

The Affinity Chart Protocol

The affinity chart is a way to begin to bring order out of chaos. It is one of the most intuitive of the protocols. Constructing an affinity chart involves several stages of group activity:

1. Facilitator identifies the topic and purpose of the study.
 2. Gathering information: whatever relevant information and knowledge fits in with the topic
 3. Brainstorming whatever else may be important to this issue.
 4. Placing each individual item identified in the previous two steps on its own Post-it Note™.
 5. Silently “group” the items.
 - Do it silently – each participant may move post-its around until there is a silent consensus.
 - New post its may be written during the grouping.
 - If a group exceeds eight post-its, subdivide the group.
 - When the groups are completed, label the group, placing the label on a separate post-it.
- Continue the silence during this activity.
6. Discuss: What has emerged? What patterns seemed to be clear? What are the implications for the work ahead?

Protocol for Examining Assessments for Alignment and Effectiveness

I. Getting Started (2 min.)

Facilitator reviews the purpose for the meeting, establishes time limits for each part of the process and reviews group norms.

II. Reviewing the Purpose of the Assessment (5 min.)

1. Solo reflection. Participants are given a copy of the assessment and reflect on the following question:
2. As a group, discuss the intended purpose for the assessment.

During this period, the group gathers as much information as possible from the assessment. Such as: "What is being assessed?" "How are the assessments scored and the results utilized?"

3. List the group's observations on chart paper. Base observations on evidence and avoid judgments about the quality of the assessment.

III. Analyzing the Alignment of the Assessment (10 min.)

Review each assessment item and determine which GLE each item is intended to assess.

1. Consider the following question as you are conducting the item analysis:
"If the item was completed successfully by a student, would it provide evidence of student understanding of the GLE?"
2. Using a list of the GLE's, highlight the GLE's that are intentionally being assessed through this assessment.

IV. Determining the Effectiveness of the Assessment: (10 min.)

Based on the group discussions about purpose and the results of the alignment analysis, does the assessment actually tell you what you need to know about student learning?

1. How well does the assessment align to what students are expected to know and be able to do?
2. How can the assessment or components of the assessment be used or modified?
3. What recommendations can the team make?
4. Record the group's responses and recommendations on the meeting notes page.

V. Closing: (5 min.) Discuss the process and use of the protocol.

A Silent Conversation Protocol

Purpose: Exploring perceptions of team members on a topic or issue. Discovering prior knowledge on subjects / topics or sharing knowledge. Create a positive culture and team cohesiveness.

Time allotted: 20 minutes.

Supplies: Chart paper, a different colored marker for each person in a group, possibly sticky notes, and individual writing materials

Process: This activity will not produce the desired results if the group is not the right size. Groups should consist of 4 to 8 individuals.

1. Explain to the groups they are going to have a conversation about an element of something they have been working on. In this conversation, no one will be talking. This conversation will take place in a “public” writing.
2. Explain that they will all use different colored markers and will be working on a sheet of chart paper on their table.
3. There will be a question or statement on the paper and they will be writing their response / thoughts about the topic on the chart paper.
4. Explain that they can respond to each other’s comments, explain that they can make connections, draw lines, arrows, etc.
5. Remind individuals about the importance of critically looking at each other’s ideas while keeping a respectful, safe environment to do our work.
6. Set the question or statement for the activity such as, “what do we hope to get out of this initiative”, or a year from now this initiative will mean”. If this activity will not include a substantial sharing of each group’s process then all of the groups should use the same question statement, if there will be in-depth sharing, groups could have different question statements. Have each group write the question statement somewhere on their chart paper.
7. Give the group about 15 minutes to work and interact in writing. It can be helpful for the facilitator to move around to the groups and add a written comment on the groups writing. This can be helpful to model how the writing can be interactive with other comments.
8. If awareness about an issue is the rationale for the activity leaving the protocol with silent reflection can be effective. If sharing knowledge or perspective is the goal, then the activity should be debriefed. The debrief could include reflective questions constructed before the activity, which are specific to the question statement, or could be more general such as:
 - How was it productive to have a conversation without talking?
 - What information provided you with new insight?
 - How was the protocol helpful in uncovering new information about different perspectives of your group members?

- How can the information move your group's work forward?
- How could you use this protocol in your work or classroom / as formative assessment?

