Appreciative Inquiry for School Quality

Tools and Protocols for Describing, Understanding, and Acting Upon MCIEA School Quality Measures

Center for Collaborative Education

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MA Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment

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Acknowledgments

The tools and protocols in this resource book have been adapted for use from a number of sources but especially from the educators and practitioners affiliated with the School Reform Initiative. Thanks to Gene Thompson-Grove for the continuing work she does in training and supporting educators to do deep and appreciative inquiry.
Thanks, too, to the educators associated with the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA) who are collectively engaged in transformative work aimed at demonstrating that an alternative accountability movement is possible – one that attends closely to the expertise students, teachers, and school leaders.

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Introduction

In 2016, six school districts in Massachusetts in partnership with their teachers unions organized the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA), a collaborative effort to design and pilot more authentic ways to measure student learning and school quality that moved beyond a narrow focus on test scores. The framework for measuring school quality was developed through an iterative process, drawing on empirical research and focus groups with more than 250 school and community stakeholders (see Famularo, French, Noonan, Schneider, & Sienkiewicz, 2018; Schneider, 2017). This process led MCIEA to identify three key inputs and two outcomes that together capture the dimensions of a good school. See Appendix A for the full MCIEA School Quality Measures (SQM) framework:

Inputs	Outcomes
• Teachers and Leadership • School Culture • Resources	• Academic Learning • Community and Wellbeing

To measure school quality, MCIEA collects a range of data beyond what is typically gathered by state agencies. These include school and district administrative data as well as survey-based measures of teachers' and students' perceptions about their school. Survey measures include questions about student-teacher relationships, school safety, curricular diversity, and civic participation. Taken together, this breadth of data acknowledges the complex interaction of many factors that together contribute to a vibrant school community. All of the collected data is then loaded into an online dashboard where schools, districts, and communities can view school quality data. MCIEA believes that having more and more varied data is critical toward better representing the complexity and dynamic nature of schools and school quality. MCIEA also recognizes that having more data alone is insufficient in the absence of tools and processes to help school, district, and community stakeholders make meaning of the data. Data are neither omniscient nor objective. On the contrary, data are deeply subjective and filtered through people's divergent experiences and perspectives. School quality data should not be seen as a definitive accounting of a school so much as the raw material for discourse about what is working and what could be improved. The tools gathered in this document are intended to support district- and school-based inquiry work using the MCIEA School Quality Measures data. We offer these tools while also recognizing that data can often be perceived as difficult to access and use in a process of improvement; the tools within this guide are designed to facilitate the process of data inquiry for school communities.

The Spirit of Appreciative Inquiry

An underlying assumption of the MCIEA School Quality Measures work is that each school has things that it does well and that a full measure of school quality data can help to surface schools' strengths as well as the areas where they can improve. This assumption is mirrored in Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a reflective process designed to generate positive

change in organizations by focusing on what is working well. (For a fuller overview, see Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).
Notably, AI is based on five principles:

- The Constructionist Principle ("Words create worlds"), which says that people make meaning of experiences through communication and that knowledge is generated in part through social interaction.
- The Simultaneity Principle ("Inquiry creates change"), which says that the moment of asking a question is also the moment when change begins to happen and so the act of inquiry is critical to growth
- The Poetic Principle ("We choose what we study"), which says that organizations – like books or poetry – can be interpreted and re-interpreted.
- The Anticipatory Principle ("Image inspires action"), which says that images of the future have considerable impact on present-day actions
- The Positivity Principle ("Positive questions lead to positive change"), which says that the positive and hopeful framing of questions contribute toward positive outcomes

To be clear, an appreciative approach to inquiry does not mean that we overlook areas for improvement or challenges. On the contrary, we believe that all schools – like all organizations or institutions – have strengths and challenges. We also believe that continuous improvement depends in large part on marshaling and making good use of an organization's existing assets and strengths. Spending time and attention analyzing what works, then, is a critical part of improvement.

Responsive and Flexible Inquiry

Data inquiry is not a linear process, and it should be responsive to the resources, questions, and opportunities specific to each group. For that reason, the tools in this guide should not be considered a series of unbendable requirements. Instead, they are resources that can be tuned to the needs and interests of the group. That said, we do have some recommendations to make the most of inquiry. Whenever possible:

1. **Inquiry should be sustained.** While "one-off" introductions to SQM data may be useful for seeing the big picture and helpful in facilitating a thoughtful improvement process, sustained inquiry is critical for participants to develop a deep understanding of both the data and their own varied interpretations of the data. This deeper understanding is an essential part of developing interventions or action steps.
2. **Inquiry should engage a consistent group of stakeholders.** Exercises that involve questioning school quality data can, at times, mean asking hard questions and being vulnerable. For this reason, building a collaborative climate based on trust and risk-taking is essential. Trust emerges most reliably among people who work together over time, particularly when discussing sensitive topics.
3. **Inquiry should examine areas for improvement *and* areas for celebration.** As noted above, data inquiry often involves targeting deficits or shortcomings, with the aim of improving them. These are, of course, critical aims. At the same time,

because a school's strengths may be one of its most valuable assets in continuous improvement, inquiry should also be used to identify and understand what is working well. Schools that make progress in improvement begin from a mindset of building on strengths.

