

that presenters may miss because they are looking for something else or because they expect particular students to produce certain kinds of work. Finally, withholding the context gives all the group's participants a chance to examine their own assumptions and preconceptions about how students carry out and convey meaning in their work. Many group members are surprised by one or several aspects of the context when it is revealed: The vivid artwork turns out to be the effort of a student whom they had never suspected of having artistic abilities; a student's reflection reveals that a research paper that seemed to the group to involve a lot of effort and care is in fact far less meaningful to the student than is the community service project that accompanied it. And so on.

As you consider choosing or designing a process for looking at student work, weigh carefully the role of context. The context you decide to share, and when you decide to share it, will have an impact on the kinds of issues and questions that arise. These subtle but powerful differences in approach and emphasis argue for careful, thoughtful, and repeated use of one protocol before moving on to others. As one district curriculum coordinator relates, "It takes three, four, five times with a protocol before the light goes on."



## C H A P T E R 4

# Three Ways of Looking Together at Student Work

IN THIS CHAPTER WE DESCRIBE three established structures for looking collaboratively at student work:

- The Tuning Protocol
- The Collaborative Assessment Conference
- The Consultancy

In Table 4.1 we give a quick overview of the key points of comparison and contrast between these three methods of looking at student work. A more detailed description and a bulleted agenda for each protocol follow.

You might use the following descriptions of the Tuning Protocol, the Collaborative Assessment Conference, and the Consultancy in several ways:

- If your group is in the early stages of deciding how to focus its efforts around looking at student work, you might try out one or more of these protocols in order to explore the opportunities provided by different formats.
- You might start with one of these models and alter or extend parts of it to better suit the goals of your particular group.
- You might use these protocols as models for developing your own unique protocol (as described in Chapter 5).

**A word of caution:** If most members of your group are novices at looking collaboratively at student work, you might want to begin by choosing one of these protocols and using it several times before modifying it or deciding to use a different one. These protocols are tools and, as with any

**Table 4.1. Three Processes for Looking at Student Work**

	<i>Tuning Protocol</i>	<i>Collaborative Assessment Conference</i>	<i>The Consultancy</i>
Purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop more effective assignments, projects, and assessment tasks.</li> <li>To develop common standards for students' work.</li> <li>To support teachers' instructional practice through focusing on student performances and how they are assessed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To learn more about students' goals and interests; the problems and issues they choose to focus on in the course of an assignment.</li> <li>To learn more about the strengths and needs of a particular student.</li> <li>To reflect on and gather ideas for revising classroom practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To gain insight into teachers' and administrators' dilemmas or "burning questions" arising from their practice.</li> <li>To open up the thinking of the presenter and participants about problems of teaching and learning</li> </ul>
Role of description, interpretation, and/or evaluation	<i>Primarily evaluation:</i> The process asks participants to provide warm and cool feedback on student work samples and teachers' assignments, scoring instruments, and so on.	<i>Primarily description, with some interpretation:</i> The process asks participants to describe the student work, to ask questions about it, and to speculate about the problems or issues in the work that the student was most focused on.	<i>Primarily interpretation:</i> The process asks participants to interpret the presenter's dilemma, to raise questions and offer hypotheses about the essence of that dilemma, and to offer other perspectives on the dilemma. Sometimes this interpretation may involve making observations (description) or suggestions (which may be interpreted as evaluative).
Presentation of the context for the student work	<i>Context presented initially:</i> At the beginning of the session, the presenting teacher typically provides descriptions of the assignment, scoring criteria, and so on.	<i>Context withheld until middle of process:</i> The presenting teacher does not describe the context for the work until after participants have looked carefully at it and formulated questions about it.	<i>Context presented initially:</i> The protocol begins with the presenting teacher's description of the dilemma and the context that gives rise to it.
Kinds and amount of student work typically shared	<i>Kinds of pieces:</i> Most often used for looking at work from a single assignment, task, or project. Samples of work usually include written and visual pieces, and sometimes a brief video as well. <i>Number of pieces:</i> Typically used with work from several students, often at different levels of accomplishment. May also be used with a single sample.	<i>Kinds of pieces:</i> Most often used to look at student work generated by an open-ended assignment (as opposed to worksheets). The work can come from any subject area (art, science, math, writing, and so on). <i>Number of pieces:</i> Usually one or two pieces of work from a single student. May also be used with multiple samples from a single student.	<i>Kinds of pieces:</i> Does not require student work samples; however, the presenter may choose to include them to illustrate the dilemma or ground it in the classroom context. <i>Number of pieces:</i> When student work is shared, the number of pieces varies from one to a few. The work might come from a single student or from several, depending on the dilemma that the presenter is trying to illustrate.

