all surprised when her colleagues comment on how sloppy and disorganized Nika’s paper is. She had the same feeling when she first looked at it. She was, however, surprised at one observation her colleague made. The dialogue went something like this…

Sue: *I am shocked at how disorganized Nika’s paper is. Based on his previous work, I expected so much more from him.*

F: *What strengths and areas in need of improvement did you see, Sue?*

Sue: *His spelling is accurate, as is most of his grammar*. *He did provide some detail to support his prediction, but I really expected to see more. He provided some transition words. There is no conclusion. Common words are misspelled. His grammar and usage of words is at times distracting. What do others see?*

T1: *His thesis statement does attempt to present some ideas about the cause-and-effect on the settlers and the Native Americans.*

T2: *The introduction vaguely presents the cause-and-effect relationship*.

Teachers continue to share.

T3: *Words are mostly correct but are often inadequate and do not capture the reader’s imagination*. *The paper seems to have an inappropriate tone*.

T2: *Interesting you mentioned that. I believe there is a lot of voice in this paper. Look at the adjectives he uses. What is intriguing to me is that he uses positive adjectives when talking about the Native Americans and negative adjectives when talking about the settlers.*

Sue sits up and takes note of this last observation. Sue shares that she is curious about Nika’s use of adjectives. She is also wondering why he did not include more transitions and completely left off the conclusion.

Analysis

F: *So, Sue what do you think would explain Nika’s performance in the areas you identified?*

Sue: *I believe Nika has just given up on doing well in class. He has been more withdrawn in class since I started this unit, and he just seems angry. When I ask him a question in class his tone is just so negative.*

T1: *I wonder if he fully understood what Manifest Destiny is?*

Sue: *Hard to say since he was reluctant to ask or answer questions. Perhaps I needed to give more background before asking this question. Something to ponder*.

T1: *If I take a closer look, he does seem to make reasonable predictions for what the consequences might be for the settlers and the Native Americans even though his organization in presenting those ideas aren’t so strong*.

Sue: *You are right. He does seem to see that the settlers had a lot to gain from moving west and the Native Americans not so much. But I haven’t talked much about the impact on the Natives Americans yet.*

Facilitator: *What other explanations might there be for why Nika’s performance is not as strong as Sue expected?*

T2: *Well, I’d like to go back to looking at his use of adjectives. As you said, Sue, you are curious as to why he used the adjectives he did. I wonder if this might have something to do with his cultural background.*

Sue: *Um, interesting you bring this up. I’m not sure. Earlier in the year I shared what Native Americans gained from the white man.*

T2: *I wonder if his sloppiness and use of strong adjectives is his way of voicing his strong alliance with his people, and his antagonism toward the pioneers for what they did to the Native Americans. Often Native American elders pass down oral histories and perhaps Nika is aware of how disruptive and painful westward expansion was on his people. He may feel that the text and resources you are using ignore the sacrifices of his people and only focuses on the economic benefits of the whites. Do you have some of the resources you’ve used previously to talk about the Native Americans so we can see what perspectives are presented?*

Sue gets up, grabs some of the resources she is using for the unit and brings them over to the table. The group explores the hunch about his affective response to this assignment.

S: *Seems the resources I’m using are heavily biased toward the settlers, which has probably upset Nika. Oh, my. If we hadn’t analyzed this paper, I might have blamed his poor behavior and sloppy work on his attitude. Instead, I have to take responsibility and see how I can change my instruction to present a more comprehensive view of historical events. I’m wondering how I might be more responsive to Nika’s learning needs and for that matter other students of color in my classroom. I’m going to need your help with this. How might I best present the different perspectives in history?*

Action

Facilitator: *Sue, based on our analysis of Nika’s paper, what might you do next?*

Sue: *Talk to Nika about his paper and see what he was thinking as he wrote it?*

T1: *Another idea might be to use some primary sources from a Native American’s and a settler’s perspective to show how people experience events differently depending on the social, political and cultural context in which they live.*

Sue: *That idea is of interest to me? Where might I find those?*

T1: *Our director of social studies probably can help with the primary sources. I have a few I could share. I’d be happy to help you design some lessons around the resources.*

T3: *Another possible strategy would be to talk to Nika’s dad. Perhaps he has stories he could share.*

Sue: *I’ll definitely conference with Nika to see if our hunch is right. I’m also intrigued by the idea of using primary sources. I’ll talk to our curriculum director and get back to all of you. If in the meantime, if I could get together with you (T1) to see what you have and to design a lesson or two that would be great.*

F: *Sue what do you plan to do next with Nika and what evidence of progress will you bring next?*

Sue: *I’ll talk to Nika and share what I learn with our study group. I’ll design a couple of lessons using primary sources. I’m thinking I’ll revise the end of the unit expository writing assignment to include both the positive impact on the country at large and the negative impact on the Native and African Americans. I need to be sensitive to my other students of color. Finally, I’ll talk to Nika’s dad to see if he can provide some insight into that period.*

Act

Sue works with her colleagues and the district curriculum director to select some primary sources that represent Native American and other minorities’ experiences during westward expansion. With the help of her colleagues, and conversations with Nika, she discovers how important it is to for Nika to see his cultural background reflected in her curriculum on the westward expansion. She gets support from her colleagues to revise her final assignment to allow all of her students to share their perspectives on these events in history. She also talked through what she was going to ask of Nika’s father.

Several weeks after the teacher has implemented the selected strategies, she returns to her Study Group with a new student work sample. The Group does another round of analysis to learn of the effectiveness of the planned actions from the previous Study Group session.

Sue brings to the study group not only Nika’s final essay, but all her students’ essays because she is so proud of what they have accomplished. In addition to the improved quality of the writing, each paper shows great empathy for the struggles of *all* the people involved in the westward expansion. The other minority students, who struggled in a similar fashion to Nika, also benefited from her new approach to the unit as evidenced from their papers. The other teachers inquire into whether Nika’s dad might also come to their classes. Sue leaves the study group with a commitment to personalize her instruction in the future by using more primary sources.