Suggestions for Student Interviews

**Interview Goals**
- To learn about the student’s strengths and difficulties for particular math content and tasks.
- To inform the planning of future instruction and interventions that are targeted to the student’s strengths and difficulties. The immediate goal, however, is not to provide instruction to try to address difficulties/misconceptions or to try to move the student toward a correct answer.

**Preparing to Conduct an Interview**

1. **Select a probe to use in the interview.** In addition, you might choose a more foundational probe to switch to if the student is having a lot of difficulty with the selected probe. Do the probe problems yourself to help you think about what your student will need to do to solve the problem.

2. **Select Students to Interview**
   Interviews are a good option to use with students who:
   - are having math difficulties
   - you have questions about their math understanding
   - have difficulty explaining their math ideas in writing and/or showing their math thinking on their classwork

3. **Prepare your materials and technology for the interview.** Upload the pdf of the probe to your tablet and be sure you are comfortable with how the app works.

**Introducing the Probe**

4. **Plan how you will introduce the probe and interview format to students.**
   Here are some key things to focus on in the introduction:
   - Explain the purpose of a probe interview and how completing this is different from other assessments likes tests or quizzes
   - Explain the format of the interview: the students’ task is to think aloud and write/draw as they solve the problems. Let the student know that you may ask questions to find out more about their thinking but you will not tell them if the answer is correct or incorrect.
   - Let them know that you will use the information to plan instruction.
   - Encourage students to put in their best effort to show you what they know.
   - Show them how the features of the app work.
   Here’s a sample way to introduce the interview to students:
   “I would like to learn more about how you are thinking about the math we are working on now in class. I am hoping you could solve a few problems while I watch and listen. Since I want to learn about your thinking and approach I am hoping you will write and talk aloud your thinking as you go. This isn't a test. It’s ok if you have difficulties with the problem.
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When you’ve gotten as far as you can, you can just tell me that you have done as much as you can. I might ask you a few follow-up questions to be sure that I have followed your thinking. You are helping me by telling me about your approach to the problem.”

Conducting the Interview
5. Here are some suggestions:
   • Set a relaxed environment and pace.
   • Allow time for the student to work on the problems individually and respond to your follow-up questions.
   • Encourage the student to explain his/her thinking as he/she is working
   • Reassure the student that it’s fine to stop working on a problem when he/she has done all she can do. If he/she seems finished, ask: Are you ready to move on to the next problem?
   • Make sure that students know that you will not be giving them feedback on whether their answers are right or wrong. Your focus is on learning about how they are thinking about the problems.
   • Avoid giving instruction so that you can see what the student can do independently.

6. During the Interview
   While the student is working on the probe problems, ask the student to think aloud. The teacher’s role is to listen and ask questions to elicit the student’s thinking. Try not to interrupt. Remind the student to both write/draw and speak about their thinking and approach. Here are some sample questions that you might ask:
   Why did you decide to…?
   • Can you tell me more about what you were thinking when you ...?
   • You just wrote down ______. Can you tell me a bit about how you got that?
   • You just said______. Could you write down or make some kind of visual to go along with what you said?
   • I am not sure I followed what you did at this part. Could you explain it to me again please?
   • **IMPORTANT**: Do not provide hints, cues or answers or indicate whether responses are correct or incorrect. Remember the goal of the probe interview is not for students to get to a correct answer; the goal is to learn how they are thinking about the math content so that you can plan instruction to support their learning.

7. End of the Interview
   At the close of the interview, tell the student your plans for reviewing their work and using the information to help you plan lessons. Here is sample way to close the interview.
   “Thank you for sharing your work and thinking with me during this interview. It was really interesting to hear what you were thinking as you worked on the problem. I noticed that you [say something positive about what the student did on the problem.] I also noticed that [say something about a difficulty the student had] and I can help you with this. Do you have any questions?”