

Handout

Analysis Instrument- Knowing Your Students as Learners (KYSL) Tool: Guidelines for Use

The ***Knowing Your Students as Learners Tool (KYSL)*** is used to guide reflective, learning focused conversations between Mentors and Beginning Teachers that support Beginning Teachers in deeply knowing their students in order to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners. While holding these important conversations, the Mentor will be using his/her flexible coaching stances (3 C's: Consult, Collaborate, and Coach.) These conversations are based on models of *Cognitive Coaching* from Costa and Garmston, *Collaborative Coaching* from West Ed, and *Appreciative Inquiry* from <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/> as adapted by TeachOntario Canada in Mentoring for All.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an “attributes-based” approach that can be used to facilitate reflective conversations either during formal professional learning sessions or as part of the ongoing dialogue between mentors and colleagues. At the core of AI is the belief that all participants come to mentoring relationships possessing many strengths and that by building on these assets, the answers to the issues and challenges they face can be collaboratively constructed.

This thinking is why the Knowing Your Students Tool (KYSL) always begins with an examination of what is already known about student(s.) Beginning with what is known will lead to questions the Beginning Teacher may have, and close with what the teacher will do (next steps) to support the student(s)' learning. This tool is a guide to help the conversation lead to identifying actual strategies to collaboratively address specific challenges and issues.

Learning Profiles

To help Mentors help their Beginning Teachers meet the challenge of coming to know their students, the KYSL Tool helps to capture five important dimensions of learning identity: *biological traits, cultural and societal factors, emotional and social influences, academic performance, and learning preferences.* (Powell & Powell, *How to Teach Now, 2011*) You won't acquire all of this information at one time, but as you continue to collect and compile student data, a meaningful and useful learning profile of individual students, class subgroups, or whole classes should emerge.

Strategies for Gathering Learning-Profile Data

Knowing students deeply as individuals or groups and organizing this deep data may seem daunting for beginning teachers. Many teachers may see more than a hundred students in a day. However, there are many sources and strategies for gathering data, framing probing questions about each student as a learner, and developing strategies for differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

While teachers are concerned about struggling student, we tend to focus on student deficits (what a student is not yet able to do) as opposed to student strengths. Organizing student learner profile data and reflecting with the KYSL Tool can provide a way to shift the focus from a student deficit model to a teacher action model- what can the teacher do to address the student(s)' needs?

- **Reflective Questions:** Powell and Powell (2011) have developed a series of questions that mentors may want to use as they reflect with beginning teachers and use the KYSL Tool. The questions are categorized under the five dimensions of learner identity. They would need modifying if you are doing a subgroup or whole group analysis.
 1. *Biological traits*
 - In what ways might the child's gender be influencing learning in the classroom?
 - Is there anything in the child's medical records that indicates a condition that might impact classroom learning?
 - Does the child have a learning disability?

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- Has the student been diagnosed with ADD/ADHD?
 - Has the student been identified as highly capable?
 - 2. *Cultural and societal influences*
 - What is the child's dominant culture (or cultures), and how might it (they) be influencing learning?
 - How do you think the child perceives the role of the student?
 - If you were to ask the child what the word "learning" means, how do you anticipate the child would respond?
 - What might be some ways that you could support the child in coming to better understand the culture of the school?
 - If the child's first language is not English, how might this linguistic diversity enhance achievement in the classroom?
 - 3. *Emotional and social influences*
 - What are the socioeconomic circumstances of the child's family circumstances? What is the family's primary language?
 - What is the student's prior school history?
 - Does the student prefer to work alone or in groups?
 - When have you seen the student take on leadership responsibilities?
 - How would you describe the student's interpersonal skills?
 - When is the student most self-directed?
 - 4. *Learner preferences*
 - What are the child's strengths as a learner?
 - Under what conditions have you seen the child doing his or her best work?
 - What are you noticing about the environmental influences on this student's learning?
 - What activities does the child engage in after school or during recess?
 - If the child were to design a field trip, what are your hunches as to where he or she might choose to go?
 - What have you noticed about the child's preferred learning styles or intelligence preferences?
 - In what ways does this student most prefer to demonstrate learning?
 - 5. *Academic performance*
 - What have you learned from your analysis of this student's work, and how will this influence the design of future instruction?
- **Examining Records** Previous school records can offer useful information, especially if previous teachers expressed insights about children as learners or comments about how and under what conditions they learn best. Guide your Beginning Teacher to look for both patterns and discrepancies. What patterns emerge from a child's grades and the teachers' comments? Are there significant discrepancies among subjects, or among school grades and standardized test scores? Is the pattern of achievement on an expected trajectory, or are there unusual dips or spikes in the records? This can be time consuming, so you might want to limit it to gathering data for an individual student analysis.
 - **Student Surveys/ Student Self-Reporting:** Students, of course, can tell us much of what we need to know about them as learners, and asking them to self-report and self-reflect also supports them in coming to know themselves as learners. There are numerous published, or Google-searched student interest inventories that a teacher can use to get a quick "read" on the areas of interest represented in a classroom. These are particularly useful at the start of a new school year when a teacher may be faced with the daunting task of coming to know a relatively large number of new learners, however, there is

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nothing wrong with using them any time this type of data needs to be gathered. ***See the attached Knowing Students: Resources for Mentors and Beginning Teachers***, for links to several of these types of resources.

