National School Reform Faculty

Harmony Education Center

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Affinity Mapping

This revision and description by Ross Peterson-Veatch, Instructional Consulting, Indiana University Kelley School of Business, 2006.

Description

This activity works best when begun with an open-ended analytic question that asks for defining elements of something, or that has many answers and thereby provides many points of entry for deepening a conversation.

Ex. What is the purpose of discussion? Or, perhaps: What do you need to be able to contribute to discussions?

Preparation

Hang pieces of chart paper on a wall in the room so that small groups can gather around the paper. Hand out to every participant a "block" of post-it notes (perhaps 5-10 maximum).

Step 1

Ask the question and request that participants write one idea in response per post-it note. Instruct them to work silently on their own.

Step 2

Split into groups (of 4-8). In ***silence***, put all post-it notes on the chart paper.

Step 3

Reminding participants to remain silent, have them organize ideas by "natural" categories. Directions might sound like this:

"Which ideas go together? As long as you do not talk, feel free to move any post-it note to any place. Move yours, and those of others, and feel free to do this. Do not be offended if someone moves yours to a place that you think it does not belong, just move it to where you think it does belong — but do this all in silence."

Step 4

Once groups have settled on categories, have them place post-it notes on chart paper in neat columns. At this point, ask them to converse about the categories and come up with a name for each one.

Step 5

Have the groups pick a "spokesperson" to report their ideas to the larger group.
Gather that data, and have an open discussion using questions such as the following to help participants make connections between each groups's responses and categories:

1. What themes emerged? Were there any surprises?
2. What dimensions are missing from our "maps"? Again, any surprises?
3. How did this expand your knowledge or your notion of what the question at the beginning asked you to consider?

This protocol was originally written in the 1990s/2000s. We encourage you to purchase an NSRF membership to access newer materials and to enroll in CFG Coaches' Training to access all of the updated materials and to develop a more thorough, experiential understanding. Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group® and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty website at www.nsrfharmony.org.