Empathy Interview Guide

Goal: To gain a deeper, **first hand** understanding of a user's experience of the issue you are working to improve. Given the nature of complex systems, it is difficult to see beyond our own unique vantage point within the system. When another person opens a window into his/her experience, they are providing us with a valuable gift.

Use: Empathy interviews are a tool that can be used throughout the improvement journey, from providing insight into a problem of practice to determining the effectiveness of a change idea.

NORMS for Empathy Interviews:

- Be curious and take a learning stance.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Be fully present, without distractions.
- Don't challenge, correct, or interrupt.
- Express gratitude.

Steps for Interviewing:

1. ***Identify the issue to investigate:*** What is it you want to understand better?
2. ***Identify who you want to interview:*** Which students/teachers/stakeholders might be helpful to interview about their experiences with your problem/issue, and the factors contributing to it?
3. ***Identify your interviewers:*** Which members of your improvement team will conduct the interviews. If possible, it is a best practice to interview in pairs, with one person dedicated to note taking.
4. ***Determine questions to ask*:** Review the sample empathy interview questions below. Adapt these or generate questions of your own.

   Sample Questions

   - *Tell me about a time when you felt successful with X…*
     - *How did it feel?*
     - *Why do you think you were successful?*
       - *What did you do?*
       - *What did others do? (your teacher, your classmates, your family, your friends)*
   - *Tell me about a time when X was hard…*
     - *Why was it hard?*
     - *How did it feel?*
     - *What did you do?*
     - *What do you wish would have happened?*
     - *What would have helped?*
   - *What do you like the most/least about X? Why?*
   - *What do think are the biggest reasons for why X happens/doesn't happen? What makes you think that?*
   - *What advice would you give another student/person about X?*
   - *What do you wish others knew about X?*
   - *Draw me a picture of what you think about when you hear X… (then "Tell me about what you drew.")*

5. ***Select & organize questions to ask*:** Select and organize your top 4-5 questions to help guide the conversation. Be flexible with questioning, and be prepared to ask follow up prompts such as:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- Why do you think that is? / what makes you think that?

6. ***Plan*:** Develop a plan for who specifically you will interview, when you will interview them, and how you will conduct the interview. If you are doing the interview with a partner, decide who will interview and who will take notes.

Who: Who will be interviewed	**When**: What date(s)? During class? During lunch? Before or after school?	**How**: with a partner? recorded or taking notes?

7. ***Conduct the Interview:*** Consider the following good practices for interviewing.
   - **Direct the conversation, but don't "lead the witness." Avoid putting words in their mouths**
   - **Ask "why?"** Even when you think you know the answer, ask people why they do or say things. Their answers will sometimes surprise you. A conversation started from one question should continue on as long as it needs to.
   - **Encourage stories.** Prompt users to share specific experiences rather than generalizations. When people tell stories, they reveal how they think about the world. Avoid binary yes/no questions in favor of questions that draw out experiences.
   - **Pay attention to nonverbal clues.** Be aware of body language and emotions.
   - **Don't be afraid of silence.** Even if they pause before answering, don't help by suggesting an answer. This can unintentionally get people to say things that agree with your expectations.
   - **Be prepared to capture data.** Whenever possible, interview in pairs. If this is not possible, bring a recording device – it is very difficult to properly engage a user and take detailed notes at the same time. Be sure to tell your user that the recording will not be shared and is only for your own purposes to make sure you don't miss any details.

8. ***Reflect*:** If you conducted the interview with a partner, be sure to reflect together.
   - *Content*:
     - What did we **hear**?
     - What are the themes and trends we have noticed in what we heard?
     - What are some compelling outlier statements to consider?
     - What are we learning about the **issue** we are investigating?
   - *Process*: How well did we follow the **norms** for empathy interviews? Were there **questions that were particularly fruitful?** Are there **questions we wish we would have asked**?