Instructional Leadership Resources:
The Final Word Protocol

**Purpose:** The purpose of this discussion format is to give each person in the group an opportunity to have her/his ideas, understandings, and perspective enhanced by hearing from others. With this format, group members explore an article, clarify their thinking, and have their assumptions and beliefs questioned in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

**Intended Audience:** All members of a learning community.

**Time Needed:** 40–50 minutes.

**Materials:** Selected texts, chart paper, markers, tape or push pins to post chart paper if necessary.

**Review of Key Concepts:** The Final Word is designed to engage members of a group in collaborative inquiry and analysis of selected texts that have been read prior to the session. Participants are each assigned a text. Each participant should read their assigned text and highlight or underline the three sentences or text passages that are most important to them.

**DIRECTIONS FOR FACILITATING THE FINAL WORD**

*Note: If the learning community has more than seven members participating in this protocol, form small groups of three to five members and include a cycle of reporting to the large group at the end of each small group activity.*

1. Arrange chairs in a circle and identify a time-keeper for each small group.

2. Each person needs to have her/his “most” significant ideas from the text underlined or highlighted in the article.

3. The first person begins by reading one of his or her “most significant ideas” from the article. Have this person refer to where the quote is in the text (one thought or quote only). Then, in less than three minutes, this person describes why that quote struck her/him. For example, why does s/he agree/disagree with the quote, what questions does s/he have about that quote, and what issues does it raise for her/him, what does s/he now wonder about in relation to that quote?

4. Continuing around the circle each person responds to that quote and what the presenter said, in less than a minute. The purpose of the response is
   - to expand on the presenter’s thinking about the quote and the issues raised for her/him by the quote,
   - to provide a different look at the quote,
   - to clarify the presenter’s thinking about the quote, and/or
   - to question the presenter’s assumptions about the quote and the issues raised (although at this time there is no response from the presenter).

5. After going around the circle with each person having responded for less than one minute, the person that began has the “final word.” In no more than one minute, the presenter responds to what has been said. Now what is s/he thinking? What is her/his reaction to what s/he has heard?

6. The next person in the circle then begins by sharing one of her/his highlighted ideas (different from the first). Proceed around the circle, responding to this next presenter’s quote in the same way as was done for the first presenter. This process continues until each person has had a round with one of her/his ideas.

7. For each round, allow about eight minutes (circles of four participants: presenter three minutes, response one minute for four people, final word for presenter one minute). The role of the facilitator is to keep the process moving, keep it clear and directed to the article, and keep time so everyone gets an opportunity for a round. Total time is about 32 minutes for groups of four (40 minutes for a group of five, 48 minutes for a group of six). End by debriefing the process in the small groups.

Adapted from the National School Reform Faculty www.nsrfaremony.org.

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