Coaching for Change

Discussion Protocols for Equity-Minded Coaching

by Community College Research Initiatives

Purpose of the Tool:

Discussion protocols are processes that help groups achieve deep understanding through dialogue (Easton 2009). Protocols can provide structures for practitioners with different interests or perspectives to interact in ways that are productive and inclusive. To best support leadership and college teams, coaches should be aware of when and how to use discussion protocols to create opportunities to advance equity dialogue and engage in responsive coaching feedback. This tool includes discussion protocol resources as well as a protocol exercise to help in preparing coaches to support colleges in equity inquiry.

Why Discussion Protocols:

A well-designed protocol is more than just a thoughtful agenda or set of meeting questions. Protocols are designed to address the tensions members of an organization often experience when convening to discuss practice, problems, and solutions. Allen and Blythe (2004) describe these team tensions as talking and listening, discipline and play, safety and risk, as well as individual learning and group learning.

Protocols provide a structured process for discussion participants to follow. While protocols come in a variety of formats, their key characteristics include collectively agreed upon discussion roles, prompts or steps, and sometimes structured time. This structured process brings focus and consistency to the dialogue.

The use of discussion protocols in equity-focused discussions has the potential to honor multiple lived realities and diverse perspectives. Done well, collaborative environments that utilize protocols can provide a safe space for people to offer different interpretations of the issues and underlying assumptions. While the structure of discussion protocols may at first feel prescriptive or restrictive, a protocol is meant to be revised and adapted over time to meet the democratic needs and learning objectives of the group. Discussion protocols can provide much-needed structure to discussions that may feel uncomfortable or with topics that can create vulnerability or generate strong emotions.

Strategies for Coaches to Maximize Use of this Tool:

- Coaches should begin with a clear understanding of the equity-minded framework and its relationship to coaching. Please see the CCRI brief *Coaching for More Equitable Student Outcomes* (Bragg, Bauman, and Wetzstein 2019).

- Coaches may choose to use this tool independently to prepare for or to reflect on coaching conversations.

- Student Success Center leadership may choose to use this tool as an exercise to be completed with a team of coaches. Coaches can discuss among themselves when and how the discussion protocols may be of use in each unique coaching relationship.

- Coaches may choose to use this tool with college teams to understand discussion protocols and to explore approaches that best align with the teams' goals and contexts.

Validate, Clarify, Stretch, and Sustain
Discussion Protocol for Equity-Minded Coaching

Purpose: This exercise builds on competencies related to discussion protocols by encouraging coaches to consider the thinking and framing that comes with applying structured dialogue to equity. In this exercise, you will be considering how to apply the "Validate, Clarify, Stretch, and Sustain" discussion protocol when discussing equity challenges related to campus-wide reform initiatives, such as guided pathways.

Coaching Exercise for "Validate, Clarify, Stretch, and Sustain" Discussion Protocol

Instructions:

Context: You have asked the institutional leader or team you support to prepare to discuss one pressing equity challenge at your upcoming check-in. You have allocated 45 minutes for the discussion and your goal is to utilize the protocol framework to coach the team or individual toward a better understanding of their own assumptions and potentially a new or alternative perspective of the challenge.

1. Select one of the Equity Challenges from the list below to focus your responses on. Circle the challenge you have selected.
2. Review the definitions of the validate, clarify, and stretch categories as well as their associated example discussion prompts.
3. For each category draft a question or observation you might provide within this discussion protocol.

1. Select an Equity Challenge

Choose a current challenge on your campus or select one from the prompts below.

A. The leadership team has produced a number of strategy and implementation documents, but has not created shared definitions or understandings of key terms and concepts related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This lack of shared language has made cross-divisional communication confusing and sometimes challenging.

B. A number of faculty on the leadership team have raised concerns about the efficacy and efficiency of differentiated instruction based on race-conscious outcomes. Their concerns have created divides within the leadership team.

