

BYRAM HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
ARMONK, NEW YORK

GROWTH PLAN END-OF-YEAR REPORT

Title: Interviewing our Youngest Math Students

Author: Leslie Goldfarb

Year: 2010-2011

School/Grade: Coman Hill/Grades 1 & 2

SUMMARY OF ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Context

I work with small groups of 1st and 2nd grade struggling math students. Unlike previous years' models, student placement is no longer flexible based on weekly performance. In order for a student to qualify for Tier II services in the RTI process, interventions must be tried and documented adhering to the following steps:

1. Teacher addresses areas of concern with specific interventions (strategies/resources)
2. Teacher gives pre test; four weeks of interventions; post test to document progress
3. Teacher fills out Student Record Form including specific concerns along with two concrete examples
4. Teacher and Case Manager review Student Record Form noting:
 - if interventions were successful (documenting successful strategies since this information might help ease future struggles)
 - if interventions were not successful, then the Case Manager presents to the Instructional Support Team (IST)

I feel that my role should be one of support for not only the student, but also the teacher as s/he gets organized during this early stage of RTI implementation.

Action Plan

I had many questions throughout this school year—all related to student interviews. At first, I thought I could *interview* students by asking them to rate the ease/hardship of weekly review questions. When I realized this did not give me adequate insight into their thinking, it was back to researching other interview methods.

Midway through the school year my question shifted to wondering how to effectively interview my students to discovering their learning gaps. I was still uncertain how to begin the interview process and wondered if my students were too young. Fortunately, shortly thereafter, the Coman Hill and Wampus math teachers were privileged to spend time with a math consultant, Sandy Atkins, Ph.D. We observed Dr. Atkins interview both advanced and struggling math students. Her technique was often compared to a rubber band. She knew when to stretch a

student's mathematical thinking, when to release it (offering guided support), and when to stretch again. Suddenly, student interviews started to make sense.

Many days/hours later, I interviewed all of my math students. I learned that Dr. Atkins did not waste one word—everything she asked was purposeful. Whereas I initially thought asking a student his/her age was a simple *get-to-know-you* activity, I later realized that *simple* can be a powerful way to gain insight into many important characteristics, such as: a sense of humor; knowledge of months and fractions (Student: "I'm 6 ½!" Interviewer: "How do you know when it's your half birthday?" Student: "It's when your mom tells you."); ability to compare age differences ("How much older is your brother?"), etc.

How do my interviews fit into this process? Sometimes a teacher is concerned because a student performs poorly on a unit assessment or is not working independently. The math interview can be useful when trying to find gaps in a student's math knowledge and then following up with a scaffolded approach to fill these gaps.

Conclusions

- Interviews are a valuable tool to guide our teaching.
- Dialoguing with students about their progress informs my teaching and empowers their learning.
- My results need to be recorded in an organized format that is readily accessible to me and easily shared with other professionals.
- I still have much to learn!

Implications

Action Research is an ongoing process. While it leads to many answers, it simultaneously creates new ones. I am already formulating my next question: How might we best support teachers in assessing, documenting and planning for purposes of Tier I strategies? To be continued...