34

*Three Ways of Looking Together at Student Work*

complex tool, they require practice in order for the user to gain the skill and comfort needed to derive the most benefit from them.

### THE TUNING PROTOCOL: A DESCRIPTION

The Tuning Protocol was originally developed as a means for the five high schools in the Coalition of Essential Schools' Exhibitions Project to receive feedback from each other and fine-tune their developing student assessment systems, including exhibitions, portfolios, and design projects. Recognizing the challenges involved in developing new forms of assessment, the project staff, led by Joseph McDonald, developed a structure for facilitated discussions. The purpose of these discussions was to help teachers to share their students' work and their own work with colleagues and to reflect together on the lessons embedded there. Since its trial run in 1992, the Tuning Protocol has been widely used and adapted for professional development purposes in schools and within networks of teachers across the country.

To take part in the Tuning Protocol, teachers collect samples of their students' work on paper and, where possible, on video. They also gather the materials they themselves have created to support student performance, such as written descriptions of the assignment and scoring rubrics. In a circle of about 8 to 12 participants, usually other teachers, a facilitator leads the group through the protocol and keeps time. The presenter, or presenting team, describes the context for the student work (the task or project)—uninterrupted by questions or comments from participants.

Usually the presenter includes a focusing question about which he or she would especially welcome feedback, for example, "What evidence do you see of persuasive writing in the student work?" Participants have time to ask clarifying questions, which the presenter answers as concisely as possible. Next, the participants examine the samples of student work and other artifacts (the assignment, the rubric, and so on). Then, with the presenting teacher listening but silent, participants offer warm and cool feedback. Warm feedback comes from a deliberately supportive, appreciative perspective; it points to what is strong in the work (both the students' and the teacher's). Cool feedback comes from a deliberately questioning perspective; it refers to what may be missing or may need to be developed in the work. Participants often frame cool feedback as questions, for example, "How might the project be different if students chose their own research topics?"

After the feedback discussion, the presenter has the opportunity, again uninterrupted, to reflect briefly on the feedback and address any of the participants' comments or questions he or she chooses. Time is reserved for debriefing the group's experience of going through the protocol.

A schedule for a Tuning Protocol appears in Figure 4.1. The times provided on the schedule for the Tuning Protocol in Figure 4.1 are guidelines for facilitators. The facilitator and group may choose to condense or expand the times for individual steps to serve their needs. The overall schedule allows for a complete Tuning Protocol in about 50 minutes; however, if a group has more time, it may benefit from adding time to individual steps of the protocol, including a longer debrief discussion.

### Guidelines for the Tuning Protocol

Participation in a structured process of professional collaboration such as 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 constructive feedback. Below is one set of guidelines; your group may want to create its own. In any case, the group should go over the guidelines and the schedule before starting the protocol. The facilitator (or any participant) may refer to the guidelines as necessary during the protocol. A group may also want to revisit its guidelines in debriefing the protocol.

- Recognize the role of the presenter(s). By making their work more public, teachers are exposing themselves to kinds of feedback they may not be used to. Participants need to be thoughtful about how they phrase comments or questions. Inappropriate comments or questions should be reworded or withdrawn.
- Contribute to substantive discussion. Many teachers may be accustomed to blanket praise. Without thoughtful, probing cool questions and comments, they won’t benefit from the Tuning Protocol experience.
- Recognize the role of the facilitator, particularly in regard to following the guidelines and keeping time. A Tuning Protocol that doesn’t allow for all parts will do a disservice to the presenter and to the participants.

