TEXT-BASED DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

Purpose
To examine a relevant issue in depth using a short article or excerpt from a book.

Directions
This seminar helps build a culture of discourse in a school by allowing for enlargement of intellectual understanding. In a text-based seminar of 40 minutes to 1 hour, a team examines an issue from an outside point of view. Participants read a short article or excerpt from a book that is related to teaching and learning and then engage in a discussion about the text. The purpose of the discussion is not to persuade other group members of a particular point of view, but to clarify, build upon, and enhance understanding of the text. Text-based seminars give participants an opportunity to extract different meanings and ideas from a text and to discuss important issues related to the text.

1 Select the text: Choose an article or book excerpt that will have implications for teaching and learning. The article may be selected by the team facilitator or by an individual member of the team.

2 Read the text: If the text is long, the facilitator may distribute it before the meeting, or a shorter text may be read for the first time during the meeting. If participants have already read the text, allow 5 minutes of seminar time to review it. If a short article is to be read during the seminar, 10–15 minutes should be enough. While reading, participants may take notes, underline or highlight important ideas, and record questions the text raises for them.

3 Begin the discourse: There are two effective ways to begin the discourse. Each member of the seminar may take turns reading aloud a sentence or two that has particular significance to them and share why they responded to that particular excerpt. Or, the facilitator may present a framing question to start the discussion.

4 Discuss the text: The facilitator leads a 20- to 30-minute discussion. He or she should remind participants to refer to the text to support their comments. Groups may want to follow these guidelines:
   - Listen actively.
   - Build on what others say.
   - Expose/suspend your assumptions.
   - Don't step on others' talk. Silences and pauses are OK.
   - Emphasize clarification, amplification, and implications of ideas.
   - Converse directly with each other, not through the facilitator.
   - As much as possible, let the conversation flow without raising hands.
   - Make references to the text and encourage others to do the same.
   - Watch your airtime for how often you speak and how much you say when you speak.

5 Close the discussion: The facilitator closes the discussion about the text, highlighting two or three main points of discussion and thanking participants for their perspectives. The result is that all participants leave the seminar with a deeper understanding of the text. Many times this leads to agreement for further exploration of the topic.

Source: Gene Thompson-Grove 1/03 “Text-Based Seminar Guidelines.” Adapted from National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), Harmony Education Center, Bloomington, IN. http://www.nsrfharmony.org/protocol/doc/text_based_guidelines.pdf