

## Assignment Protocol

**Purpose:** This protocol assesses whether or not an assignment matches a teacher's goals. For instance, the protocol could be used to determine if students are being asked to explain or infer; if the assignment helps students address essential questions, big ideas, or concepts; if students are required to use different habits of the mind; or if an assignment helps students make connections between school and the world outside of school. (Suggested time: 60 minutes)

### Steps:

1. The facilitator reviews the protocol.
2. The presenter describes the assignment, explaining his/her goals, the context for the assignment, and the ways the work fits into the unit as a whole. (10 minutes)
3. The group asks clarifying questions. (5 minutes)
4. Everyone, including the presenter, takes a few minutes to work through the assignment as if they were students. (10 minutes)
5. The presenter moves outside the group.
6. The group discusses the assignment. (10 minutes) The facilitator reminds the group of balancing the discussion with warm and cool comments and ensures the comments specifically refer to the work. The discussion follows this outline:
  - What are the strengths of the assignment?
  - What will students know and be able to do when they complete this assignment?
  - What type of thinking does this assignment require? Analysis? Summarization? Evaluation?
  - How does this assignment connect to student experiences, feelings, and observations about the world?
  - How could this assignment be strengthened if it were used again?
7. Presenter moves back into the group to respond. (10 minutes)
8. The group discusses what was learned from the conversation. They explore how this conversation led them to insights about their own work. (10 minutes)
9. Debrief. (5 minutes)

### Tips:

The facilitator needs to ask for evidence within the work for comments. For example:

- Where do you see this in the work?
- Point to the word or phrase that led you to say this.
- How else might students interpret this?
- Using this evidence, is there another way to interpret this?

## Atlas<sup>1</sup>

Purpose: This protocol is a tool to guide groups of teachers to discover what students understand and how they are thinking. Time: 50 -60 minutes

### Steps:

1. Presenter describes what students were asked to do but does not explain what was hoped for or expected to see. Presenter provides NO background information about the student or work and avoids any statements about whether or not it is good or poor. Then the presenter moves out of the group to listen and observe. (10 minutes)
2. Describing the student work (10 minutes)
  - Facilitator asks, "What do you see?"
  - Group describes what they see in the student's work, avoiding judgments about quality or interpretations about what the student was doing.
  - If judgments do arise, the facilitator asks the person to describe, not interpret.
  - Option: record observations on chart paper.
3. Interpreting the student work (10 minutes)
  - 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, the group infers what the student was thinking, what the student does and does not understand, and how the student interpreted the assignment.
  - Think broadly and creatively. Assume that the work, now matter how confusing, makes sense to the student. The group's job is to see what the student sees.
  - As the group listens to each other's interpretations, they ask questions to better help understand each other's perspectives.
4. Implications for classroom practice (10 minutes)
  - The facilitator asks, "What are the implications of this work for teaching and assessment?"
  - Group discuss the classroom implications, including:
    - What steps could the teacher take next?
    - What teaching strategies might be most effective?
    - What other information would they like to see in the student work?
    - What kind of assignments or assessments could provide this information?
  - What does this conversation make you think of in terms of the group members' own practice? About teaching and learning in general?
5. Debrief

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by Eric Buchovecky as part of the work on Leadership for Urban Mathematics Project and Assessment Communities of Teachers Project. It draws on the work of Steve Seidel and Evangeline Harris-Stefanakis of Project Zero at Harvard University. Gene Thompson-Grove of National School Reform Faculty revised it.

## Charrette

**Purpose:** This informal protocol is used to explore a problem. Once the presenter explains the problem, the problem belongs to the entire group, and once the presenter finds what s/he is looking for, the protocol ends. (Suggested time: one hour)

### Steps:

1. The facilitator reviews the protocol.
2. The presenter (or team) states what it needs from the Charrette so that the discussion is focused. For example:
  - How can we make this better?
  - Is this standards-based?
  - What is the next step?
  - How clear is this assignment's purpose? How might students interpret the purpose of this task?
3. The participants discuss the issue while the presenter listens and takes notes. Even though the presenter remains outside the discussion, s/he may join the discussion briefly in order to clarify a point or respond to the discussion.
4. The discussion ends when the presenter decides the need has been met. The participants summarize the discussion, and the presenter responds.
5. Debrief.

