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Module 4: The Work of PLC Teams – Part One

Essential Questions

- How do we recognize we have a culture of trust?

- What do PLC Teams do?

- How does the work of a PLC connect to what we are already doing?

Expected Outcomes

Participants will:

- Begin to identify and use practices of an effective PLC

- Identify how collaborative analysis of day-to-day classroom data like student and teacher work is a key practice to improving teaching and learning

- Begin the practice of using "Looking At Student Work" and "Dilemma" Protocols to assess progress.

Vocabulary

- **Looking at Student Work –** Using a structured process (a **protocol**) to look collaboratively at student and teacher work in order to assess challenges (and successes).

- **Student work –** one or more of these three components (in any combination): artifacts (writing or tangible products of projects), classroom behavior and performances (records of classroom behavior or performances).

- **Common Assessments –** Created by vertical or grade level teams as action plan benchmarks to assess student learning in areas specific to team goals.

- **Facilitator –** The person who takes responsibility for initiating, maintaining, monitoring, and concluding structured group activities. The main role of a facilitator is to maintain the integrity of the process and attend to the needs of the participants while being as unobtrusive as possible. This role usually rotates in highly functioning PLCs.

- **Feedback (descriptive) –** A means of communicating with others by describing their work. Although feedback is usually evaluative in nature, descriptive feedback is literal and non-judgmental. It is geared primarily towards a deeper understanding of the work in question instead of evaluating it.

- **Feedback (giving) –** A process that is often solicited (formally or informally) by a colleague in need of a particular type of information related to his/her work. The important thing to remember here is that this is essentially a communication process that

works best when it is constructive rather than destructive. Giving constructive feedback is not easy and it does not come naturally to many. It must be learned and practiced and works best in a context of trust and mutual respect.

- **Feedback (receiving) –** This is the other side of the "communication coin." Like giving feedback, this is not easy and for the most part does not come naturally to many of us who have worked individually and in isolation for most of our teaching careers. It must be learned and practiced and requires a special emphasis on active listening and controlling the reactive reflex which so often prevents our ability to reflect and learn from others' feedback.

- **Clarifying Questions –** Questions that need to be answered in order to clearly understand what one is being asked to do. Clarifying questions are often formulated by individuals who really want to understand what kind of feedback they are being asked to provide for a colleague. Clarifying questions are not judgmental or evaluative in nature. They require a simply answer, a yes or a no and help the participants to "set the stage" for the presenter's question. These questions are usually one stage in a protocol prior to the use of probing questions.

- **Probing Questions –** Questions that attempt to "push" a conversation deeper, add to, or challenge ideas being considered are probing questions. They are often used to explore the underlying assumptions of a particular argument or line of thought.

Introduction
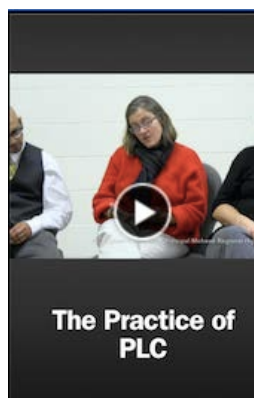
Once schools and districts have decided to explore the concept of becoming a Professional Learning Community and have created the underlying structure that has created time, teams and understandings (norms) the next question is usually, "What do we DO as a PLC? " followed by, "What does it look like when we are together as teams?"

Module 4 looks first at clarifying what the climate of an effective PLC needs to be and secondly, at some of the foundational practices and protocols in which Professional Learning Communities engage. One underlying assumption is that this work rests on continually looking at many forms of data—student and teacher work, common assessments, projects and presentations and dilemmas, in an effort to know how students are learning and to problem-solve challenges. PLCs focus on "razor-edged thinking" about teaching and learning. Effective PLCs are always questioning their own teaching practice.

"PLCs give people opportunities to work together in new ways."
Lynn Dole, Principal, Mohawk Regional High School -Shelburne, MA

Organizing for Success

A fundamentally classic series of questions underscores the **reflective work** of PLCs in the quest to improve teaching and learning:

- **What are we teaching?**
- **Why are we teaching it?**
- **How are we teaching it?**

- **How do we know our students are "getting" it?**
- **How do our students know they are "getting" it?**

Quinn's six questions revised, Julie Quinn NSRF

These simple queries provide the framework for what a PLC does. Our work together is about creating a community that works through habits of reflective practice. Creating the collaborative community to explore these questions is the work of a Professional Learning Community. Some PLC groups post these on a wall where they can refer to them as a reminder about the purpose of their work together.

_____

Developing a Climate of Shared Practice

"My development in previous years was based on my own reflection and perceptions. I only had myself. This year I can reflect through the eyes of four to nine other people. When you're only looking at it from your own perspective, you can't see that it might be you. When you have so many eyes to see things; that alone has helped with my reflection and growth— ten times more growth this year than in previous years because I'm seeing things through at least ten other eyes. I have the opportunity to not only work with them and reflect with them, but to see things from their perspective as well as my own."