### The Tuning Protocol in Action

Two high schools in neighboring districts on Long Island, New York, had been developing schoolwide goals for student performance. The principals considered how the two schools could become “critical friends” in helping each other address their goals. In conversation with members of their faculties and a researcher from Annenberg Institute at Brown University,

**Figure 4.1.** The Tuning Protocol  
Developed by Joseph McDonald, Coalition of Essential Schools  
Revised by David Allen

1. Introduction (5 minutes)
  - Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, guidelines, and schedule.
  - Participants briefly introduce themselves (if necessary).
2. Presentation (5–8 minutes)
  - Presenter shares the context for the student work, which might include information about the students, the class, the assignment or prompt, the learning goals (or standards) addressed, and/or the evaluation context (rubric, scoring criteria, and so on).
  - Presenting teacher frames a focusing question for feedback; facilitator may post focusing question for group to see.
  - Participants are silent; no questions are asked at this time.
3. Clarifying questions (5 minutes)
  - Participants ask “clarifying” questions in order to get information that may have been omitted in the presentation and which would help them understand the context for the student work.
  - The facilitator limits the questions to those that are truly “clarifying,” determining which questions actually belong in the warm/cool feedback segment.
4. Examination of student work samples (10 minutes)
  - Participants look closely at the work samples—keeping the presenter’s focusing question in mind, and perhaps taking notes for the warm and cool feedback.
  - Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently or talk quietly with a neighbor.
5. Pause to reflect on suitable comments and questions for warm and cool feedback (2–3 minutes)
  - Participants take a few minutes to reflect individually on what they would like to contribute to the feedback discussion.
  - Presenter is silent.
6. Warm and cool feedback (10–15 minutes)
  - Participants share feedback with one another while the presenter listens. The feedback typically begins with a few minutes of warm feedback, moves on to a few minutes of cool feedback, and then a mix of the two. *Warm feedback* points to strengths, for example, comments about how the work presented seems to meet the desired goals. *Cool feedback* identifies possible “disconnects,” or gaps, between the work and the teacher’s goals for it; cool feedback is often phrased as a question.
  - The facilitator may remind participants of the presenter’s focusing question.
  - Presenter is silent; he or she may choose to take notes.
7. Reflection (5–10 minutes)
  - Presenter addresses those comments and questions he or she chooses to. The purpose is not to defend the student work or his or her own work, but instead to reflect aloud on those ideas or questions that seemed particularly compelling or intriguing.
  - Facilitator may intervene to help focus, clarify, and so on.
  - Participants listen silently.
8. Debrief (5–10 minutes)
  - Facilitator leads a reflection focused on the process, rather than content, of the discussion, that is, how the protocol supported a learning conversation.
  - Everyone participates.

they decided to use the Tuning Protocol as a way to help each of the schools connect its goals to classroom practice and student learning.

While the student performance goals for the schools varied somewhat, the principals were able to identify a small number of complementary goals on which to focus, including improving student writing across genres, improving oral communications skills, and developing and supporting an informed opinion. Each of the schools selected a group of 10–12 teachers from the science, math, and English departments to meet regularly to present and get feedback on projects and student work samples that reflect the goals.

The teachers met for a full day four times during the year, alternating between the two schools. In small-group discussions by discipline, a teacher, or team of teachers, presented a project and framed a focusing question that related to the schoolwide goal. Following the structure of the Tuning Protocol, the group asked clarifying questions, examined student work samples, and provided warm and cool feedback. Typically, each group went through two Tuning Protocols during the day with one presentation from each school.

In one meeting, a veteran science teacher presented his students' research projects. One of his school's goals for student performance was "Developing and supporting an informed opinion." He began with the focusing question "How can a rubric that includes presentation skills be used as a teaching tool as well as an assessment instrument?" Participants viewed a video of a student presenting his research on conductivity and looked at the written outline for the presentation. In giving feedback, the teachers considered how students would benefit from viewing videotapes of prior presentations and discussing—even using—the rubric before they presented.

In his reflection, the presenting teacher recognized the value of the group's feedback, stating, "The protocol will have an immediate impact in my practice." Reflecting on comments from the protocol, he talked about showing students videotapes of prior performances and asking students to evaluate them and to discuss them using the rubric. "The rubric itself is not the teaching tool; it's a discussion tool." He also commented on the value of the Tuning Protocol structure: "I wouldn't have been able to hold back if not for the training of the Tuning Protocol, and so I wouldn't have heard the kinds of feedback I did."