Options:

- Use a picture on the chart paper instead of a question statement, this is very effective in the classroom with students
- Have group members respond with symbols or pictures instead of words
- After a minutes, rotate the chart paper between the groups and have them add to the initial work, you can do this a couple of times and often brings out points that might get missed otherwise.
- When the “conversation” is finished, have group members pair up and take sticky notes with them as they move to a different groups chart paper. Have the pairs create statements of actionable feedback (feedback that requires action or reflection to accomplish) and stick them by the statement that they are giving feedback on.

A Tuning Protocol for Team Input

David Allen and Joe McDonald at the Coalition of Essential Schools developed the “tuning protocol” primarily for use in looking closely at student exhibitions. It has evolved into a protocol that Learning Teams can use to invite team input on virtually any issue that a teacher or team might encounter in their profession. It is an opportunity for the “owner” of the issue to gain valuable insight from others without the feeling that the participation from others is “personal”.

The Outline below will give you, the facilitator, a basic understanding for the elements of this protocol and their purpose.

I. Introduction [5 minutes]. Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, norms, and agenda. Participants briefly introduce themselves.

II. Teacher Presentation [15 minutes]. Presenter describes the context for problem or dilemma and may present samples of student work or their own work (such as photo-copied pieces of written work or video tapes of the classroom or performance assessment). Having work to present is very beneficial in the process as it gives a focus away from the presenter.

III. Clarifying Questions [10 minutes maximum]. The team asks questions that help them better understand the situation. The facilitator judges if questions more properly belong as warm or cool feedback than as clarifiers.

IV. Pause to reflect on warm and cool feedback [2-3 minutes maximum]. Participants make note of "warm," supportive feedback and "cool," more distanced comments (generally no more than one of each) about the situation before they discuss them with each other.

V. Warm and Cool Feedback [15 minutes]. Participants among themselves share responses to the work and its context; teacher-presenter is silent (it is a good idea for the presenter to actually sit a few feet away from the rest of the group, and may choose to take notes). Facilitator may lend focus by reminding participants of an area of emphasis supplied by teacher-presenter.

VI. Reflection/ Response [10 minutes]. Teacher-presenter reflects on and responds, uninterrupted, to those comments or questions he or she chooses to. Participants are silent. Facilitator may clarify or lend focus.

VII. Debrief [5 minutes]. Beginning with the teacher-presenter ("How did the protocol experience compare with what you expected?"), the group discusses any frustrations, misunderstandings, or positive reactions participants have experienced. A more general discussion of the tuning protocol may develop.

Constructing Meaning From Text

* It is suggested that you have team members read or view the piece before the meeting time, they may want to take notes about any part that impacts their thinking about the subject.

Purpose:

This Protocol is a foundational tool for uncovering meaning from a “text” document. The “text” may be in the form of an article, video, online snippet, or even oral presentation. An element of this protocol is the connection to the work of the group, so if your group is together for a day or short time span you may want to consider a different protocol or adapt step 5, which discusses the connection to the team work, or even skip that step.

1. Getting Started

Participants review the text briefly 2-3 minutes, or view / read the material and take notes if it has not been assigned previously, time will vary if this is the case.

2. Identify [5-10 minutes]

What is in the work, what is note worthy?

The facilitator has members point out what is in the article. You are not looking for opinion or evaluation. Some examples of appropriate answers for this section might be:

“I noticed there are five parts to the article with the last section being the author’s solutions”.

“I noticed that there 3 case studies in the article, and the author refers to the first as the “most common””.

If in doubt, ask the team member who is sharing to point out the element they are speaking about in the work. If they can’t then they may be going too far with interpretation, let them know that is covered in the next steps.

3. Asking Questions [5-10 minutes]

What questions does this piece bring to mind?

The facilitator asks team members to write down 3-4 questions that the work raises for them. Some areas to specifically ask about are: implementation, impact on learning, reflection, and assumptions by the author, etc.

Then do a quick whip around (have each member share, in an order, around the group) to share the questions, this is not a time for team members to answer the questions, this is a sharing piece.

4. Significance [5-10 minutes]

What are your impressions of the piece, what is significant about the ideas presented?

This is the time for team members to share their opinions or interpretations about the ideas presented by the author. Again, a quick whip around works well for this step in the process.

5. Implications [10-15]

How can the ideas or information in the ‘text’ contribute to the effectiveness of our team’s work?

Take enough time during this step to explore how this “text” could affect the work of the team, in particular **student learning**. You may wish to give members time to write their responses before sharing.

6. Reflecting on the Protocol [5 minutes]

Facilitator asks team members how the protocol worked and what they liked or could be improved.

