Collaborative Analysis of Student Work: Improving Teaching and Learning

This Study Guide is designed to enhance your understanding and application of the information contained in Collaborative Analysis of Student Work: Improving Teaching and Learning, an ASCD book published in September 2003.

Written by Georgea M. Langer, Amy B. Colton, and Loretta S. Goff, the book describes the Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning (CASL-pronounced "castle"), a powerful professional development system that helps teachers gain a deeper understanding of the link between their instruction and their students' progress toward significant standards-based learning outcomes. The system develops a culture for collaborative inquiry and results in improved student and teacher learning.

CASL was developed and refined with more than 100 elementary and secondary teachers. It combines the best of action research, study groups, standards-based learning, student assessment, and teacher reflection. Specifically, CASL

- Focuses on student work samples relative to a particular content standard
- Engages teachers in the study of selected students' learning over time.
- Follows a systematic analysis cycle.
- Occurs with a collaborative culture for inquiry.
- Provides written documentation of teacher and student learning in a portfolio.

The book describes
- The benefits of the system.
- The research and theory underlying CASL.
- How to develop a culture for collaborative inquiry.
- Specific directions and examples for each of the five CASL inquiry phases.

It also provides suggestions for facilitation, leadership, and support.

Each section of this study guide corresponds to one of the seven chapters in the book. The questions in each section may be used by a person reading alone, but are best discussed with a colleague or group of like-minded educators who wish to explore the links between teacher practice and student learning results. The authors are glad to receive questions, suggestions, or descriptions of adaptations to the system and their results. Their correspondence information is at the end of this guide.

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER 1: **THE BENEFITS OF THE COLLABORATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING**

1. What did you learn about the critical attributes and purposes of the four components of the Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning (CASL) system?

2. What do you find to be the most intriguing component of the CASL system?

3. Why do you think it is easier to implement the CASL system in schools or districts where teachers are used to working collaboratively on curriculum and instructional issues?

4. What are the benefits of the CASL system?

5. Which three benefits are most important to your school or district and why?

6. How might CASL help you become more effective?

7. What already exists in your school or district that may facilitate the implementation of the CASL system? How does it facilitate implementation of the CASL system?

8. What do you predict might be the greatest challenge to implementing the CASL system in your school or district and why?

CHAPTER 2: WHY CASL WORKS: THE FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE INQUIRY

1. Describe and discuss the characteristics of a reflective inquirer.

2. What underlying assumptions about how teachers grow and learn professionally are represented by the Framework for Reflective Inquiry?

3. Describe the characteristics of the four components that comprise the framework and how they are interconnected.

4. What is case knowledge and why is it important?

5. How does CASL help a teacher develop case knowledge?

6. What professional knowledge does an experienced teacher draw on when interpreting a piece of student work?

7. What knowledge do you most frequently draw on when analyzing why students are or are not making progress? What knowledge are you most likely to overlook?

8. What is transformative learning? How does the CASL system help transform teachers' thinking?

9. What are the different ways teachers gather information about their students?

10. Why is it important for teachers to avoid what Pat Carini calls "habituated perception"?

11. Describe how teachers interpret and act on their experiences using the analysis cycle. How well does this cycle match how you have figured things out as a professional?

12. Within the analysis cycle, how can going from observation directly to the planning of instructional strategies short-circuit the analytic process?

13. Explain the meaning of the "ladder of inference." How does CASL help teachers avoid climbing up that ladder?

14. How is dialogue different than discussion? How does dialogue help teachers reach common understanding?

15. What are the different ways teachers can gain additional insight when information is not readily available in the group?

16. How does a teacher's filtering system (e.g., feelings or beliefs) influence the analysis process? How might it influence access to a teacher's knowledge base?