The Tuning Protocol provided the structure for the conversation and helped keep the focus on student learning. After three sessions, teachers felt that there was a level of trust within the group and recognized that their conversations had begun to address core issues of teaching and learning, such as how goals for student performance can be brought to life in

the projects students do and how the goals can be assessed in the work they produce.

### THE COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE: A DESCRIPTION

Since its development by Steve Seidel and colleagues at Harvard Project Zero in 1988, the Collaborative Assessment Conference has been used for various purposes: to hone participants' ability to look closely at and interpret students' work, to explore the strengths and needs of a particular child, to reflect on the work collected in student portfolios, and to foster conversations among faculty about the work students are doing and how to support that work. It provides a structure to help group members look together at a piece of work, first to determine what it reveals about the student and what that student is working on, and then to consider the implications of that student's work for teaching and learning in general. The structure for the conference has evolved from three key ideas:

- First, students use school assignments, especially open-ended ones, to tackle important problems that are of personal interest to them. Sometimes these problems are the same ones that the teacher has assigned them to work on, sometimes not. This means that a piece of student work has the potential to reveal not only the student's mastery of class goals, but also a wealth of information about the student, including his or her intellectual interests, strengths, and struggles.
- Second, adults can begin to see and understand the serious work that students undertake only if they suspend judgment long enough to look carefully and closely at what is actually in the work, rather than what they hope or expect to see in it.
- Third, teachers need the perspectives of others—especially those who are not familiar with their students or classroom contexts—in order to see the many facets that student's work may reveal and to help generate ideas about how to use this information to shape daily practice.

In Collaborative Assessment Conferences, the presenter brings a piece of student work to share with a group of 5 to 10 colleagues, usually other teachers and administrators. The protocol begins with the presenter showing, or distributing copies of, the piece to the group. Throughout the first part of the conference, the presenting teacher says nothing—giving no

information about the student, the assignment, or the context in which the student worked.

Through a series of questions asked by the facilitator, such as “What do you see in the work?” the group members work to understand the piece by describing it in detail, raising questions about it, and speculating about the problems or issues in which the student was most engaged. They do this without making evaluations about the quality of the work or its appeal to their personal tastes. The facilitator helps this process by asking participants to identify evidence in the work for judgments, which inevitably slip out. For example, if someone comments that the work seems very creative, the facilitator might ask the participant to describe the aspect of the work that led him or her to say that.

In the second part of the conference, the focus broadens. Having concentrated intensively on the piece itself, the group, in conversation with the presenter, now considers the conditions under which the work was created as well as broader issues of teaching and learning. First, the presenter provides any information about the context for the work that he or she thinks is relevant. This might entail describing the assignment, responding to the discussion, answering questions raised in the first part of the conference (though the presenter can choose which of those questions to respond to), describing other work by the student, or commenting on how the presenter’s own reading or observation of the work relates to that of the group.

Next, the facilitator asks the whole group (presenter included) to reflect on the ideas generated by the discussion of the piece. These might be reflections about specific next steps for the student in question, or ideas about what the participants might do in their own classes, or thoughts about teaching and learning in general. Finally, the whole group reflects on the conference itself.

Figure 4.2 is a working agenda for a Collaborative Assessment Conference. The time allotted for each step of the conference is not fixed, since the time needed for each step will vary according to the work being considered. At each stage, the facilitator makes the decision about when to move the group on to the next step. Typically, Collaborative Assessment Conferences take from 45 to 75 minutes.

### The Collaborative Assessment Conference in Action

At an urban middle school in Massachusetts, teachers felt that they needed to “do more” with what students put into their folders. “I give the students time to reflect on their work, but I don’t ever have time to reflect on it,” said one teacher, to a chorus of head-nodding from others on the faculty.

