

Tuning for Equity

Mary Hastings, Maine

As Coaches we all know that protocols are valuable tools that help us create a safe space where teachers feel comfortable bringing their questions and dilemmas to the table for feedback. As an experienced Coach, I continue to value these tools and the need for a safe space, but lately I have had the nagging sense that I/we might not be going as far as we can in our examination of student and teacher work. My nagging doubts grow out of my awareness that at times the process or protocol being used and my adherence to it might be limiting the conversation, especially in the area of implications for equity in our work. So I began to think about the ways we might continue to create a safe space where we could have the “uncomfortable,” risky conversations about equity that we need to have if we are serious about serving historically marginalized students.

Following our Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE) Seminar last July in Sonoma, a number of the participants held email discussions about the role of equity in using the Looking at Student Work (LASW) protocols. During the discussion, some of us recalled Nancy Mohr’s draft of “Looking at Student Work: Building in the Habit of Equity” protocol. In her writing, Nancy proposes that we “go beyond protocols to the next step which must be specific actions.” I began to think about actively including the equity lens within the protocols as we use them. Nancy suggested preliminary work around community building and equity prior to using protocols. I include her suggestions here:

Purpose: To focus looking at student work specifically so that it furthers equity for our students, our teachers and our schools.

Facilitation tips: There must be appropriate community building before using any protocol. Suggestions include: (and these are only a few of the many things that can be done – there has to be a lot of facilitator judgment used)

- Reflection on the word equity
- Dyads on feelings about equity
- Introductions, which include self-identification, historical moments, etc.

And building norms for doing hard and sensitive work together—if this hasn’t already been done. If it has been done months ago, time for a review.

In the process of considering how this should be a preparation for all our efforts, looking at student work, I began to consider how one of the often used protocols might be “expanded” to include the

focus on equity that Nancy championed. Here’s a snapshot of my thinking as it applies to the Tuning Protocol (suggestions in italics). This is not a finished product, but I hope it will open up the conversation about the ways we can go deeper with our efforts to serve all students through our collaborative learning from student and teacher work.

Introduction to the Tuning Protocol

Often the presenter begins with a focusing question or area about which she/he would especially welcome feedback, for example, “Are you seeing evidence of persuasive writing in the students’ work?” Participants have time to examine the student work and ask clarifying questions. Then, with the presenter listening but silent, participants offer warm and cool feedback — both supportive and challenging. Presenters often frame their feedback as a question, for example, “How might the project be different if students chose their research topics?”

Some specific examples of equity questions might be useful here, such as “Does this look/feel like a project that all students can access?” or “How can I make this work relevant to the different perspectives/experiences of the student in my class?”

After this feedback is offered, the presenter has the opportunity, again uninterrupted, to reflect on the feedback and address any comments or questions she chooses. Time is reserved for debriefing the experience. Both presenting and participating educators have found the tuning experience to be a powerful stimulus for encouraging reflection on their practice.

Tuning Protocol

Developed by Joseph McDonald and David Allen

1. Introduction — 5 minutes
 - a. Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, guidelines, and schedule
 - b. 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.

Descriptions of the students grounded in evidence the way descriptions are shared in (continued on page 14)



- perpetuated within our communities and schools,
- Creating the space for the participants to undertake the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth to eliminate their behaviors that support the cycle of inequity (i.e., fostering trust, increasing confidence, decreasing pretense and passivity).

By the end of our Seminar, we challenge you to be ready, willing and able to interrupt inequity and oppression in your school, build the alliances required to create that equitable reality, encourage new leaders to emerge, and to support these new leaders to reflect on the issues of equity that arise in their lives and work. All schools need to create safe opportunities for educators to share and reflect upon stories and experiences about how racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression have affected our lives as individuals, parents, educators, and citizens. In CES Small Schools it is our responsibility to do so.

Our work together will continue to be guided by these essential questions:

- What do I need to know and be able to do to interrupt inequities in my school?
- What do I need to know and be able to do to create, foster and sustain an equitable Professional Learning Community?
- How does a Professional Learning Community focused on equity and social justice increase student success in school and in life?

In order for us to attend rigorously to these questions, please come prepared to work hard, complete nightly assignments, and engage in a professional discourse that will renew our passion for teaching and learning. Please read and come prepared to discuss the two texts; “Hiphop In the Classroom,” and “What Do We Mean by Rigor.”

Because the work of this Seminar is tied so closely to our work as educators in our individual settings, we ask you to bring samples of student or adult work. If you are not currently teaching, then please bring a piece of your work for the purpose of receiving feedback or a dilemma you face as a leader for educational equity. We will make the time to honor all the work that you bring.

We hope you know how excited we are to continue our critically important work together. ■

Daniel Baron may be contacted at dbaron@bloomington.in.us and Camilla Greene may be contacted at camillagreene@att.net

the Collaborative Assessment Conference would be useful here. This might eliminate predisposing the participants to a particular “view” of the class or students in question.

- Assignment or prompt that generated the student work
- Student learning goals or standards that inform the work

Potential clarifying questions might be,

“How are all students being served with this assignment?” or “How was it ‘differentiated’ for the members of this particular class?”

- Samples of student work — photocopies of work, video clips, etc. — with student names removed.

More questions to consider: How did the presenter select the work? Was it truly random? Does it represent not only the range of learning, but also the range of diversity in the class?

- Evaluation format — scoring rubric and/or assessment criteria, etc.

Questions here could focus on how evaluation is handled. Are clear, high expectations stated for all, using student-friendly language that guides the students to equitable outcomes?

- 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

(continued next page)

- 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. Implications for Equity: Like the Collaborative Assessment Conference, it may be valuable to discuss the implications for teaching and learning of what we’ve heard and discussed using the lens of equity. The reflection questions below would enrich the learning and help us “interrupt” inequities that may be raised by the Tuning. The point is not to shut the presenter down, or put them on the defensive but rather to challenge everyone involved to a higher level of awareness. Thus placing these at the end of the warm/cool feedback session both addresses the focus question and takes it beyond the presenter’s work.

Possible Reflection questions following the activity: (from both Nancy Mohr’s draft of LASW for

Equity and additions by Debbie Bambino)

- What have each of us learned about building the habit of equity through doing this protocol?
 - What are our own next steps?
 - Who’s at the table? Who’s missing?
 - Why aren’t those voices included?
 - How can we include those whose perspectives have been silenced historically?
 - How does the work we’ve just done serve all of our students?
 - How does it serve those students who have been marginalized in the past?
9. Debrief — 5 minutes
 - How well does the presenter feel the question has been answered?
 - How well do we feel we answered the presenter’s question?
 - Facilitator-led discussion of this tuning experience.

In conclusion, examining specific protocols through the lens of equity begs the question of doing the equity work ahead of the protocols. It seems that trying to do the work through the protocols could be risky and half-baked if the baseline work of some of the equity tools we used this summer at the CFEE seminar (Constructivist Listening, Examining Equity Perspectives, relevant readings), or other thoughtful equity work, hasn’t been done previously with the group. On the other hand, if we wait for that preparation to be done, we may never get to examining the student/teacher work. So once we’ve examined these protocols for equity we need to think about stepping up and making a strong case for CFG training and existing CFGs to do purposeful equity work. This might include more CFEE seminars around the country and an equity “curriculum” involving all our protocols. I like to think Nancy is cheering us on! ■

*Mary Hastings may be contacted at
mhasting@usm.maine.edu*

*A printer friendly version of this protocol is
available at www.nsrharmony.org/connections.html*