Improving Teacher Effectiveness through Structured Collaboration: A Case Study of a Professional Learning Community, Parry *Graham*

Creating an atmosphere of shared practice is critical to improving teaching and learning and is at the core of school improvement. It is a practice through which teachers can observe fellow teachers' pedagogy in a collegial manner as opposed to an evaluative context. To promote sharing of practice requires developing a climate where teachers open their doors willingly for colleagues to observe classrooms and provide feedback as they "de-privatize" their work. They are also willing to take risks and unafraid to make mistakes or to learn from one another. Building a collaborative climate is a complex process which requires time, patience, and reflection and includes the following elements to ensure success:

- **Sensitivity –** A sense of extending care and support to colleagues, both personally and professionally.

- **Norms –** Shared beliefs, common expectations, and an assurance that all participants' voices and opinions will be heard

- **Honesty –** Teachers are straightforward with each other and are critical friends who provide constructive feedback that is both warm and cool.

- **Openness –** Teachers willingly share professional secrets, best practices, and resources

- **Reliability –** Teachers understand their interdependence upon each other and are accountable for their actions

- **Mutual Respect –** A sense of respect, commitment, and patience shared by teachers

Staff-wide beliefs and behaviors that support successful PLCs include:

- Failure, mistakes and uncertainty in work are openly shared and discussed
- Colleagues agree on broad educational values, but accept disagreements that foster new dialogue
- Teachers receive respect and consideration as people
- Administrators support "dispersed leadership," where teachers develop the confidence to select and adapt strategies that drive improvement

NCREL Monograph: Building Collaborative Cultures - Seeking Ways to Reshape Urban Schools

PLC School Teams: Looking at Student Work (LASW)
How do we know the students are learning?

One of the most powerful practices that school-based teams can engage in is looking at student work to inform a teacher-led cycle of inquiry. What question do we have? How does this piece of student work help us know more about it? What additional questions come up for us from looking at this piece of student work? What more do we need to know? What additional resources do we need to know this? What do we need to learn and be able to do? How will we do this? What will success look like?

Students' work in schools is serious work.
Students' work is key data about the life of the school.
The work of children and adults in school should be public.
Practices for looking at student work must be connected to serious changes in curriculum, instruction, and professional development.
LASW.org

Student work is one of the most authentic data sources that teachers can use to inform their decisions. Through sharing different points of view, looking at student work collaboratively expands how teachers examine what their students know and are able to do, and helps them gain insights into their own practice.

Looking collaboratively at student work is a process in which teachers look collaboratively at the work students create as a reflection of what they have been taught. To structure the process and create a safe, caring environment, teams can use several protocols to facilitate the conversation. Through the use of specific structured, agreed-upon protocols, teachers clarify problems, identify evidence to support opinions, share perspectives, and reflect on their practice. Teachers often find that protocols help them mine the wealth of riches that student work contains. Protocols for looking at student work are always about helping the teacher deepen her thinking about her question or dilemma and not about a group of experts telling her what she should do.

Teacher teams have noted many benefits to looking at student and teacher work, including:

- **Gaining a more comprehensive understanding of what students know and are able to do over time:** Student work helps teachers "get inside students' heads" and understand what they are thinking and how their thinking is developing over time.

- **Embedding professional development in teachers' daily practices to improve student achievement:** When teachers participate in ongoing conversations about teaching and learning, they engage in the practice of reflective thinking about their beliefs, assumptions, and practices. Collegial feedback and critical analysis of student and teacher work in a safe and structured format creates a culture that supports continuous learning.

- **Educator Evaluation:** Looking at student and teacher work helps practitioners identify personal teaching challenges, set goals and create action plans that often involve the ongoing support of the PLC team and the use of protocols to assess progress.

- **Building a sense of community:** Looking collaboratively at student work and participating in collective problem solving moves teachers away from the isolating concept of "my students" and toward the community concept of "our students." These practices develop a culture of shared problem solving and demonstrate the power of focusing multiple perspectives on a single issue.

- **Fostering a culture that collaboratively assesses the quality and rigor of teacher work:** Collegial feedback and discussion enable teachers to critically analyze whether their lessons or units ask students to construct knowledge, develop habits of mind, and make connections between school and the real world.

- **Developing shared, public criteria to assess student work:** As teachers look at student and teacher work, they develop a shared language for assessing student work and a common understanding of what quality student work looks like. When these criteria are made public and shared with students, the quality of the work continues to improve.

PLC Group Member Roles

Facilitator: Reviews the process at the outset, even if everyone is familiar with it; Sets time limits and sticks to it, observing when time is challenged and bringing it back to the group to decide if they want to extend. Participates in discussions but is on the lookout for others who want to get in conversations. Adjusts time slightly depending on participation; May end one part early or extend another, but is aware of the need to keep time; Reminds discussants of roles, warm and cool feedback, and keeping on topic that the presenter designated; Leads debriefing process and is careful about not "shorting" this part; Is careful during the debriefing not to slip back into discussion.

Friend of the Facilitator: Can be a real support when new to facilitation; Acts as an extra set of eyes to make sure all voices are heard, helps with stages and steps of protocols, and most importantly is there to assist in facilitation challenges (which do happen!).

Time Keeper: Keeps close watch for the facilitator on the agreed upon time limits and uses the group's agreed upon "signal" to alert both the group and speakers about time's up. Often the time keeper lets the group or participant know how much longer they have, which can really help to sharpen a sense of bringing conversation to a directed end. Protocols which are conducted within specific time frames (e.g. a 45 minute class period) need to be closely timed. Leaving the end of a protocol hanging because the bell rang is not a plus.

