



# Leadership and Educator Effectiveness

## A Collaborative Inquiry Protocol

### Purpose of the Collaborative Inquiry Protocol

West Wind Education Policy Inc. originally developed this Collaborative Inquiry Protocol to guide our consultations on racial equity in K–12 public education. We have since customized the protocol for specific audiences, including those working on educator effectiveness—here—and those using implementation science to support their work.

While the instrument is structured around a challenge presented by an individual participant, it is designed to help all participants involved in a consultation learn about themselves so they may consider new and different ways of exercising leadership. This includes helping to reveal the assumptions, values, and beliefs the presenter and the group bring to the framing of the challenge, as well as the stories that are privileged by the participant’s choice of relevant information and the group’s discussion while working the challenge.

This protocol was built upon the theoretical foundations of systems thinking (Wheatley, 1999), learning organizations in education (Senge, Cambron McCabe, et al., 2000), Adaptive Leadership™ (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), implementation science (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005), and direct action organizing (Midwest Academy, 2008). The format for the Collaborative Inquiry Protocol was originally adapted from the Critical Friends Protocol developed by the Annenberg Institute, and informed by the Consultancy Protocol of the National School Reform Faculty and the Adaptive Leadership case consultation process developed by Cambridge Leadership Associates.

### Preparing to Use the Collaborative Inquiry Protocol

The Collaborative Inquiry Protocol is to be used by groups as one way to help individuals—and the group as a whole—better understand systems change in education and to develop new ideas for how to exercise leadership. The group should be made up of 6–8 people.

At least one person should prepare to **present a challenge she/he currently** faces by thinking about something **that has not yet been resolved**. As the presenter prepares the case, it is helpful to think about the caveats offered in the National School Reform Faculty’s Consultancy Protocol Overview:

We have found that Consultancies don’t go well when people bring dilemmas that they are well on the way to figuring out themselves, or when they bring a dilemma that involves only getting

other people to change. To get the most out of this experience, bring something that is still puzzling you about your practice. It is riskier to do, but we guarantee that you will learn more. (Thompson-Grove, 2004)

The more **specific** you can be in your presentation, the better. You should be prepared to give a **contextual description** in as much detail as you feel is necessary to help the consulting group understand you and your leadership challenge.

You should be prepared to describe **how you fit** into the context. Who have you talked to? What have you done? What have you *not* done? What is off the table? How does the challenge relate to your values and beliefs?

You should end with a **specific question or statement that your group can attend to**. Once you formulate your question or statement, ask yourself why this is a challenge for you five times. This should help you to refine or refocus your question or statement. You might also consider sharing with the group what it is about this particular challenge that you are unprepared to resolve on your own.

You may consider **writing** your challenge down as part of your own process of inquiry.

### **Using the Collaborative Inquiry Protocol**

This Protocol provides a construct with **specific roles, rules, and time boundaries**. The construct is designed for several purposes: to create a space for brainstorming and creative inquiry; to help individuals and groups consider alternative interpretations of what is happening in a situation; and to help individuals and groups learn. The process of inquiry will be enriched by varied interpretations of the information presented, articulation of different stories that people in the case might be telling themselves or one another, and analyses of power, authority, mental models, and tensions.

There are several roles for participants in the consultations. In addition to the person presenting a challenge, the group should have a **facilitator** and **someone on the balcony**. The facilitator moves the group through the protocol, keeping time and helping the group to address the tasks at hand. The balcony observer is not consulting to the presenter, but rather pays attention to the consultation group, coaching them to stay on task, noting potentially fruitful lines of inquiry, and indicating when the group is avoiding something.

## **References:**

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## Consulting on a Problem of Practice

### A Collaborative Inquiry Protocol<sup>1</sup>

**Purpose:** This consultation protocol is designed to help a participant work on a problem of practice they are in the midst of and have not yet resolved.

#### Set-Up and Facilitator Overview (4 minutes)

- Explain/review the process and roles
- Select a time-keeper
- Select a note-taker
- Select the balcony observer

#### Presenter Overview (5 minutes)

- Share a problem of practice
- *Provide as much background context as is necessary for the group to understand your problem, include solutions you have already considered and rejected or tried*
- Close by clearly stating the problem or by posing a question to the group

#### Group Questions to Presenter (5 minutes)

- Group members ask clarifying questions
- *This is not a time to give advice or get into the discussion*
- Sample questions:
  - What makes you think this is a problem? What evidence do you have that indicate this is a problem?
  - What have you done to work on the problem? What have you NOT done?
  - Are you stuck on anything in particular? If so, what about the problem is “sticky”?
  - Have you been here before? If so, what did you do?
  - Who will act on this problem?
- As a final step, the note-taker restates the problem or question to the presenter to confirm that the group works on the right problem

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on defining a Problem of Practice and for the complete protocol with references, see the webinar and related materials we shared to support the Educator Effectiveness Working Group at <https://sites.google.com/a/educationnorthwest.org/nwedeff/home>.

**Balcony (1 minute)**

- *Having been silent during the questioning, the balcony observer now offers quick observations about the group's process*
- Note what may be fertile for inquiry and what the presenter and the group may have missed

**Group Collaborative Inquiry (17 minutes)**

- *Presenter is silent and resists the urge to defend her/himself or correct any of the group's data or interpretations—remember, the group cannot possibly get it all right, but they might offer new ways of looking at the problem or thinking about solutions*
- Group explores the presenter's interpretation of what is happening in the problem and offers as many different interpretations of what is happening as they can imagine
- Sample discussion questions:
  - What hypotheses did the presenter share, or seem to hold, about why this is a problem? What might be some different hypotheses about why this is a problem?
  - What are different ways to think about the nature of the problem? How might the problem be re-defined?
  - What does the presenter value and how might that impact the way she/he is looking at the problem?
  - What assumptions might the presenter hold? How might the presenter test those assumptions?

**Balcony (1 minute)**

- *Balcony observer offers quick observations about the group's process*
- Balcony observer notes what, when, and how the group avoids talking about issues

**Where Might the Presenter Go from Here? (7 minutes)**

- Group provides ideas for the presenter on next steps; ideas should relate directly to insights from the inquiry process
- *Presenter remains silent*
- Sample discussion questions:
  - If the presenter's assumptions about the problem are incomplete, what solutions might that open up?
  - What additional evidence might the presenter gather about the problem?
  - How might the presenter build on work already underway to solve this problem?
  - What are some smart risks or small experiments the presenter might take in the next 30-90 days?
  - How might the presenter know if the solutions are working?

### **Presenter Response (3 minutes)**

- Presenter reflects on insights gained during the consultation
- *Presenter resists the urge to correct and defend—this is not a time to correct misunderstandings or be defensive, but rather to reflect on the ideas that were generated*
- Sample questions (for the presenter):
  - What were noteworthy comments, insights, or questions?
  - What ideas would you consider trying out?
  - In what ways might you refine your practice as a result of this experience?

### **Group Debrief (2 minutes)**

- Group discusses how the consultation went, with the balcony observer participating
- Sample questions:
  - What ideas or insights did the *consulting group* garner during the consultation?
  - What portions of the protocol did we struggle with? What might we do differently or better next time?
  - What questions do we have for the planners about the process?