

Consultancy Protocol for Looking at Student Work

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.

Time: Approximately 40 minutes

Roles:

- Presenter (whose work or dilemma is being discussed by the group)
- Facilitator (who sometimes participates, depending on the size of the group)
- Consultants (people who listen and discuss the dilemma in order to offer ideas, questions and new perspectives)

Process

1. The presenter gives an overview of the student work, and frames a question for the consultancy group to consider. (5 minutes)
2. The consultancy group asks clarifying questions of the presenter — that is, questions that have brief, factual answers. (5 minutes)
3. The group reviews the student work with the teachers’ focus question in mind
3. The group asks probing questions of the presenter (See Pocket Guide to Probing Questions on the back of this page). These questions should help the presenter clarify and expand her/his thinking about the dilemma. The presenter responds to the group’s questions, although sometimes a probing question might ask the presenter to see the dilemma in such a novel way that the response is simply, “I never thought about it that way.” **There is no discussion by the consultancy group of the presenter’s responses.** At the end of the 10 minutes, the facilitator asks the presenter to re-state her/his question for the group. (10 minutes)
4. The group talks with each other about the dilemma/student work presented. In this step, the group works to define the issues more thoroughly and objectively. The presenter doesn’t speak, but listens in and takes notes. The group talks about the presenter in the third person. **The facilitator’s job in this step is to help the group thoroughly analyze the dilemma, resisting the temptation to “solve” the problem.** Remember that it is the group’s job to offer an analysis of the dilemma presented, focused by the framing questions. It is not necessary to solve the dilemma or to offer a definitive answer. This protocol asks the consultants to talk about the presenter in the third person, almost as if she/he is not there. As awkward as this may feel at first, it gives the presenter an opportunity to listen and take notes, without having to respond. Some presenters like to pull their chairs back from the group a bit. (10 minutes)
5. The presenter reflects on what she/he heard and on what she/he is now thinking, sharing with the group anything that particularly resonated for him or her during any part of the Consultancy. (5 minutes)
6. The facilitator leads a brief conversation about the group’s use of the Consultancy process. How did

Pocket Guide to Probing Questions

it go? Did everyone feel heard? Was it helpful to the presenter? (5 min)

PROBING (or POWERFUL, OPEN) QUESTIONS are intended to help the presenter think more deeply about the issue at hand. If a probing question doesn't have that effect, it is either a clarifying question or a recommendation with an upward inflection at the end. If you find yourself asking "Don't you think you should ...?" or "What would happen if ...?" you've gone beyond a probing question to giving advice. The presenter often doesn't have a ready answer to a genuine probing question.

Possible probing question stems:

- 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 done/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?Why do you think this is the case?
-
- 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....?

Pocket Guide to Probing Questions

- If you were X, how would you see this situation?
- If time, money were not an issue...?