

	Clueless	Proficient	Master
Suitcases			
Lifemaps			
Peer Workshops			
Publishing			
Lit Circles			
Reading Workshop			
Multigenre			
Textmapping			
Expert Groups			
Pig Prompts			
Image Grammar			
Protocols			

Taking a Different Look at Student Writing: What Does It Tell Us?



Greater Houston Area Writing Project

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Looking at Student Work

[HOME](#)[WELCOME](#)[WHO WE ARE](#)[PROTOCOLS](#)[RESOURCES](#)[RESEARCH](#)[CONTACT](#)[BEYOND](#)

Resources



[Books, Articles
& Videos](#)

[Student
Work Sites](#)

[Web Picks](#)

[Supporting
Materials](#)

- [Guidelines](#)
- [Getting Ready](#)
- [Collecting Student Work](#)
- [Facilitation Tips](#)

◆ Collecting Student Work

Below are some examples of student work you might bring to a session. Whatever you choose to bring should be accompanied by the assignment/directions/prompt that you provided for the students and, if appropriate, by specific reference to relevant portions of whatever student outcomes, learning goals, standards, and/or curriculum frameworks you use.

Possible Samples:

Developed by [AISR](#) for the Math/Science Project and revised for [NSRF](#).

- written work (or artwork) from several students in response to the same assignment
- several pieces of work from one student in response to different assignments
- one piece of work from a student who completed the assignment successfully and one piece from a student who was not able to complete the assignment successfully (same assignment for both)
- work done by students working in groups (include work of at least two groups that were given the same assignment)
- videotape, audio tape, and/or photographs of students working, performing, or presenting their work (this might be particularly useful for very young children who haven't yet acquired adequate written communication skills)

Whatever you choose to bring, keep in mind that it should be something about which you have a real question or concern, that you are curious about, or would benefit from several pairs of eyes looking at it. Remember, this is an opportunity to have others help you examine the work.

Tips for Teachers on Collecting Student Work

Originally developed for users of the [Tuning Protocol](#).

- Collect **multiple samples** from students at different levels (2-4 samples).
- **Remove student names** from samples (if possible).

- **Context documents** (description of objectives, rubric, assignment, etc.) should be provided along with student work samples.
- **Enough copies for everyone.** If original work (e.g., piece of artwork, complete portfolio) is the focus, let facilitator know in advance so s/he may think about format for presentation.
- Video of presentation (if applicable) should be **brief** (a 5 minute clip is usually enough)
- Teacher(s) should be prepared to give brief (15 min.) **description of the context** for the student work, including objectives, assignment, time and organization of task/project, scoring criteria.
- Teachers presenting work should prepare a **"focusing question"** about the work, e.g., Do the samples provide evidence of analytical writing?

<http://www.lasw.org/collecting.html>



Looking at Student Work

Protocols



◆ Why Protocols?

In this part of Looking at Student Work you will find [brief descriptions](#) of a number of protocols developed and used by participants in the site (and others), intended to illustrate how protocols support teachers and others in LSW.



[Introduction](#)

[Methods](#)

[Virtual Protocol](#)

[Definitions](#)

[Supporting Materials](#)

First, 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 issues are 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

*** The Virtual Protocol.**
 This is a recreation on-line of a [Collaborative Assessment Conference](#) in which teachers looked at two pieces of writing from the same student. Includes a teacher profile, list of participants, the student's work, and excerpts from the dialogue through each step of the process.

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 continuously 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. Protocols are a way to **make the most of the time** people do have.
- Finally, it is important to remember that the point is not do the protocol well, but to have an in-depth, insightful, **conversation about teaching and learning**.

What's a typical protocol look like?

- A "typical" protocol for looking at student work look like this: **A small group of teachers and/or administrators gather in a circle** - eight to twelve is a good number. One of the teachers (the presenter) has brought samples of his or her students' work to present. A facilitator gets the discussion going and makes sure that the guidelines and agenda for the protocol are followed. **The protocol specifies that time be allotted for different purposes**, which may include asking a focusing question, presenting the instructional context (or standards) for the student work, description of the student work, asking clarifying questions, asking "probing" questions, providing feedback on the work, reflecting on the feedback, etc. The protocol may last from 45 minutes to an hour and a half.

<http://www.lasw.org/protocols.html>

Descriptive Review

Steps

Time: 1 hour (can be as much as 2 hours)

Roles: Presenting Teacher(s), Facilitator, Review Group

Preparation:

- Teacher designated for presentation or teacher volunteers
- Group determined (keep to 10 or less)
- Chairperson/facilitator designated
- Meeting of facilitator and teacher presenter for planning:
 - Choose the work (1 to 6 samples of one child's work).
 - Why has the teacher chosen this work? Is it indicative of what the child does?
 - Are there questions or dilemmas the presenter wishes to explore?
 - How will the work be presented to the group – how much background, etc?

Review Process:

1. Chairperson/presenter reviews the descriptive process. (5 minutes)

- This process is grounded in description, not judgment or evaluation.
- The major assumption is that all work bears the imprint and signature of the author and so offers important access to the maker's interest, ways of creating order, and point of view. The purpose is to understand this student's way of knowing.
- The process is formal. The group speaks in go-arounds. You are free to pass. Everyone listens carefully. There is no cross dialogue. Comments are kept short (if you keep hearing yourself say "and" you've said too much).
- Use action words, descriptive words and phrases.
- The chair sets the focus for each round, listens, takes notes for common ground.

