

Tuning Protocol

Purpose

As a problem-solving tool, the Tuning Protocol aims to ensure that educators receive direct and respectful feedback on the problems they present, as well as the opportunity to reflect on the feedback. It also aims to help all participants “tune up” their values through contact with others’ diverse and candid views. It forces presenters to frame a particular problem from the hundreds they might select, and to collect and present evidence that bears on the problem. It orients their colleagues to examine both the problem and the evidence from both warm and cool perspectives.

Details

The Tuning Protocol takes 45 minutes to an hour or more, and usually involves 6 to 12 participants. It is sometimes used, however, by groups as large as 30. Presenters might share relevant supporting materials, which may include documents in paper or video format.

Steps

1. Introduction. The facilitator briefly introduces the protocol goals and norms and distributes a copy of the steps.
2. Presentation. The presenter shares the problem, or a draft of a plan currently under development, and provides relevant information about efforts to date. The presenter may also highlight particular questions that he or she would like the respondents to address, drawing on documents as appropriate to support the presentation. During this step, respondents may not speak. (10-15 minutes)
3. Response (warm and cool feedback). Respondents note their warm and cool reactions to what the presenter has said. Warm reactions emphasize the strength of the presenter’s views of the problem and his or her particular approaches to solving it. Cool reactions emphasize problematic aspects of these. Often cool reactions come in the form of questions: “I’m wondering why you chose to...” or “I’m curious about your interpretation of the parental reaction. Could you say more? During this step, the presenter may not speak. He or she is encouraged instead to take notes, and in the process to consider which responses to comment on and which to let pass. In some versions of the Tuning Protocol, participants are invited to

McDonald, J.P., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., McDonald, E.C. (2003). *The power of protocols; A educator’s guide to better practice* New York: Teachers college press 63-66

- offer warm reactions first, then cool. In other versions are encouraged to mix warm and cool (though never in the same response). (10 minutes)
4. Reaction. The presenter reacts to any response he or she chooses to react to. The presenter is reminded that the response is not meant to answer questions but to talk about her or his thinking. During this step, respondents may not speak. (10 minutes)
 5. Conversation. Presenter and respondents engage in open conversation. (10-15 minutes)
 6. Debriefing. Participants reflect on the process and explore ways to use the protocol in other situations. The facilitator may ask, “How did it feel hearing warm and cool feedback? How did it feel not being able to respond to the feedback? How can you apply this protocol in your ordinary work?”

Facilitation Tips

Each step of the protocol requires a prespecified allotment of time (though not necessary those suggested above). The facilitator must therefore watch the clock. In some versions of the protocol, facilitators simply facilitate. In other version, they are permitted to offer responses, typically to redress an imbalance between warm and cool comments. In such cases, however, facilitators must make sure that they do not dominate. A good rule of thumb in the regard is that the facilitator should never be the first to offer either a warm or cool comment. Another is that he or she should refrain from offering more than one of each unless absolutely necessary to redress an imbalance.

The facilitator should advise the presenter to respond to the warm as well as the cool reactions. Indeed, the facilitator should take care throughout the protocol—in his or her introductory remarks and responses—to suggest that warm reactions are not simply a prologue to cool ones, that both warm and cool reactions deserve thoughtful attention from presenter and respondents.

The facilitator should be prepared to interrupt tactfully when a participant violates the protocol—for example, by speaking out of turn, or by mixing warm and cool, or by jumping to cool when the variation calls for warm to be handed first.