Data Dialogue Protocol

Facilitation Difficulty: ◣◣◣◣◺   🕐 About an hour   👥 Up to 15   🅿 Preconference in advance

Purpose — To replace hunches and feelings with data-based facts. This protocol asks participants to examine the patterns and trends of performance indicators and to generate "root-cause" discussions. These discussions move the participants from identifying symptoms to possible causes of student performance, and then, to identify next steps to improve that performance.

Selecting data to share — This tool requires the presenter(-s) to share a page or two of grade-level, school-wide, or district-wide data reports. If a presenter needs the group to review more data, you'll need to schedule multiple, separate sessions with significant breaks to avoid "data fatigue."

Preconference — Examine the data with the presenter(-s) to ensure that it is appropriate (see above). Review the protocol, and remind/instruct presenter to introduce the data as briefly as possible to avoid influencing the outcome.

Preparation — Instruct the presenter to prepare sufficient copies of the data for all meeting participants, with identifying details (such as student or teacher names) marked out. Bring a timer to the meeting. Ensure all participants have writing materials.

Possible pitfalls — In Step 7, remind participants to share literally only what they see, without judgments or speculations. The dialogue portions of this protocol are key, and possibly tricky to facilitate: while participants engage in discussions, be vigilant to ensure that all participants share air-time. If some participants are speaking most of the time, don't hesitate to interrupt the dialogue and invite the people who haven't yet shared to speak if they wish.

Steps:

1. **Setup —** Explain that the purpose of the protocol is to look at a particular set of data with fresh eyes. This protocol is designed to build awareness and understanding of the participant's viewpoints, beliefs, and assumptions about the data, while suspending judgment. Participants will be given only limited information about the data, intentionally, to avoid influencing the interpretation of the data. The participants are instructed to act as "data detectives" searching for any relevant clues as to what the data is, what it might mean, and what implications might arise for the individuals or groups being reviewed. The group's job is to collaboratively construct meaning around the data as they go through the steps. Lastly, instruct participants that, as they examine the data, they should prepare to share:

    •   *Any predictions that they have around the data*

    •   *What they actually see*

    •   *What they think the data means (*Participants are asked to think broadly and creatively. Assume that the data, no matter how confusing, makes sense.)

    •   *What they believe the implications of that data are (suggestions & next steps)*

2. **Present —** The presenter gives a very brief statement (one sentence) defining the data, taking care to avoid revealing any conclusions already drawn. Please do NOT hand out the data sheets at this time. (2 min.)

3. **Separate** — If there is a presenter, direct them to physically move away from the group but stay close enough to hear. Ideally, the presenter should turn so they aren't making eye contact with anyone. Through the next steps, the presenter silently takes notes of what is interesting to them. Instruct everyone to imagine the presenter has left the room and to avoid eye contact with the presenter. If the data is brought by the entire group to review, ask for a volunteer to record notes from each round. (1 min.)

4. **Predict** — During this time the participants need to activate their prior knowledge, identify assumptions, and make predictions, thus preparing themselves to examine and discuss the data. Participants will silently reflect, recording their preliminary thoughts about the data. (2-3 min.)

   Use these prompts:

   - *I assume ...*

   - *I predict ...*

   - *I wonder ...*

   - *My questions and expectations are influenced by ...*

   - *This data may present these possibilities for learning ...*

5. **Predictions dialogue** — The group will now discuss their predictions for the data. Direct the group to listen actively to their colleagues and honor all assumptions and ideas as the foundation for new learning. If participants wander too far from the "prediction prompts" listed in step 4, remind them not to jump ahead, to focus on assumptions and predictions first. (5-7 min.)

6. **Distribute and examine** — Give each participant a copy of the data. Instruct them to silently examine the data, noting any patterns they see, anything significant or unusual, outliers, and any conclusions that are beginning to arise. (5-7 min.)

7. **Observations dialogue** — During this discussion, participants will note only the facts that they can observe in the data. Remind the group to describe only what they actually **see** in the data, avoiding all judgments or interpretations. They should identify where the observation is being made, as in, *"On page one in the second column, third row ..."* If judgments or interpretations arise, ask the person to describe the evidence they see, not as a defense, but as an observation. (5-7 rnin.)

   Use prompts like these:

   - *I observe that ...*

   - *Some patterns/trends that I notice ...*

   - *I see that this number is _____ compared to the other numbers ...*

   - *I can count ...*

   - *I see ...*

8. **Inferences dialogue** — Instruct the group now to attempt to make sense of what the data says and why. *"This is the time for speculation. We should find as many different interpretations as possible and evaluate them against the kind and quality of evidence."* As we listen to each other's interpretations, participants can ask one another questions to improve understanding of varying perspectives. (5-7 min.)

   Use prompts like these:

- *What do you think the data suggests?*

- *What do you speculate to be true?*

- *From the evidence gathered in the preceding section, what might be happening and why?*

- *Additional data that would help verify/confirm my explanation could be ...*

9. **Implications dialogue —** The group is now asked to consider the implications of our observations and interpretations of the data. (7-10 min.)

   In particular, consider the following questions:

   - *What steps could be taken?*

   - *What strategies might be effective?*

   - *What else would you like to see happen? What kinds of assignments or assessments could provide this information?*

   - *What are the implications for equity?*

10. **Presenter reflection —** If there is a presenter, ask them to return so they can interact with everyone again. (If there is no single presenter, the group should reflect as a whole.) Presenter should share any results of the protocol that were particularly meaningful or helpful to them. *(5 min.)*

    The presenter might consider:

    - *What did you learn from listening to your colleagues that was interesting or surprising?*

    - *What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?*

    - *How can you make use of your colleagues' perspectives?*

    - *What next steps might you take?*

11. **Debrief and reflect —** Begin with the presenter, then open to the entire group. (5 min.)

    - *What did you think of the protocol?*

    - *Why do you think we asked you to withhold judgment or conclusions at first?*

    - *What about the process helped you see and learn interesting or surprising things?*

    - *What didn't work well for you?*

    - *Can you imagine a way to use this protocol with some of your data?*

    - *Could you use this protocol in your classroom? How?*