National School Reform Faculty

Harmony Education Center

www.nsrfharmony.org

Forming Ground Rules

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Ground Rules, or Norms, are important for a group that intends to work together on difficult issues, or who will be working together over time. They may be added to, or condensed, as the group progresses. Starting with basic Ground Rules builds trust, clarifies group expectations of one another, and establishes points of "reflection" to see how the group is doing regarding process.

Time
Approximately 30 minutes

1. Ask everyone to **write down what each person needs in order to work productively in a group**, giving an example of one thing the facilitator needs, i.e. "to have all voices heard," or "to start and end our meetings when we say we will." (This is to help people focus on process rather than product)

2. **Each participant names <u>one</u> thing from his/her written list**, going around in a circle, with no repeats, and as many circuits as necessary to have all the ground rules listed.

3. **Ask for any clarifications** needed. One person may not understand what another person has listed, or may interpret the language differently.

4. **If the list is VERY long – more than 10 Ground Rules — ask the group if some of them can be combined to make the list more manageable**. Sometimes the subtle differences are important to people, so it is more important that everyone feel their needs have been honored than it is to have a short list.

5. **Ask if everyone can abide by the listed Ground Rules**. If anyone dislikes or doesn't want to comply with one of them, that Ground Rule should be discussed and a decision should be made to keep it on the list with a notation of objection, to remove it, or to try it for a specified amount of time and check it again.

6. **Ask if any one of the Ground Rules might be hard for the group to follow**. If there is one or more, those Ground Rules should be highlighted and given attention. With time it will become clear if it should be dropped, or needs significant work. Sometimes what might appear to be a difficult rule turns out not to be hard at all. "Everyone has a turn to speak," is sometimes debated for example, with the argument that not everyone likes to talk every time an issue is raised, and others think aloud and only process well if they have the space to do that. Frequently, a system of checking in with everyone, without requiring everyone to speak, becomes a more effective ground rule.

7. **While work is in progress, refer to the Ground Rules whenever they would help group process**. If one person is dominating, for example, it is easier to refer to a Ground Rule that says, "take care with how often and how long you speak," than to ask someone directly to stop dominating the group.

8. **Check in on the Ground Rules when reflection is done on the group work.** Note any that were not followed particularly well for attention in the next work session. Being sure they are followed, refining them, and adding or subtracting Ground Rules is important, as it makes for smoother work and more trust within the group.

Using a Protocol with Your Study Group

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 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.

Getting Ready to Use a Protocol

Developed for use by the National School Reform Faculty

1. Select a project, task, or assessment that addresses one of the school-wide goals for student performance (e.g., forming and supporting an opinion). This may be a long term project (culminating in a presentation) or a short-term task, but in either case it should call for significant student work products or performances. (Typically, worksheets, quizzes, or tests don't provide much of a basis for giving feedback!)

2. Gather relevant contextual documents that will help participants understand the project or task, for example, assignment, scoring/grading criteria (or rubrics), models, timelines, checklists, etc. Think about how other key information participants will need to understand the project or task can be presented succinctly.

3. Select samples of student work that demonstrate authentic student responses to the project or task. You might choose two or three samples to provide contrast. Teachers often find that a sample of work that shows promise but is not a stellar response to the assignment provides the best basis for feedback. Work selected may include final products, drafts, reflections, etc. (See Tips on Selecting Student Work Samples.)

4. Frame a focusing question for participants that addresses a real interest or concern of yours. Questions typically focus on either **inputs** (the assignment, teacher's support of student performance) or **outputs** (quality of student work, teacher's assessment of the work).

- A broader question may elicit a wide range of feedback - and this may be desirable. For example: How can I support higher quality presentations? (input) What are the strengths and weaknesses you see in the student presentations? (output)
- A narrower question might provide the kinds of feedback the teacher(s) finds most useful. For example: How can my prompt bring out more creativity in the students' work? (input) What evidence is there in the students' work of mathematical problem solving? (output)

Remember, even with a narrower focus question, participants will offer a range of feedback - on and off the question.

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?

Facilitation Tips Developed for use by the National School Reform Faculty

1. **Take some time to clarify terminology.** For example, what is a clarifying questions? How is it different from a probing question (both in terms of structure and purpose)?

Clarifying questions **are for the person asking them.** they ask the presenter "who, what, where, when, and how." These are NOT "why" questions. They can be answered quickly and succinctly, often with a phrase or two.