17. Describe the five personal characteristics that teachers need to possess to participate in reflective inquiry.

18. What is collective efficacy and how does it develop?

19. Why is a culture for collaborative inquiry important to the CASL system?

20. Why is the framework so valuable to the CASL system?

21. Why would a teacher who fits the description in this chapter likely to be successful in promoting student learning?

CHAPTER 3: CULTURE BUILDING: NORMS AND SKILLS FOR COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

1. What are two important ways to develop a feeling of trust and help everyone open up to new ways of thinking and practicing?

2. Why are group norms important? Why should they be written? Why do they need to be discussed and reviewed periodically?

3. What norms are important to you when working with a group and why?

4. How would you go about creating norms for a CASL study group?

5. How does the use of specific group communication skills support the productive analysis of student work samples?

6. Describe the complex processes of effective listening and what purpose each serves when communicating with another person.

7. What are some of the things that interfere with our ability to listen effectively?

8. How do mediating responses guide the conversation to deeper levels of analysis?

9. Practice effective listening with a colleague or family member. Ask the other person to advocate for an issue they feel particularly strong about that has an opposing point of view. As the person shares, inquire into his ideas using mediating responses.

10. How do mediating responses help teachers transform their thinking?

11. Which mediating questions do you find the most difficult to use?

CHAPTER 4: PHASES I AND II: THE TARGET LEARNING AREA, INITIAL ASSESSMENT, AND FOCUS STUDENTS

(See also appendices A and B)

1. Discuss the benefits of providing written documentation for each CASL inquiry phase.

2. What challenges might teachers face as they attempt to complete the written documentation for the portfolio? How can these challenges be addressed?

3. How would you schedule CASL sessions for your school or district (frequency and length of sessions)? How many teachers would you start with? (See also chapters 6 and 7)

4. How could you generate interest and recruit teachers? (See also Chapter 7)

5. Why is the Collaborative Skills Session necessary?

6. What Target Learning Area (TLA) could your grade, building, and district focus on during the CASL inquiry phases? How well does this area meet these criteria

   a. Matches standards?

   b. In need of improvement?

   c. Complex, cross-cutting process that is not too broad or vague and not too narrow or short term?

   (Also see Chapter 7.)

7. In your setting, how do you determine which areas of student learning are in need of improvement? What standardized test data and school- or grade-based assessments do you consider in making this choice?

8. In your setting, will all participants focus on the same TLA, or will you allow some teachers to select a different TLA? What are the advantages or disadvantages of each?

9. What are the pros and cons of having teachers develop their own classroom assessment tasks and rubrics for the TLA? Will this be necessary in your own setting?

10. In Phase II, what are the pros and cons of having teachers gather a classroom assessment for every student (as opposed to a sample of students) in their class (elementary) or period (secondary)?

11. How can the Student Performance Grid (Phase II) help teachers personalize or differentiate their instruction to meet varying student needs?

12. What are the pros and cons of selecting as a focus student

   a. A student who is struggling in a typical way?

   b. A student who represents a unique or rare case that is unlikely to be encountered again?

   c. A student who demonstrates average performance in the TLA?

   d. A student who is gifted or needs more challenge?

CHAPTER 5: PHASES III, IV, AND V: STUDY GROUOP ANALYSIS OF STUDENT WORK, FINDING MORE INFORMATION, FINAL ASSESSMENT, AND REFLECTION

(See also Appendices A and B)

1. Why is Phase III considered the heart of CASL? Why is it important in helping teachers find ways to help their students succeed?

2. In your setting, how would you combine teachers into study groups so they learn the most about the TLA? Consider the following characteristics in forming the groups:

   a. Grade-level

   b. Subject matter knowledge

   c. Expertise (e.g., special education specialist, reading specialist, bilingual specialist)

   d. Combination of above characteristics

3. In your setting, consider the logical group size. Then decide how often study groups would meet and the length of study group meetings.

4. Examine the Study Group Questions for Analysis of Student Work (Figure 5.1). Which two or three of these questions are most likely to be forgotten during a study group session? How would you make sure they are all considered at some point during the discussion of a student's work?

5. How might the Study Group Record (Figure 5.2) be used in a study group or by an individual teacher during or after the session?

