

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE PROTOCOL: TEACHING DURING A PANDEMIC

Adapted from School Reform Initiative: See more at schoolreforminitiative.org

Preparing a dilemma for discussion

This protocol can be used with a small group of colleagues or adapted for use in a class discussion with students. Its purpose is to help individuals think more deeply about a concrete dilemma around teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to build collaboration and collective efficacy among the group. It is ideal for small groups that meet regularly so that the responsibility for sharing a dilemma can be rotated among group members over a series of meetings. For a more general peer consultancy protocol, visit the [CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL](#).

A dilemma is a puzzle: an issue that raises questions, an idea that is challenging to put into practice, or something about a process or relationship that you just can't figure out. When choosing a dilemma to discuss with a group, you'll want to share a question that will benefit from multiple perspectives and can reasonably be addressed through an individual's or group's collective action. Consider these questions when brainstorming dilemmas:

- Is it something that is bothering you enough that your thoughts regularly return to it?
- Is it something that is not already on its way to being resolved?
- Is it something that does not depend on getting other people to change - in other words, can you/your group affect the dilemma through your practices?
- Is it something that is important to you, and is it something you are willing to work on?

Once you select a dilemma to bring to the consultancy group, frame a focus question that gets to the heart of the matter, and prepare background information and context to share with the group.

Dilemma	Framing Question	Background Information
The longer we are teaching remotely, fewer of my students sign on for our virtual class meetings. This affects class morale, and also causes students to miss info about homework help and other support.	How can I keep up initially high rates of participation in class meetings without resorting to punitive consequences?	-Data on how participation in virtual class meetings has changed over time -Ways I've observed this affect morale -What I've tried so far to increase participation
I used to use class circles and group work all the time to build community and skills for collaboration. With the new distancing guidelines in place, I feel like the only safe way to do instruction with my 1st graders is teacher-directed instruction and independent work.	How can we adapt to allow students to learn "with" each other and build relationship skills while still observing school rules about staying 6 feet apart? How might this look if we have to shift back to distance learning?	-Example of a small-group-centric lesson that I had to adapt recently to comply with new rules -Describe my best pre-COVID instructional strategies and why they are not feasible/not going well under current circumstances
Students had different experiences during distance learning and are in different places academically. I am struggling to differentiate instruction.	How can I provide appropriately challenging instruction for all students without dividing them into groups that highlight and perpetuate social inequities in my classroom?	-Data that shows "where students are at" academically, disaggregated by subgroup -An upcoming lesson and the challenges I foresee in meeting everyone's needs



Facilitating the Protocol

Roles

- Presenter (whose dilemma is being discussed by the group)
- Facilitator (who poses questions below and helps drive the conversation and ensure equity of voice)
- Timekeeper (who keeps conversation flowing according to the minute guidelines below, and provides helpful reminders to participants on timing)
- Consultants: Outside perspective is critical to the effectiveness of this protocol; therefore, some of the participants in the group should be people who do not share the presenter's specific dilemma at that time.

Process (35 minutes total)

1. The presenter gives an overview of the issue and frames a question for the group to consider. **(5 minutes)**
2. The group asks clarifying questions of the presenter — that is, questions that have brief, factual answers. **(5 minutes)**

Examples of clarifying questions:

- Did I understand you when you said...?
- How much time...?
- What was the last thing that happened?
- Did you already...?
- What materials did you use?
- What happened when...?

3. The group asks probing questions of the presenter. These open-ended questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand her/his thinking about the dilemma presented to the group. The goal is for the presenter to learn more about the question she/he framed and to do some analysis of the issue presented. 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."

The group does not discuss or respond to the presenter's responses, and they do not offer suggestions or attempt to lead the presenter to a conclusion. At the end of the 10 minutes, the facilitator asks the presenter to re-state her/his question for the group. **(10 minutes)**

Examples of probing questions:

- Why do you think this is the case?
- What would have to change in order for...?
- If you were X, how would you see this situation?
- How did you decide/determine/conclude...?
- If time and money weren't an issue...?
- What was your intention when...?
- What do you think is the root cause of...?
- What's the connection between... and ...?
- What is the best thing that could happen?

4. The presenter steps back and the **group talks** about the issue presented. In this step, the group works to define the issues more thoroughly and objectively. The goal is not to definitively solve the dilemma, but rather to analyze it and bring in new perspectives to help the presenter reach a resolution. If a group member suggests an action the presenter might take, it should be framed as an "open suggestion," and should be made only after the group has thoroughly analyzed the dilemma. The presenter doesn't speak during this discussion but listens in and takes notes. The group talks about the presenter in the third person. **(13 minutes)**

Examples of questions the facilitator can ask to frame the discussion:

- What did we hear?
- What didn't we hear that might be relevant?
- What assumptions seem to be operating?
- What questions does the dilemma raise for us?
- What do we think about the issue?
- What might we do or try if faced with a similar issue?
- What have we done in similar situations?

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 protocol. **(2 minutes)**