Probing questions **are for the person answering them.** They ask the presenter "why" (among other things), and are open-ended. They take longer to answer, and often require deep thought on the part of the presenter before she speaks. The person asking the probing question doesn't know (or even assume) an answer to the question being asked, and doesn't have an investment in how the question is answered.

2. **Alert people to the likely places/points in the protocol which will feel awkward** like when the group gives warm and cool feedback and speaks as if the presenters aren't in the room. This protocol requires the group to talk about the presenters in the third person, almost as if they are not there. As awkward as this may feel at first, it often opens up a rich conversation. Remind the group that it is their job to give feedback, and to offer an analysis of the issue or questions presented. It is not necessary to solve a problem or to offer a definitive answer.

3. **Suggest that the presenters physically sit back** from the group so as not to have any eye contact when the group gives their warm and cool feedback. Remind the presenters to listen in a non-defensive manner. They might listen for: new ideas, perspectives, and approaches; the group's analysis of their question and related issues; and/or the assumptions implicit in the conversation. Remind the presenters that this is not supposed to be about the presenters themselves, but about a question they have raised.

4. **Remind the group that the point of the last step is for the presenters to talk about what were, for them, the most significant feedback, comments, ideas and questions they heard.** It is NOT for the presenters to give a "blow by blow" response to the group's conversation, nor is it to defend or further explain themselves. They can also share any new thoughts or questions they had while listening to the group.

5. **Remind people that they can never know everything, but that they can know enough to be helpful.** There will be much that the group says that won't be useful because they don't know enough about the context, but that there will be things they say and questions they raise that ONLY outsiders who don't know every nuance of the context can say or ask.

6. **Be explicit about your role as a facilitator.** Will you ever join in on the conversation? etc.

7. **Remember to debrief each feedback session as a whole group.** Debriefing the process is key. Don't short-change this step.

Tuning Protocol

* The schedule below can be revised to meet the needs of different groups of teachers.

1. Introduction.....5 min.

- Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, guidelines, and schedule
- Participants briefly introduce themselves (if necessary)

2. Presentation.....15 min.

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
- Assignment or prompt that generated the student work
- Student learning goals or standards that inform the work
- Samples of student work — photocopies of work, video clips, etc. — with student names removed
- Evaluation format — scoring rubric and/or assessment criteria, etc.
- Focusing question for feedback
- Participants are silent; no questions are entertained at this time.

3. Clarifying Questions.....5 min.

- 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 min.

- 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 focusing question.
- Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.

5. Pause to reflect on warm and cool feedback.....2-3 min.

- 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 min.

- 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 min.

- 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. Debrief.....5 min.

- Facilitator-led discussion of this tuning experience.

Great Sources for other Protocols:

Looking at Student Work Website: http://www.lasw.org

Tools for Leaders: Indispensable Graphic Organizers, Protocols, and Planning Guidelines for Working and Learning Together by Marjorie Larner

The Power of Protocols: An Educator's Guide to Better Practice by Joseph McDonald

Probing Questions:

The distinction between clarifying questions and probing questions is very difficult for most people working with protocols. So is the distinction between probing questions and recommendations for action. The basic distinctions are:

Clarifying Questions are simple questions of fact. They clarify the dilemma and provide the nuts and bolts so that the participants can ask good probing questions and provide useful feedback later in the protocol. Clarifying questions are for the participants, and should not go beyond the boundaries of the presenter's dilemma. They have brief, factual answers, and don't provide any new "food for thought" for the presenter. The litmus test for a clarifying question is: Does the presenter have to think before s/he answers? If so, it's almost certainly a probing question.

Some examples of clarifying questions:

- How much time does the project take?
- How were the students grouped?
- What resources did the students have available for this project?

Probing Questions are intended to help the presenter think more deeply about the issue at hand. If a probing question doesn't have that effect, it is either a clarifying question or a recommendation with an upward inflection at the end. If you find yourself saying "Don't you think you should ...?" you've gone beyond probing questions. The presenter often doesn't have a ready answer to a genuine probing question. ***Since probing questions are the hardest to create productively, we offer the following suggestions:***

- Check to see if you have a "right" answer in mind. If so, delete the judgment from the question, or don't ask it.
- Refer to the presenter's original question/focus point. What did s/he ask for your help with? Check your probing questions for relevance.
- Check to see if you are asserting your own agenda. If so, return to the presenter's agenda.
- Sometimes a simple "why...?" asked as an advocate for the presenter's success can be very effective, as can several why questions asked in a row.
- Try using verbs: What do you fear? Want? Get? Assume? Expect?
- Think about the concentric circles of comfort, risk and danger. Use these as a barometer. Don't avoid risk, but don't push the presenter into the "danger zone."