Adapted from National School Reform Faculty (www.nsrfharmony.org)

Everyone Gets A Final Word

*Note: This protocol is useful for reviewing any “text” that a team might encounter. It is suggested that you have team members read or view the piece before the meeting time. Ask team members to highlight 3 or 4 elements that caught their attention or made them think deeply about the information.

This protocol serves two purposes, the first:

To give each person in the group the opportunity to have their ideas, understandings, and perspective heard and enhanced by hearing from others. It is useful for team building and creating equity of voice.

The second:

The group can explore an article, clarify their thinking, and have their assumptions and beliefs questioned in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issue within the reading, however this protocol will not always uncover all the learning content of the article. There are better protocols for “uncovering” content and are available in the resources.

Roles/Facilitation:

- The participants are divided into small groups of 3-5.
- Each group selects a facilitator and a timekeeper.
- Each participant has selected several significant ideas from the article.

Process:

- The first person begins by reading one of their selected passage that caught their attention from the article. Have this person refer to where the quote is in the text— one quote or thought only. At this time, the person should **NOT** provide comments or reasoning for the passage.
- Next the facilitator sets the purpose of the responses to the passage, which is:
 - to provide a different look at the quote,
 - to clarify the presenter’s thinking about the quote,
 - to provide questions to the presenter’s assumptions about the quote and the issues raised
- Each group member is given time to respond to the presenters quote and their thoughts about the passage. Each person should respond in one minute or less.
- The person that began has the “final word” in this round. In no more than 3 minutes, the presenter responds to what has been said. Facilitator questions: Now what is your thinking? What is your reaction to what s/he has heard? Did it change your initial thoughts to hear the other team members input?

- This process continues until each person has had a round with his or her quote / thought.

Debrief:

- The facilitator ends by debriefing the process to determine how well the protocol worked for team building and exploring the article / information.

Adapted from National School Reform Faculty (www.nsrfharmony.org)

Hopes and Fears Protocol

Purpose: To bring to the surface expectations and concerns—help team members to see that others share their fears and hopes and that they are out in the open and will be addressed. This is the first of a two-step process to set group norms, the second half follows this process.

Time allotted: 20 minutes.

Supplies: Individual writing materials, chart paper and markers

Facilitation tips:

- It is a good idea for team members to write down briefly for themselves their greatest fear for this initiative / guiding question: “If it’s the worst experience you’ve had, what will have happened (or not happened)?” And then, write your greatest hope, i.e., “If this is the best initiative you’ve ever been involved in, what will be the outcome(s) that will have taken place by the end? (3-4 minutes)
- Have two pieces of chart paper—one labeled “fears” and one “hopes”, and list everything that team members call out. Ask that they avoid repeats.
- Be sure that all fears and hopes are written down, as expressed, without comment or any sense of judgment, except perhaps, “*That’s interesting.*”
- Do not be fearful of having folks express their worst fears, it always makes things go better once expressed. Plus, we want to know what to not do! This activity segues very well into norm-settings (see below).
- If time, ask participants to share their hopes and fears with a partner. (3 minutes)
- This activity transitions very well into norm setting / guiding question: In order to reach our hoped –for outcomes, what norms do we need?

*Adapted from Coalition of Essential Schools (www.essentialschools.org)

Setting Group Norms

Purpose: To set up mutually agreed-upon norms (guidelines), and to give permissions for certain positive behaviors e.g. taking risks, having our voice heard, etc.

Setting norms may feel unnecessary, and there may be little time, but it is an essential step and should never be skipped.

Time allotted: 15 to 20 minutes.

Supplies: Chart paper and markers

Facilitation tips:

- After using the Hopes and Fears protocol there is a natural segue, you may want to use this guiding question: “Based on our list of hopes and fears, and in order to meet our expectations, what norms would be important for us to list?”
- It can be helpful to have a few norms ready to prime the pump example: “We may judge ideas, but not individuals.”
- Do not succumb to any sense from the group that this is not necessary. Just cheerfully say, “This is a necessary step that will give us a process to do our work, we will follow these guidelines, but they can be revised.” Emphasize often that the list of norms generated is a working list.
- If you used the Hopes and Fears protocol keep using those lists to build your norms. You may want to say: “how could we fashion a norm that would insure that one of our “hopes” are realized, or so one of our “fears” do not happen?”
- After the list is generated say, “This is a brainstormed list and that does not mean that we’ve all agreed to everything. So at this time, is there something you think won’t work for you or something you think is extraneous?” Everyone in the group should have an opportunity to respond.
- When the list is finished you should make sure that every team member can abide by, and “live with” the group’s norms.
- Let the group know these norms are for all of us, including the facilitator, and we are all responsible for their utilization during our work.
- Then, repeat that this is not fixed in stone and say something like, “We will come back to these norms time and again, to answer the question: *“How are we doing?”*”

*Adapted from National School Reform Faculty (www.nsrfharmony.org)

Looking at Data Protocol

Learning from Data is a tool to guide groups of teachers discovering what students, educators, and the public understands and how they are thinking.

