Research Workshop Series
Session 3: Focus Groups

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Workshop Series

2017

September 28  Data, Research, and Evidence
October 24    Survey Development and Administration
November 15   Focus Groups

2018

January 17    Observations and Rubric Development
March 8       Data Analysis
April 24      Communicating Research Findings
1. Presentation: Planning for focus groups
2. Activity: Write focus group protocol
3. Presentation: Moderating focus groups
4. Activity: Mock focus groups
5. Presentation: Analyzing focus group results
6. Session close and evaluation
Today’s goals

1. Discuss strategies for planning a focus group project.
2. Practice writing protocols and conducting a focus group session.
3. Learn about techniques for analyzing focus group results.
Planning focus groups
Focus groups

Participant interaction can provide a rich description of views and experiences.
Potential focus group goals

1. Help formulate and pretest survey items.

2. Explore quantitative survey findings.

3. Use as a stand-alone data collection method.
Gain consensus on the specific goals of the focus groups.
Define research goals

- How will the results will be used?
- What actions or decisions will the results of the study inform?
- What do you want to learn from the focus group study?
Decide number of groups and participants

Each focus group typically has 5–10 members.
Determine important subgroups

- Teachers
  - T T T T T T T T T T T T T

- Principals
  - P P P P P P P P P P P P P

- Superintendents
  - S S S S S S S S S S S S S
Recruiting focus group members
Alternative focus group modes
Prepare a moderator guide

A moderator guide includes an introductory script and lists questions to ask the group.
### Focus group questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Helps participants get acquainted and feel connected</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introductory</td>
<td>Begins discussion of topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Moves smoothly into key questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key</td>
<td>Obtains insight into areas of central concern to the study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ending</td>
<td>Helps researchers determine where to place emphasis and brings closure to the discussion</td>
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Scripted questions should be:

- Conversational
- Simple
- Clear
- Open-ended
Don’t ask “why” questions. Instead, ask for more information.

Can you describe more details about _____?

Are there other instances where that happened?

What do you mean by that?

And how did that make you feel?
Activity 1: Write a focus group protocol
Moderating focus groups
Moderating focus groups

Let the conversation flow while keeping it on track.
Moderators

• Stay neutral
• Engender trust
• Listen carefully
• Probe for clarity
• Demonstrate respect for all
Taking notes
Activity 2: Mock focus groups
Analyzing focus group results
Recording groups
Analysis

The “data” are the answers and remarks made by participants as well as the notes about nonverbal information from group members.

A spreadsheet can be used to record and link key comments to moderator questions and group identification. Comments can be coded for primary themes.
Sharing results
Additional resources
Much of the information in this session comes directly from these resources.