1) You could have students use the rubric to assess their own papers. (recommendation re-stated as a question)

2) What would happen if students used the rubric to assess their own work? (recommendation re-stated as a probing question)

3) What do the students think is an interesting math problem? (good probing question)

4) What would have to change for students to work more for themselves and less for you? (better probing question)

In summary, good probing questions:

- are general and widely useful
- don't place blame on anyone
- allow for multiple responses
- help create a paradigm shift
- empower the person with the dilemma to solve his or her own problem (rather than deferring to someone with greater or different expertise)
- avoid yes/no responses
- are usually brief
- elicit a slow response
- move thinking from reaction to reflection
- encourage taking another party's perspective

Some final hints for crafting probing questions. Try the following questions and/or question stems. Some of them come from Charlotte Danielson's Pathwise work, in which she refers to them as "mediational questions."

- Why do you think this is the case?
- What would have to change in order for...?
- What do you feel is right in your heart?
- What do you wish...?
- What's another way you might...?
- What would it look like if...?
- What do you think would happen if...?
- How was...different from...?
- What sort of an impact do you think...?
- What criteria did you use to...?
- When have you done/experienced something like this before?
- What might you see happening in your classroom if...?
- How did you decide/determine/conclude...?
- What is your hunch about ....?
- What was your intention when ....?
- What do you assume to be true about ....?
- What is the connection between...and...?
- What if the opposite were true? Then what?
- How might your assumptions about...have influenced how you are thinking about...?
- Why is this such a dilemma for you?

Some Examples of Probing Questions:

- Why is a "stand-and-deliver" format the best way to introduce this concept?
- How do you think your own comfort with the material has influenced your choice of instructional strategies?
- What do the students think is quality work?
- You have observed that this student's work lacks focus – what makes you say that?
- What would the students involved say about this issue?
- How have your perspectives on current events influenced how you have structured this activity?

Staying Grounded in Student Work

It's what we think we already know that often prevents us from learning.

—Claude Bernard

Late in the spring I run into Jamie, a student from Cindy's classroom. Her smile stretches from ear to ear, and a ribbon of paper trails behind her. She has taped together the pages of her latest story, and she carries them high over her head, careful not to let her words touch the ground. Jamie isn't a typical ten-year-old. Her mother is in and out of jail, and she is in the care of a teenage sister. Jamie's hair is tightly braided into cornrows. A scowl is her typical expression and "Just try to make me do it" is her mantra. Even as a fourth grader, she intimidates most adults. Yet her proud strut down the school hallway, with her writing in hand, reveals another side of Jamie. Thanks to Cindy and writer's workshop, Jamie is willing to write because for the first time, Jamie chooses what she writes. For the first time, she makes the rules.

As happy as I am to see this transformation in Jamie, I wonder if we might have settled too quickly for such personal successes. We had spent a lot of time discussing our writing instruction, but we hadn't taken a close look at the work our students were producing as a whole. We celebrated the successes of individual students but failed to analyze the trends across students and grade levels. Our professional development is supportive and comfortable, but I realize our learning has stalled out. We need to come together to take a much closer look at our students' writing even though deep down we know we may not like what we see. Without knowing it, we haven't been engaging in the feedback that is essential to the guided-practice phase of professional development.

Grounding Professional Development in Student Work

Right around this time, Jamie and the rest of the fourth graders are about to struggle through the state-required writing assessment. Cindy passes out the test and her students begin writing. The test prompt reads, "Describe a typical day in your school cafeteria." Gerardo writes, "I hate the cafeteria because it's noisy." Amanda says, "My favorite is chocolate milk." Jamie scrawls, "I eat fast so I can go outside." Practically every fourth grader in the school responds to the prompt with an opinion, even though the correct response is to describe how the cafeteria functions. Those scoring the assessment are looking for something like, "The first thing I do is pick up my tray. Then I go through the line and choose my lunch." We soon realize our students only seem to know how to write their opinions.