In the pages that follow, you will be introduced to the steps of inquiry as well as to tools used to facilitate a deep and respectful inquiry into your school's data. These steps and tools are designed to assist your team in finding opportunities for celebration and (when deemed necessary) developing interventions to address areas needing attention to help the school continue to improve.

A cycle of inquiry and action

Data inquiry is not a new idea. Many tools and processes have been developed to help school and district teams make meaning of the massive amount of data collected in schools. Many of these protocols are adapted from the work of teachers and educators affiliated with the School Reform Initiative (SRI), a network of educators and facilitators committed to building transformative learning communities that contribute to greater equity. Some of the tools that follow come from SRI's (2014) Resource Guide. These tools, additional protocols, and more information about SRI's work may be found at www.schoolreforminitiative.org.

In this guide, we do not intend to reinvent these tools, nor do we mean to claim that the tools and resources on the pages that follow are preferable to tools or resources that a school may already use. Instead, our goal is to curate tools that we have found useful and that we feel are especially applicable to the work of interpreting whole school quality. We have organized this guide around four collective actions that we believe are integral to an appreciative and holistic inquiry: team-building, storytelling, data reflection, and action planning. We believe that full inquiry would include protocols related to each of these actions, but it is certainly possible to design a meaningful inquiry that focuses its attention on some steps more than others. (See Appendix C for sample sequences that are responsive to the needs and experiences of different groups).

The four collective actions of school quality inquiry:

1. **Build a team.** Inquiry as a process cannot be divorced from the people doing the inquiring, and so we have intentionally designed time and tools for teams to build trust and think carefully about the story of their school. Although "team-building" is often thought about as a step that is only done once, we believe that it is something that must be re-visited regularly, especially since turnover – among students and adults – is an inevitable part of the life cycle of schools. As new people join the inquiry process, they must be integrated and acclimated to the group's norms and expectations.
2. **Surface stories.** MCIEA believes that schools are too complex to be reduced to a single letter or number, which means that often times school community members have deeper and more meaningful stories to tell (and they are often all too aware of the stories other people tell *about* their schools, for better and worse). The SQM data can and should be used in service of surfacing these implicit stories told about schools and empowering school communities to tell their own stories. Because stories change – and storytelling is a powerful and empowering tool for school improvement and professional growth – this step should be regularly revisited.
3. **Engage the data.** Data can be overwhelming, especially when there is a lot to sift through. Consequently, we approach data with care – gradually and deliberately setting aside our expectations and interpretations until we are ready to question them. The first part of this step involves *description* – noticing what the data say and do not say, noting the data that make us pleased or curious or concerned, observing our own reactions to the data. Once we have described the data, only

then do we move on to *meaning-making* – offering multiple interpretations for what we see and coming to reasonable conclusions about what caused the trends we see in the data. Coming to a shared conclusion about the underlying causes helps to form the basis for action.

4. **Move toward action.** Having described data and offered some interpretations of it, the group is ready to respond. Actions need not be in response to the full scope of data. On the contrary, actions tend to be most effective when they are narrowly targeted. Identifying precisely defined challenge areas and developing a plan for addressing them requires gathering multiple perspectives, developing hypotheses, identifying solutions, and taking action together.

Step 1: Build a Team

These tools and protocols are intended to surface the group's expectations for inquiry, refine these expectations into norms for working together, and develop rituals around which the group can continue to be mindful of the process. Read through them and select one (or more than one) that fits with the needs of your team. Some sample sequences for different teams can be found in Appendix C.

Fears and Hopes

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative. Developed in the field by educators.

Time Required

15-20 minutes

Purpose

To have people learn about each other and to establish a collective ownership over everyone's expectations and concerns. By getting them into the open, it is then possible to establish norms for addressing these concerns.