Selecting Data to Share

Data is the centerpiece of the group discussion. The following guidelines can help in selecting data that will promote the most interesting and productive group discussions. Data that do not lead to a single conclusion generally lead to rich conversations.

Sharing and Discussion of Data

Discussions of some forms of data sometimes make people feel “on the spot” or exposed, either for themselves, for their students or for their profession. The use of a structured dialogue format provides an effective technique for managing the discussion and maintaining its focus.

A structured dialogue format is a way of organizing a group conversation by clearly defining who should be talking when and about what. While at first it may seem rigid and artificial, a clearly defined structure frees the group to focus its attention on what is most important. In general, structured dialogue formats allot specified times for the group to discuss various aspects of the work.

1. Getting Started

- The facilitator reminds the group of the norms.
- The educator(s) providing the data set gives a very brief statement of the data and avoids explaining what s/he concludes about the data if the data belongs to the group rather than the presenter.

2. Describing the Data (10 Minutes)

- The facilitator asks: “What do you see?”
- During this period the group gathers as much information as possible from the data.
- Group members describe what they see in data, avoiding judgments about quality or interpretations. It is helpful to identify where the observation is being made—e.g., “On page one in the second column, third row . . .”
- If judgments or interpretations do arise, the facilitator should ask the person to describe the evidence on which they are based.
- It may be useful to list the group’s observations on chart paper. If interpretations come up, they can be listed in another column for later discussion during Step 3.

3. Interpreting the Data (10 Minutes)

- The facilitator asks: “What does the data suggest?” Second question: “What are the assumptions we make about students and their learning?”
- During this period, the group tries to make sense of what the data says and why. The group should try to find as many different interpretations as possible and evaluate them against the kind and quality of evidence.
- From the evidence gathered in the preceding section, try to infer: what is being worked on and why?
- Think broadly and creatively. Assume that the data, no matter how confusing, makes sense to some people; your job is to see what they may see.

- As you listen to each other's interpretations, ask questions that help you better understand each other's perspectives.

4. Implications for Classroom Practice (10 Minutes)

- The facilitator asks: "What are the implications of this work for teaching and assessment?" This question may be modified, depending on the data.
- Based on the group's observations and interpretations, discuss any implications this work might have for teaching and assessment in the classroom. In particular, consider the following questions:
 - ✓ What steps could be taken next?
 - ✓ What strategies might be most effective?
 - ✓ What else would you like to see happen? What kinds of assignments or assessments could provide this information?
 - ✓ What does this conversation make you think about in terms of your own practice? About teaching and learning in general?
 - ✓ What are the implications for equity?

5. Reflecting on the Looking at Data Protocol (10 Minutes)

Presenter Reflection:

- What did you learn from listening to your colleagues that was interesting or surprising?
- What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?
- How can you make use of your colleagues' perspectives?

Group Reflection:

- What questions about teaching and assessment did looking at the data raise for you?
- Did questions of equity arise?
- How can you pursue these questions further?
- Are there things you would like to try in your classroom as a result of looking at this data?

6. Debrief the Process

- How well did the process work?
- What about the process helped you to see and learn interesting or surprising things?
- What could be improved?

Pass the Question Protocol

Pass the Question is a protocol that provides an opportunity for participants to collaborate in activating their own ideas and examining other people's thinking. Partners work together to create a partial response to a question, then switch their work with another pair of participants. They then take the response that the other partnership began and add to it and revise it. It is okay to reword what has been written, but not to completely remove an idea or concept. In the end, the four participants merge their pairs and take a look at what has been created.

It is important to develop a question for this activity that will elicit a rich explanatory response. It can be used after reading a text as a way to debrief the information in the passage.

