

Protocols for Looking at the Big Picture

School Walk Protocol

Purpose: This protocol provides a means for visitors to a school to have a meaningful interchange with hosting educators about their observations of the school. This protocol can help hosting educators harvest learning from their visitors and deepen the learning of the visitors themselves. The protocol can be used while school is in session or after school hours. (Suggested time: about one hour)

Steps:

1. School Walk

Pair up in cross-school pairs and walk through the host school for 20-30 minutes. Make non-evaluative observations, avoiding qualitative judgments about what you see. As you walk, discuss the following questions:

- What do you see? What don't you see?
- What do you wonder about?
- What do you think this school is working on?

If you are a member of the school's faculty, don't give a tour, or explain, apologize or show off. Look at your school and participate in the protocol with beginner's mind.

2. Sharing Observations

Return to the large group and share your findings on the questions in sequence.

3. Host Reflections

People in the group who work in the school reflect aloud on what they heard that surprised and interested them and what they saw during their walk that was new.

4. Implications for Education

Discuss the implications of the observations for education.

5. Debrief:

Was this protocol valuable? How could it have been better? How might this protocol be put to use in the future?

Vertical Slice Protocol

Purpose: This protocol allows a school to capture a broad cross-section of ordinary student work and thereby to examine what that slices reveals about teaching and learning with the school. (Suggested time: this protocol requires work to be done over several days; however, the analysis of the work requires at least two hours.)

Steps:

Planning

1. Decide on the purpose for the slice and frame a guiding question. For example:
 - How are our students performing on everyday work?
 - What does the work show about our expectations?
 - How much thought is required of our students in a typical day?
 - What does the work reveal about the current literacy level and needs of our students?
 - What does it mean to be a standards-based school?
2. Decide on a sampling strategy. Will you collect work across a range of particular groups or from all grades/subjects?
3. Decide on how you will collect data. Will you collect all written work? Will it include artwork, photos, student notes? What about teacher assignment sheets? Will the data include information about the context?
4. Determine the duration of the slice. Will you collect work during a couple of hours on a specific day or work from the entire day or even a week?
5. Arrange the logistics. Who will collect the work? Where will it be housed? What about names of students - removed or remain? Who will photocopy the work and organize it? How will the work be displayed for analysis?

Analyzing

6. Decide how you will interrogate the slice. Will you use one of the protocols, such as the descriptive review? Will the discussion of the work be similar to a Socratic seminar?
7. Examine the work and take notes. This might be done individually or in groups.
8. Discuss the work, using the guiding question to focus the discussion. Look for patterns.
9. Identify next steps. What needs to be done instructionally based on the slice? What staff development would be helpful? What resources are needed? How will the group know these changes are making a difference?
10. Debrief. What have you learned of value from looking at this slice and why? What needs to be done differently next time?

Note: A variation of the vertical slice is to have a presenting team organize and guide the entire process and a separate team respond to the work. During step 8 - the responding group discusses the work -- the presenting team does not participate. Instead the team takes notes on the discussion. Step 9 would be a response from the presenting team. The discussion of the next steps and the debrief would include both the responding and presenting teams.