

ATLAS — Learning From Student Work Protocol

This protocol has been revised for use when examining multiple samples of student work. The work may be from one source, or may come from a variety of students, teachers, grade levels, departments, year-round school tracks, schools or districts. This protocol works well in conjunction with the “Slice” method for gathering student work samples. Revised October 2003 by Debbi Laidley for NSRF.

Learning from Student Work is a tool to guide groups of teachers in discovering what students understand and how they are thinking. The tool, developed by Eric Buchovecky, is based in part on the work of the Leadership for Urban Mathematics Project and of the Assessment Communities of Teachers Project. The tool also draws on the work of Steve Seidel and Evangeline Harris-Stefanakis of Project Zero at Harvard University. Revised November 2000 by Gene Thompson-Grove for NSRF.

Before beginning the protocol, samples of student work must be collected, numbered (for later discussion) and should be photocopied after teachers’ and students’ names have been removed. Usually, any markings that indicate grades or point scores should be removed, unless this information is vital to the purpose of the LASW session. Each participant in the protocol should have a set of copies of the work.

1. Getting Started – 12 minutes

The facilitator reminds the group of the norms: no fault, collaboration, and consensus and, with the group, establishes time limits for each part of the process. The time frame for each of the next four steps is typically 10 minutes per step.

Note: Each of the following steps should be about 10 minutes in length. The full 10 minutes should be allowed for each round. Resist the temptation to skip forward quickly. Because the work “belongs” to the entire group and there is no individual who is designated as the “presenter,” someone should agree to take notes of the group’s observations. This role may rotate for each of the three rounds of the protocol.

- The facilitator gives a very brief statement about the collection of work. This can be basic factual information such as the time period during which the work was collected, the general group of students from whom the work was sampled, and the purpose for this examination of the work.
- If the work was in response to a common prompt or assignment, the facilitator should describe only what the students were asked to do and can provide some information about the length of time for the assignment, whether it was individual or group work, on demand, final product, etc.
- The facilitator should avoid any statements about whether these are particularly good or poor pieces of work from the students.
- The members of the group should spend the next 10 minutes examining the work samples individually and silently. Notes can be written directly on the samples, and/or on a reflection sheet.

2. Describing the Student Work – Literal Description – 10 minutes

- The facilitator asks: “What do you see?”
- Group members should respond in a round-robin fashion, with anyone allowed to pass when necessary. When offering an observation, it’s important to identify the work sample by number, so that everyone can turn to the same piece of work.
- During this period the group gathers as much information as possible from the student work.
- Group members describe what they see in the students’ work, avoiding judgments about quality or interpretations about what the students were doing. It is important to make

observations about patterns of performance across multiple samples as well as observations from the individual pieces.

- If judgments or interpretations do arise, the facilitator should ask the person to point out, directly in the work, the evidence on which the interpretations are based.
- Someone should serve as note-taker for this round. (It may be useful to list the group's observations on chart paper. If interpretations come up, they can be listed in another column for later discussion during Step 3.)

3. Interpreting the Student Work - 10 minutes

- The facilitator asks: "How are you interpreting what you see in the work samples?" or "What inferences are you drawing about the work?"
- 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 point out the evidence that led to the interpretations.
- From the observations gathered in the preceding section, try to infer: what the students were thinking and why; what the students do and do not understand; what the students were most interested in; how the students interpreted the assignment; what the students are really good at; what the students are struggling with; what the students may be ready to learn next.
- Think broadly and creatively. Assume that the work, no matter how confusing, makes sense to the students; your job is to see what the students see.
- As you listen to each other's interpretations, ask questions that help you better 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 learning?" or "... for assessment?" or "... for professional development?"
- For this round it's particularly important that someone serves as note-taker.
- In particular, questions to consider might be:
 - What professional development seems to be indicated?
 - What steps might the teachers take next with students who produce similar work?
 - What teaching strategies might be most effective?
 - What teaching strategies seem to be working? What adaptations appear to be called for?
 - What elements of the work seem to indicate specific needs for scaffolding and differentiation?
 - What else would you like to see in the student work? What kinds of assignments or assessments could provide this information?
 - What does this conversation make you think about in terms of your own practice? About teaching and learning in general?

5. Reflecting on the Process - 10 minutes

- Reflect on what you each noticed about how the process worked. If the group has designated someone to observe the conversation, this person should report his or her observations.
- (Optional) As a group, share any new insights you've gained about the students, about your colleagues, about yourself, about your practice.