

Opportunities Protocol Number 1 (Tasks)

The purpose of this conversation is to gain a deeper understanding of the kinds of thinking opportunities provide for our students in the assignments and tasks we give them. Sometimes we are so close to the content and lessons we teach that we might not always be aware of the opportunities they afford. Conversely, we may at times over-estimate the thinking involved in our assignments. Seeing our plans through others eyes can be illuminating in both of these respects. The protocol can be done in multiple rounds depending on the time and the size of the group

1. Identifying Opportunities for Thinking (done in advance)

Participants select an assignment/lesson/activity that they feel engages students in doing the kinds of thinking they, as teachers, most value and wish to encourage.

2. Presentation of the Opportunity (2-3 minutes)

- A member of the group briefly describes the opportunity he/she identified, using the same language and introduction given to students to the extent possible. The presenter specifically *REFRAINS* from naming the kinds of thinking he/she feels the assignment encourages.
- Clarifying Questions. Other members of the group ask clarifying questions to make sure they understand the assignment/task, that is, what students were asked to do.

3. Discussion and Analysis of the Opportunity (12-13 minutes)

Presenting teacher actively listens to the conversation and takes notes on the group's observations but does not participate in the conversation. However, if new questions of clarification arise, the teacher can respond to these *briefly* but should be careful to avoid interpreting the task for the group in a way that curtails their discussion/analysis. The following questions can be useful in analyzing the thinking opportunity, though others might arise as well.

- What kinds of thinking seem central here?
- What kinds of thinking are ancillary or secondary to the task?
- Can students be successful with the task and still not engage with that thinking?
- Do students need to spot the occasion for thinking or is it built in?
- How are/might students be supported and pushed in their thinking?
- What in students' completion of this task/assignment would tell us that students are developing as thinkers as opposed to just completing the assignment?
- How might the task be "bumped up" to further encourage thinking? Where might it go next?

4. Presenting Teacher Responds (5 minutes)

The presenting teacher speaks about what he or she found interesting and revealing about the discussion. There is no need to defend the work as the process is meant to provide the teacher with "what others see." However, If there were specific aspects of analysis that the presenting teacher felt were unexpected or unclear, he or she can ask for additional background on those issues by asking, "Can you tell me more about why you felt...?"

5. Take Aways & Questions Forward (3 minutes)

Each member of the groups states what they take away from the analysis of this particular opportunity that might be applicable to their own teaching situation. It might be an aspect of task design that one wants to try and incorporate, a condition that one wants to try and replicate, a question about supporting students' thinking one wants to think more about, etc.