### Tip:

The facilitator needs to make sure the discussion stays focused on the stated need. When conversation wanders from that need, the facilitator has to decide if the conversation is likely to wander into new territory that might shine light on the issue. If that is unlikely to occur, the facilitator should pull the group back to the issue.

## Collaborative Assessment Conference

Purpose: to look closely at student work, describe it, raise questions, and consider teaching implications. (Suggested time: 45 minutes)

1. The facilitator reviews the protocol.
2. Presentation of student work:
  - Presenter does not explain the work or the context.
  - The presenter moves out of the group to jot down notes.Presenter distributes copies of student work, which could be:
  - Work from several students or from one student
  - Work in response to one assignment or work from different assignments
  - Videotapes, art, essays, tests, projects - anything
3. The responders *describe* the work.
  - What are the students doing and saying?
  - What evidence do you see of their thinking, learning, and /or understanding?
  - The description does not include any kind of judgment about the quality of work or about personal preference.
1. The responders *speculate* about what the student is working on.
  - What questions does this work raise for you?
  - What skills are the students working on?
  - How did the students try to fulfill the assignment?
  - What questions did the students seem to be answering?
5. The presenter speaks. At this point, the presenter returns to the group and adds his/her perspective to the above conversations and responds to issues raised by the group.
6. Everyone discusses what the *next instructional steps* are.
7. Together the group extends the conversation to address each person's own teaching:
  - What new understandings have I come to?
  - What new ideas do I have for my students?
  - Based on what I saw today, what strategies might I use?
8. Debrief the discussion.

### Tips: (from *Horace*, Nov. 1996)

When listening to colleagues' thinking:

- Listen without judging.
- Tune in to differences in perspectives.
- Use controversy as an opportunity to explore and hear from others.
- Focus on understanding where different interpretations come from.
- Make your own thinking clear to others.
- Be patient and persistent.

## Consultancy

**Purpose:** This protocol is used to allow a group to explore a problem or a dilemma.  
(Suggested time: 60 minutes)

### Steps:

1. The presenter gives an overview of the issue and then poses a focus question. (10 minutes)
2. The participants ask *clarifying* questions. Keep in mind that clarifying questions are primarily for the responders since these questions are aimed to help responders understand the questions and context. (5 minutes)
3. The group asks the presenter *probing* questions. Probing questions are primarily for the responders. They ask the presenter "why" among other things and are open-ended. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand her thinking about the issue or question she raised for the consultancy group. The goal here is for the presenter to learn more about the question she framed or to do some analysis of the issue she presented. The presenter responds to the group's questions, but there is no discussion by the larger group of the presenter's responses. (10 -15 minutes)
4. The presenter moves outside the group, silently taking notes.
5. The participants talk with each other about the work and issues presented. What did we hear? What didn't we hear that we needed to know more about? What do we think about the question or issue presented? (10 - 15 minutes)
2. The presenter moves back into the group, responding to the discussion. During this time, the group remains silent.
3. Open discussion.
4. Debrief the process.