Process

1. (5 minutes) The facilitator asks the group to write down briefly their greatest fear for this process (e.g., "If this were the worst meeting/cycle/class, what will happen or not happen?"). Then have them write their greatest hope (e.g., "If this were the best meeting/cycle/class, what will be its outcomes?")
2. (2-3 minutes) If time permits, have group members share their hopes and fears with a partner.
3. (5 minutes) Have participants share out their hopes and fears. The facilitator should capture these – verbatim, if possible – on separate pieces of newsprint, one for hopes and one for fears.
4. (10 minutes) Discuss the lists together. Do not be afraid of the worst fears.
5. From these lists, it is easy to move toward norm-setting: ask, "In order for us to reach our hoped-for outcomes, while making sure we deal with our fears, what norms will we need?"

Sample Norms

In setting norms, it can be helpful to have some examples to offer the group. Some sample norms include:

- Be kind
- Be specific
- Ground observations in the data
- Monitor airtime

The Paseo

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative. The result of collaborative work by Debbi Laidley of the UCLA School of Management Program, with Debbie Bambino, Debbie McIntyre, and Juli Quinn. Created at the Winter Meeting, 2001.

Time Required

25-30 minutes

Purpose

To initiate a dialogue about how people's identity shapes their decisions and behaviors. Members first reflect individually and then work in pairs to tell and listen to stories.

Process

1. (2-3 minutes) On a blank page, each participant draws a circle in the center and then writes their name in the circle.

   Connected to this circle, participants should draw up to five additional circles. In each additional circle, participants should write a word or phrase that captures some element of his or her identity – terms or descriptions that capture who they are and how they interact with the world. Some groups may prefer to have the facilitator model this. For example, one circle might contain the word "woman," another the word "Black," another the phrase "grew up in the Deep South," and so on.
   Optional: As an additional step, participants could include words or phrases that other people use to identify them. These could be written in a different color or within a different shape (e.g., squares instead of circles).
2. (1 minute) The entire group now moves into a large open area and forms two concentric circles with equal numbers of people. The outer circle faces inward and the inner group faces outward. Members may decide to take their pages with them. (Because an even number is necessary for this part of the exercise, the facilitator may need to participate or excuse her- or himself depending on the group size.)
3. (15-25 minutes) Once everyone is in a circle and has a partner across from them, the facilitator will ask the group a series of questions. Some key guidelines to explain before asking the first question:
   - Once the question has been asked, everyone will have <u>one minute</u> to think about her or his response. This is to ensure that each person is fully listening to their partner without being distracted by a desire to plan their response.
   - At the end of the one-minute thinking time, the facilitator will announce the beginning of a round of dialogue. Each person will take turns responding, <u>without interruption</u>, to the question. Each person will have 2-minutes. If the speaker does not take the full two minutes, allow the time to pass in silence. After two minutes, the speaker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the speaker, with another full two minutes to respond.
   - At the end of round, the facilitator will ask partners to thank each other. Either the inner or outer circle will be asked to shift to the left or the right. Participants should take a moment to greet their new partners.
   - The next round will begin, with a new question, with 1-minute of thinking time, with 2-minutes for each partner to respond.
   - After 3-5 questions, the group will return to their seats to debrief the process.

4. (5 minutes) Debrief the process. One way to begin this is to have the group take a moment to write what they saw, heard, or felt and then do a round robin sharing.

Question Prompts

The order of the questions for the Concentric Circles exercise should be carefully considered. Because one's identity is often closely tied to emotions, these emotions may resurface in storytelling. It is best to vary the depth of questioning and not to start with the deepest possible question. Choose 3 to 5.

- With which descriptors do you identify most strongly? Why is that?
- With which descriptors do others identify your most strongly? How do you feel about that?
- Describe a time when one of the elements of your identity definitely worked to your advantage, either in your educational experience or in other areas of your life.
- Describe a time when one of the elements of your identity appeared to hold you back, either in your educational experience or in other areas of your life.
- Talk about a time when your perceptions of a student's identity caused you to do something that held her or him back.
- Talk about a time when your perceptions of a student's identity caused you to d something that moved her or him forward.
- Talk about a time when your identity heightened your awareness of an inequity.
- Talk about a time when your identity diminished, lessened, or obscured your awareness of an inequity.

What's in a Name

Source: Peace Games/Peace First

Time Required

15-20 minutes

Purpose

To create a gentle introduction to storytelling and to build connections within the group.

Process

1. (6 minutes) The facilitator splits the group into pairs. Each partner will have up to three uninterrupted minutes to share "the story of their name." While one partner talks, the other partner should take notes. Possible prompts include the following:
   - What is your full name?
   - What does your name mean – or what have you been told it means?
   - How do you feel about your name? Have you always felt this way? How has your feeling about your name changed over time?
   - Were you named for someone? If so, who? What do you know about this person? How do you feel about being named for them?
   - Have you ever had a nickname? Who gave it to you? How did you feel about it?
   - Do you know other names your family considered for you?
2. (10 minutes) After each partner has had a chance to tell their story, bring the group back together and have partners give one minute introductions of their partner to the whole group.
3. (5 minutes) Debrief the process.

