

## EXHIBITION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

- *Provides a form of self-assessment related to the school's mission*
- *Offers evidence of the kinds of learning not often reflected in standardized tests*
- *Provokes conversation about teaching and learning in the wider community, in part by challenging unexamined notions of children's capabilities*
- *Deepens exhibitors' own learning through the hard, but rewarding work of communicating student and adult learning to others*

- *Grade Level: Any*
- *Degree of Preparation: High*
- *Level of Interpretation Required: High*
- *Possible Media Needs: Varied materials for creating exhibits*
- *Participation of Learners: Yes*

Most of the information the public receives about student learning takes the form of test scores or dispiriting news stories. Exhibitions of teaching and learning offer another way to make learning public. Exhibitions can serve multiple purposes and audiences.

Why: Exhibitions offer another way to hold teachers and students accountable to each other and the community. They contribute to our collective knowledge about how teachers teach and children learn. Creating and reflecting on exhibits also provide a powerful form of professional development. Exhibitions can be designed: 1) as a form of self-assessment for teachers or schools; 2) to share and celebrate student learning not often represented on standardized tests; 3) as a political act to provoke assumptions, values, and beliefs about teaching, learning, and the role of school; and 4) to contribute to public knowledge about how children learn.

What: Exhibitions can focus on teachers or students, the learning process or product, learning content or learning about learning, or all of the above! They can be designed to address a schoolwide topic or exhibition-specific topic (e.g., the role of questioning in learning) or have diverse foci. Often, exhibits tell a story of learning that enables both creator and viewer to go deeper, rather than cover an entire project or unit. They can expand on astonishing or unusual moments of learning or moments when learning gets stuck. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of exhibitions is that they focus on learning, not just what was done. Components of exhibits usually include photographs, text, children's work and reflections, and adult analysis. See *Components of Making Learning Visible* for related considerations.

How: Exhibitions communicate most effectively when there is a shared esthetic for the exhibits with regard to layout, ratio of pictures to text, graphics (use of mounting, font style and size), color, text structure and flow, and balance of child and adult voices. Supporting material should be positioned near the related text to make clear the

connection for viewers. See Appendix B for sample exhibition brochures from an early learning center, elementary school, and high school.

Who: Exhibitions can be created by and shared with multiple audiences including teachers, students, parents, administrators, the school board, and the wider community. It is critical to designate one or two point people to oversee the entire process, ideally with an advisory committee to help with decision-making and details. Exhibits can be created by individuals or teams. Depending on the goals of the exhibition, you might ask students what part of their learning they most want to share and what they most want to learn from viewers (specific questions elicit the most useful feedback). You can also involve students in creating an exhibit and/or reflecting on the finished product.

Where and When: Exhibitions can be held in the middle or end of the year in a school auditorium, library, halls, or individual classrooms. They can also be held in other public arenas such as the town library, community center, or Town Hall. Considerations include:

- Having an Opening Night with structured remarks by an administrator, teacher, parent, and student. You can also designate other public viewing times
- Allowing for some roaming, then asking exhibitors to host structured conversations about their exhibits using a Thinking Routine or protocol
- Asking viewers to post or leave reflections on post-it notes
- Documenting the exhibits for your archives and institutional memory
- Choosing pairs of exhibits to rotate through public places during the year
- Using a staff meeting for teachers to view and reflect on each other's exhibits

### Tips

- Beware of including too much text
- It is often more powerful to document the experience of one small group or learning moment than an entire lesson or unit
- Because exhibitions represent a different venue for parent-teacher interaction, send a letter in advance and/or include text in the brochure about the differences between exhibitions and family-teacher conferences focused on one's child
- If you have time, "test" the exhibits on others to make sure they communicate effectively
- Useful thinking routines for reflecting on exhibits include "See-Think-Wonder" and "Connect-Extend-Challenge"

### **Variations and Extensions**

Try...

- Creating a "studio" or "workshop" type of exhibition to solicit feedback on works-in-progress or focusing on one grade level or subject matter at a time
- Inviting designated respondents to post responses to the exhibits
- Asking students to help document, take pictures, or add reflections
- Posting exhibits on your school Website
- Hosting a panel discussion about provocative exhibits
- Creating a "museum of learning" with rotating exhibits throughout the year
- Offering a series of brown bag lunches that focus on one or two exhibits at a time