- **Assignments and Activities:** Teachers can build data gathering right into assignments and activities, which not only helps them to know students better but also helps students to know each other. Many community building activities can provide teachers with valuable data about their students. ***See attached resources.***
- **Conducting Parent Interviews/Surveys:** Parent/teacher conferences is often a time when the teacher has an opportunity to learn about their students as learners. Parents are often very knowledgeable about their children and have useful insights to share. Teachers may come to conferences with questions/surveys for the parents, or they may want to send them home ahead of time and ask parents to bring the completed surveys to conferences. **Any of the earlier questions about learner identity can be adapted for use in a parent or student interview.
- **Structured Reflection:** Another way teachers may come to know students deeply as learners is to engage with their mentor in some structured reflection about a student or students. Powell and Powell, 2011, have adapted a structured reflection map from the work of Art Costa and Robert Garmston (2002). This tool may suffice for individual Knowing Your Students ad Learners, rather than using the complete KYSL Tool. *See Attached.

Before the Conversation

Remember that the mentor should be the one using the tool, filling it out while the beginning teacher has the freedom to think and share. Be sure you are listening well as you document the beginning teacher's thoughts, ideas, questions, needs in each of the 15 boxes. Remember to use your Mentor Language Stems to help guide your conversation.

Beginning the Conversation: What Does the Beginning Teacher Already Know?

What Do We Already Know About the student(s)?

Often in our practice we can focus on deficits or what is missing. Creating time for paired conversations about what the teacher already does know about his/her students can help bring to the fore the strengths and attributes the teacher may not realize they know. Following this segment of the conversation, mentors may note the information that is missing, and coach the teacher with mentor language that will elicit questions about missing data and strategies for gathering it.

Example learning focused language:

As you think about your commitment to making a difference for students, share what you know at this point in the year about (student, subgroup, whole group) in each of these areas.

Continuing the Conversation: What Questions Does the Beginning Teacher Have?

What are your questions, challenges, concerns? What "deep data" about your student(s) is missing?

Acknowledging the "real world" challenges both new and experienced colleagues encounter in their work of deeply knowing their students will help the beginning teacher realize that knowing students is a process, and no teacher knows all there is to know about students. However, it is important to remind Beginning Teachers that knowing students deeply is a pre-requisite to planning and implementing instruction that meets all learners' needs.

Example learning focused language:

As you think about your students and their learning, and reflect on what you already know in these areas, what questions do you have? What issues you are encountering?

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Concluding the Conversation: What Will I Do Differently? (Practical Ideas and Next Steps)

What Will I Do Differently? Mentee's Next Steps and Support needed from Mentor: collaborative harvesting of ideas

Often when someone expresses a question or challenge they have already given the issue a great deal of prior thought.

For mentors, awareness of flexibility of stance and role is critical at this point of the process.

Based on what they are hearing, mentors may decide to:

- Consult (offer support and resources, such as suggested, sample student or parent interest surveys.)
- Collaborate (create challenge and encourage growth, such as offering to review students' previous records alongside the Beginning Teacher.)
- Coach (facilitate professional vision, such as using mentor language stems/ questioning to facilitate the Beginning Teachers own reflection on what they will do differently.)

Example learning focused language:

What specific ideas / strategies / resources are you considering to address the issue or concerns expressed? So What / Now What – share an individual action plan of possible next steps (next day / next week / next month)

After the Conversation

What was the emphasis of the conversation?

The KYSL Tool is confidential between the mentor and beginning teacher. It serves to document and organize your work together, and provides a tool to reflect on progress during the year. The tool is NOT evaluative.

However, many mentors, coaches, and beginning teachers find it helpful to note how their work aligns with and supports the district's professional teaching standards. It can identify areas of focus for mentor-beginning teacher work.

Set a next meeting date?

At the conclusion of the discussion, be sure to set a date and time for your next conversation or follow up on this topic. Be sure to follow up on the things you and the teacher agreed to do in the What Will I Do Differently boxes. Give the teacher a copy (or email) of the completed KYSL for their records/reflection.



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Knowing Our Students as Learners: Student Analysis Instrument

Name:		Mentor:		Grade Level / Subject Area:		Date:	
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We are focusing on Individual Student Subgroup Whole Class
 Talk with your mentor about what you know (or don't know yet) about your students

Dimension	What I Know	Questions I have	What Will I do Differently
Biological Traits: <i>Include</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>child's gender</i> • <i>age</i> • <i>physical development</i> • <i>physical disabilities</i> • <i>health,</i> • <i>motor skills, coordination</i> • <i>diagnosed learning disabilities.</i> 			
Cultural and Societal Factors <i>Include child's</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>sense of stability, now and in past;</i> • <i>economic status;</i> • <i>ethnic and racial background; cultural identity;</i> • <i>language;</i> • <i>religion; norms and values;</i> • <i>gender expectations.</i> 			
Emotional and Social Influences <i>Include</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>family structure & history,</i> • <i>attitude, disposition,</i> 			

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Dimension	What I Know	Questions I have	What Will I do Differently
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>peer status,</i> • <i>self-esteem</i> 			
<p>Academic Performance <i>Includes evidence of child's</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>reasoning skills,</i> • <i>reading skills,</i> • <i>attentional focus,</i> • <i>past success,</i> • <i>oral language development,</i> • <i>written language.</i> 			
<p>Learning Preferences <i>Include</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>interests,</i> • <i>intelligence preferences,</i> • <i>learning styles,</i> • <i>production styles,</i> • <i>environmental influences.</i> 			