Microlabs

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative. Originally developed by Julian Weissglass for the National Coalition for Equity in Education based at the University of California, Santa Barbara, adapted in the field by educators.

Time Required

15-20 minutes

Purpose

To generate participants' thinking through a short series of intensive questions and deep active listening.

Process

1. (2 minutes) Form triads. Explain to the groups that the facilitator will pose three questions. After each question is asked, each person will have 1-2 minutes to respond. While the person is responding, the other two members of their triad will simply listen. The facilitator will indicate when it is time to switch.
2. Have groups count off by three (so that each person has a number).
3. (15-20 minutes) Read each question twice. After the first time, give groups one minute of "think time." Assign a number to respond first (e.g., in Round 1, person #1 will respond first). Vary the numbers in each round.
   - Question 1: Why did you decide to become an educator? What drew you to this profession?
   - Question 2: Why do you stay? What keeps you coming back, year after year?
   - Question 3: In terms of your practice, what's the one thing you won't compromise? What is at the heart of what you do?

Note that the questions may vary, but in general the first question should be intentionally sequenced so that one naturally leads to the next and that they deepen reflection and increase risk. Question 1 should be easy to access; question 2 should help participants think; and question 3 should go deep.

Connections

Developed by Gene Thompson-Grove

Time Required

5-15 minutes

Purpose

To allow people to clear their concerns or distractions and enable them to engage more fully with the group, best done as a ritual that opens each session in a multi-session inquiry

Process

1. If not already doing so, sit the group in a circle where everyone can see everyone else.
2. The facilitator explains or reminds the group of the "rules" for Connections:
    - Speak if you want to
    - Don't speak if you don't want to – silence is okay
    - Speak only once until everyone who wants to has had a chance to speak
    - Listen and note what people say, but do not respond
3. Begin by saying, "Connections is open," and say how long it will last.
4. Let people speak as they are moved to.
5. A few minutes before the time is up, let the group know so that anyone who has not yet spoken may speak
6. Give another one-minute reminder before ending.
7. End by saying, "Connections is closed," and thank the group.

Step 2: Surface the stories

These tools and protocols are intended to surface implicit stories we (and others) tell about schools and to use the gaps between these perceptions to generate a goal for improvement. As with Step 1, review all of these tools and decide which one (or ones) is best for the needs of your group. For some sample sequences, see Appendix C.
As noted in the Introduction, each of these protocols draw on the principles and philosophical orientation of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to varying degrees. AI is an approach to organizational development focused squarely on the assumption that in every society, organization, or group *something is working* and that a powerful lever for improvement is to build from what is working.

Three Levels of Storytelling

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative. Original protocol adapted by the Southern Maine Partnership from Camilla Greene's Rule of 3 Protocol, November 2003. Further adaptations for data use and storytelling inspired by Michelle Cox, Mary Ann McLaughlin, and Josh Bookin, July 2018.

Time Required

30-40 minutes

Purpose

This activity is designed to deepen individual and shared understanding of a text and to consider implications for our work together. The suggested text is meant to help generate deep thinking about the impact of stories on how people act.

Process

1. In groups of 3-5, identify a facilitator and timekeeper.
2. (10 minutes) Pass out a transcript of Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's 2009 TED talk. Have participants read the text in silence and identify *multiple* passages that they feel may have implications for their work (and/or the work of the group). Alternatively, participants could *watch* the TED talk with these same questions in mind.
3. (15-25 minutes) Once everyone has finished reading, do 1 to 3 rounds of discussion. Each round consists of the following:
   - One person presents (up to 3 minutes):
     - Level 1 (Literal): Read aloud the passage s/he has selected. If another participant has previously read a passage, select another one to read.
     - Level 2 (Interpretation): Say what s/he thinks about the passage (e.g., interpretation, connections to past experiences)
     - Level 3 (Implications): Say what s/he sees as the implications for her or his work.
   - The group responds to what has been said (up to 2 minutes)
4. (5 minutes) After all rounds have been completed, debrief the process.

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Microlab: Gap Analysis

This tool combines two protocols developed by the School Reform Initiative – the first a series of questions posed as a Microlab and the second a Gap Analysis. Microlabs were developed by Julian Weissglass for the National Coalition for Equity in Education based at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and adapted in the field by educators. The Gap Analysis – a tool often used in business to bolster profitability – was developed for educators by Daniel Baron.

Time Required

Microlab: 10-15 minutes

Gap Analysis: 65 minutes, if every person presents (20 minutes per person, plus 5 minutes of "think time"

Purpose

To surface perceptions and beliefs about the school community and then to forge stronger connection between these beliefs and action.