This experience arouses our interest in figuring out ways to improve our students' writing, so the instructional coaches decide it is time to suggest that the grade-level teams spend some time analyzing student work. In our weekly staff development meeting Marjory explains, "We are going to compare our student writing to benchmark papers I have collected from schools that are scoring well on the state assessment. That way we will see where our students are not doing well. Everyone will write to the same prompt so we have something that is comparable—in other words, something that is written in the same genre and text structure. I suggest we begin with a prompt that is sequenced. We'll give the students a few weeks to write to the prompt and then come together in grade-level teams to see how they did."

"Writing to a prompt goes against everything I believe," Cindy protests. "I think my students should be able to choose what they write."

I help Marjory out by saying, "The prompts will be only one small part of our writing instruction. I agree that students should choose their own topics, but now that these writing assessments are a reality, we are trying to figure out where to go next with our learning so we can help our students with their learning."

More than anything the teachers are nervous. The benchmark papers Marjory collected are from schools in the suburbs. Schools where students are read to every night and never faced learning English as a second language. Schools where we assume teaching seems a whole lot easier. Even so, everyone agrees and we decide on our first prompt.

The prompt we select is "Describe your morning routine." Kindergartners draw and label their pictures with a few words. The fifth graders write in a paragraph format. A few teachers mention that they dread the day they will have to share their student work with the rest of their grade-level team. Will their peers pass judgment on their teaching ability when they share their students' work?

Will the teacher have the opportunity to explain how far some students have come, even though they have far to go? How much of a match will there be? Will the students' work be deemed proficient when measured against the benchmark? We will soon find out.

Grounding Professional Development in Student Work: A Risky Business

Two weeks have passed since we began working with the prompt, and it is time to analyze our first sample. Throughout the day, every grade-level team will meet with their instructional coach to analyze the pieces. Each team will have fifty minutes together, and we hope our students aren't too far off.

Since I provide instructional coaching for the first-grade team, I will help facilitate their conversation. Lisi, Christina, Keith, and Susan make their way into my office, and right away it is clear that they are worried about their students' performance with the prompt. "I hope I did this right," Christina admits. "I wasn't exactly sure how much help to give them."

I try to console her. "There isn't really a right or wrong way to do this. We are just here to look at the work and see what we find."

I ask the group who would like to share today, and Lisi volunteers to go first. She passes around copies of a piece by Javier, one of her emergent English speakers. Beforehand, the first-grade team had decided to help their students sequence the piece by folding the paper into six sections. That way, they thought, the task would be more concrete for the young writers.

In each section of his paper, Javier had written a sentence describing what he did in the morning. "I bruch teeth" was in the first box. Then, "I wach TV" in the second. He continued with an idea in each box and then finished with, "I go to scool."

We take a few moments to read over Javier's writing and Susan already has a question for Lisi. "How did you get him to write a different idea in each box? My students didn't seem to understand how to do that."

"Just like anything: I started by modeling the task," Lisi answers. "I wrote my own while they observed. Then we did a few together during shared writing. And finally, after these examples, they tried it on their own."

Susan says, "Of course. I should have known they needed to see it modeled so many times. I think I asked them to write too quickly."

Next we talk about how Javier jumped right into his piece without an introduction. We agree that this was confusing to the reader and decide to teach our students how to write an introduction. On the other hand, Javier ended the piece with a simple conclusion, and the rest of the first-grade teachers volunteer

that most of their students hadn't done that. We all have the same opinion that Javier could use a few transition words to guide the reader through his sequence.

By the end of our meeting, we have a long list of next steps for our instruction. We decide to keep working on this one for another week, so the students can have help making their pieces better. Next week, we'll compare our students' pieces with the benchmark papers.

Until now teaching had been a private act and no one really knew how each others' students were doing, so it wasn't surprising that not every teacher bravely volunteered to share a student work sample. A few even openly complained that the meetings were a waste of time. I acknowledged that I was sorry they felt that way and reminded them that they didn't have to bring student work until they felt ready. As the first volunteers went through the process, a sense of trust was gradually established. Our conversations remained focused on what the student work was teaching us, and we were careful to honor the students, remembering that our goal was to improve our instruction. It didn't take long for the most reserved teachers to see the benefits of the conversations. After sitting through a few sessions and seeing the presenting teachers walk away with so many ideas, they decided they wanted the same support and volunteered to go next.

Looking together at student work fits into the guided-practice phase of the gradual release continuum. In many schools, this is brand new territory, because most teachers rarely expose their students' performance to colleagues. It's the masterpieces that get passed around; rarely does anything short of perfection hang on the bulletin board outside the classroom door, and planning with colleagues is more focused on next steps than on what the students are already doing.