Presenter: Prepares an issue for consultancy; is clear about the specific questions that should be addressed. Unlike most discussions of this nature, the presenter does not participate in the group discussion; he/she sits outside the group and does not maintain eye contact during the discussion but rather takes notes and gauges what is helpful and what is not. Later, is specific about the feedback that was helpful.

Discussion Members: Address the issue brought by the presenter and give feedback that is both warm (positive) and cool (critical). The feedback should be given in a supportive tone and discussants should provide practical suggestions clarified and re-visited in order to do this work well. Review the guidelines with participants.
It is of great value to spend upfront time exploring and considering what each of these roles

requires. Rotating roles is part of the collaborative process with a goal that each member of the team or group finds it comfortable to be facilitator, presenter or discussion member. Not everyone will jump to wanting to facilitate or present and it may be helpful to begin the work with a team by creating co-roles for facilitator and presenter where possible. The friend of the facilitator is an extra set of eyes and ears and helps to move the protocol smoothly along. Friend of the presenter is part of the pre-conference, helps to define the question and "listens" along with the presenter prior to his reflection, adding anything he may have missed that seems relevant. If you have these roles—add extra time to the protocol.

Norms for Participants in Looking at Student Work

Reviewing norms prior to each session embeds the sense that these are the agreements that make it both safe and productive for teacher=presenters to honestly bring their work to share. Posting them where they are visible to the group reminds everyone as the work progresses.

Be respectful of teacher-presenters.	By making their work more public, teachers are taking a risk.
Be thoughtful in how you word responses	Presenting work requires trust.
Contribute to the substance of the conversation	Thoughtful, probing questions and comments are helpful. "Cool" questions enable the presenter to take the work to a deeper level.
Be aware of "airtime"	Protocols run on a tight schedule. Keep your comments succinct and relevant
Be respectful of the facilitator's role	Supporting the requirements for both time and process are critical to success
Be mindful about supporting group norms	It is the responsibility of each member to hold each other accountable for honoring norms-not just the facilitator!

Norms for Facilitators in Looking at Student Work

Facilitating a LASW session for the first few times can feel awkward. It's okay to say so! One norm that groups often emphasize is "*Trust the Process",* which also means *allow the facilitator to facilitate.* Setting a positive tone for the session, like any good learning experience, makes a huge difference. Making sure you have included time for a substantive debrief is how the process strengthens and comfort levels increase for takeaway impressions as well as setting the stage for future LASW sessions.

Prepare	Make the time to meet with the presenter prior to the session and determine together which protocol best suits her needs and help hone the question she brings about the work.
Be assertive about keeping time	Each part of a protocol is critical to the success. Make sure you have allocated enough time for each part—including the debrief!
Be protective of teacher-presenters.	Many teachers may not be used to having their work critiqued. Inappropriate questions should be withdrawn or re-phrased.
Set the tone for the session	Your respectful and friendly introduction and the courtesy and serious respect you exhibit go a long way towards making the session productive and engaging.
Be provocative of substantive discourse	While warm" feedback is supportive, it often doesn't "push" a presenter's thinking. Encourage "cool" questions and comments when it's clear that the session is not being productive for the presenter.
Don't forget the debrief	Closing each session with time to allow both presenter and participants (and facilitator!) to share how the process of this protocol worked for each is a huge part of the learning experience.

Looking at Teacher Work

What are we teaching? Why are we teaching it?

Looking at student work inevitably demands that teachers look at their own practice, including the demands they make of their students. Looking at Teacher Work is an additional step in de-privatizing classroom practice. Teams need to have an established culture of trust, observance of shared norms of conduct and know that the conversations the team has about their work are not shared to a larger audience inappropriately.

While the process for Looking at Teacher Work is very like that of Looking at Student Work, it takes it to a different level where a teacher brings a question about his or her work to the team, rather than a more diffuse entry point via student work although often the group will look at both. Using a Tuning Protocol where a presenter shares a work in progress (a unit, an assessment, a rubric, a project, a lesson) and gets feedback is a good start to building a climate of trust.

Case Study Looking at Teacher Work

Shelly, a high school health/science teacher, provides two samples of a persuasive essay she has assigned as the culminating project for a mental health unit on violence and violence prevention. Shelby is not satisfied that the essays had captured what she had hoped her students would learn from the unit.

Her colleagues in the meeting, representing a wide range of subject fields, have all participated in professional development aimed at strengthening "writing across the curriculum." In examining the student essays using the Atlas Protocol which very deliberately focuses on observational layers of evidence, they begin to realize that they each have an incomplete grasp of what it means for students to produce a persuasive essay — and for teachers to assign and assess one. A math teacher muses, "What comes to mind is how well do the students understand what is meant by a 'persuasive essay'?" Seconds later, she adds, "…because *I'm* not clear what is meant by a persuasive essay."

