

DATA * WISE

A Step-by-Step Guide
to Using Assessment
Results to Improve
Teaching and Learning

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PROTOCOL 2: THE QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE

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Purpose

- * To help a group of people fully explore an important issue before jumping in to a discussion of what they are going to do about it.
- * To provide a forum in which all voices can be heard, thus increasing the number of ideas generated and leveling the power dynamic.

Notes

- * This protocol takes about 45 minutes to complete; adapt suggested times as needed.
- * Break group into teams of five to eight people each.
- * Pass out a chart pad, tape, and two markers to each group.
- * During protocol, circulate around the room and remind people to follow the “two rules” (see Step 2 below).

Steps

1. 2 min: Identify issue. Write the issue you would like the groups to address on chart paper at the front of the room. Issues can be phrased as questions or statements and can be quite general, such as “Using data to improve instruction,” or more specific, such as “Why don’t more of our tenth graders score in the top proficiency levels of our state exam?”
2. 5-10 min: Brainstorm. Ask groups to brainstorm questions about this issue and to write these questions on their chart paper. Tell people that they have to follow two rules:
 - No. 1: Phrase all responses as questions, not statements.
 - No. 2: Write questions exactly as stated—no editing questions.
3. 3 min: Examine. Ask groups to look at their brainstormed list, classifying questions as close-ended and open-ended. Allow groups to change the form of any questions if they would like.
4. 5 min: Prioritize. Ask groups to choose the three questions that they think are most important, and then choose the most important of these prioritized questions.
5. 5-8 min: Branch off. Ask groups to write the most important question at the top of a new piece of paper and then brainstorm new questions about it, again following the two rules described above.
6. 3-5 min: Prioritize again. Ask groups to choose the three most important questions.
7. 5 min: Share. Go around the room and ask each group to state their prioritized questions.
8. 10 min: Debrief. Ask people what they noticed in doing this exercise. Key points that may come up include the way this process keeps a group from jumping to solutions, allows many voices to be heard, and allows for deep consideration of an issue.

PROTOCOL 3: THE AFFINITY PROTOCOL¹

Purpose

- * To help a group of people explore the causes of a problem that they have identified.
- * To allow all individuals to participate anonymously in generating hypothesized causes.

Notes

- * This protocol takes about 45 minutes to complete; adapt suggested times as needed.
- * Break group into teams of four to seven people each.
- * Pass out chart paper, small adhesive notes (at least 5 per person), and markers to each team.
- * This protocol works best if the group has decided what problem they want to dig into before starting the exercise.

Steps

1. 1 min: Ask teams to write the problem to be explored at the top of a piece of chart paper.
2. 5-10 min: Ask individuals to work independently to brainstorm hunches and hypotheses about what might be the causes of the problem. Individuals write each of their ideas on separate adhesive notes.
3. 10 min: Ask individuals to place their adhesive notes randomly on their chart paper. Tell the teams to make a section on the chart paper for items over which they have no control. Then tell the teams to sort the remaining items into classifications, using minimal discussion. It is okay for some notes to stand alone. If there is an idea that goes under more than one grouping, participants can duplicate the idea on a separate adhesive note and include it in two categories. If the item is something over which they have no control, move it to that section of the chart paper.
4. 5 min: Tell teams to create a header for each category and write it on the chart paper. Large categories can be divided into subcategories with subheadings.
5. 5-10 min: Ask teams to choose their top three (or one or two, depending on your purpose for this exercise) causes for the problem, remembering that the best causes to choose are:
 - * Things they have control over
 - * Things they believe that, if fixed, would have the biggest impact in fixing the problem
6. 5-10 min: If you have more than one team, all teams share their top causes. Ask for a few comments about what people notice. Ask about whether there is any pattern in where these choices came from.