

# Reflection on a “Protocol in Practice”

Dave Lehman, New York

During a recent CFG training, “Coaching for Equity” with a group of teachers from new small high schools throughout North Carolina, I used the Four “A”s text-based discussion protocol with chapter six — “Changing the Discourse in Schools” by Eugene Eubanks, Ralph Parish, and Dianne Smith — from *Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism Policy and Practice* (edited by Peter Hall, New York: Garland Publishing, 1997). As the “rounds” progressed from Assumptions to Agree to Argue and to Aspire, some people had selected the same passage to “Agree with” that others had selected to “Argue with.”

One of the participants pointed this out during lunch, and so we returned to an extended discussion of the various places in the text where this occurred, giving the differing participants an opportunity to say what they “Agreed with” and why, and others what they would “Argue with” and why, for the same passages. This discussion produced considerably heightened awareness among the group, both about each other and about how different people bring different perspectives to the table — it clearly took us deeper.

Thus, in using the Four “A”s protocol in the future, I intend to listen carefully to the selections for Agree and Argue, and to create a space for an extended conversation focusing on those passages where different people choose the same thing about which to Agree and to Argue. I also will modify the protocol so as to have a discussion after each round of hearing from everyone on each “A”, and not wait until we have heard from everyone on all 4 “A”s. Experience tells me this will lead to deeper, more meaningful conversations, and not just reporting-out. ■

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## Four “A”s Text Protocol

*Adapted from Judith Gray, Seattle, WA 2005*

1. The group reads the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin on post-it notes in answer to the following four questions (you can also add your own “A”s):
  - What Assumptions does the author of the text hold?
  - What do you Agree with in the text?
  - What do you want to Argue with in the text?
  - What parts of the text do you want to Aspire to?
2. In a round, have each person identify one assumption in the text, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence.
3. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the text in light of each of the remaining “A”s, taking them one at a time – what do people want to argue with, agree with, and aspire to in the text? Try to move seamlessly from one “A” to the next, giving each “A” enough time for full exploration.
4. End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as: What does this mean for our work with students?
5. Debrief the text experience.

In addition to Dave’s comments on going deeper with the Four “A”s, I would like to add my use of “Application or Action” for the fourth “A.” I have found that asking folks to commit to an action they will take as a result of our conversation about a text connects it directly to our practice with and for students.

- Debbie Bambino, Philadelphia

## Online Protocols and Resources

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