Those dual themes — what students understand and what the teachers understand as a "persuasive essay" —are picked up throughout the discussion, culminating in this exchange:

>   English teacher: *Do you think maybe the kids didn't get it?*
>   Shelly: *Do you think maybe the teacher didn't get it?!*   [Laughter]

In their 45-minute discussion of the two essays, both Shelby and her colleagues gain new insight into the students' writing and their own instructional practice while also reinforcing a spirit of mutual support and community. They identify a common goal (teaching the persuasive essay across the curriculum), create an action plan which includes in-house professional development from the school's ELA team, benchmarked progress and identify relevant professional articles which they will share in text-based discussions.

"As you decide what to bring, please keep in mind that it should be something about which you have a real question or concern. We have learned over the years that as we think about choosing the student work to learn from with our colleagues, we are faced with a choice, "Do we strut our stuff by bringing the student work that shows how successful we can be?" Or "Do we mine our mistakes, by bringing the work that didn't meet our expectations?"

If we accept that all of us want to do our best learning for the sake of our students, then we need to bring work to the table that comes from our wonderings and confusions, from our failed efforts and uncomfortable dilemmas. So, as you think about what to bring to our session, please consider bringing the student work that "keeps you up at night." Remember, this is an opportunity to examine the work with others, so that we can ALL learn from it!"

National School Reform Faculty

The Process of Looking at Student and Teacher Work

No protocol works well unless the presenter has a real question about practice. In the early stages of Looking at Student and Teacher Work, some participants will bring work they know looks "good" and about which they are complacent. Protocols are ineffective in aiding change in practice if the question is not about challenges the teacher has encountered in her own work (a lesson that just didn't work) or a student she is having difficulty reaching.

The facilitator meets with the presenter prior to the session, looks at what the presenter has written about the dilemma ("Why am I wondering about this assignment or this student? " What would others see in his work or what to do with this student?"), and together they craft a question from the presenter's concerns. If the presenter discovers that he/she has actually answered that question by the time of presentation, then he/she does not present but might review the process she went through to arrive at his/her conclusion with the group.

It is not surprising for Looking at Student or Teacher Work sessions to bring up a whole new perspective—and of course new questions. The group then adjusts their own action planning to accommodate these.

The link between student and teacher work is clear. Its potential for improving teacher practice and by extension, whole school practice, is at the heart of PLCs and how it informs data-based inquiry.
LASW.org

There are many protocols which lend themselves to Looking at Student and Teacher Work. We include a few in this module and more in our tools section. Nearly all of them can be used for a variety of questions but each requires the time to do it well and to provide for the debrief: "How did this process work for the presenter? The facilitator? Participants?"

As teachers use structured protocols to review and analyze student work including scores from their own formative and summative assessments, results from projects, labs and other authentic or performance tasks, they will also discuss/analyze the assignments themselves, including the directions, requirements, and rubrics used to score them.

Notes on the Process of Looking at Student Work

Be prepared for pushback. Take the time to build trust. Explore the norms the group has used and which need to be clarified and re-visited in order to do this work well. When teachers first begin using protocols as a way of looking at their student's work, teacher assignments and instructional practices, the process may seem formal or stiff. Because teachers are not used to sharing work publically with peers, the process can feel intimidating. With time and practice the protocols create the safe and nurturing atmosphere as teachers gain experience, their comfort level rises and so do the benefits.

Protocols often focus on listening and regulate specific times for feedback and comments. Some call for the presenter to listen and for the conversation to refer to her in the third person. This can feel awkward and overly-orchestrated for those new to the process until they discover for themselves how much deeper the conversation goes when listening and sharing are prescribed as specific actions. When the whole school is regularly engaged in looking at student and teacher work as a way of assessing learning goals, they must go beyond standardized test scores to the daily work that teachers assign and students produce.

What work do we bring? Anything relevant to the student experience in school is appropriate if it provides a clue to answering a question. Include the teacher assignment, directions or prompt along with the criteria or rubric used to assess the work. Most protocols call for the work copied without teacher, student name or comments.

Some examples are:

- Written work or artwork from several students in response to the same assignment.
- Several pieces of work by the same student in response to different assignments.
- One piece of work from a student who you feel completed the assignment successfully- and one from a student (same assignment) who you feel didn't.
- Work done by groups (at least two) of students.
- Homework
- All the work assigned to one student in a single day (or week) by one teacher.
- All the work assigned to one student in a single day or week by all her teachers.
- Video, audio, photographs of students working or presenting their work.
- Video, audio or photographs of teachers involved in their work.

Some team members may balk at being asked to look at student or teacher work which is outside their area of content expertise. Some of the most valuable insights come from teachers looking at work across disciplines as well as informing them as community about what students are being asked to do and where there are overlaps in skills that can be shared in other content areas.

What protocol do we use? Choosing a protocol is determined by the question the presenter has and is often dictated by process: how much time, who is involved and how frequently the group meets. Each protocol has a varying purpose. Some look at student learning, others help solve instructional dilemmas and some expand knowledge and conversation through sharing professional resources. Most protocols can be modified to meet time and purpose and teams experienced in using them often move creatively ahead and create their own to fit specific needs, being mindful of the foundational purpose of protocols. Through the use of protocols, teachers clarify problems, identify evidence to support opinions, share perspectives, and reflect on their own practice

"When I first volunteered to bring student work to my team I was terrified. I kept worrying that my "cover" would be blown and they would know what a bad teacher I was. But I worried more about why my students weren't mastering a skill I thought I had taught well and my team was having a good experience with others having brought work to look at, so I figured, okay do it. What did I come away with? Some great self-reflection for me, which came from some probing questions and "cool" feedback from the group, as well as the beginnings of a plan that came from their great feedback; I can't wait to present again!"

