

Protocols

What is a protocol?

1. A protocol consists of agreed upon **guidelines for a conversation**, and it is the existence of this structure, which everyone understands and has agreed to, that permits a certain kind of conversation to occur - often a kind of conversation that people are not in the habit of having.
2. Protocols are vehicles for **building the skills and culture necessary for collaborative work**. Thus, using protocols often allows groups to build trust by actually doing substantive work together.

Why use a protocol?

1. A protocol creates a structure that **makes it safe to ask challenging questions of each other**; it also ensures that there is some equity and parity in terms of how each person's issues are attended to. The presenter has the opportunity not only to reflect on and describe an issue or a dilemma, but also to have interesting questions asked of him or her, and to gain differing perspectives and new insights. Protocols build in a space for listening, and often give people a **license to listen** without having to continuously respond.
2. In schools, many people say that time is of the essence, and time is the one resource that no one seems to have enough of. Protocols are a way to **make the most of the time people do have**. (Have you ever been to a meeting where you have a burning issue you want to discuss, and what happens is that everyone "dumps" his or her issue and feeds off each other, but you walk away feeling unsatisfied, not really gaining anything of significance that will help you with your issue? A protocol guards against this.)
3. Finally, it is important to remember that the point is not to do the protocol well, but to have an in-depth, **insightful conversation about teaching and learning**.

A side note: people often think that CFGs are synonymous with protocols; however, protocols are simply tools to accomplish the goal of building a learning community that makes a clear difference in the lives of students.