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# Preparing to Look at Student Work

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## Rationale:

It is beneficial for teams of teachers to look at student work together. Collaboration enables teachers to overcome their biases about students and to more effectively find evidence in student work to justify grading choices. In addition, looking at student work collaboratively allows teachers to become more reflective about the ways in which they assess student work and it also provides an opportunity for schools to be more consistent in their expectations and grading.

## Read about protocols.

### What are Protocols?

- “A protocol consists of agreed upon guidelines for a conversation, and it is the existence of this structure— which everyone understands and has agreed to — that permits a certain kind of conversation to occur — often a kind of conversation which people are not in the habit of having.
- Protocols are vehicles for building the skills — and culture — necessary for collaborative work. Thus, using protocols often allows groups to build trust by actually doing substantive work together.”

### Why use a protocol?

“A protocol creates a structure that makes it safe to ask challenging questions of each other; it also ensures that there is some equity and parity in terms of how each person’s issue is attended to. The presenter has the opportunity not only to reflect on and describe an issue or a dilemma, but also to have interesting questions asked of him or her, AND to gain differing perspectives and new insights. Protocols build in a space for listening, and often give people a *license* to listen, without *having* to continually respond. In schools, many people say that time is of the essence, and time is the one resource that no one seems to have enough of. We have been experimenting with protocols as a way to make the most of the time people do have. (Have you ever been to a meeting where you have a burning issue you want to discuss, and what happens is that everyone “dumps” his or her issue, and feeds off each other, but you walk away from the meeting feeling unsatisfied, not really having anything new of significance that will help you with your issue? A protocol guards against this.) Finally, it is important to remember that the point is not to do the protocol well, but to have an in-depth, insightful conversation about teaching and learning.”

National School Reform Faculty available online [www.nsrffharmony.org](http://www.nsrffharmony.org)

**Select an appropriate protocol for looking at student work. Decide which one is best based on the description below.**

- Basic Protocol-This is a good place to start if the team hasn't had a great deal of experience collaboratively looking at student work.
- Tuning Protocol-The objective of this protocol is to determine which activities will get our students to meet specific goals. This protocol helps the learning team assess and analyze whether their lessons are aligned with their goals.
- Atlas Protocol-This protocol looks at the student work in greater depth than the others. It is effective once the team has gotten its "feet wet" with the basic and tuning protocols.
- Examining Student Work-This protocol allows for students to look at and assess their own work. Once teachers are familiar with the use of protocols for looking at student work, this protocol can be used in the classroom.

# Basic Protocol

1. What do you see? (10 minutes)
2. What does this student know how to do? (10 minutes)
3. What is the next thing this student needs to learn? (10 minutes)
4. What will the teacher do to move the student along? (15 minutes)

# Tuning Protocol

*Developed by Joseph McDonald and David Allen*

1. **Introduction** (5 minutes)
  - Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, guidelines, and schedule
  - Participants briefly introduce themselves (if necessary)
  
2. **Presentation** (15 minutes)
  - The presenter has an opportunity to share the context for the student work:
  - Information about the students and/or the class – what the students tend to be like, where they are in school, where they are in the year
  - Assignment or prompt that generated the student work
  - Student learning goals or standards that inform the work
  - Samples of student work – photocopies of work, video clips, etc. – with student names removed
  - Evaluation format – scoring rubric and/or assessment criteria, etc.
  - Focusing question for feedback
  - Participants are silent; no questions are entertained at this time.
  
3. **Clarifying Questions** (5 minutes)
  - Participants have an opportunity to ask “clarifying” questions in order to get information that may have been omitted in the presentation that they feel would help them to understand the context for the student work. Clarifying questions are matters of “fact.”
  - The facilitator should be sure to limit the questions to those that are “clarifying,” judging which questions more properly belong in the warm/cool feedback section.
  
4. **Examination of Student Work Samples** (15 minutes)
  - Participants look closely at the work, taking notes on where it seems to be in tune with the stated goals, and where there might be a problem. Participants focus particularly on the presenter’s focusing question.
  - Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.
  
5. **Pause to reflect on warm and cool feedback** (2-3 minutes)
  - Participants take a couple of minutes to reflect on what they would like to contribute to the feedback session.
  - Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.

6. **Warm and Cool Feedback** (15 minutes)

- Participants share feedback with each other while the presenter is silent. The feedback generally begins with a few minutes of warm feedback, moves on to a few minutes of cool feedback (sometimes phrased in the form of reflective questions), and then moves back and forth between warm and cool feedback.
- Warm feedback may include comments about how the work presented seems to meet the desired goals; cool feedback may include possible “disconnects,” gaps, or problems. Often participants offer ideas or suggestions for strengthening the work presented.
- The facilitator may need to remind participants of the presenter’s focusing question, which should be posted for all to see.
- Presenter is silent and takes notes.