## Descriptive Review

Purpose: To help a teacher understand a question s/he has about a student's work.  
(Suggested time: 45 minutes or more)

### Steps:

1. The facilitator introduces the student work and describes what participants should try to see in the work - use of strategies, habits of the mind, assumptions, understandings, etc.
2. Presenter describes the work in detail.
3. Participants ask clarifying questions.
4. Round 1: *What do you see?*  
The group describes literally what they see. This is done as a "whip around" so that the discussion moves in an orderly fashion from one person to the next until each person has responded in turn. Participants may pass when it is their turn to speak.
5. The facilitator summarizes the round, capturing important themes and ideas that emerged from the discussion.
6. Round 2: The facilitator asks a guiding question that is either built from the presenter's concerns or emerged from round 1. This discussion is also done as a whip around so that each person has an opportunity to add a comment.
7. The facilitator summarizes the round.
8. The rounds continue until the facilitator is confident that the work has been described in depth. Each round becomes less of a literal description and can move into a discussion of values, patterns, assumptions, etc.
9. The facilitator makes a final summation of the descriptions that emerged throughout the entire protocol and invites the presenting teacher back into the group.
10. The presenting teacher responds.
11. The group discusses new insights as a result of the discussion.
12. Debrief.

### Tips: (from *Horace*, November 1996)

#### Questions to consider:

1. What did you see in this student's work that was interesting and surprising?
2. What did you learn about how this student thinks and learns?
3. What about the process helped you see and learn these things?
4. What did you learn from listening to your colleagues that was interesting or surprising?
5. What questions about teaching and assessing did looking at this student's work raise for you?
6. How can you pursue these questions further?
7. Are there ideas you would like to try in your classroom as a result of looking at the student's work?

## Examining a Body of Work Protocol

Purpose: This protocol provides a structure for looking at samples of student work. The work might be from students in different grades or in the same grade but from different content areas. By looking at a body of work, participants are able to reflect on their expectations as a system rather than those of the individual.

### *Steps*

1. *Gathering:* The individual teacher or team of teacher should gather the body of work they would like the team to examine and discuss. This work should meet explicit criteria, such as be representative of a grade or examples of work from a particular group of students.
2. *Introducing:* The presenter or team states the question and provides context for the work.
3. *Examining:* The responders study the first piece of writing, making notes.
4. *Describing.* The facilitator leads the group through a descriptive process in which the group describes what they see in the work -- no judgments, just factual observations.
5. *Speculating.* The facilitator poses the following question: "If this is typical work for a student at this grade, what does it tell you about student writing at this grade?" Notes are kept on a flip chart.
6. *Moving on:* Continue this process until all the work is described.
7. *Ordering:* Determine which writing represents the youngest learner and which represents the most sophisticated learner. Arrange all the work in order of sophistication.
8. *Reflecting and discussing.* Open discussion as you reflect on this experience.  
Discuss:
  - What does this body of work tell us about our students and their learning experiences?

## Future Protocol (a.k.a. "Back from the Future")<sup>2</sup>

Purpose: To expand and clarify the vision of what the group/individual is really trying to accomplish; to "vision" into the future and tell what it would look like in the very best-case scenario; to initiate discussion of steps, players, actions, and timelines needed for success. A good time to use this protocol is in the early stages of creating a project with an endpoint. Ideas should be formulated, but not completely finalized. If finalized, it might be used to consider improvements almost like a "tuning" protocol.

### Considerations:

- May be presented by an individual or an entire group
- Members of groups must have similar buy in and context to that which is presented
- Uses our ability to tell stories as a way to imagine the best-case scenario
- Does not focus on the obstacles, but rather the opportunities...stays very positive

**Time:** Approximately 1 hour.

### Steps:

1. Individual presenter: shares what he/she is trying to do and how it might look when it is all done.  
Group presentation: presents what it would like to accomplish and how it would look when done. (5 minutes)
2. Clarifying Questions: If presented by a single person and not a whole group, the rest of the group asks clarifying questions. If a group presents together, no clarifying questions. (5 minutes)
3. Probing Questions: If a single presenter, the groups asks probing questions to further the presenter's thinking. The presenter may choose to answer, think aloud or quietly consider it.  
If a groups presents, they raise probing questions to the whole group with perhaps no real expectation of answering them in this step. Again, the idea is to extend the thinking about what they want to accomplish. (10 minutes)
4. Presenter steps out
5. The responders project into the future (whatever timeline seems appropriate) and thoroughly describe what it looks like, sounds like and feels like having accomplished this endeavor.
  - Must talk in **present tense**.
  - Describe *what is* in this best case scenario. Do not yet describe *how*.
  - Focus on the sights, sounds, behaviors and feelings surrounding this accomplishment.

