



Center for Leadership & Educational Equity

Critical Incidents Protocol

A variation of Costa and Kallick's model (See "Through the Lens of a Critical Friend" by Costa and Kallick, Educational Leadership, October 1993) and based on the theory and language used by David Tripp in Critical Incidents in Teaching: Developing Professional Judgment (Routledge, 1993). Also see: "Reflection Is at the Heart of Practice," Simon Hole and Grace Hall McEntee, Educational Leadership, May 1999 for Alternative Critical Incidents Protocol. Revised February 2002 by Gene Thompson-Grove. Revised January 2007 by Kim Feicke.

Purpose

To provide a small group of colleagues a window into each other's practice

Time

35-40 minutes for each round (after the writing)

Roles

- The facilitator follows the protocol, keeps time, and participates fully.
- The presenter shares a critical incident from their work. This is to be used as a text for professional learning within the group.

Process

The presenter writes about an incident, with as much detail as they can muster. This writing should tell only what happened, like a snapshot, without interpretation or analysis. The writing should be crisp and succinct, but it should be clear that the group's discussion will be about what happened, and not about the quality of the writing. (10 minutes)

1. The presenter reads the written account of what happened and sets it within the context of professional goals or outcomes that they are working on. (5 minutes)
2. Colleagues ask clarifying questions about what happened or about why the incident occurred. (5 minutes)
3. The group raises questions about what the incident might mean in the context of the presenter's work. They discuss these as professional, caring colleagues. The presenter listens and takes notes. (10 minutes)
4. The presenter reflects back to the group what they heard that was significant, and then the group engages in a general conversation about what the implications might be for the presenter's practice and/or for their own practice. A useful question at this stage might be, "What new insights occurred for all of us?" (10 minutes)
5. Debrief the process. The group talks about what just happened. How did the process work? (5 minutes)

Adaptation: *This protocol can also be designed in a way that allows everyone in a group to share a critical incident. In this version, provide time for everyone in the group to write their critical incident and then break into small groups of 3 or 4 to go through the protocol. You will need 30-40 minutes for each presenter in the small group.*