6. Why is it important to seek out additional information about student learning and instruction as the inquiry phases unfold? What information will likely assist your group in promoting student learning in your TLA?

7. What are the benefits of constructing the Student Performance Grid (Figure 5.4) in Phase IV? How might this information be useful for the teacher or the school?

8. Examine the Phase V Final Reflections questions for the Written Commentary in Appendix B. Select two or three questions that you think are the most important to consider. Discuss why these are so important.

9. Why is it important to celebrate the completion of the CASL inquiry phases? How would you do this in your setting?

10. Imagine that you have completed the five inquiry phases during the past school year. How could you continue collaborative inquiry into student learning during the next school year?

CHAPTER 6: FACILITATION OF CASL

(See also Appendices A and B)

1. Why is it important to have a skilled facilitator lead the study groups?

2. How might you go about selecting a facilitator? Who in your school or district would make a good facilitator?

3. What skills should a facilitator have before leading a group?

4. What is meant by guided participation?

5. Describe the two different approaches the facilitator uses to guide the group through the "zone of proximal development." How does the facilitator know which approach to use?

6. Describe some of the steps a facilitator might take in preparing to lead teachers through the Collaborative Skills session and the five Inquiry Phases.

7. What information might a facilitator gather prior to beginning CASL and why?

8. What elements of the five Inquiry Phases need to be emphasized and why?

9. How might the facilitator help a study group establish their group norms?

10. How does the facilitator help the group maintain an atmosphere of trust and encourage teachers to transform their thinking?

11. How does the facilitator scaffold the group's learning so it can ultimately function independently?

12. Why is written documentation an important aspect of the CASL system?

13. Describe the three types of writing and the different kinds of thinking each illuminates.

14. How might the facilitator encourage teachers to document what they learn? How would the facilitator provide feedback to them on their commentaries?

15. When might it not be a good time to introduce the CASL system to a school or district?

16. What are some of the logistical issues that need to be considered when implementing CASL?

CHAPTER 7: LEADERSHIP FOR CASL

(Most questions apply to administrators and leaders.)

1. How do the concepts of teachers' collaborative inquiry into students' learning relate to the vision you hold for your educational organization (school or district)?

2. How accurate is your assessment of your organization's culture, especially as it relates to collaboration and inquiry? How would a cultural audit help you find areas that would facilitate or hinder the operation of the CASL system in your organization?

3. How natural is it for you (or your organization) to put pressure on teachers and others to push toward excellence?

4. How natural is it for you (or your organization) to support and recognize excellence (e.g., providing positive comments, taking on teaching tasks to allow teachers time to collaborate)?

5. How do you currently engage teachers and teacher leaders in the analysis of student learning data and other pertinent data? How can you make sure the information is specific enough to provide direction for classroom and program changes?

6. How might the analysis of such data help you identify a Target Learning Area for CASL inquiry?

7. Who will facilitate CASL?

8. How will you develop interest in the CASL system?

9. What groups of teachers would you bring together to begin the CASL sessions?

10. How will you provide time for the CASL inquiry phases? What short-term and long-term changes in school schedules and teacher compensation might be necessary? How will you work toward the long-term changes?

11. How can an administrator gain information about the frequency and duration of study group meetings, and the progress being made in those meetings, without dampening the collaborative nature of the process?

12. What incentives, rewards, or recognition will you provide for CASL participants?

13. How can an administrator model and demonstrate commitment to the type of collaboration promoted by CASL?

14. How can an administrator communicate the willingness and ability to access print, electronic, and human resources (e.g., videotapes, Web sites, workshops, or consultation with experts) to support teachers' professional growth? Discuss how to invite requests from CASL teachers about their needs for such resources.

15. If you have already selected a Target Learning Area for inquiry, what resources (e.g., videotapes, Web sites, workshops, or consultation with experts) might help improve student learning in this area? How could these resources be made available to CASL teachers without prescribing the solution and cutting off the analytical thinking of teachers?

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