Examining student work fits into all phases on the gradual release continuum. Modeling comes in the form of defining a standard for student writing. Just as observing good instruction helps teachers determine a set of goals for their instruction, looking at benchmark papers helps them determine a set of goals for student writing.

Conferring with students is the cornerstone for the guided-practice phase, because it gives teachers the opportunity to figure out next steps based on the students' needs. Similarly, grade-level meetings give me the opportunity to confer with the teachers I coach because discussing student work helps me see what they are doing well and where to go next.

Guided practice is also provided through my work in the teachers' classrooms. For example, when the teachers realized their first graders weren't writing introductions, I modeled that during the time I spent in their classrooms. When they wanted to model sequenced text, I helped them find books and other resources.

Support is also offered during professional development meetings. Together, the whole faculty discussed sequencing in different genres: "how to's" such as recipes, chronological sequencing in biographies and historical fiction, the way a letter is sequenced, and the types of transition words a writer uses to sequence a piece of writing. A conversation about sequencing began to permeate the school, and as teachers reached independence on the gradual release continuum, they had many opportunities to share. We were grounding professional development in the actual work our students produced instead of on instinct or philosophy.

In its early stages the process isn't easy, and it isn't long before we realize that our students aren't even close to the standards against which they are being measured. The benchmark papers from other schools reveal that a piece by a Harrington fourth grader roughly compares to the proficiency level of a second grader. After spending so much time with our own students we have no perspective on what even constitutes proficient writing. Reality is staring us in the face and we are overwhelmed. "How will we ever get them there?" "There's no way," and "That's a first grader's writing?" are the comments that fly around the room.

Comparing our students' writing with the benchmarks gives us the ambition to keep working on sequencing for a few more months. We use children's literature as well as nonfiction to model how other writers sequence text. Teachers write their own pieces to share with students, and students share their writing on a regular basis. By the second month, we begin to notice that our students are writing well-sequenced pieces, and that's when our focus changes.

"My kids can write sequenced pieces in their sleep, but they're boring. I think we need to help them write more descriptively," Paul complains to the other fourth-grade teachers at the grade-level meeting. "Does anyone else feel that way?" The other teachers agree, and we realize that having accomplished our first goal, it is time to help our students breathe more life into their writing. Descriptive writing becomes our focus. We find benchmark papers that are written descriptively, create prompts for the students to practice writing descriptive pieces, and continue to come together with our student work. This time around we are more comfortable, and everybody is willing to share his or her students' work. The fifty minutes always pass too quickly.

Practical Steps

When Harrington began looking at student work, we were casual in our approach. Since then, I have learned that a number of protocols are available to

help formalize the process. In their bulletin, Phi Delta Kappan speaks to the genesis of looking at student work and Critical Friends Groups:

> The professional development unit of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), took on the task of designing a program to train coaches who would help groups of practitioners, or Critical Friends Groups (CFG's), identify student learning goals that make sense in their schools, look reflectively at practices intended to achieve those goals, and collaboratively examine teacher and student work in order to meet their objectives. (*Phi Delta Kappan Research Bulletin,* December 2000, No. 28)

Here we were looking at student work while there were protocols designed to make the task easier and more effective.

In our experience, it was important to maintain a single focus during a Critical Friends Group. At Harrington, our focus was on teaching writing. With a single focus, the teachers knew what type of student work they would be examining. More important, the instructional coaches found it easier to provide support in the classrooms to follow up on the group's discoveries.

We also learned to ease into the process gradually. Looking at student work is intimidating for many teachers, so give teachers time to adjust to this new way of working together. Let the process evolve at its own rate. Give the group time to linger, and don't rush an outcome.

It is important to avoid letting too much time pass between sessions. We met every other week in grade-level teams, giving us enough time to do the work between sessions while still keeping the momentum going. The process takes time, so determine a regular schedule for meeting. If the meetings are anticipated, the teachers will have time to collect the student work they plan to present.

To create a shared experience we rotated presenters. Anyone who has had the chance to present a piece of student work in a Critical Friends Group knows what a powerful experience it can be. Make sure that everyone has the opportunity to present, but don't force those who might not be ready.

We also asked the presenting teacher to bring a copy of the student work for everyone in the group. The group will need time to carefully analyze the student piece before launching into a discussion, and the pieces can be archived in case the group wants to reexamine them at a later date.