New teacher urban middle school

Guidelines for Looking At Student Work

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.

When listening to colleagues' thinking:

• Listen without judging.
• Tune in to differences in perspective.
• Use controversy as an opportunity to explore and understand each other's perspectives.
• Focus on understanding where different interpretations come from.
• Make your own thinking clear to others.
• Be patient and persistent.

When reflecting on your own thinking:

• Ask yourself, "Why do I see this student work in this way? What does this tell me about what is important to me?"
• Look for patterns in your own thinking.
• Tune in to the questions that the student work and your colleagues' comments raise for you.
• Compare what you see and what you think about the student work with what you do in the classroom.

When you reflect on the process of looking at student work:

• What did you see in this student's work that was interesting or surprising?
• What did you learn about how this student thinks and learns?
• What about the process helped you see and learn these things?
• What did you learn from listening to your colleagues that was interesting or surprising?
• What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?
• How can you make use of your colleagues' perspectives?
• What questions about teaching and assessment did looking at this student's work raise for you?
• How can you pursue these questions further?
Are there things you would like to try in your classroom as a result of looking at the student's work?

LASW. Org   http://www.lasw.org/guidelines.html

Getting Ready to Look at Student Work (LASW)

Step 1:

Work together as a team to create the environment members need to feel "safe" in de-privatizing their practice by bringing their work to the table. What norms do you need to have in place to ensure this? Generating discussion about the benefits and challenges of LASW by using a text-based discussion or video can help raise questions and allow for clarification. What do members of your team know about this process? About protocols? What questions do they have?

Step 2:

Review several protocols together and choose two or three that seem appropriate to where your team is starting and which seem relatively straightforward to potential facilitators.

Step 3:

Decide who will present and who will facilitate—and when. These two make time to define the presenter's question and choose an appropriate protocol. Remember that the presenter should have an authentic question about the work or student. If the presenter resolves that question prior to the team meeting (and check in to determine this) then look for a new presenter with a new query. Facilitator adjusts times of the protocol where needed, but doesn't cut short the process so much that it does not allow for deep reflection and of course debrief.

Step 4:

Prior to the session, the presenter makes several copies of the student work for the group to look at (one for each member is great unless the protocol requires a number of artifacts or is not reproducible) and takes any identifying student name from it. The facilitator makes copies of the protocol for each member as well as putting it on chart paper (or projecting on LCD or Smart Board) for everyone to refer to as well as a chart of group norms.

Step 5:

When the team assembles, start on time. If a team member is late, don't wait. The timekeeper should start the clock at the time the group agreed to begin. Get into the habit of starting on time at the outset. Review norms, review the protocol, introduce the presenter and the question and get started! The time-keeper lets the group know when the allocated minutes for a particular segment are coming down to a minute or two.

"Our team was notorious for being time wasters. We'd had many years of practice in being late to what we considered a poor use of our time at our usual department meetings. Once we started using that time to look at our own student work using a protocol, we changed our ways because we valued the process and outcome. This is the kind of learning that engages us in being better teachers."
-Veteran teacher urban high school

Step 6:

When the protocol concludes and the presenter has identified next steps and any additional resources or support he/she is considering, debrief the process: "How did this protocol work?" Thank the presenter and the participants and determine who will present at the next session and who will facilitate. Well done.

Note:

Some protocols for looking at student and teacher work are shared here and more can be found in the module's Tools section.

Most protocols are created with a window of 45-60 minutes but can be modified for time using caution to not weaken the process.

Looking at Student Work Protocols

Name of Protocol	When To Use It	What To Bring
Collaborative Assessment Protocol	To get a fresh perspective on a student's work in the absence of any contextual information when the presenter is truly baffled by the work and/or the student.	Student work with any student or teacher name or comments removed. Usually one or several assignments from the same student.
Atlas Protocol	In a situation where the presenter is wondering about either the student work or its implications for his or her practice.	Usually a student response to an open-ended assignment which allowed for significant student response (essay, project, art work etc.)
Tuning Protocol	To develop more effective curriculum plans, assignments, or assessments. To develop common standards or assessments for students' work. To reflect on and gather ideas for envision of classroom practice.	The assignment, lesson, project in process or before it is given to students. Student work at any stage which reflects the assignment.
Describing Student Work	Uses several samples of student work to deepen 5understanding of the student's ways of knowing and learning	One or more pieces of work from the same student with all names and comments removed.
The Slice Protocol	To learn from student work or assignments by looking at cross-section of student responses to the same assignment or several pieces of work from a single student in one class or several.	Common benchmark assessments, homework or in-class work assigned by all members of a team to the same student or a cross-section of students. Teacher assignments from the same team or discipline.

Tips for Facilitating Looking at Student Work

- Choosing a protocol takes experimentation—some "feel" right while others just seem enticing. The facilitator and presenter are the ones who consider the question in front of them and decide which protocol best suit its needs.

- Notes are taken only for individual use and team notes indicate only who presented, the category of presentation, who facilitated and who kept time. Confidentiality stays within the group.

