

Occasional Paper Protocol

Purpose: to think collaboratively about ‘research occasions’ and the meaning they have for our projects.

Structure: The presenting researcher describes an occasion that made them think. Peers assist the presenter to reflect on the meaning of the occasion and raise questions about its implications. A facilitator helps to move the process along and facilitates debriefing.

Process Steps:

1. The presenter reads his or her occasional paper to the class, focusing on the incident itself. (5 minutes)
2. Classmates ask “clarifying questions” that help them to understand the event more fully. These are not “why” questions, but deeper “what” questions. (2 minutes)
3. Members of the group formulate probing questions for 5 minutes, then share them one by one going around the circle. Members aid in rephrasing yes/no questions, or in deepening questions. The presenter does not answer the questions, but takes notes.
4. Members of the group discuss among themselves why the event may have happened as it did, and what it might mean. The presenter sits aside, does not interact with the group, and takes notes on the discussion. (8 minutes)
5. At the conclusion of the discussion, the presenter returns to the group and processes aloud her or his reactions to the discussion, focusing only on those points which seem to have resonance. S/he answers the questions, “What insights do I have now that I didn’t have before and what are the implications?” (3 minutes)
6. After we have heard all of the OP for the day, to conclude the process, we will debrief the process, focusing on the usefulness for the presenters and suggestions for next time. (5 minutes)

Probing Questions

Probing Questions are intended to help us think more deeply about the situation or issue we are talking about. We don't often have a ready answer to a genuine probing question. Probing questions invite us to consider other possibilities, play devil's advocate, look critically at our own thinking. If a probing question doesn't have that effect, it is either a clarifying question or a recommendation with an upward inflection at the end. If you find yourself saying "Don't you think he or she should ...?" you've gone beyond probing questions. The litmus test for a probing question is: Would you have to think before answering it? If so, it's almost certainly a probing question.

Some hints for crafting probing questions. Try the following questions and/or question stems. Some from Charlotte Danielson's "mediational questions" in her pathwise work.

- Why do you think this is the case?
- What would have to change in order for...?
- How would students perceive this situation? How would they describe it?
- What do you feel is right?
- What do you wish...?
- What's another way he might ...?
- What would it look like if...?
- How was...different from...?
- What sort of an impact do you think...?
- What criteria can we use to...?
- When have we done/experienced something like this before?
- What might you see happening if...?
- How can we decide/determine/conclude...?
- What is your hunch about?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages?
- What do you assume to be true about?
- What is the connection between...and...?
- How might your assumptions about...have influenced how you are thinking about...?
- What is your greatest fear about this situation?