

Facilitation Difficulty: 

 60-80 min.

 Up to 15

 Preconference
in advance

Purpose – To investigate what a piece of work reveals about the student. The assumption that governs this protocol is that all work bears the imprint and signature of the author and so offers important access to the author’s interests, ways of creating order, and point of view. The participants work to discover this particular student’s way of knowing. This protocol also allows participants to consider how a student’s academic issues and concerns may relate to the teacher’s goals for that student.

Preconference – Direct the presenter to bring one to six samples of one student’s work, about which they have real questions. Ask the teacher why they have chosen these samples and whether they are indicative of what the student produces. Discuss the questions and/or dilemmas the teacher would like to explore and, together, determine a focusing question for the group. Remind the presenter that this protocol requires participants to observe the student’s work without hearing much presentation about the assignment or the student.

Preparation – The presenter should bring enough copies for all participants, having previously marked out identifying details such as name, age, or grade level. Bring a timer, and remind all group members to bring note-taking materials to the meeting.

Possible pitfalls – In Step 5, be particularly careful to instruct participants to share only what they see without judgments or speculations of any kind.

Steps:

1. **Setup** – (3 min.) Explain the protocol’s purpose. Instruct participants to act as detectives, searching for clues to uncover what the student is working on and what they believe the student might be thinking while doing the work. Tell participants they will be asked what ideas they may have to support this student in particular, as well as implications for their own teaching. If participants want more context, assure them that they will be able to add value without more information, since the point is to learn specifically from the piece of work itself rather than the presenting teacher’s views, opinions, or other outside information. This protocol uses collaboration as a powerful tool to make meaning.
2. **Present** – (5 min.) Direct the presenter to distribute copies of the student work. The presenter may give a very brief, one-sentence introduction to the work. They should only give background information if it was determined in preconference that it would be helpful to the process. The presenter gives the group their focusing question and it is charted in everyone’s view.
3. **Separate** – (1 min.) Direct the presenter to physically move away from the group but stay close enough to hear. Ideally, they should turn so they aren’t making eye contact with anyone. The presenter should bring materials for taking notes. For the next steps, instruct everyone to imagine the presenter has left the room and to avoid eye contact with the presenter.
4. **Examine** – (5-15 min., depending on how much work there is to examine.) Participants are asked to examine the work through the lens of the focusing question, in silence, making brief notes about aspects of the work that stand out to them or that they find significant.
5. **Description round** – (Up to 10 min.) This round will ask the group to describe what they observe. Remind participants to describe **only** what they actually see in the work, avoiding all judgments or

interpretations. They should identify which detail triggered their observation (e.g., “*In the first paragraph...*”). Inform participants that this feedback will occur in a round. Start the round by choosing a volunteer and asking, “*What do you see?*” If judgments or interpretations arise, ask the speaker to describe the evidence they see as an observation and hold interpretations until a later round.

6. **Presenter reflection** – (2 min.) Give the presenter some time to reflect, either silently or aloud, on what they learned from Step 5, the describing round. If they wish to speak to the group, they can stay in their seats, simply turning to address the other participants and turning away again at the end of this step.
7. **Interpretation discussion** – (Up to 10 min.) Instruct the group now to attempt to make sense of what they have observed. Advise the group to avoid straying into offering suggestions. Remind participants to share airtime and that you will make sure everyone has a chance to speak if they want to. Choose a different volunteer and ask: “*What do you think the work suggests?*” From the evidence gathered in the preceding section, try to infer what you think is happening and why? Participants may speculate around areas such as:
 - *What do I think the student is actually working on?*
 - *What seems to be the student’s thought process?*
 - *What skills does the student possess and what skills are missing?*
 - *What does the student appear to value?*
 - *What does the student seem on the verge of understanding?*
 - *What are the tasks the student is trying to accomplish?*
 - *What elements seem apparent in the work (such as rhythm, tone, form...)?*
8. **Presenter reflection** – (2 min.) Ask the presenter to reflect, silently or aloud, what they learned from Step 7, the interpreting round. If they wish to speak to the group, they can turn in their seats to address the other participants, and turn away again when their time is up.
9. **Implications discussion** – (Up to 10 min.) Now the group may offer suggestions to the presenter based on the previous steps. Encourage them to consider the implications for teaching and learning. Choose a volunteer and ask: “*What are the implications of this work?*” Remind participants to couch their suggestions in “*I wonder...*” language and to watch their airtime. Participants may consider the following questions:
 - *What steps or strategies might be effective with this student, or with this type of assignment in the future?*
 - *What else would you like to see happen?*
 - *What are the implications for equity?*
10. **Presenter reflection** – (5 min.) The presenter returns to the group and reflects aloud what they are now thinking and any next steps that they may take.
11. **Debrief and reflect** – (5 min.) Begin with the presenter:
 - *How did it feel to bring student work to the group? How was the experience of presenting?*
 - *What did you think of turning your chair away and listening silently?*
 - *Was the outcome of this protocol different than you expected? What, if anything, did you discover*

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that you hadn't thought of before?

- *Do you have a different appreciation of the protocol rules now that you have presented?*

Then open to debrief with the rest of the group.

- *What about the process surprised or impressed you?*
- *What didn't work well for you?*
- *What did you learn from this protocol that will be helpful in your work?*
- *Can you imagine a way to use this protocol in your work?*