What is a protocol?

- 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.

- 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?

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.
The Consultancy

(Adapted from Colorado Critical Friends Group manual, 2001)

Purpose: To explore a problem or a dilemma.

Facilitator reviews protocol

1. Presenter gives an overview of the issue and then poses a focus question. (5 minutes)

2. Participants ask clarifying questions. Clarifying questions help responders to understand the presenter's question and the context. (5 minutes)

3. The group asks the presenter probing questions. Probing questions ask "why" and are primarily for the presenter. These questions should be open-ended and designed to help the presenter learn more about the question raised as well as to clarify and expand their thinking about the issue or question posed. The presenter responds to the group's questions but there is no discussion by the larger group. (10 minutes)

4. Presenter moves outside the group, listens silently, and takes notes.

5. Participants talk about the work and issues presented. What did we hear? What didn't we hear that we needed to know more about? What do we think about the question or issue presented? (10 minutes)

6. Presenter moves back into the group, responding to the discussion. During this time the group remains silent. (5 minutes)

7. Open discussion. (10 minutes)

8. Debriefing the process. (5 minutes)
Peeling the Onion:

(Adapted from Colorado Critical Friends manual, 2001)

Purpose: To provide a structured way to develop an appreciation for the complexity of a problem to avoid "solving" it before we understand it. In other words, to peel away the layers in order to address the deeper issues under the surface.

Facilitator reviews the protocol

1. Presenter explains the dilemma and poses a focus question. (3 minutes)

2. Group poses clarifying questions (4 minutes)

3. Round 1: as a "whip around," everyone finishes the statement: I understand the question to be . . . The presenter is silent and takes notes. (5 minutes)

4. Round 2: as a whip around, everyone finishes the statement: The questions this raises for me are . . . The presenter is silent and takes notes. (5 minutes)

5. Round 3: as a whip around, everyone responds to the statement: What if? Or, have you thought of . . . The presenter takes notes. (5 minutes)

6. Presenter reviews notes and says: Having heard these questions, I think there are implications for . . . (5 minutes)

7. Together, the presenter and responders think of possibilities and options that have surfaced. (15-20 minutes)

8. Debrief: Did the process uncover complexities and improve problem solving? What about this process was useful? Frustrating? (5 minutes)