Microlab

Each round will take 4 minutes. The total time for this part of the protocol will be 10-15 minutes.

1. Form triads.
2. Explain to the groups that the facilitator will pose three questions. After each question is asked, each person will have 1-2 minutes to respond. While the person is responding, the other two members of their triad will simply listen. The facilitator will indicate when it is time to switch.
3. Have groups count off by three (so that each person has a number).
4. Read each question twice. After the first time, give groups one minute of "think time." Assign a number to respond first (e.g., in Round 1, person #1 will respond first). Vary the numbers in each round.
   - Question 1: What do you think you know for sure about your/our school?
   - Question 2: What do you think other people think they know for sure about your/our school?
   - Question 3: Where are the gaps? What do you most want to clarify to the community about your school?

Gap Analysis

Each round will take 20 minutes. With thinking time before the rounds, this part of the protocol will take 65 minutes.

1. Have each person in the triad write down the gap they identified as part of the last microlab question: specifically, the gap between what they *know* to be true and what other people might *believe* to be true. Ask them to reflect on why this gap might exist and what it says about what the school is doing well and where it could improve.
2. (5 minutes) Choose a person to begin and have them present their gap and their own analysis of it.
3. (3 minutes) The other two members of the triad ask clarifying questions about the analysis.
4. (10 minutes) The other two members discuss what they heard with a focus on (a) what they heard and (b) the possibilities for how to bridge the gap—that is, how

to help outsiders and insiders see and learn from the others' perspective. The presenter is silent and takes notes.

5. (2 minutes) The presenter reflects back on the group's analysis and shares one idea for how they can use what they have heard. .
6. Repeat steps 2 through 5 for each member of the triad.

Success Analysis

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative and The Power of Protocols (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2007). Original versions developed by Gene Thompson-Grove, Vivian Johnson and Daniel Baron

Time Required

50 minutes minimum (add 15 minute rounds for each person presenting a success)

Purpose

To surface and share professional successes in order to gain insight into the conditions that lead to those successes and apply their insights and understandings to future practice.

Process

1. (5-10 minutes) In groups of 3 to 6, have each person reflect on and write notes about one area where they're finding success or making progress in their work. Participants should include specific details concerning their involvement and the conditions that seemed to make it different from other successes they have had.
2. (5 minutes) One member of the group shares their story with as much detail as they can provide. Other members in the group take notes.
3. (2 to 3 minutes) The rest of the group asks clarifying questions about the case in order to fill in any information that they need to reflect fully on the experience.
4. (5-7 minutes) The group discusses what they heard and offer an analysis of the success focused on what they think the presenter may have done to contribute to it and other conditions that contributed. The presenter is silent and takes notes.
5. (2-3 minutes) The presenter reflects back on the group discussion and how the analysis contributes to their own understanding of the success.
6. Repeat steps 2 through 5 for each member of the group. Each round should take approximately 15 minutes. (To save time, choose 1-2 successes for deep discussion.)
7. (5 minutes) Using a piece of newsprint, the group compiles a list of specific behaviors and principles that seem characteristic of the stories that were discussed.
8. (5 minutes) If there are multiple groups, the groups report out their lists – either verbally or by posting them on the wall and doing a "gallery walk."
9. (10 minutes) The facilitator leads a discussion about the lists and the process, asking the group what items the lists seem to have in common and whether there are items that seem surprising. The facilitator should also encourage members to consider how these principles might be applied to the school community and individual practice.

Optional, for groups that are engaged in multiple sessions of inquiry:
Save the lists of conditions and behaviors and return to them after digging into the MCIEA school quality data. Convene a discussion or affinity mapping activity where members explore the extent to which successes are reflected (or not) in the data.

Appreciative Interview

Adapted from Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom's (2010) book, The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change

Time Required

60-75 minutes

Purpose

To build connections within the group and to surface aspects of the school that are working well as a lens onto subsequent data analysis

