



PROBLEM OF PRACTICE PROTOCOL

This protocol provides the basic structure for our learning community discussion. Also known as a “consultancy protocol,” it enables a group of practitioners to work together to address the difficult dilemmas they face in their work. Problem of Practice protocols are commonly used in schools; this protocol is adapted from one created by the School Reform Initiative (<http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/consultancy.pdf>).

WHAT IS A PROBLEM OF PRACTICE?

A problem of practice is a dilemma that you face in your work that you cannot easily resolve. The dilemmas that work well in this context are ones that can be adequately described in 5 minutes or less, but are sufficiently complex to generate meaningful conversation.

HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

The first step in a problem of practice session is to assemble groups of 3-6 participants, and to select roles. Roles include:

- **Presenter:** Presents a dilemma for the group to consider
- **Facilitator:** Keeps time, and keeps the process on track; may also consult depending on group size
- **Consultants:** Ask questions of the presenter, and make suggestions

The process (23-45 minutes) proceeds as follows:

1. The **presenter** provides an overview of the dilemma they are facing. The presentation should include a brief summary of the dilemma, and a framing question for the group (**2-5 Minutes**).
2. The **consultancy group** asks *clarifying* questions of the presenter. These should be questions that can be answered briefly and factually (**2-5 minutes**).
3. The **consultancy group** asks *probing* questions of the presenter. These questions should be more in-depth, and should help the presenter to think differently about their dilemma. Consultants should avoid making suggestions at this stage (**5-10 Minutes**).
4. The group discusses the dilemma. At this stage, group members more fully analyze the dilemma, and can make suggestions to the presenter on dealing with the dilemma (**10-15 Minutes**).
5. The **presenter** summarizes what they heard and how their thinking has evolved through the consultancy process (**2-5 Minutes**)
6. The **facilitator** leads a brief conversation that allows the group to reflect on the consultancy process (**2-5 Minutes**).