

### Vertical Slice Protocol

Source: *Protocols for Professional Learning* by Lois Brown Easton, May 2009

#### Purpose

The vertical slice protocol can be used for a variety of purposes, depending entirely on what the group engaged in the slice wants to know. It can be used to help educators understand students' perceptions of the schools, some aspects of a problem or issue, how rigorous classroom work is, how interdisciplinary curriculum functions, and so forth.

#### Time allotted

Typically 1-2 hours for the planning meeting and 3-4 hours for analysis.

#### Group format

The protocol needs one facilitator, with understanding of and experience with the protocol, and any number of participants. Large groups, 20 or more, work better if broken into smaller groups of 10 or so, but the group can be a single grade level, subject area teachers, or an entire school staff. If groups are broken up it is important for them to consolidate their learning.

#### Facilitation tips

- This protocol works best if one person, preferably someone who is familiar with the protocol, acts as the facilitator. This person will not be part of a group that discusses the question(s).
- The facilitator should begin the session by restating the importance of the trust and respect that this protocol requires. Discussions and feedback that take place in the session are professional conversations between the participants and the teacher seeking feedback.
- The facilitator should also explain that the protocol will be implemented with fidelity to the process and the constructive spirit of the process. The facilitator may ask participants to reword or withdraw comments that are evaluative or judgmental.
- The protocol follows the following steps:
  - Introduction (protocol goals, guidelines and schedule): 5 – 10 minutes
  - Part 1: Planning Meeting (involves either the entire group that will be participating in analysis or a representative group): 120 minutes
    - Step 1: Determining the purpose of the slice: 15 minutes
    - Step 2: Determining a Guiding Question Related to the Purpose of the Slice: 15 minutes
    - Step 3: Determining how student work is to be obtained: 15 minutes
    - Step 4: Identifying other aspects of the work to be collected: 15 minutes
    - Step 5: Deciding on the duration of the slice: 15 minutes
    - Step 6: Attending to the logistics of the collection process: 15 minutes
    - Step 7: Determining how the analysis will be conducted (will participants scan all the material and then focus on representative pieces? Will group be large or small?): 15 minutes

- Step 8: Determining questions to ask during the protocol: 15 minutes
- Part 2: Analysis: 130 minutes
  - Step 1: Preparation (the facilitator establishes norms, facilitates introductions, and explains the process): 15 minutes
  - Step 2: Examining the work (participants examine the work and take notes in silence. Small groups may examine different blocks of evidence in order to cover all the work presented): 50 minutes
  - Discussion: 90 minutes
  - Framing answers (the whole group works together to frame some answers to the guiding question and to questions designed during the planning process): 55 minutes
  - Debriefing (open discussion of the experiences of the group): 15 minutes