Directions:

- Write the question on a chart or chalk board and ask the participants to find a partner.
- Have them work on their response for only about five to seven minutes before asking them to find another "partnership" to switch responses with.
- Give them another five to seven minutes to work on completing their "new" response.
- At this point, the two partnerships join together to create a group of four.
- In their groups of four, they can examine the two responses that all four people have had input in creating.

POMS - Point Of Most Significance Protocol

Description/Purpose

POMS is a quick technique to check in as a learning team about a short reading, such as an article or chapter. Each team member is asked to identify the most significant learning or idea they gained from the reading.

How it improves team learning:

Team members are provided with a meta-cognitive strategy to help them connect with the important points of a reading. Members reflect back on the reading and identify key points that contributed to their learning.

How it informs next steps:

POMS is a strategy used to gather information on what team members feel were the most significant points made in a shared reading. Team facilitators can quickly collect, and sort responses to figure out how the group interpreted the key ideas in the reading and feed this information back to the group. If the POMS of the members differ, this opens up an area for discussion.

How it works

- After reading a short article or chapter, each person describes orally in writing the most significant points made in the reading that contributed to their learning.
- Three points is usually enough.
- The team facilitator can provide a prompt ("Today we read an article about assessment. What points or ideas in the article were new for you? What points resonated with you? Which points were hard for you to understand?")
- Collect and analyze responses in order to discuss where the group differed in their thoughts or where there was over-lap in thinking.

Variations

POMS can be changed to Part Of Most Significance to be used as a reflection on the most effective part of a professional development activity, like a webinar session or a guest speaker.

“Spend Your Dimes Wisely”- Protocol

This protocol is a great way for teams to prioritize issues that need attending to for school improvement.

1. As a group, or individually, brainstorm questions about the various issues or problems relating to school improvement. Phrase all responses as questions, *not* statements.
2. Write each question on a sticky note and place on the table.
3. Sort questions and stick into 4 categories on chart paper. Suggested categories include:
 - Curriculum and Instruction
 - Assessment
 - Behavior / Expectations
 - Parking lot (items that don't have a larger theme- yet)
4. Prioritize the questions
 - Each person gets 3 sticker dots (3 dimes)
 - Choose which questions are most significant to you by placing a dot next to it.
 - Spend all your dots/dimes
5. The group analyzes which questions received the most dots
6. Prioritize the group's questions
7. List top 5 questions on chart paper

The Vertical Slice Protocol: Sampling Student Work

The “Vertical Slice” is a technique developed in the Educational Leaders Program at the University of Minnesota in which you capture and analyze all “ordinary student work” (data) produced by a broad sample of students during a narrow time period or vertical slice. This may involve all work done during a period ranging from one day up to a week—worksheets, artwork, notes, drafts, homework, and even discussion and classroom interaction captured on audio- or videotape. This data would later be analyzed in a team or cluster meeting. If used for baseline sampling, the process will be repeated at intervals to make comparisons and determine changes in performance, impact of teaching, and implications for teaching and learning.

STEPS IN THE PROTOCOL*

Preplanning: The facilitator may be responsible for all the preplanning procedures, or the group may divide up the tasks.

1. Decide on the purpose of the slice

The cluster or grade team decides on the purpose of the slice. If used for baseline sampling, the purpose would be to get an impression of the students’ current level of performance, skill development, and knowledge.

2. Agree on a guiding question

In conducting baseline sampling, a suitable question might be, “What does the work reveal about the current literacy level and needs of the students in this grade?” What is the range of different types of work that we see? What is the depth of thinking required by the work?

3. Decide on a sampling strategy

The sample is distributed across the range of groups in the school or grade.

4. Identify methods of data collection for the slice

Decide on the range of student work to be collected—will you collect only written work done in class, or will you include artwork, photos, audio and videotapes, and student notes?

5. Decide on the duration of the slice

Decide on the length of time from which the work will be drawn.

While you may look at work from a whole week, you should consider resources and logistics. For the purpose of baseline sampling, one to two days may be adequate.

6. Arrange the logistics

The cluster or grade-level team decides who will collect the data and prepare it for the group to analyze. This step includes collecting, removing names, organizing, and copying the work.

STEPS IN DISCUSSION:

7. Facilitate the discussion

The facilitator reviews all the established norms for the group and restates the guiding question to open up the discussion.

8. Analyze the data

The facilitator describes the methods used for collecting the data and the sample. Then the group engages in analyzing the data. Patterns in the quality of teacher assignments and student work are identified, and strategies are developed to strengthen both.

9. Record the data

A record of findings is kept for comparison with future “slices.”