



Text-Based Dialogue

Mining the Text Protocol

Acts 15:65-7 (NLT) - So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: "Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe."

Purpose:

In a text-based dialogue of 45–60 minutes, a team or group of colleagues examines an issue in an article, excerpt from a book, or something to be learned. Then they dialogue about it to learn not only what is in the text, but to gain perspective from each other. This protocol helps build a culture of discourse by creating a safe place for individuals to approach topics, ideas, issues, and content.

The purpose of the dialogue is not to persuade other group members of a particular point of view but to clarify, build upon, and enhance each individual's understanding of the actual text. There is no overriding agenda except that held by the participants.

Ground Rules for the Dialogue

- Listen actively.
- Build on what others say.
- Expose or suspend your assumptions.
- Do not step on other's talk. Silences and pauses can be good.
- Emphasize clarification or implications of ideas you express.
- Converse directly with each other as learners together.
- Let the conversation flow.
- Watch your airtime in relationship to others who want to speak.

Follow the Rule of Three:

- Refer to the text.
- Provide your thoughts on the author's meaning or ideas from the text.
- Then, provide your interpretation or thoughts on the text.

Roles

1. **Facilitator:** One of the participants who keeps time within the group and also is responsible for keeping order using the ground rules. The facilitator begins and ends the dialogue. The facilitator monitors to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and that no one person becomes the focus.
2. **Participants:** People who discuss the text. They are charged with using the ground rules as a basis for monitoring their participation.

Procedure

Ahead of Time

1. **Select the Text.** The text should be something that adds to the agenda for the collegial group.
2. **Distribute the Text.** Before the meeting, distribute the text or article for participants to read at their leisure ahead of time. Be sure to let them know the date and time of the meeting.

Procedure At the Time of the Text-Based Seminar

3. The facilitator welcomes everyone and reviews the ground rules. The facilitator presents the Framing Question. The framing question is a clear question that is likely to push the thinking of the collegial group. The framing question requires that the participants have captured the meaning and nuances of the text. The framing question may be directly from the text. It is not the only question, but it helps to begin the conversation.

4. Review the Text (5–15 Minutes). As the meeting begins, allow 5 to 15 minutes of group time to review the text with the framing question now presented. While reading, participants may take notes, underline or highlight important ideas, and record questions that the text raises for them.

5. Conduct the Discourse (20–40 Minutes). The discussion begins once the facilitator feels that the team is ready to have the discussion. The framing question is reviewed one more time. The facilitator then says, “Our Text-Based Dialogue is now open.” At that time people should begin to discuss what they have read and what it means to them remembering to: *Refer to the text, what do you think the author means, and what is your interpretation.*

5. If the discussion becomes labored. There are times when a discussion is labored for different reasons. When that happens, the facilitator should ask additional questions to engage the collegial group. Potential questions can be:

- Which parts of the text do you agree with in relationship to our work?
- Which parts of the text do you aspire to or want to work toward?
- What is the difference between our current reality and the text?
- What changes might be apparent from this text?

6. Debrief the conversation (5 Minutes). When the facilitator feels that the text has been “mined” or the participants have dug into the text far enough, then that facilitator should close the dialogue. The facilitator may ask for a last word from one, several, or all the participants. Or, the facilitator may pose any of following questions for final open discussion:

- What did we learn?
- What new insights did we gain?
- What is missing or still need to learn?

6. Debrief the protocol (3 Minutes). The facilitator asks the following questions of the group.

- What do you want to remember when you do this protocol again?
- What was the value for the Individual? For the Group?
- What other setting or how else might you use this protocol?