

THE TUNING PROTOCOL

From L. B. Easton (2009). Protocols for professional learning. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

(SOURCE OF PROTOCOL: Joseph McDonald, David Allen, and others; the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), which grants permission for its use.)

OVERVIEW OF PROTOCOL:

This protocol is the classic protocol, the one upon which most other protocols have been based. It features times when a presenter talks and is silent and times when participants talk and are silent. It provides three levels of depth: presentation > participant discussion > presenter reflection, finalized by a general debriefing that can extend the conversation.

DIRECTIONS

Step One: Introduction

- Facilitator briefly introduces the protocol, goals, and norms and distributes a copy of the steps.

Step Two: Presentation (5 minutes)

- Participants are quiet, taking notes. They do not interrupt the presenter.
- Presenter sets the context, describes the teaching/learning situation.
- Presenter shares materials related to the practice being described, including student work. When student work is being presented, the presenter should allow participants part of this time to examine this work.
- Focus question- Presenter poses one or two key questions to be answered about their practice as it relates to student work that is provided.

Step Three: Active Listening (5 minutes)

- The facilitator leads a Round Robin in which everyone completes the statement: "I understand the problems to be..."
- The presenter stays silent and take notes

Step Four: Clarifying the Focus Question (2 minutes)

- The presenter has another opportunity to clarify misunderstanding about the focus questions posed

Step Five: Clarifying Questions (5 minutes)

- Participants ask non-evaluative questions about the presentation, such as "What happened before X? What did you do next? What did Y say?"
- Facilitator should guard against questions that approach evaluation, such as "Why didn't you try X?" If someone asks an evaluative question, that person may be invited to rephrase the question as clarifying or save it for the participant discussion below.
- It is entirely possible that the group will not get all its questions answered (there never is enough time!), but members have enough information to conduct a productive protocol.

Step Six: Individual Writing (about 5 minutes)

- This part of the protocol helps each participant focus and have something to say during the Participant Discussion.
- Participants write about the presentation, addressing the key/focus question(s). The participants are listing where the work and presentation seems “in tune” with the focus questions. They prepare their feedback based on two categories.

Warm Feedback:

- This includes comments about how the student work seems to meet the desired goals. When providing warm feedback, avoid judgment statements such as “I like, Great job... etc.” Instead, consider starting comments as “I saw,” “I noticed,” “I heard,” or “I see evidence of...”

Cool Feedback:

- This includes possible disconnects, gaps, or suggestions for change.
- Remember that cool feedback should offer ideas or suggestions that strengthen the student work. The cool feedback should address the focus question outlined in step 1.
- When providing cool feedback, consider starting comments such as “I wonder if you have considered...,” “I’m curious to know what might happen if...” Results are more positive if you frame cool feedback as a probing question that allows the presenter to reflect on their plan.
- The presenter should remain silent during this reflection time.

Step Seven: Warm and Cool Feedback (5 minutes)

- Participants share feedback with the presenter, starting with warm feedback then transitioning into cool feedback.
- Remember the suggestions should help answer the focus question in step 1.
- Presenter is silent and takes notes while the participants provide feedback.

Step Eight: Presenter Reflection (5 minutes)

- Participants are silent, taking notes on the presenter reflection.
- Presenter reflects aloud on the participants’ discussion, using the issues the participants raised to deepen understanding and reflecting on possible answers to the questions posed. Presenter can also project future actions, questions, dilemmas, etc. 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.
- Although presenter does not have to do this, presenter may correct misunderstandings.

Repeat Steps 2-8 until every teacher has presented and received feedback on their Student work.

Step Nine: Debriefing (5 minutes)

- Presenter discusses how well the protocol worked and thanks the participants for their work.
- Then participants discuss how well they think the protocol worked and thanks the presenter for bringing the work to them to be tuned.
- Presenter and participants engage in more general discussion of the content of the protocol as well as the process itself.