- Review the team's norms. Honor them. When they aren't working—address that.

- Introduce who is taking on an active role (time-keeper, facilitator) and introduce the protocol and the presenter.

- Always have a copy of the protocol for each member—it really helps to have it posted on a wall chart or LCD screen/Smart Board as well.

- Go through the protocol's steps with brief detail and ask if everyone is clear about the process. Remind members that the protocol (usually) is about deepening the presenter's thinking and not about solving his problem.

- Some protocols go through layers of looking for evidence ("what do you see?") which mean just that, not what do you think or suppose.

- Expect that some members of the team new to the experience will feel constrained by the structure of the protocol and want to jump right into open discussion or solution suggesting.

- Laughter will occur from time to time—let it!

- Don't forget the debrief!

Facilitation Nightmares

- These can happen! Keeping in mind a norm of, "Everyone is a Learner" helps to focus teams on surviving the bumps in the road. A common push-back is, "We don't need protocols—we're professionals!" Often as teachers, we struggle with a sense of defensiveness and division in our professional relationships when our students' performance varies. Protocols provide the safe structure to ask hard questions in a PLC that envisions school as "all of our children."

- Challenges that often arise are in team dynamics, using time well, having team time honored without disruption, scheduling issues, uncertainty about what the work should look like or in a facilitator's feeling "alone" in guiding the team through a protocol that moves their work from their comfort zones.

- Knowing that change in the way we work together is never without wrinkles; be transparent. Share what you are doing why you are doing it and what questions you have about that.

- Practice and determination to learn together helps. All teachers are facilitators and facilitating a group of facilitators is not easy! Debriefing process is critical. So is honesty. Make time to re-visit and benchmark your team's progress.

Looking at Student Work: Putting it All Together

Our elementary principals have taken the lead in PLC implementation at the elementary school level. Because our schools are so small, most with only one teacher per grade level and some with combined classrooms, principals needed to carefully consider how they would put teams of educators together and have focused their work on vertical alignment: creating common language and expectations for students as they move through the grade levels at a school, and exploring curriculum maps to ensure that all standards are addressed in a way that is meaningful for students (introduction, instruction, practice, application). Buckland-Shelburne has served as our model school, as they are in year two of the PLC Pilot and have transitioned to teacher-led PLCs. Each PLC at Buckland-Shelburne is able to identify a year- long goal for their group that is reflected in the School Improvement Plan.

As the PK-6 Director of Curriculum and Assessment, I am able to support the district by focusing my work on horizontal alignment. I created an opportunity for grade level teachers to meet on a monthly basis this year. This year we used our PLC time to create standards -based report cards. We are looking forward to using PLCs next year to explore our new writing program.

We use Looking at Student Work protocols to facilitate deep and meaningful conversations about our own practice and help us identify best practices in the district. I believe that these conversations enable us to share resources and talents across the district and improve the educational experiences we create for our students.

Jennifer Lagoy, Elementary Curriculum Director Mohawk Regional Districts, Shelburne, MA

Next Steps to Implementing Looking at Student Work

Don't wait to get started. Looking at Student Work is both an entry point and a foundational tool for the work of highly effective PLCs. Ask a confident member of the team if she or he would present, choose a protocol and closely facilitate the process. Start making it a habit (this is the work we do) and it quickly becomes one.

1. Take the debrief seriously. This is where issues of facilitation—and trust emerge. Sometimes this raises dilemmas (time for a Consultancy!).

2. Take the time to support norms—don't let gaps in honoring them go without attention. Good intentions are often at odds with old habits. The effectiveness of protocols requires Trust. Trust starts with shared understandings of behavior.

3. Continue to use team time to make a regular habit of reading professional articles. Make them relevant to the work at hand, rotate facilitator and researcher (bringing an article about teaching and learning relevant to the group's goals) and close with recording what learnings came from this piece and how they can be applied to practice.

4. It helps to look at videos of teachers engaged in the practice of PLCs—use a protocol like *Eyes and Ears* where dyads record what they heard and what they saw, to structure responses.

5. Don't leave the next steps determined after using a protocol in limbo—define them and create an action plan which might include coming back to the group for benchmarking (*"Here's what I decided to do -and how and when- here are the resources I accessed or still need, here is an example of where I am now with this dilemma").* Protocol-directed discussions are not much use if they are just about practicing a protocol.

6. Determining what you or the team *knows* now based on the data you have gathered from any one or more of the protocol-driven processes in this module, a next step is what *don't* we know and determining how to learn more. Often this is where either more discovery steps are needed in gathering data or professional development needs are determined as generated by the data needs. Professional Learning Communities are an excellent vehicle for sharing in-house expertise as PD!

7. Keep a record of who presents, who facilitates, which protocol and next steps. Don't be afraid to modify protocols and experiment with new ones—keep notes about what worked and what didn't.

8. Regularly re-visit the team's goals and benchmarks not only with its focused work but with how the team is working—as a team. Take the time to explore challenges, and celebrate successes.

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Tools & Resources – The Practice of PLCs (Part 1)

Use these resources to explore the ideas expressed in this module:

<u>Responsive Facilitation Support:</u>

- <u>A Rationale for Protocols:</u> Why should we use a process for communication that feels so artificial, awkward and restrictive?

