Center for Leadership & Educational Equity

The 5 Whys for Inquiry of Group Questions

Developed in the field by educators.

Purpose
To help the group get at the foundational root of a question and uncover multiple perspectives on that question.

Presentation (3 minutes)
A chosen presenter describes the context of the group's inquiry question (For instance, "Why are most of our freshman students failing science?")

One might include...
- Why this question was chosen
- Why it is important
- How it relates to the group

Clarifying Questions (3 minutes)
The group asks clarifying questions. These are questions, which clarify the context of the presenter's remarks. They should be specific questions, which can be answered with brief statements. For example, "How many freshman students are there?" Or, "How many different teachers teach science?"

Brainstorm (3 minutes)
The group brainstorms potential answers to the initial "why question". The presenter is silent. (i.e. Because we have new teachers teaching it, because our curriculum is not meeting student needs, because science falls after lunch...)

The "Why Questioning" (10 minutes)
The group chooses one "why question" to take deeper and repeats the brainstorm cycle. This cycle continues for a maximum of five rounds. (Often only 3 are needed to get to a potential root issue.)

Discussion (15 minutes)
The group then discusses potential answers to the last why question that was surfaced. The discussion is not a solving of a problem but an attempt to help build understanding of the underlying causes for the issue described. The presenter is silent.

Response (3 minutes)
The presenter responds to what has been said. The group is silent.

Debrief (3 minutes)
The group and the presenter debrief the experience.

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