**Figure 4.2.** Steps in the Collaborative Assessment Conference  
Developed by Steve Seidel and Project Zero Colleagues

1. Getting started
  - The group chooses a facilitator who will make sure the group stays focused on the particular issue addressed in each step.
  - The presenting teacher puts the selected work in a place where everyone can see it or provides copies for the other participants. He or she says nothing about the work, the context in which it was created, or the student until Step 5.
  - The participants observe or read the work in silence, perhaps making brief notes about aspects of it that they particularly notice.
2. Describing the work
  - The facilitator asks the group, “What do you see?”
  - Group members respond without making interpretations, evaluations of the quality of the work, or statements of personal preference.
  - If evaluations or interpretations emerge, the facilitator asks the person to describe the evidence on which those comments are based.
3. Asking questions about the work
  - The facilitator asks the group, “What questions does this work raise for you?”
  - Group members state any questions they have about the work, the student, the assignment, the circumstances under which the work was carried out, and so on.
  - The presenting teacher makes notes about these questions (but does not answer them yet).
4. Speculating about what the student is working on
  - The facilitator asks the group, “What do you think the student is working on?”
  - Participants, drawing on their observation of the work, make suggestions about the problems or issues that the student focused on in carrying out the assignment.
5. Hearing from the presenting teacher
  - The facilitator invites the presenting teacher to speak.
  - The presenting teacher provides his or her perspective on the student’s work, describing what he or she sees in it, responding to the questions raised, and adding any other information that he or she feels is important to share with the group.
  - The presenting teacher also comments on anything surprising or unexpected that he or she heard during the describing, questioning, and speculating phases.
6. Discussing implications for teaching and learning
  - The facilitator invites all participants, including the presenting teacher, to share any thoughts they have about their own teaching, children’s learning, or ways to support this particular child in future instruction.
7. Reflecting on the Collaborative Assessment Conference
  - The group reflects together on their experiences of or reactions to the conference as a whole or particular parts of it.
8. Thanking the presenting teacher
  - The session concludes with acknowledgment of and thanks to the presenting teacher.

The school decided to institute regular Collaborative Assessment Conferences to give teachers more time to reflect on and discuss their students' work.

The school designated one of the weekly planning sessions each month to carrying out a Collaborative Assessment Conference. The teachers took turns bringing a piece, or pieces, of work from one of their students. To lead the meetings, the principal invited facilitators, from outside the school, who were well versed in the Collaborative Assessment Conference.

At first, the protocol felt awkward. Many teachers were uncomfortable with having to describe and ask questions about a piece of work without knowing the assignment or the context in which the student was working. "It would be a lot easier if we knew more about the assignment and the student," several teachers commented as they reflected on the session.

The presenting teachers were the first to identify the power of excluding context in the initial discussion. One remarked, "When people began asking questions about the work, like 'What did this student learn the most about while putting together this project?' I realized just how much I don't know about my students." She continued, "It gives me ideas for what I need to go back and talk with them about." Another teacher discovered that he never would have noticed the amount of effort and detail that went into a drawing that accompanied an essay without the benefit of other teachers' comments: "I was more focused on the writing part of the assignment. But as the other teachers described it, I started to see that the student had captured an important theme in that picture."

Over time, as the teachers became more comfortable with the Collaborative Assessment Conference, they found that the process helped them to identify important schoolwide concerns: how to balance supporting students in long-term projects with encouraging them to work independently, how to tie important curriculum topics to student interests, how to clarify for students standards and criteria for their work. These issues became topics for whole-school faculty meetings. One teacher summed up the importance of arriving at these issues through looking at student work:

It's not like we couldn't have decided to concentrate on one of these issues without having gone through the Collaborative Assessment Conference. But, somehow, letting those issues grow out of looking at student work makes them feel more real, more grounded, more important. It's not someone telling us to pay attention to a particular issue. It's that we see the need for it ourselves in our students' work.

## THE CONSULTANCY: A DESCRIPTION

The Consultancy (see Figure 4.3) was developed by Gene Thompson-Grove, Paula Evans, and Faith Dunne as part of the Coalition of Essential School's National School Re:Learning Faculty Program. It was further adapted and revised as part of the work of the National School Reform Faculty Project.