Process

1. (2 minutes) Frame the activity: the focus of these interviews is to surface individual stories that may speak to things that the school is doing well and that may in turn be sources of strength moving forward. Identifying and holding on to successes is important as the group moves toward discussions of potential challenges and areas of improvement.
2. (3 minutes) Ask the group to reflect silently about their "best experience" as a member of the school community. Have them try to reconstruct in their minds a story they could tell about this experience.
3. (30 minutes) In pairs, have each person interview their partner and take detailed notes (as they will be asked to share highlights from the story with others). Each interview should last about 15 minutes and focus on the following three questions (see Appendix C for a handout of the questions that can be given to participants):
    a. Think about your experiences working at this school. Looking at your entire experience here, try to recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, or most excited. Tell me the story of that time. What made it an exciting experience? Where was it? What were you doing? Who was involved? Describe the event in detail. (*Backward-looking*)
    b. What do you think makes that experience stand out from other experiences? What made it feel meaningful to you? (*Inward-looking*)
    c. Mindful of your own experience and what made it meaningful, if you could have three wishes for this school, what would they be? (*Future-looking*)
4. (20 minutes) Have pairs join with another pair to form a foursome. In the foursome, each person should take five minutes to introduce the story they heard. As each person is talking, the other members of the group should be taking notes on possibly common themes.
5. (5 minutes) As a foursome, have a conversation about common themes. Generate a list on a piece newsprint.
6. (10-15 minutes) Post newsprint summaries around the room and have people circulate and read them. Depending on time and the mood of the group, either have them to a "chalk talk" response to the paper or bring the group together to discuss common themes and strengths of the school.

Notes

- Consider providing to the group – or have the group generate – a specific area of the school quality framework to be the topic for the interview. For example, "Think back on a time at this school when you felt like you were part of a strong professional community." (See Appendix A for the full school quality framework).

Step 3: Engage the data

These tools are intended to facilitate a close examination of data, suspending assumptions and beliefs and making space for multiple interpretations of what the data might be saying. These tools may not – by themselves – point the way toward action, but they will foster a deeper understanding of what the data (and by extension what students and teachers) are trying to communicate.

Both the ATLAS protocol and the Data-Driven Dialogue require participants to identify or generate a focus for deep discussion. Sometimes, this focus may come from school leaders or an intuitive curiosity about what is working well or needs improvement (e.g., low levels of student engagement or students' perspectives on safety). If this is the case, read through both data analysis protocols and choose the one that feels like the best fit.

Other times, a focus for deeper data analysis may feel elusive. Perhaps there are many potentially interesting topics to explore and it is hard to choose just one. If that is the case, we recommend using the Question Formulation protocol to generate ideas and select a focus question.

Question Formulation

Adapted from The Right Question Institute (www.rightquestion.org), as adapted by and presented in Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2005)

Time Required

45 minutes

Purpose

To focus a group's attention on specific issues emerging from data before a deep discussion of what they mean and what action steps to take

Process

1. (2 minutes) Present a focus topic. On a piece of chart paper, write the topic. Topics are meant to be a point of departure for small groups and can be quite general, phrased as questions or statements. For example, a topic could be as broad as "School Climate" or as focused as "Why do our students feel so stressed about taking tests?"
2. (5 minutes) In groups of 5-8, brainstorm questions related to this topic and write these questions on a piece of newsprint (or on post-it notes that they stick to the newsprint). There are two rules for this brainstorm:
    a. Phrase all responses as questions, not statements.
    b. Write questions exactly as stated – no editing.
3. (3 minutes) Ask groups to examine their list and classify them as open-ended or closed-ended. Allow groups to change the form of any questions if they would like.
4. (5 minutes) Ask groups to prioritize the questions. First, have them choose the three that they think are most important. Next, have them choose the one question of these three that they think is most important.
5. (5-8 minutes) Write the "most important" question on a new piece of newsprint and have the group generate new questions about it, again following the two rules above.
6. (3-5 minutes) Again have the group prioritize the most important questions.
7. (5 minutes) Bring the groups back together and have them share the most important question emerging from this process. Record them on the piece of newsprint with the topic printed on the top.
8. (5-10 minutes) Debrief the process.

Note

By itself, this process does not include an examination of data or the description of action steps. Rather, it is meant to generate specific and compelling questions that can be used to focus subsequent explorations of data. See the protocols and processes under Step 4 for more guidance on action planning.

ATLAS: Looking at Data

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative. Originally developed by Eric Buchovecky, revised by Gene Thompson-Grove and then by Dianne Leahy.

Time Required

45-60 minutes

Purpose

To focus on the descriptive evidence in the data and listen to multiple perspectives without getting bogged down by one's own assumptions

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Pre-Protocol: MCIEA Data Exploration (10-15 minutes)

If needed, this could be done prior to an inquiry session.

- Spend time exploring the dashboard individually or in pairs.
- As you explore, make note of data that stands out. This could include data that is surprising, troubling, interesting, or otherwise compelling.
- Ask for a volunteer(s) to "present" the data they find compelling to the group for a deeper exploration. To do this, they will be asked to explain why they found it worthy of discussion and then asked to be an observer of the discussion.