Finally, we learned how important it is to come to the meetings with a nonjudgmental attitude. Questions are a critical part of these discussions, but a Critical Friends Group isn't the time to challenge or instruct the other teachers in the group. Maintain a spirit of neutral inquiry.

Establishing a Safe Community for Critical Friends Groups

Because a Critical Friends Group may be the first time a group of teachers comes together in this manner, it is a good idea to begin by defining how the group chooses to function as a learning community. Together group members brainstorm what they believe is important for their learning community. For example, our learning community will

- be safe;
- address the self-interests of group members;
- have a clear set of norms;
- have shared leadership;
- encourage mutual respect;
- provide time together, both productive and fun;
- have a shared vision that may need to be flexible;
- offer members the opportunity to really know each other;
- include rituals and celebrations; and
- respect differences and opinions of all group members.

It is also important to set group norms early on, because it is more awkward to deal with problems after they have occurred than to deal with them in advance through a norm-setting process. We set the following norms at the beginning:

- listen to each other;
- come with a nonjudgmental attitude;
- take charge of your own learning, and at the same time, honor the other learners in the group;
- consider all questions to be safe questions;
- avoid interrupting others;
- come ready to participate;
- do your homework.

Roles for Protocols

Each participant has a specific role in a Critical Friends Group. A single group member acts as facilitator to keep the discussion focused. The presenter(s) are responsible for bringing student work samples, or in some cases instructional dilemmas or teacher assignments. A process observer listens to the discussion and takes notes about how the group functioned. Responders offer feedback to

Figure 6.1 The Roles for Protocols

Roles	Tasks	Tips
Facilitator	—Guides the discussion —Ensures that the protocol is followed —Keeps track of time —Redirects conversation that gets off track —Attends to the focus question posed by the presenter	—Be assertive about the time. —Be sure no one monopolizes. —Invite quiet participants to join the conversation, but don't force comments. —Be protective of the presenter. Remember that when teachers make their work public, they are highly vulnerable. —Encourage provocative comments. Everyone should leave the conversation with a new or altered insight. —Encourage warm comments, but don't let all the comments stay on the warm side. —Seek divergent points of view. Ask if anyone sees the situation another way.
Presenter(s)	—Presents student work —Decides on the appropriate protocol —Frames a question —Listens and takes notes of comments —At the appropriate time, responds to the comments	—Select work that raises a question for you. —Take a risk; avoid "masterpieces." —Meet with the facilitator beforehand to frame your question. —Even when the group is on the wrong track when discussing your work, listen for new insights or for the reasons for misunderstanding. Sometimes what sends the group in a wrong direction is what also misdirects students.
Process Observer	—Notes the dynamics of the group —Provides a picture of how the group works together	—Watch who has the floor space and who doesn't. —Note who emerges as the leader. —Record the kind of comments made. —Attend to what can be observed rather than what can be inferred.
Responders	—Discuss the work —Provide feedback —Follow the protocol	—Be respectful of the presenter(s). Remember how vulnerable they are when they make their work public. —Contribute to substantive conversation. Keep in mind that we grow from understanding our strengths and from having a new understanding provoked. —Respect the time. —Invite quiet participants to join the conversation. —Encourage divergent points of view.

Adapted from Benson 2000

the presenting teacher(s). Literacy consultant Laura Benson created a list of roles, tasks, and tips that are helpful for clarifying the roles of participants (see Figure 6.1).

Probing Questions

Questioning techniques are important to consider when using protocols. In the following examples, questions are distinguished as *clarifying questions* and *probing questions*. Clarifying questions are factual and designed to help responders get a complete picture of the question, dilemma, or work sample that is being presented. Clarifying questions might be like these: What did you do before this particular lesson? What was your goal for the lesson? How many students do you have? What is the students' educational background? If the presenter has to think before answering, it is most likely a probing question rather than a question intended to clarify. Most protocols allow time for clarifying questions because getting enough background comes before the group brainstorms a solution.