The goal of the Consultancy is to help participants gain insight into dilemmas or "burning questions" arising from their practice. The aim is less to solve a problem than it is to open up the thinking of the presenter and, thus, deepen the thinking of all participants. The Consultancy gives the presenter the chance to frame a question, respond to clarifying and probing questions, and then step back and listen to participants discuss the question from a variety of perspectives. It helps presenters to examine their assumptions about their own work, their students' work, and other aspects of their professional lives and often changes the way they think about an issue.

The presenter identifies a dilemma and hones a question related to this dilemma that he or she wants to bring to the group for their perspectives. Since the effectiveness of the Consultancy often depends on the quality of the presenter's question, developing an appropriate question is critical to the success of the protocol. The question should be one that focuses on the presenter's actions, behaviors, and beliefs, not on someone else's.

Framing a dilemma that is a true dilemma, rather than a question for which the presenter already has partial or full answers, is challenging. Facilitators often work closely with presenters before the protocol to frame an authentic dilemma that they think the group will be able to help with.

The presenter often brings a written description of the dilemma to the group in addition to any relevant samples of student work. The description ends with a question that gets at the heart of the dilemma and that guides the Consultancy group in its work. The Consultancy does not require that student work samples be used to illustrate the presenter's dilemma, but presenters often choose to include them. Sometimes the dilemma relates very directly to the student work samples that are presented; at other times, the samples serve to ground the dilemma in the reality of the classroom context.

After the presenter has given an overview of the dilemma and posed the question to the group, the participants ask clarifying questions. These are short-answer questions, such as "How many students are in your class?"

Next, the participants ask the presenter probing questions. The probing questions and the discussion that follows form the crux of the Consultancy. It may take some time for the group to learn the art of asking probing questions. As one facilitator emphasized, the Consultancy "lives

**Figure 4.3. The Consultancy**

*Developed by Gene Thompson-Grove, Paula Evans, and Faith Dunne  
Further revised by Gene Thompson-Grove and Colleagues in the  
National School Reform Faculty Project*

1. **Presentation of the dilemma (5–10 minutes)**  
The presenter gives an overview of the dilemma with which he or she is struggling and frames a question for the Consultancy group to consider. The framing of this question, as well as the quality of the presenter's reflection on his or her dilemma, are key features of this protocol. If the presenter has brought student work, educator work, or other artifacts, there is a pause here to silently examine the work or documents. The focus of the group's conversation is on the dilemma.
2. **Clarifying questions (5 minutes)**  
The group asks clarifying questions of the presenter—that is, questions that have brief, factual answers.
3. **Probing questions (10 minutes)**  
The group asks the presenter probing questions. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand his or her thinking about the dilemma presented to the Consultancy group. The goal here is for the presenter to learn more about the question he or she has framed or to do some analysis of the dilemma presented. The presenter may respond to the group's questions, but the group does not discuss the presenter's responses. At the end of the 10 minutes, the facilitator asks the presenter to restate his or her question for the group.
4. **Discussion of the dilemma (15 minutes)**  
The group members talk with one another about the dilemma presented. Possible questions to frame the discussion include the following:
  - What did we hear?
  - What didn't we hear that we think might be relevant?
  - What assumptions seem to be operating?
  - What questions does the dilemma raise for us?
  - What do we think about the dilemma?
  - What might we do or try if faced with a similar dilemma? What have we done in similar situations?
 Members of the group sometimes suggest solutions to the dilemma. Most often, however, they work to define the issues more thoroughly and objectively. The presenter doesn't speak during this discussion, but instead listens and takes notes.
5. **Presenter reflection (5 minutes)**  
The presenter reflects on what he or she has heard and on what he or she is now thinking, sharing with the group anything that particularly resonated with him or her during any part of the Consultancy.
6. **Debrief (5 minutes)**  
Everyone participates as the facilitator leads a brief conversation about the protocol.

in the probing questions. It takes practice. . . . Becoming good at probing questions is the role of participants." Other facilitators concur that the probing-question step can be the most challenging. One commented:

The trick is finding the right amount of cognitive dissonance to cause. After all, the point of the consultancy is to shake up how we see our own dilemmas—to cause cognitive dissonance—but not to cause so much that we shut down or get overwhelmed.