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1. **Getting started (5 minutes)**
    - Facilitator: Remind the group of the norms.
        - If part of a series, refer back to norms created at the beginning.
        - If a "one-off" session, set some key norms.
    - Presenter(s): Share the data they found compelling and give a brief explanation. Avoid sharing any conclusions or interpretations of the data.

2. **Describing the data (10 minutes)**
    - Facilitator: Ask the group, "What do you see?"
    - Group: Gather as much information as possible from the data, describing what they see and avoiding judgments about the data's quality or any interpretations.
    - Facilitator, when necessary: Remind the group to stay close to the data, giving page numbers or precise locations for where they are making observations. For example, it is often helpful to ask group members to "put their finger on where they see that."
    - Write observations on chart paper. Make sure to keep interpretations separate.

3. **Interpreting the data (10 minutes)**
    - Facilitator: Ask the group, "What does this suggest?" Follow up by asking, "What are the assumptions we are making about school quality or about students?"
    - Group: Try to make sense of what the data say. Try to find *as many different interpretations as possible* and evaluate these interpretations against the kind and quality of evidence (either in the data or in what they know about the school).

- Think broadly and creatively. *Assume that the data – no matter how confusing – makes sense to some people*. Try to see what they see.
- In interpreting the data, listen carefully to each other and ask questions to try to understand others' perspectives.
- Write interpretations on a separate piece of chart paper from observations.

4. Implications for school quality and school improvement (10 minutes)

- Facilitator: Ask the group, "What are the implications of this work for school improvement?"
- Discuss: Based on the group's observations and interpretations, discuss implications for practice. For example:
  - What other information would be helpful to have?
  - What steps could be taken next?
  - What strategies might be most effective?
  - What does this conversation make you think about in terms of overall school culture and quality? What about your own practice? About teaching and learning?
  - What are the implications for equity?

5. Reflecting on the process (10 minutes)

- Presenter reflection
  - What did you learn from listening to your colleagues?
  - What was interesting or surprising?
  - How did what you heard affirm or challenge your own interpretations?
  - What ideas do you have for integrating these perspectives into your practice or into the work of this team?
- Group reflection
  - What questions about school culture (or about teaching and learning) did looking at the data raise for you?
  - What questions about equity arose and how did you feel about them?
  - How can you individually – or this group collectively – pursue these questions further?
  - Are there things you would like to do differently as a result of looking at these data?

6. Debriefing the process (5 minutes)

- How well did this process work?
- What about the process helped you to see and learn interesting or surprising things?
- What could be improved?
- Facilitator: what felt good, what felt like a challenge

Data-Driven Dialogue

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative. Developed by the Teacher Development Group, 2002. Based on work presented by Nancy Love, author of Using Data/Getting Results (2001).

Time Required

60-90 minute; if needed, this could be spread across two sessions:

- Session I: Pre-Protocol, Phase I, Distribute Data, Phase II (40-60 minutes)
- Session II: Review Phase II, Phase III, Phase IV, Response, Implications, Debrief (45-60 minutes)

Purpose

To build awareness of participants' viewpoints, beliefs, and assumptions about the data. The dialogue is divided into four phases.

To Do Beforehand:

- Decide who will present the data. Ideally, this would be the principal or a teacher leader who has had a chance to review the full complement of data and selects a discrete slice of the data that they would like others to see and think deeply about.
- Phase II of this protocol asks participants to "go visual" – recreating and marking up the data. Have newsprint available for participants to draw or record the data visually. Another possibility is to have a project the data onto a whiteboard so that participants can mark it up without having to recreate the data themselves.

Pre-Protocol (10-12 minutes)

1. (2-3 minutes) Review the protocol and its phases.
2. (4-5 minutes) The facilitator (or "owner" of the data) provides an overview of the data, the context in which it was collected, and the focus for today's dialogue.
3. (4 minutes) Clarifying questions.

Phase I: Predictions (7-10 minutes)

Before sharing the data, have participants reflect and write about what they expect they will find. Encourage them to draw on previous experiences, surface assumptions, and make predictions. Making these assumptions and predictions explicit is a way to create readiness to examine and discuss the data.

1. (1-2 minutes) Give participants one minute of think time.
2. (3 minutes) Have participants write responses to as many of the following sentence stems – written on newsprint or as a handout – as they can or want to:
    - I assume…
    - I predict…
    - I wonder…
    - My questions/expectations are influenced by…
    - Some possibilities for learning that these data may present…

3. (3-4 minutes) Report out on predictions. Go around the group and have each person select one prediction to share. Record predictions on newsprint.

Distribute Data (10 minutes)

1. (7 minutes) Distribute data and examine it together. For the MCIEA dashboard, the facilitator should open it on a shared computer and orient participants to its navigation but should avoid interpreting.
2. (3 minutes) Invite participants to ask additional clarifying questions.

