

Chapter 4 Recording Prior Experience

Recording Prior Experience.....	1
Parent Conference: Record of Interview with Parent or Caregiver.....	1
Student Conference: Record of Interview with Student.....	3

The front page of the Learning Record provides background information and summaries of what the student, the student’s parents and/or caregivers say about the student as a mathematics learner. It is completed during the first quarter or term and consists of a section containing general information about the student and sections for summaries of conferences between the parent and the teacher and between the student and the teacher.

Student background data includes the grade level, birth date, languages spoken and understood, an identification of any physical limitations, and names of other staff, such as Title I teacher, special educator, or school counselor, who are working with the student. Noting all involved staff on the document can make the LR a vehicle for unifying classroom and support services.

Information from the conferences contributes “baseline data” from which to measure accomplishment as students progress during the year. Students and their parents can begin to set criteria for measuring success in their *own* terms and can compare year-to-year achievements. It is important to remember, in regard to gathering such information, that the LR is an open record of accomplishment. Therefore, only evidence of what the student knows and understands will be recorded. For teachers using both the literacy and mathematics components of the Learning Record, information for this section of the LR can be collected at the same time.

Parent Conference: Record of Interview with Parent or Caregiver

The purpose of the parent conference is to draw on the knowledge that parents have about their child at home that has relevance for learning at school.

Parents can contribute their observations of how their child learns best, what they know about their child's interests, accomplishments, learning needs, and what their hopes and concerns are for their child's future. Also during the conference, teachers may wish to share the Mathematical Understanding and the Mathematical Disposition Scales with parents to help explain the expectations for the year.

Teachers can talk with parents directly in a meeting or by phone, or data can be collected through a letter or survey. Older students can be assigned to interview their parents or guardians by asking them to describe the student as a learner. Typically, the in-person or phone conference takes about fifteen minutes. It should be clear from the beginning of the conference that the student is the focus for the discussion.

The focus of the conference—describing the nature and extent of the students' learning and understanding of mathematics—means that the parent should understand that the teacher needs the information to help support the student's learning. The role of the parent is to share perceptions of the student's knowledge, interest, and use of mathematics in and out of school. The teacher's role in the discussion is that of a nonjudgmental collector of this data. Notes can be taken during the conference or the discussion can be summarized at the end. Teachers need to keep in mind that this is an open record of accomplishment. Items that are confidential should not be written on the Record. The parent or caregiver will need an opportunity to read and approve the summary of his/her contribution that becomes part of the Record.

A good way to begin is to explain the Learning Record, noting that it is an alternative assessment designed to solicit multiple perspectives on student learning. One way to start is to simply say to the parent, "Tell me whatever you think will help me support your son's/daughter's learning in mathematics—for example, his or her special interest, learning habits, opportunities, or accomplishments."

The quality of the information gathered from the discussion will be enhanced if some questions that focus on mathematics are considered ahead of time. A

few examples are below. These questions will be useful to further the discussion or, if there is a need, to refocus the conference on how the student learns best and on what the parent knows that can be helpful to the student in school.

- What experiences has your child had with mathematics in past grades?
- When or how have you helped your child with math in the past?
- When and how does your child use mathematics outside of school? For example, does your child play any games that involve math?
- How does your child react when solving a challenging math problem?
- Does your child use a calculator and a computer? In what situations?
- Do you have any concerns or special hopes for this year? Does your son/daughter?

A letter inviting parents to the conference and briefly explaining its focus could also include a short list of questions to help parents begin to think about their child's understanding of mathematics. Secondary teachers may also choose to use a parent survey, which can be conducted by students themselves, instead of a direct conversation. The returned questionnaire can then become part of the student's Learning Record.

Student Conference: Record of Interview with Student

The student conference is intended to give students an opportunity to talk about themselves as learners. It also allows students to show the teacher what they perceive as their strengths and weaknesses, and what goals and interests they have. The value of this conference for the students is that it helps them link their world outside school with what they must do for success in school. Upper-grade students, especially, need to assess their own experiences as learners of mathematics and to help set the direction for the year's work.

Teachers may want to have their students, especially older students, use the Mathematical Understanding and Disposition Scales as a way to focus student direction during the upcoming year. They can also be used to develop common vocabulary for describing student progress and to inform students about grading

policy in the classroom by providing analyses of progress with documented evidence of achievement, including student work samples.

Generally speaking, fifteen to twenty minutes is enough time to gather useful information for the LR. Conferences can be scheduled during class, or during non-class time. Generally, teachers try to limit the number of conferences to two or three conferences per day so that they can give each student their full attention.

At least two student-teacher conferences need to take place during the year: one in the first quarter as a way to document prior experience and knowledge and one in the fourth quarter to review the student's progress in terms of goals set in the first quarter. For older students, one or both of the conferences might include student to teacher written comments about the student's strengths and interests.

Above all, the conference should be a sharing of information by the student and goal setting. As in the conference with parents, the teacher summarizes what students say they can do, have done, and are interested in that can serve them in the academic setting. The following suggestions may help the teacher plan for conferences during class time:

- Explain to the class beforehand the purpose of the conference and describe what the teacher and student will be doing so the conference is uninterrupted, except for emergencies.
- Hold the conference in a place where the student will be at ease.
- Consider holding conferences late in the first quarter when students will be more comfortable with the teacher.
- Start by telling students that you will be taking notes because what they say is important and you want to remember it.
- Share some interesting positive observation you've made about the student's work this year.
- Invite the student to talk about himself or herself as a learner, emphasizing that such information is important to making curriculum decisions.

- Be prepared with a list of potential questions ahead of time, but be flexible and adjust interview questions for each student..
- Listen carefully and attentively.
- Encourage students to elaborate upon their responses through wait time, and verbal and nonverbal cues.

Although the following questions suggest topics for discussion, they should not be used in a rigid question-and-answer format that distracts students from saying what they want the teacher to know. A good way to initiate the interview is to say, “I’m going to summarize what you tell me today about your learning, especially about your learning in mathematics. What you have to say is important to me and I want to remember it.” The summaries should capture what students say about their mathematical learning and be approved by them as accurate summations. Some information might be gained through a written survey which could be used as a discussion starter for the interview.

- What has math been like for you in school?
- How do you use math in your life outside of school?
- What areas of math are your strongest? most challenging?
- What do you do when a math problem is really hard or when you get stuck solving a problem?
- After you have solved a problem, how do you know your answer is reasonable?
- Do you prefer to work by yourself, with a partner, or in a small group? Why?
- Are you comfortable sharing your work in a small group or with the whole class?
- If you need help doing math at home, what do you do?
- Do you use calculators and/or computers outside of school?

Summaries of Conferences with Parents and Students

Information from conferences with parents and students can be incorporated, or at least considered, when working with the students throughout the year.

Parents (or other adult caregivers) are familiar with important facets of student experience outside of school and are personally invested in their son's or daughter's success in school. They, and the students themselves, are uniquely qualified to contribute otherwise overlooked perspectives about what the student already knows and can do as well as how that student learns best.

The Learning Record approach to conferring with students grows out of the emphasis that current learning theory places on the need for students to make connections between their own prior experience and the concepts and skills that schooling offers. In addition, when students can participate in the evaluation of their work, they are more likely to take on the responsibility for their progress.

Advantages go both ways:

- Teachers have a broader picture of their students than is possible to form in the classroom alone. By understanding their student better, teachers can provide appropriate opportunities to help each student learn more.
- Parents and students understand together the expectation for student performance and the ways academic progress is being assessed so they can actively engage in improving achievement.

See the end of the chapter, pages 7-9, for samples of summaries of conferences with parents and with students.