

Microlab Protocol

Source: adapted from the National School Reform Faculty, Harmony Education Center; and Dr. Tina Blythe, Project Zero

Purpose

To address a specific question, or a sequence of questions in a structured format with small groups, using active listening skills.

Time allotted

About 8 minutes per question — this works best with a series of no more than three questions.

Group format

Groups of three people, led by a facilitator.

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 first works with the whole group to agree the question (or questions) that will be discussed. The quality of the questions matter.
- Each person will have one minute to respond to the question when it's their turn. The actual time stated may be 65 seconds, to allow a few seconds for transition from directions to activity. The facilitator keeps time.
- While first the person is speaking, the other two in the group simply listen.
- When the time is up, everyone in the group of three reflects silently for 15 seconds. Members of the group may record notes during the reflection time.
- The cycle is repeated two more times, allowing each person a minute to speak. The facilitator tells the groups when to switch speakers. Explain that if the person is done speaking before time is up, the three people should sit in silence, using the time to reflect.
- When everyone has had a chance to speak, the facilitator explains that the group will have five minutes to discuss the question together. The purpose of this time is to explore the ideas expressed in the one-minute responses, not to give any member of the group an opportunity to expand on their initial responses.
- Following the small group discussion, a plenary discussion is used to debrief and share important points from the small group discussions.