C. The leadership and equity team has grown in size to encompass diverse voices. With busy schedules and limited time for data discussion, the team is finding it difficult to meet regularly, make decisions, and accomplish short-term goals.

D. The institution has an active and dedicated equity team that exists in isolation from the rest of the initiative committees and teams. Lack of collaboration has limited equity dialogue and problem solving among other teams.

E. Describe your own challenge: _____

Student
Success Center
**Coaching
Program**

Student Success Center
NETWORK

JFF

CCRI

2. Review "Validate, Clarify, Stretch, and Sustain" Discussion Protocol

This protocol builds on principles of adult learning to establish reliable discussion points of mutual care, clarity, and consideration. The protocol has four phases of response and should typically begin with validation.

Validate Response:
Acknowledge planning, goals, and/or focus of the leadership team to address equity gaps.

Example Coaching Prompts:
- It is evident that the team...
- This challenge suggests progress in ...
- It is clear that you care about ...

Clarify Response:
Deepen understanding and surface confusion or incongruencies about equity actions, beliefs, and behaviors.

Example Coaching Prompts:
- Could you give me more information about ...?
- Let me make sure I understand...
- What strategies have you utilized to address ...?
- What evidence or data is informing this challenge?

Stretch Response:
Identify assumptions and norms that frame, define, or obfuscate equity issues.

Example Coaching Prompts:
- How might this challenge look different if ...?
- What does this challenge say about ...?
- How might a different perspective apply to ...?

Sustain Response:
Move practice forward and establish commitment to equity-minded outcomes.

Example Coaching Prompts:
- What does this challenge mean for future work related to ...?
- What lessons are we taking from this challenge?
- How are we capturing or documenting this challenge to inform our next steps?

3. Draft Coaching Responses

In the space below, draft a few "Validate, Clarify, Stretch, and Sustain" coaching responses as they apply to the equity challenge you have chosen. Keep in mind that your questions are an opportunity to demonstrate that you care about the work that has already been done, gather more information about what the college is doing, probe for alternative perspectives of the situation, and ultimately strengthen the college's commitment to equity action.

Reflective Questions for Coaches

1. How was the "Validate, Clarify, Stretch, and Sustain" protocol useful *as well as not useful* in thinking about responses to your selected equity challenge?
2. How might the consistency and structure associated with discussion protocols support equity-centered discussions?
3. When might a discussion protocol be useful for coaches? How might a coach introduce the use of protocols to a college?

Discussion Protocol Examples

Modified What, So What, Now What? Protocol | Network for College Success

Data Equity Walk Tool Kit | The Education Trust—West

Coffee Talk | School Reform Initiative

Equity-Centered Critical Friends Tuning Protocol | Adapted from San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools

Protocols Library (see Critical Friends example)| National School Reform Faculty®

Discussion Protocol Readings

1. Cheliotes, L., and M. Reilly. 2010. Coaching Conversations: Transforming Your School One Conversation at a Time. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
2. Easton, L. B. 2009. Protocols for Professional Learning. Alexandra, VA: ASCD. http://static1.squarespace.com/static/55560e1ae4b0cf3d98431253/t/5666742c0e4c1145da0f1f78/.

References

Allen, D., and T. Blythe. 2004. *The Facilitator's Book of Questions: Resources for Looking Together at Student and Teacher Work*. New York: Teachers College Press; Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Bensimon, E., and L. Malcom. 2012. *Confronting Equity Issues on Campus: Implementing the Equity Scorecard in Theory and Practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Bragg, D. D., K. Bauman, and L. Wetzstein. 2019. *Coaching for More Equitable Student Outcomes*. Seattle: Community College Research Initiatives, University of Washington.

Easton, L. B. 2009. Protocols for Professional Learning. Alexandra, VA: ASCD. http://static1.squarespace.com/static/55560e1ae4b0cf3d98431253/t/5666742c0e4c1145da0f1f78/.