

## Using a Tuning Protocol to Look at Lesson Plans<sup>1</sup>

Modified from <http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/jsd/easton203.cfm>.

This protocol is a process in which a group of colleagues comes together to examine each other's work, honor the good things found in that work, and fine tune it through a formal process of presentation and reflection. The presenting teacher should have multiple copies of one lesson plan to share with their small group (4 to 6 people). The following steps should be followed to assure maximum focus and quality feedback to the presenting teacher. Also, it is recommended that the group selects a time keeper. Times given are for a 40 minute long protocol session, and should be adjusted proportionally for different time periods.

### Steps in the Protocol

#### 1. Presentation - 8 minutes

The presenting teacher distributes copies of his or her lesson plan and sets the context, describing the context of the lesson plan. Participants say nothing but take notes.

The presenter then poses **one or two** key questions from the following questions:

- Is the lesson (the objective and instructional choices) clearly aligned with standards and state tests?
- Does my lesson plan require high levels of critical thinking? How could the level be raised even further?
- Is the objective(s) measurable, specific, and attainable?
- Do my activities/assignments match or "lead to" my objective(s)?
- Is it clear how students will demonstrate understanding?
- Is the lesson relevant, motivating, and likely to engage students? How could it be made more so?
- How well do the instructional choices break down complex tasks and target diverse learning needs, readiness, styles, and interests?

#### 2. Clarifying questions - 5 minutes

Participants ask non-judgmental questions about the presentation, avoiding questions that could be perceived as critical, such as "Why didn't you try X?" After reviewing the lesson plan, for example, they might ask: "What teaching on this topic has been given before?" and "How does the student know this is the expectation?"

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<sup>1</sup> This protocol could also be used to examine any aspect of teaching and learning: a sample of student work, a unit design, an evaluation system, a classroom conduct plan, a plan for teaming, or a problem that has occurred.

### **3. Individual writing - 4 minutes**

Participants write about the presentation, in particular trying to answer the presenter's questions for themselves.

### **4. Participant discussion - 8 minutes**

While the presenting teacher is silently taking notes, the participants discuss issues raised during the presentation and clarified during individual writing. They strive to deepen their understanding of the situation and to answer questions posed by the presenter. Each person's comments are directed to the whole group, not to the presenter. For example, a participant might say: "Here are some of the strengths I noted..." Others may add to that list. Another might say: "The level of critical thinking asked in this lesson might have been enhanced if the objective had included..."

Participants should both praise and criticize, offering a mix of "warm" and "cool" feedback (Allen & McDonald, 1993). If the discussion is overly laudatory or overly critical, participants (or the facilitator, if there is one) should point this out and help the group adjust the comments accordingly. Many presenters may be used to blanket praise. Without thoughtful but probing "cool" questions and comments, they won't benefit from the tuning protocol experience. After taking part in the tuning protocol process, presenters often say they would have liked more "cool" feedback. (Cushman, 1995). If participants view themselves as "critical friends" to the presenter, their comments will be more likely to be thoughtful and provocative.

### **5. Presenter reflection - 15 minutes**

The presenter reflects aloud on the participants' discussion, using the issues the participants raised as a framework and reflecting on possible answers to the questions posed. The participants remain silent.

Usually, the protocol is concluded with step 6. However, today the debriefing will occur with the whole group after each teacher has had the opportunity to present his/her lesson plan. Once the presenting teacher reflects aloud, the protocol begins again with another teacher sharing his/her lesson plan, described in step 1.

### **6. Debriefing - 5 minutes**

*First the presenter and then the participants discuss how well the protocol process worked. Then they engage in more general discussion of both the process and the content of the protocol. The presenter might, for example, suggest ways that the feedback from the protocol session will be used to modify the particular lesson plan being examined. Other participants might describe insights into their own practice they've gleaned from the process.*