



## 7 DESIGNING AND FACILITATING ADULT STUDY GROUPS

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Even if you are committed to creating an adult study group to look at documentation of student learning, it can be hard to know where to start. This tool identifies key features to consider when launching adult study groups. It also includes a sample agenda and discussion protocol for looking at documentation of student learning.

**Who** This tool is most useful for administrators, professional development providers, or teacher leaders who facilitate adult study groups such as classroom teams, grade-level colleagues, members of an academic department, or colleagues from different schools.

**How** Consider the following elements when forming adult study groups.

### *Group Size and Composition*

Determine size of the group (ideally four to eight participants) and criteria for group membership depending on your goal (e.g., interest in the topic, similarity or diversity of grade level or subject matter, or variety of perspectives).

### *Length and Frequency of Meetings*

Decide on length and frequency of meetings—ideally at least forty-five to sixty minutes and once or twice a month.

### *Rotation Schedule*

Create a rotation schedule in which one to two individuals or teams share documentation at each meeting.

### *Documentation Guidelines*

Propose guidelines for selecting and sharing documentation:

- Ask participants to identify a focus question about teaching and learning to guide their inquiry (see tool 12 in chapter 13). Although posing a question about teaching and learning often helps to focus the collection and selection of documentation, sometimes teachers prefer to document in a more open-ended fashion to see what emerges (see tool 13 in chapter 13).
- Put your documentation into an easily shareable format such as PowerPoint or video that can be shown on a laptop or projected, or make copies of text and images for the entire group to look at. Video clips should be fewer than five minutes and, ideally, viewed twice. Written documents should be able to be read in three to five minutes.
- Keep context brief (two to three minutes).
- Choose a protocol or thinking routine for discussing the documentation.

## Visible Learners

### Group Norms

With the group, identify group norms such as the following:

- Start and end on time
- Ensure equal participation (go-arounds can be useful here)
- Rotate roles such as note taking, time keeping, facilitating, and monitoring norms

### Notes

Think about how to capture what the group is learning for its own use or for sharing with others.

### Sample Meeting Agenda (Thirty to Thirty-Five Minutes)

- Review meeting goals, group norms, agenda, and notes or highlights from the last meeting. (two minutes)
- Participants give brief classroom updates since last meeting. (three to five minutes)
- Presenter provides brief context. (three minutes)
- Group asks presenter clarifying questions. (two minutes)
- Group looks at documentation in silence. (three to five minutes)
- Group responds to following questions while presenter is silent. (ten to twelve minutes)
  - What do you see or hear in the documentation? Point to what makes you say that.
  - What questions does the documentation raise? (Presenter does not answer questions.)
  - What are the implications for teaching and learning and next steps for the presenter?
- Presenter shares his or her take-aways. (two minutes)
- Group members jot down at least one idea to use in their own classrooms and share ideas with the group. (four minutes)
- Debrief protocol and thank presenter. (one minute)

## Variations and Extensions

- Presenters may prefer to name one or two questions when giving a brief context for more specific group feedback.
- Experiment with different amounts of time for looking at the work and the protocol as a whole. What do you notice when you spend more or less time with the protocol?
- The following is another possible set of discussion questions for when the group responds. Identify two or three focus questions in the following that one or more of the group is most interested in exploring.

## What Are Students Learning and Understanding?

- What are the key concepts or skills the students are working on?
- What evidence do you see of student learning?

## How Is the Group Learning?

- How do the interactions or conversations among students help them learn or make learning more difficult? (Consider size and composition of the group, the language and strategies used, the roles students take, and what they choose to share with each other.)
- When does one person's thinking seem to affect the thinking of another or the whole group?
- What does the documentation suggest about creating better conditions (physical space, time, materials, nature of the task, etc.) for learning in groups?

## Where Do You Go Next?

- What might you try next to deepen or extend students' thinking or learning?
- What might be the value of sharing some or all of this documentation and perhaps your own reflections with the students? What might you select and how might you frame it?
- What is still puzzling or interesting to you after viewing the documentation?

Tools 8 through 10 provide other discussion protocols from which to choose. You can also visit [www.makinglearningvisibleresources.org](http://www.makinglearningvisibleresources.org) or [www.schoolreforminitiative.org](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org) for additional options.

## If You Only Have Five Minutes . . .



- Start a routine of sharing a short video clip or other example of student documentation at the beginning of staff meetings.
- Start staff meetings with five minutes in which anyone can ask for help with a dilemma and get quick feedback or brainstorming.
- Invite a colleague into your classroom when something unusual is going on.
- Display documentation in the teachers' room over the course of a week with a note asking colleagues to share what they see, think, or wonder on sticky notes.