- <u>Guide for Bringing Student Work:</u> A one page handout that is a useful barometer of what the criteria for bringing student work to a session is and informs the pre-process (like bring enough copies of the work for everyone and white- out all names and grades). Remember though—the biggest impetus to bringing student work is that the presenter has a question that is really challenging him!

- <u>Considerations for Responsive Facilitation</u>:   Facilitation is a crucial part of any kind of collaborative work. A responsive facilitator has to keep many things in mind as he/she supports the work of a collaborative group. This list is intended as both a general reminder of important skills, and a checklist of areas one might want to focus on for personal growth. This list is useful as a group check-in around facilitation and can serve as a springboard to identifying facilitation dilemmas or assessing progress.

- <u>Glossary of Protocol Terms</u>: A great cheat-sheet on what each step in LASW facilitation is asking the group to do. Clarifies the meaning of...clarifying questions among others!

- <u>Norms for Looking at Student Work</u>: Good guide for discussing prior to beginning or in recognizing challenges.

- <u>Choosing a Question</u> Protocol: A helpful process for identifying and creating questions for LASW.

- <u>Learning From Student Work Overview</u>: The principles. Purposes, protocols. Why, how, results and how LASW supports other teachers who aren't presenting.

- <u>Looking at Student Work: Building in the Habit of Equity</u>: A terrific one-pager about how the practice of LASW is about the critical concept that we, as teachers, are looking at how all of our students (mine and yours) achieve.

- <u>Examples of Debriefing Questions at the End of a Looking at Student Work Protocol:</u> Handy guide for groups and facilitators for ways to look at process after a LASW session.

- <u>Examples of Questions for Looking at Student Work Sessions:</u> Useful prompts for presenters thinking about honing that critical question.

- **Protocol Matching Activity**: Each question has a protocol that best matches it—here's help in figuring that out.

- **Probing Questions Exercise:** Probing Questions are part of several protocols for Looking at Student Work. They are tricky questions as people tend to ask more detailed clarifying questions or questions that pertain to what the speaker wishes to say or know, rather than questions clearly for the benefit of the presenter. Use along with…

- **Pocket Guide to Probing Questions:** Probing Questions are part of several protocols for Looking at Student Work. They are tricky questions as people tend to ask more detailed clarifying questions or questions that pertain to what the speaker wishes to say or know, rather than questions clearly for the benefit of the presenter.

- **Reflections on Adapting/Creating Protocols:** NOTHING is cut in stone. Protocols need to be designed to meet the needs of the question, the group and the presenter.

- **Suggestions for Bringing Student Work**: We often think that if we are going to take the risk of sharing our work—we'd better show our best stuff. Looking at Student Work is so not about that. Protocols are only productive if we have a real question or concern that we haven't been able to figure out.

- **Facilitation Scenarios**: A very useful problem-solving activity for small groups to work through how they handle facilitation issues by looking at brief case studies The scenarios provided below illustrate some key moments in fictional-but-plausible protocols. We offer them here as an opportunity for readers to reflect on facilitation challenges in a more contextualized way. Of course, just as in actual protocols, none of the scenarios below has a single "right" response. We hope these scenarios will serve as a departure point for considering a range of productive moves that a facilitator might make in a given situation, as well as the possible consequences of those moves.

- **Guide for Using Seven Protocols**: Nice boxed handout of what each is, when to use it and a brief overview of "what makes it sing"

Learning From Student Work Reflection:

- **Principles for Looking at Student Work:** A good explanation of why looking at student work—works.

- **Learning from Student Work Form**: Another one-pager that guides the pre-conference goals for the presenter and facilitator with a template that informs the facilitation and choice of which protocol best suits the question.

- Learning from Student Work Feedback: This template can aid by using prompts and writing space to help a presenter frame his sense of what he heard and what he is willing to try based on that feedback.

- Learning from Student Work Documentation: It is helpful to keep records and the whole point of LASW sessions is to think about a change in practice. This form could serve as a basis for something similar in your school or district that keeps record of what the question was and what the presenter took away as next steps.

- Learning From Student Work: Reflection: Oh templates—but they do help organize us! These prompts can help teacher track changes in student learning that are grounded in a change in practice that came from learnings in a LASW session.

- Looking at Student Work Team Report: Another template but useful for recording the work of the team-- We looked at these pieces of work: We used these standards: What we discovered about the quality of student LEARNING: What we discovered about the quality of INSTRUCTION: What are the implications for change in the CLASSROOM and SCHOOL? What is our action plan to make these changes?

Looking at Student Work Protocols

- Looking at Patterns in Student Work: A good "starter" LASW protocol. This protocol focuses on inquiry into an essential question through looking at a range of work from students in multiple classrooms. As you examine patterns, themes, and inconsistencies, you gain insight about a particular population or large group of students and are able to draw conclusions and generate implications for instruction in general. This is a good protocol to introduce looking at student work as it does not focus on performance of one student or one teacher, thus presents a lower level of personal risk.

- Collaborative Assessment Protocol: Commonly known as the "CAC", this protocol can be adapted to a wide number of uses. Participants come in with virtually no information other than what they see as evidence in the student work and then go through the layers of what that evidence tells them and what questions it raises for them; Used to get a fresh perspective on a student's work in the absence of any contextual information when the presenter is truly baffled by the work and/or the student.

