

# Protocols in Practice

by Dave Lehman, Interim Director  
National School Reform Faculty



The following are three variations on doing “Consultancies” which I have been using with teachers, principals, school change coaches, those currently in a CFG, and/or those yet to be in a CFG:

## **(1) Partners in a Fish Bowl**

After having assigned the reading of the “Consultancy” protocol and reviewing the process for developing framing or focusing questions, I typically introduce the Consultancy protocol by inviting a volunteer to share a dilemma or concern for the whole group to engage in as a “practice run” in how to use the protocol. With a group of more than ten I do this in a modified “Fish Bowl.” For example, with a group of fifteen, I have seven of the participants sit in a circle with the volunteer presenter, and the other seven sit behind the initial seven in the inner circle of the Fish Bowl. These seven in the outer circle each serve as a consultant to those in the inner circle, listening closely to the conversation occurring in the inner circle, then at specific intervals they will be asked to confer with their partners in the inner circle.

I will do this first after “clarifying questions,” inviting the outer circle Fish Bowl “consultants” to make possible additional clarifying questions, then again after “probing questions,” and again at one or two points of the discussion period in the protocol.

In this way everyone participates more actively than just those in the inner circle of the Fish Bowl, yet it keeps the number of those participating directly with the presenter to a more manageable number rather than having fourteen people all try to participate directly in an initial run through of a Consultancy.

These next two protocols are not in our current list of Protocols and are shorter versions of the Consultancy which I have modified from the originals I learned a number of years ago. I often receive comments from participants that they don’t have enough time to do these kinds of things with their staff. The two shortened versions of Consultancies address that issue as they can both be done in less than an hour. They also have the added advantage of engaging everyone in sharing and working on each others’ dilemmas, concerns, or issues.

## **(2) “Sticky Issues” - Modified, Shortened Consultancy**

Read the Protocol below, then write out the particulars of a situation you would like to lay out to a small group of “consultants,” ending with a “focus or framing question” for your issue/concern/problem. The group might offer some suggestions and resources, and also help you see how to strategize on your own.

*[Here I provide a blank space for half of the page]*

### **(3) The “Sticky Issues” Protocol**

**5 minutes** all members of a triad make notes on their own Sticky Issue

**15 minutes** (3 mins) first person briefly outlines issue to responders

(3 mins) responders ask clarifying questions

(7 mins) responders talk about what they heard or are thinking about, presenter turns around and only listens

(2 mins) presenter talks about what s/he is now thinking

Repeat the 15 minute process for the other two people in the triad

**5 minutes** debrief the total process

**55 minutes** total time

### **(4) Two Minute Consultancy**

*[adapted from “Collaborating for Student Success” of the Ohio Center for Essential Schools]*

Objective – to brainstorm silently, in writing only, several possible solutions or suggestions for individual educators’ own current work challenges, problems, or dilemmas

Procedure –

1) groups of no more than 10, no less than 5, around a table

2) each person is given a stack of half-sheets of paper equaling the number of people in this small group (e.g. 10 in the group, 10 sheets)

3) each person is asked to think about a current, job-related challenge, problem or dilemma that is puzzling - for which they do not presently have a solution - and writes it on a half-sheet of paper – e.g. teachers might ask - “How can I get more group involvement out of my students,” or “How can I get my students to be more punctual?”

after allowing a few minutes for thinking, each person should write-out his/her issue and pass it to the person to the right; that person then reads the issue just received, has 2 minutes only to jot down on another half-sheet of paper the first thought, idea, suggestion that comes to mind in addressing the issue, and then attaches it behind the problem sheet just read, with a paper clip [Note – monitoring time is crucial with a warning given with 30 seconds to go]

4) repeat this process every 2 minutes and keep the process going until each person gets his/her sheet back with the attached suggestions/ideas

### **(5) Possible Discussion Questions**

- What solutions were discovered that you hadn’t previously considered?
- Can you see any value in trying some of these suggestions/ideas?
- What suggestions/ideas triggered other ideas or solutions for you?
- What does this teach about reaching out to others for help?

(6) Debrief (total time for a group of 10, approximately 45 minutes)

Although this protocol seems very directive, participants have virtually unanimously liked it, noting not only that they get several useful ideas and/or confirmation of what they were thinking, but get thoughtful responses from everyone with it being done totally in silence, with the “conversation” occurring only in writing on each persons’ half-sheet of paper. Thus, my mantra has become – *“It’s not how much time you’ve got, it’s how you use the time you’ve got!”*