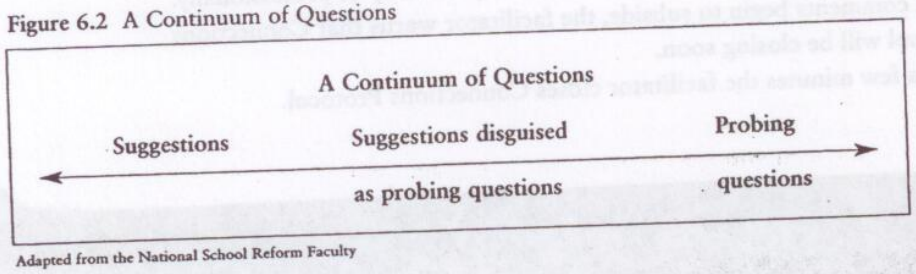
Probing questions are more substantive and therefore are intended to help the group think more deeply about the dilemma. Learning to ask probing questions takes practice, and the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) put *suggestions* and *probing questions* at either end of their questioning spectrum (see Figure 6.2).

According to the NSRF, the purpose for probing questions is to

- help uncover a belief rather than a solution;
- create depth in conversation;
- reinforce that we are creating a culture in which we can learn together;
- move the presenter into new territory;
- help move beyond the original perspective or insight; and
- lead to an "aha."

They also suggest that when constructing probing questions,

Figure 6.2 A Continuum of Questions



Adapted from the National School Reform Faculty

- prepare questions carefully before asking them;
- check to see if you have a "right" answer in mind. If so, delete judgment from the question or don't ask it;
- refer to the presenter's original question; and
- check to see if you are asserting your own agenda. If so, return to the presenter's agenda.

Examples of Protocols for Engaging in Discussion

When we began looking at student work at Harrington, we took an informal approach and didn't know there were research organizations, such as the National School Reform Faculty, the Annenberg Institute, and the Coalition of Essential Schools, that were developing protocols right under our noses. Now we know that these protocols would have made looking at student work both more comfortable and more focused.

Here are a few protocols that I have found to be particularly useful when working with teachers. They range in purpose from assessing student work against the standards to analyzing an open-ended dilemma. Though I am sharing only a few examples, others are available through the previously mentioned school reform organizations.

Connections Protocol

(taken from the Quaker tradition)
Purpose: This protocol is designed to encourage a safe community of learners by allowing group members to become more familiar with each other.
Time: approximately 10–15 minutes.

1. Facilitator introduces the protocol and reminds group members of the following expectations:
   - speak if you want to;
   - don't speak if you don't want to;
   - speak only once until everyone has had a chance to speak; and
   - listen and note what people say, but do not respond.
2. Facilitator opens Connections Protocol.
3. Responders say what is on their mind either personally or professionally.
4. When comments begin to subside, the facilitator warns that Connections Protocol will be closing soon.
5. After a few minutes the facilitator closes Connections Protocol.

Tuning Protocol

(adapted from MacDonald 1996)

Purpose: This protocol is designed to provide feedback on either a teacher's assignment or on student work.

Time: approximately 60 minutes.

1. Introduction (up to 3 minutes)
   - The facilitator introduces the protocol, time frame, and norms.
2. Presentation (7 minutes)
   - The presenting teacher explains a context and background for the work.
   - The presenting teacher shares what he would like addressed by asking the group a focus question.
   - Responders listen and take notes.
3. Clarifying questions (7 minutes)
   - Responders ask questions to clarify their understanding.
   - Clarifying questions are factual, straightforward, and nonjudgmental.
   - The presenting teacher answers clarifying questions without going into great detail.
   - Responders take notes.
4. Examination of student work samples (5 minutes)
   - The presenting teacher brings a copy of the student sample for every group member.
   - Responders silently read the work while keeping in mind the presenting teacher's earlier question.
5. Feedback (18–20 minutes)
   - The presenting teacher remains silent while the responders generate comments. They address issues such as the strengths and weaknesses of the work.
   - The presenting teacher takes notes.
6. Reflection (5 minutes)
   - The presenting teacher rejoins the discussion and shares what she learned from the feedback, focusing on what was learned rather than defending the work.
   - Responders are silent.
7. Debrief (5 minutes)
   - The facilitator leads an open discussion of the process.
   - The process observer shares what he or she noticed about the way the group functioned.

Standards Protocol

(adapted from a protocol developed by the Center for Collaborative Education)
Purpose: To analyze student work against a specific standard, criteria, or scoring rubric.
Time: approximately 45 minutes.