7. **Reflection** (5 minutes)

- Presenter speaks to those comments/questions he or she chooses while participants are silent.
- This is not a time to defend oneself, but is instead a time for the presenter to reflect aloud on those ideas or questions that seemed particularly interesting.
- Facilitator may intervene to focus, clarify, etc.

8. **Debrief** (5 minutes)

- Facilitator-led discussion of this tuning experience.

**NOTES:**

# Atlas – Learning From Student Work

Revised November 2000 by Gene Thompson-Grove for NSRF

## 1. Getting Started

- The facilitator reminds the group of the norms; no fault, collaboration, and consensus. With the group, establishes time limits for each part of the process.

*Note: Each of the next four steps should be about 10 minutes in length. The presenter is silent until the “Reflecting on the Process,” step 5. The group should avoid talking to the presenter during steps 2-4. It is sometimes helpful for the presenter to pull away from the table and take notes.*

- The educator providing the student work gives a very brief statement of the assignment. The educator should describe only what the student was asked to do and avoid explaining what he or she hoped or expected to see.
- The educator providing the work should not give any background information about the student or the student’s work. In particular, the educator should avoid any statements about whether this is a strong or weak student or whether this is a particularly good or poor piece of work from this student.

*Note: After the group becomes more familiar with this process for looking at student work, you may find it useful to hear the educator’s expectations. However, this information will focus more of the group’s attention on the design of the assignment, the instruction, and the assessment, rather than on seeing what is actually present in the student’s work.*

## 2. Describing the Student Work

- The facilitator asks: “What do you see?”
- During this period the group gathers as much information as possible from the student work.
- Group members describe what they see in the student’s work, avoiding judgments about quality or interpretations about what the student was doing.
- If judgments or interpretations do arise, the facilitator should ask the person to describe the evidence on which they are based.
- It may be useful to list the group’s observations on chart paper. If interpretations come up, they can be listed in another column for later discussion during Step 3.

## 3. Interpreting the Student Work

- The facilitator asks; “From the student’s perspective, what is the student working on?”
- During this period, the group tries to make sense of what the student was doing and why. The group should try to find as many different interpretations as possible and evaluate them against the kind and quality of evidence.
- From the evidence gathered in the preceding section, try to infer: what the student was thinking and why; what the student does and does not understand; what the student was most interested in; how the student interpreted the assignment.

- Think broadly and creatively. Assume that the work, no matter how confusing, makes sense to the student; your job is to see what the student sees.
- As you listen to each other's interpretations, ask questions that help you better understand each other's perspectives.

#### 4. **Implications for Classroom Practice**

- The facilitator asks: "What are the implications of this work for teaching and assessment?"
- Based on the group's observations and interpretations, discuss any implications this work might have for teaching and assessment in the classroom. In particular, consider the following questions:

\_What steps could the teacher take next with this student?

\_What teaching strategies might be most effective?

\_What else would you like to see in the student work? What kind of assignments or assessments could provide this information?

\_What does this conversation make you think about in terms of your own practice? About teaching and learning in general?

#### 5. **Reflecting on the ATLAS**

- The presenter shares back what they learned about the student, the work, and what they're now thinking. The discussion then opens to the larger group to discuss what was learned about the student, about colleagues, and self.

#### 6. **Debriefing the Process**

- How well did the process work-what went well, and what could be improved? If the group has designated someone to observe the conversation, this person should report his or her observations.

#### **NOTES:**

# Examining Student Work: A Constructivist Protocol

Examining Student Work *Developed by Daniel Baron*

What makes students and teachers really care about their work? This self-assessment tool is aimed at generating new insights and increasing that investment. The protocol can be used both for assessment and for planning, and it can be done individually or in groups.

1. Students bring to class an example of the best work they have ever done. The work can come from any source, medium, or setting.
2. Students look carefully at their own work and come up with a list of three to five qualities they believe exist in the work and contribute to making it their best.
3. The whole class brainstorms the qualities they found, then condense the list to three to five qualities everyone agrees are essential to good work.
4. The teacher gives an assignment to the class, asking that students attempt to build those qualities into their work. Students should make five copies of their completed assignment.
5. When the assignment is completed, small groups of three or four students look at each other's work in search of evidence that the agreed-on qualities are present. (The tuning protocol makes an excellent vehicle for the student to present such evidence.)

## NOTES: