

Consultancy Protocol

Source: Developed by Faith Dunne, Paula Evans, and Gene Thompson-Grove as part of their work at the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute of School Reform

Purpose

The structure of this protocol helps presenters think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma. It has two main purposes, to develop participants' capacity to see and describe the dilemma that are the essential material of their work, and to help each other understand and deal with them.

Time allotted

About 60 minutes depending on the dilemma being presented.

Group format

The protocol needs one facilitator, with understanding of and experience with the protocol, one teacher seeking feedback on dilemma (an issue that raises questions, an idea that seems to have conceptual gaps, or something about process or product that you just can't figure out), and three or more colleagues prepared to offer constructive feedback.

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
 - Teacher presents their reflection of their dilemma (context for work, focusing question, group is silent): 10 minutes
 - Clarifying questions (questions about missing context, using who, what, where, when, and how, not why): 5 minutes
 - Probing questions ('why' and open-ended questions are asked, avoid suggestions and recommendations disguised as questions.) The group (aka the consultants) talk about the presenter in the third person, as if they are not there, this gives the presenter the opportunity to listen and take notes without having to respond to the group in any way, and keeps defensiveness at a minimum: 10 minutes
 - The presenter responds to the group's conversation (not a blow by blow response, but what were the most significant comments, ideas and questions she/he heard, and also share any new thoughts or questions that arose whilst listening to the group): 10 minutes

- Debrief (open discussion of the experiences of the group): 10 minutes
- Thank the presenting teacher