

Consultancy Protocol

*Adapted from the School Reform Initiative

Purpose

The structure of the Consultancy helps presenters think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma. The Consultancy protocol has 2 main purposes – to develop participants’ capacity to see and describe the dilemmas that are the essential material of their work, and to help each other understand and deal with them.

Process

In pairs (Total time: 30 minutes)

- Quick introductions (1 min)

- Presenter: (3 min) - Share your dilemma.
 - The presenter gives an overview of the dilemma. The framing of this question, as well as the quality of the presenter’s reflection on the dilemma being discussed, are key features of this protocol. The focus of the group’s conversation is on the dilemma.

- Consultancy Partner: (2 min) - Clarifying questions
 - Clarifying questions are for the person asking them. They ask the presenter “who, what, where, when, and how.” These are not “why” questions. They can be answered quickly and succinctly, often with a phrase or 2. The presenter has ready answers to clarifying questions.
 - Examples of clarifying question:
 - How much time does the project take?
 - How were the students grouped?
 - What resources did the students have available for this project?

- Consultancy Partner: (3 min) - Probing Questions
 - Probing questions are for the person answering them. They ask the presenter “why” (among other things), and are open-ended. They take longer to answer, and often require deep thought on the part of the presenter before they speak. Remind group members to avoid suggestions and recommendations disguised as questions.
 - Possible probing question stems:
 - Why do you think this is the case?
 - What would have to change in order for...?
 - What do you feel is right?
 - What’s another way you might...?
 - How is....different from...?
 - What sort of an impact do you think...?
 - When have you experienced something like this before? What does this remind you of?
 - How did you decide/determine/conclude...?
 - What is your hunch about...?
 - What was your intention when...?
 - What do you assume to be true about?
 - What is the connection between....and...?
 - What if the opposite were true? Then what?
 - How might your assumptions about....have influenced how you are thinking about...?

- What surprises you about...? Why are you surprised?
- What is the best thing that could happen?
- What are you most afraid will happen?
- What do you need to ask to better understand?
- How do you feel when...? What might this tell you about...?
- What is the one thing you won't compromise?
- What criteria do you use...?
- Do you think the problem is X, Y, or something else?
- What evidence exists?
- If you were X, how would you see this situation?
- If time, money was not an issue...?

- Open discussion (5 min)

Switch roles and repeat process.