#### *Examples:*

- 5 years later in a school's reform efforts
- The end of a team's project with students

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<sup>2</sup> Created by Scott Murphy

- A groups of *new* teachers focused on classroom management at the end of the year (10-15 minutes)
  - *It really helps to chart steps 4, 5, and 6 so that each can see publicly what is being said.*
6. Look back from your projected present and describe how it looked when it started.
    - Must talk in **past tense**.
    - Think about issues, culture, conversations, teacher's work, student achievement, etc.
    - Try to remain as tangible as possible (10 minutes)
  7. Continue looking back from the projected present and discuss how you addressed the starting place and how you moved from that to the projected present.
    - Must talk in **past tense**
    - Directly relate to previous description of how it looked when it started.
    - Consider discussing how, when, with what resources and by whom. (10 minutes)
  8. Presenter returns to conversation.
  9. Return to projected present and discuss if it can get any better than it is or is this as good as it could possibly be? Again, think about how it will look, sound and feel if it can get even better.  
(5 minutes)
  10. Presenter shares with group thoughts about the future and info she has gathered (5 min)
  11. Debrief the process. (10 minutes)

## Issue Discussion Protocol<sup>3</sup>

### Steps:

1. Select a recorder to keep thorough notes on at least the recommendations and preferably on the complete discussion. These notes then become valuable documentation for further discussion and planning.
2. Identification of an issue: An issue can be one needing immediate clarification or one relative to long-range planning. It can emerge from many sources such as daily practice or from meetings and interviews involving teachers, parents, students and administrators. Examples of issues are: relationships, choice, leadership, recognition and standards.
3. Reflection on the Issue: Participants individually think about the dimensions and meanings of the issue and then share the se with the group. The chair summarizes.
4. Examples and Discussion: Participants are asked to offer concrete examples or to describe their own experiences relevant to this issue. During the discussion, the chair should discourage judgmental comments. The chair summarizes.
5. Interrelationship with other Issues: The chair calls for examples and discussion of how this issue is interrelated with others. This should clarify how a decision relative to this issue might affect others. The chair summarizes discussion.
6. Recommendations: Participants suggest recommendations and additional information or documentation that would be useful (interviews, observations, other perspectives).
7. The chair makes a final summary of the recommendations and schedules a time for follow-up on the recommendations.

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<sup>3</sup> From Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research, 1980

## Peeling The Onion: Developing A Problem Protocol

**Purpose:** To provide a structured way to develop an appreciation for the complexity of a problem in order to avoid the inclination to start out "solving" the problem. Most of us are eager to solve problems before we understand their depth. This protocol is designed to help us peel away the layers in order to address the deeper issues that lie underneath the surface. (Suggested time: approximately 50 minutes)

### Steps:

1. The presenter explains the dilemma and poses a focus question.
2. Clarifying questions (4 minutes)
3. Round 1: as a whip around, everyone finishes this statement: I understand the question to be...
  - The presenter is silent and takes notes.
4. Round 2: as a whip around, everyone finishes this statement: The questions that this raises for me are...
  - The presenter remains silent and takes notes.
5. Round 3, as a whip around, everyone responds to: What if...? Or, have you thought of...?
6. Presenter reviews notes and says, "Having heard these questions, I think there are implications for..."
7. Together, the presenter and responders think of possibilities and options that have surfaced.
8. Debrief. Be sure to discuss: (5 minutes)
  - How was this like peeling an onion?
  - What about the process was useful?
  - Frustrating?