- Examining Assessments: Another version of the ATLAS but geared towards assessments.

- Atlas Protocol: In the Atlas" we look at the assignment through the student's eyes. The presenter gives a very brief statement of the assignment—only what the student was asked to do—and avoids explaining what she or he expected to see from the work.

Useful In a situation where the presenter is wondering about either the student work or its implications for his or her practice.

- **Further Thoughts About Learning from Student Work**: written for use with the Atlas protocol.

- **Tuning Protocol**: Teachers often bring examples of work –in- progress, often the materials relating to an exhibition or project, cumulative assessment or student performance. The facilitator guides the group through a series of deepening levels of understanding—which culminate in warm and cool feedback; or student or teacher work they have a question about I terms of "tuning" it to better achieve their goal; to develop more effective curriculum plans, assignments, or assessments; To develop common standards or assessments for students' work. To reflect on and gather ideas for envision of classroom practice.

- **Tuning Protocol Guidelines**: Participation in a structured process of professional collaboration like this can be intimidating and anxiety producing, especially for the teacher presenting student work. Having a shared set of guidelines or norms helps everybody participate in a manner that is respectful as well as conducive to helpful feedback. Below is one set of guidelines; teachers may want to create their own. In any case, the group should go over the guidelines and the schedule before starting the protocol. The facilitator must feel free to remind participants of the guidelines and schedule at any time in the process.

- **Tuning Protocol Narrative:** More info on why and how of Tuning Protocol use. Good to use with groups and pre-facilitation for clarification of purpose and direction.

- **The Slice Protocol**: *(also see all the versions of this on www.nsrfharmony.org/protocols)* Ever wonder what a student's homework looks like for a week on your team or in your grade, across classes? This is a terrific protocol for looking through the lens of expectations, modality, etc. to share what it is that each teacher expects from students who share the same teachers in other content areas or the same content and grade level. The goal is to learn from student work or assignments by looking at cross-section of student responses to the same assignment or several pieces of work from a single student in one class or several.

- **The Art Shack Protocol**: Sort of a combination of the Atlas and Descriptive Review, the Art Shack presenter doesn't give any information about the work to the group other than a brief statement of the assignment. A series of rounds lead the group through a deepening layer of questions starting with the physical description of what they see, evidence of what the student is working on or trying to accomplish, what the student finds of value, what the teacher finds of value and "I wonder's." 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 (or these students') way(s) of knowing.

- **Examining Student Work: A Constructivist Protocol—for Students**: While all of these protocols can be (and should be!) used in the classroom, this is a starter protocol which of course rests on the foundation of norms, trust and understanding of process. What makes students and teachers really care about their work? This self-assessment tool is aimed at generating new insights and increasing that investment. The protocol can be used both for assessment and for planning, and it can be done individually or in groups.

- **What? So What? Now What?**: This protocol allows participants to quickly connect one another to their work, while at the same time allowing them to get useful feedback from one another.

- **Thirty Minute Protocols**: Brief (and clearly not as deep) versions of the Consultancy, Tuning and Success Analysis Protocol

Articles and Books

- Looking Collaboratively at Student Work, Kathleen Cushman. A good introductory article about why look at student work and how the process comes from the practices of medicine, business and triage.

- Teachers Learn from Looking Together at Student Work, Diane Weaver Dunne Education World® An overview of why and how LASW and includes a case study of a high school in Maine.

- Reflecting on Student Work at Staff Meetings, Jennifer Allen, Choice Literacy. "Over the last four years our teaching staff has included reflecting on student work as a part of our staff meetings. To be honest, we struggled for probably three of the four years to find meaningful ways to look at the work. You may read this and wonder how we could be so behind the times - hasn't everyone been doing this effectively for years? But the truth is, this has been a process in which we have been revising and now fine-tuning our routines for making the most of our discussions about student work."

- The Facilitator's Book of Questions, Allen and Blythe. **Facilitators** will expand their repertoire and walk away with ideas and tips for responding to the wide range of **facilitation** issues.

- Looking Together at Student Work, Allen and Blythe. This expanded second edition provides teachers and administrators with strategies and resources for working together to examine and discuss student work, such as essays, projects, art work, math problems, and more. Providing real examples of how educators can do this, the authors describe three structured conversations, or protocols: the Collaborative

Assessment Conference, the Tuning Protocol, and the Consultancy. The book also offers case studies from schools that developed their own protocols.

Websites:

- **Looking at Student Work** : Annenberg –hosted website with many resources, not updated very recently but a great resource nonetheless.

Videos

- Eyes and Ears Protocol: This is the tool we mentioned that helps adults (and students) focus and listen while watching.

- **Looking at Student Work: A Window Into the Classroom**

The practice of using protocols for looking at student and teacher work has been used for years. This classic video from Annenberg Learner at Brown University chronicles the beginnings of LASW with the National School Reform Faculty and has an excellent clip of teachers using a protocol to look at student work. The video requires that viewers click through two pages to the VOD box to display but is also available for sale through Annenberg.

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This module is interdependent with tools introduced in Modules 1 and 2 and 3 as well as those you will use from Module 5. Many of the protocols are useful in a variety of situations.