2. Setting the Tone for Description. (5-15 minutes)

Since true description is difficult, start with a reflection/description exercise, such as:

- Group is given a word, object, or witnesses an event and responds with free association in a round, i.e., storm – impending, wet, wind ... or a doll – 6 inches, dark hair ...
- A 3-5 minute reflective writing, describing a word, object, event ...

If this is the first time the group has used this process, it may be wise to do several practice rounds with a short paragraph or piece of artwork to practice responding descriptively. The skill of the group in being descriptive rather than evaluative dictates how much practice is needed.

3. Teacher/presenter puts the work out for reading by the group. (5-10 minutes)

- Teacher may choose to read some of the work aloud or have someone else do so.
- Amount of time needed depends upon amount of student work, complexity, and number of group members.

4. Teacher/presenter gives a brief introduction to the work. (5 minutes)

- The description tends to be less evaluative if the teacher does not give too much information, as too much pre-knowledge may prejudice the view of the work ... Often NO information is given other than the work itself.

- S/he may give the child's name, age, time in school, siblings and other pertinent background/context information, as desired or as may help the process. S/he may pose a question or dilemma for the group to consider concerning this student.

5. Rounds begin. (30 to 90 minutes)

- Each round (or rounds if the same focus is used for several rounds) is summarized by the facilitator and the focus for the next round set.
- Facilitator may vary the beginning person for rounds, and change the order from clockwise to counter-clockwise.
- Facilitator may choose to insert a clarifying question round, where group members can ask the presenter(s) clarifying questions -- not probing questions.
- A pause for presenter(s) to reflect on what they are learning, either silently or aloud to the group, can be interjected into the rounds.
- There is no absolute order, nor focus for rounds, except for literal description rounds, which must always be done: "What do you see?" Six colors used; one cloud, two people, one with red pants.

Descriptive Rounds:

Seventeen rounds are unrealistic, so obviously there is some careful selection that reflects the purpose of the review, and is appropriate to the work. **Literal Description rounds** are always done, as are the **Debrief/Feedback rounds**. The others are selected for appropriateness. Sometimes a particular focus within a round (i.e., "how the student is visible in the work") may be done more than once.

Literal Description Rounds

- General impressions
- Physical description – what do you see? (likely to be more than one round)

What Student is Working On Rounds

- Elements that seems apparent (style, rhythm, tone, form)
- Tasks student is trying to accomplish
- How the student is visible in the work
- What does the student appear to value
- What does s/he know how to do re: skills
- What does the student seem on the verge of understanding
- "I wonder"

Optional Teaching Focus Rounds

(Very difficult as evaluation is hard to avoid)

- Implications for teaching this child
- Changes teacher might make in instruction or curriculum practices, in assessment tools, or in attitude toward student

Debrief/Feedback on Process Rounds

- How did this work, or not
- What did you learn
- Suggestions for facilitation
- Time for presenter to say what was learned about this student

Monkeying Around

One thing I have discovered, surprisingly, monkeys are very popular pets. In fact many of the facts I found are very shocking, and I never heard about them.

Monkeys enjoy eating all the time. A few things they enjoy snaking on are: grapes, oranges, and as we all know bananas. Some monkeys are simply happy eating grass and trees; whereas, other monkeys have to have gourmet meals such as spaghetti.

Monkeys drink some very interesting things. I came very shocked. Can you believe they enjoy drinking beer, whiskey, and tequila. Cokes are very popular with monkeys. Monkeys are really like humans in a lot of their habits especially eating and drinking. Most pet monkeys act better than the monkeys you see at the zoo or in the wild. People train ninety percent of the monkeys. I guess you learn from those most like you.

People who have had or have monkeys claim they make wonderful pets unlike other animals such as a pig or others that live out side. Monkeys are some of the cleanest pets on earth maybe this is one reason people think they are wonderful pets. I hope that during this article you have learned as much as I have about monkeys. Now I would like to have my own pet monkey.

Dunbar Middle School

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Expert Groups

1. Students are divided into groups of 4 or less.
2. Choose a concept, divide chapters, or select pieces of a chapter
3. KWL Chart
4. How can you teach your concept to others?
 - Notes
 - Hands-on Activity
 - Video
 - Comic Strip
 - Reader's Theater
 - Other: _____
5. Where did you get your information?

Literature Circles

Getting Started:

- Students choose own reading materials
- Small groups (3-6)
- Group by text choices not ability/tracking
- Groups create and meet on regular basis
- Active reading: take notes
- Students write own discussion questions
- Teacher led mini-lessons open and close: Literature elements, cognitive strategies to help understand texts, social skills for small group discussions
- Personal responses, connections, questions start the discussions
- Group project to mark the end of book readings
- Form new groups to begin again
- Assessment is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation

Reading Strategies:

- Visualize—mental pictures as reading
- Connect—to own life experiences
- Question—wonder
- Infer—predict, interpret, draw conclusions
- Evaluate—make judgments, critique, relative importance
- Analyze—authors' crafts: text structure, language, style, theme, point of view
- Recall—retell, summarize, remember important info
- Self-monitor—adjust, troubleshoot, fix understanding

What works?

- Book talks by teacher before students choose texts
- Student input about each book
- Listing top 3-4 choices to read
- Mixing up the groups
- Having a schedule for reading
- Working the Room
- Good, thoughtful questions
- Teaching literary elements through the texts

Publishing
Writer's Market
Merlyn's Pen
Novel and Short Story Writer's
Market
Teenink
Freelancewriting.com
Jack and Jill
Poetry.com
Cricket
Barnes and Noble
Blue Mountain
Greensheet
School/Local
Your own anthology