### Tips: The Art of Questioning

Use introspective, open-ended questions:

- "Why" questions can seem confrontational but are valuable if the asker is careful with tone
- Ask environmental questions that explore the context
- Consider Bloom's taxonomy
- Build your questions: start with easy and accessible ones and develop from there
- Don't ask questions that you know the answer to
- Avoid questions that do not have the potential to provide important information
- Listen to the answer
- Use connecting questions: How does \_\_\_ lead to \_\_\_? How is \_\_\_ similar to \_\_\_?
- Turn the question back to the person to answer

Possible questions:

- Have you ever tried...?
- What if...?
- How might things be different if...
- What questions do you have? What would be the next question for you?

## Standards Protocol<sup>4</sup>

Purpose: This protocol is a close examination of teachers' assignments and students' work in direct relationship to standards. Teachers or teams would select this protocol if they wonder if the assigned work accurately assesses a particular standard. A teacher brings to the group a set of student work, the assignment sheet, and, if possible, the scoring rubric. (Suggested time: 90 minutes)

### Steps:

1. The facilitator reviews the protocol.
2. The presenter describes the assignment, the standards the assignment addresses, and the process for assessing the work. The presenter then asks a focus question for the group to explore.
3. The participants ask clarifying questions.
4. The presenter moves out of the group and takes notes on the discussion.
5. Collectively, the participants either examine the rubric or create an informal rubric using the standards and the assignment.
6. Individually the participants score the work, using the rubric.
7. The participants discuss their scores, noting discrepancies. Looking carefully at the student work and the teacher's assignment, they explore questions the work raises for them such as:
  - What does this work tell us about student learning in relationship to the standards?
  - Are there patterns that indicate what students know and are able to do and what they don't know?
  - Does this assignment help all students meet the standards?
  - What are the strengths of this assignment?
  - How might the assignment be strengthened and better aligned with the standards?
8. The facilitator asks the presenter to restate the question and confirms that this is the focus for the discussion. The participants then discuss the work, weaving in both warm and cool comments. The presenter remains outside of this discussion and takes notes.
9. The presenter responds to the discussion.
10. The participants and the presenter develop an action plan that describes what needs to happen next so that all students can do this and similar tasks.
11. The entire group discusses implications for teaching and learning. Along with considering next steps for the student, they examine insights that emerged from this conversation.
11. Debrief.

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<sup>4</sup> From Center for Collaborative Education's Turning Points, *Transforming Middle Schools*

## Tuning Protocol

Purpose: To provide feedback on a teacher's assignment or on students' work. (Suggested time: 45 minutes)

1. Introduction (up to 3 minutes)
  - Facilitator reminds group of procedures, time frame for each part, and norms.
2. Presentation by the presenting teacher (7 minutes)
  - Explains the context (students, class, grade, etc.).
  - Asks a focus question s/he would like addressed.
3. Responders listen and take notes.
4. Clarifying questions (7 minutes)
  - Purpose of these questions: to ensure the responders understand the question/concern.
  - Clarifying questions refer to facts: How many students are in this class? What have they done before on this assignment?
  - Avoid questions that hint of judgment.
5. Examination of work (5 minutes)
  - Responders silently read the work.
6. Presenter moves out of the group and may not participate until step 8.
7. Feedback (18 -20 minutes)
  - Warm or positive comments: What are the strengths of this work?
  - Cool not cruel comments: What questions does the work provoke? Are there gaps?
  - Presenter takes notes on the discussion.
8. Reflection
  - Presenter rejoins the group and talks about what s/he has learned from the feedback. This is NOT a time to defend oneself, rather a time to explore interesting ideas that came out of the feedback section.
9. Debrief: Facilitator leads open discussion of this experience.
10. Optional: the group writes in teaching journals about how this discussion informs their own teaching.

### Tips: (from *Horace*, November 1996)

When looking for evidence of students' thinking:

- Stay focused on the evidence that is present in the work.
- Look openly and broadly; don't let your expectations cloud your vision.
- Look for patterns in the evidence that provide clues to how and what the student was thinking.
- Avoid judgments.