1. Describe the assignment and the standards that apply (5 minutes)
   - The presenting teacher describes the assignment, discusses which standards the assignment addresses, and outlines the assessment process, rubric, or criteria.
   - The presenting teacher frames a question to focus the discussion.
2. Clarifying questions (5 minutes)
   - Responders ask questions to clarify their understanding.
   - Clarifying questions are factual, straightforward, and nonjudgmental.
   - The presenting teacher answers clarifying questions without going into great detail.
   - Responders take notes.
3. Score the work (5 minutes)
   - Responders individually score the work sample, using the presenting teacher's criteria or rubric.
   - If the presenting teacher failed to bring a rubric, the group can develop one together.
   - The goal is to develop a common idea about the quality of the work.
4. Look at the work (10 minutes)
   - The group discusses discrepancies in the responders' scores while considering questions the work raises in relationship to the standards.
5. Analyze the work (15 minutes)
   - The facilitator asks the presenting teacher to restate the question to confirm the group's focus.
   - The presenting teacher listens as the responders discuss the work and offer feedback.
   - The group is careful to connect their comments to the standards.
6. Reflection (10 minutes)
   - The presenting teacher rejoins the discussion and shares what he learned from the feedback, focusing on what was learned rather than defending the work.
   - Responders are silent.
7. Discuss implications (10 minutes)
   - Both the presenting teacher and responders share new thoughts they have about their teaching practices.

- The group may develop an action plan to further address the issues generated by the discussion.

8. Debrief (5 minutes)
   - Open discussion of the process, led by the facilitator.
   - The process observer shares what he or she noticed about the way the group functioned.

The Consultancy Protocol

(adapted from a protocol developed by the Coalition of Essential Schools, www.essentialschools.org)

Purpose: This protocol is used to allow a group to explore a problem or dilemma.

Time: Approximately 60 minutes.

1. The presenting teacher gives an overview of the issue or dilemma and then poses a focus question. (5 minutes)
2. Responders ask clarifying questions, keeping in mind that they are primarily aimed at helping responders understand the questions and context. The presenter responds to the clarifying questions. (5 minutes)
3. The group asks the presenter probing questions. Probing questions are primarily open ended and are for the responders. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand her thinking about the issue she has presented. The presenter responds to the probing questions, but there is no discussion by the larger group. (10–15 minutes)
4. Responders discuss the issue or dilemma while the presenting teacher silently takes notes. What did we hear? What didn't we hear that we needed to know more about? What do we think about the question or issue presented? (10–15 minutes)
5. The presenting teacher responds by sharing what she is thinking and the next steps she might take. During this time, the responders listen. (10 minutes)
6. The facilitator opens up the discussion to the whole group. (10 minutes)
7. The process observer leads an open discussion about the process. (5 minutes)

Peeling the Onion: Developing a Problem Protocol

(adapted from Nancy Mohr and the National School Reform Faculty)

Purpose: To provide a structured way to develop an appreciation for the complexity of a problem while avoiding the inclination to start out "solving" it. Most of us are eager to solve problems before we understand their depth. This

protocol is designed to help a group peel away the layers to address the deeper issues that lie underneath the surface.
Time: approximately 50 minutes.

1. The presenter explains the dilemma and poses a focus question.
2. Clarifying questions (4 minutes)
3. Round 1: One by one, everyone finishes this statement: "I understand the question to be . . ." The presenter is silent and takes notes.
4. Round 2: One by one, everyone finishes this statement: "One thing I assume to be true about this problem is . . ." The presenter remains silent and takes notes.
5. Round 3: One by one, everyone finishes this statement: "A question this raises for me is . . ." The presenter remains silent and takes notes. If there are more questions among the group, this round may be repeated.
6. Round 4: One by one, everyone poses a question starting with the following: "What if . . . ?" or "Have you thought of . . . ?" The presenter remains silent and takes notes.
7. The presenter reviews notes and says, "Having heard these questions, I think there are implications for . . ."
8. Together, the presenter and responders think of possibilities and options that have surfaced.
9. The process observer leads an open discussion of the process. (5 minutes) Be sure to discuss the following:
   - How was this like peeling an onion?
   - What about the process was useful?
   - Was the process frustrating? If so, how?

A Final Thought

Until we began examining student work, we held on to the shining moments when students such as Jamie showed off their isolated successes as writers. We knew most of our students had a long way to go, but it wasn't until we came together to share ideas and offer feedback that we were able to determine how to move forward. For too long, we had subconsciously insulated ourselves from the constructive feedback that is essential to guided practice. Much like our students, each teacher needed help to know where to go next. We hadn't been challenging ourselves to take risks, and it wasn't until we sat together and asked, "How do you think I could make this student a better writer?" that we were able to move on in our learning.