After asking the probing questions, the Consultancy group discusses the presenter's focusing question. The presenter, who may choose to push his or her chair back from the circle, listens as the group wrestles with the question he or she has raised. "You can almost see the presenter's world opening up," reports one teacher. "It helps the presenter realize, perhaps for the first time, that there were presuppositions or areas that [he or] she never thought about before."

### The Consultancy in Action

A school in Massachusetts for Grades 7–12, whose principal is an experienced facilitator of "critical friends groups," uses the Consultancy when a teacher has a burning question or dilemma. The critical-friends groups, teams of a dozen teachers of diverse grades and subjects, meet monthly to discuss issues of teaching and learning in their school. Although the meetings are scheduled a year in advance, the teachers do not sign up in advance to present their cases. Instead, the critical-friends-group facilitators visit each class during the month to find out which teachers might have a burning question for the group. The facilitators also weed out questions that are inappropriate for the Consultancy.

One month a new teacher formulated a question. He wondered how effort was factored into the assessment equation in a school that focused on written assessments. When it came to effort, he thought—echoing the Supreme Court justice's infamous remark about pornography—"teachers know it when they see it." He knew he was including his interpretation of the child's effort in his evaluation—even though it was not on the rubric he shared with his students. He was concerned that he was assessing effort—how hard his students were working—without really telling them. Through this first step of the Consultancy, a clear dilemma emerged: "What does effort look like?" The facilitator reminded the group members that their job was not to solve the presenter's problem; rather, it was to open up the presenter's thinking. In doing so, they themselves would doubtless come away "knowing something new."

After an initial discussion of the question, the group members decided to postpone the remainder of the Consultancy until they could gather more data. They visited the teacher's class and wrote down what they considered to be student effort. After gathering evidence on the question, the group reconvened to share notes. The new question was "How much does effort factor into an assessment when effort is not in the rubric?"

Next, the Consultancy group asked probing questions. These questions tested the assumptions of the presenter. It emerged, for example, that the presenter assumed that a student listening to an iPod during a writing assignment was automatically putting in less effort. The evidence from the classroom observations raised the possibility that listening to an iPod did not necessarily mean that a student was not trying.

As a result of listening to the Consultancy group's subsequent discussion, the presenting teacher realized that he had to include in the rubric more about the students' process. He had to be more open with the students about the role of effort in his assessment. As for the group, one teacher commented: "We each realized we made assumptions about what effort kids were making. We learned what effort looked like."

In the final step of debriefing the protocol, the facilitator allowed the presenting teacher to make a few general comments and then asked him questions that were more focused: "What question was most intriguing? What did you hear that made you uncomfortable? Where was the greatest dissonance?" The group members then discussed their experiences during the protocol, in particular, how it had supported or constrained their conversation. In thinking about the role of the Consultancy Protocol, the facilitator said:

The Consultancy is a very beautifully choreographed piece. If any one of the steps is done carelessly, it does not hold together. All of the steps are important. Trust each step. You never know which step will be critical to the presenter.

Over the years, facilitators and teacher groups in this school have become attuned to what the principal calls the "reciprocity of how the protocols talk to each other." Sometimes a Collaborative Assessment Conference leads to a dilemma, and then the Consultancy becomes the logical next protocol to use. As teachers become more at ease with the structure and nuances of the protocols, they begin using them as the need arises. At the beginning of the school year they use the Tuning Protocol to fine-tune units of curriculum with parents and students. Informally, during the year, teachers use the Tuning Protocol for lessons they are about to teach. They show

newly developed lesson plans to colleagues to get quick warm and cool feedback.

Like the other two protocols, the Consultancy provides a solid structure as an aid for looking together at student work, in this case by focusing the group's conversation on the presenter's dilemma about that work. The dilemmas and questions provide infinite variety within the structure. A seasoned facilitator has learned the importance of emphasizing to groups the purpose of the Consultancy:

The purpose of the structure is not to hammer out a solution to a problem. From the beginning, the mindset of problem solving has to be put on a ledge. What we're trying to do is help the presenter to get into the state of dialogue, the free flow of ideas, without judgment, which opens up the presenter's thinking. We help the presenter get out of her own way and examine her assumptions and in so doing, we learn something new.