Phase II: Go Visual (10-30 minutes)

1. Give participants a chance to mark-up and reorganize the data, with the goal of better understanding it.
2. Mark-ups may be done individually or in pairs or in small groups, depending on the size of the group and the amount of data.
3. Have highlighters, chart paper, and calculators on hand.

Phase III: Observations (10-15 minutes)

1. (5 minutes) Circulate around the room and observe other members' visual representation. As people circulate, have them write their observations. Remind people to note *only the facts they can observe*. Conjectures, explanations, and inferences are not allowed (yet)! To assist with people's observations, hand out "observation sheets" with the following sentence stems (or write them and post them on a piece of newsprint):
   - I observe that…
   - Some patterns/trends I notice…
   - I can count…
   - I am surprised that I see…
2. (5 minutes) Go around and have people report observations. One observation per person, continuing rounds until all new observations have been shared.

Phase IV: Inferences (10-15 minutes)

Finally, it is time to make meaning of the data!

1. (5 minutes) Individually, participants should reflect on what they have observed and make some notes. Some of the following sentence stems could be used to generate ideas:
   - I believe the data suggest… because…
   - Additional data that would help me verify or confirm my explanation are…
   - Some appropriate solutions/responses that address the needs implied in the data would include…
   - Additional data that would help guide the implementation of these solutions and determine if they are working would be…

2. (5-10 minutes) Go around and have people report out inferences. One inference per person, continuing rounds until all new inferences have been shared. Record them on newsprint.

Response from the presenter (5 minutes)

- Have the presenter reflect back to the group: what new thoughts are you having about the data now? What feel like next steps?

Implications (10-15 minutes)

- Facilitate an open discussion about the implications of this exercise for teaching and learning, as well as for the school community as a whole.

Debrief the protocol (5 minutes)

Step 4: Move towards action

These tools are designed to answer the "Now what?" question. After a group has spent time together building trust and making meaning of data, they need to have a next step or series of next steps. These tools are designed to help the group identify problem areas and to prioritize issues and potential solutions. Review each of the tools and choose one (or two) that best fits the needs of your group.

In addition to these protocols, we also recommend that groups develop action plans for school improvement. These clearly define challenge areas, strategies for addressing them, people responsible for implementing strategies, deadlines, and guidelines for evaluating success. Tools for action planning are available in Appendix F.

Nametags

Adapted from the Boston Teachers Union Professional Learning Initiative

Time Required

30-35 minutes

Purpose

To identify the most pressing areas for action and the resources available to address them.

Process

1. (1 minute) Ask the group to take one minute to reflect silently – taking notes if they want to – on the following question: "Based on the data we have looked at and our conclusions about the data, what is the most significant school climate issue or area of work at our school that we should focus on improving?"
2. (2 minutes) Lay out nametags and markers on the table (or pass out a nametag and markers to each person) and ask people to write down the issue or area of work on their nametag. Explain the next steps before having the group do anything:
    a. Stand up, mingle, and read your colleagues' nametags.
    b. The goal is to try to convene "affinity groups" – that is, groups of issues that seem similar or related to each other – but to do so *in silence*.
3. (5 minutes) Have the group mingle and form affinity groups.
4. (10 minutes) Once groups have formed, have groups sit together. First, as a group, name the area of work and write it on a piece of chart paper. Then, on the chart paper, brainstorm responses to the following question, "What do we need as a school community to make progress in this area?" Use post-it notes and have participants write one response per post-it note.[*]
5. (10 minutes) Engage in a "chalk talk." Post chart papers around the room and give everyone a pen or marker. Have people circulate around the room and make notes in the margins. Specifically, encourage people to suggest ways that they can take action on the issues they have identified as important.
6. (5 minutes) Debrief the process as a whole group.

[*] Writing responses on post-it notes makes it easy to prioritize responses and items for action using the Affinity Mapping protocol.

Affinity Mapping

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative. Developed by educators in the field, adapted by Ross Peterson-Veatch, 2006. Further adapted for this guide to use in action planning.

Time Required

15-30 minutes

Purpose

To identify shared priorities and prioritize areas for school improvement

Process

For this protocol, you will need post-it notes and chart paper.

1. Choose a framing question for the group to respond to. One option is to connect this activity to previous data exploration or action planning protocols and ask participants to consider, "What is the most important area for improvement?"
2. Ask the question and give participants a short stack of post-it notes. Have participants write *one answer per post-it note*.
3. Split into small groups of 4-6. Give each group a piece of chart paper. In *silence*, have the group put their post-it notes on the paper.
4. Reminding participants to remain silent, direct them to organize the post-it notes into "natural categories." Directions might sound something like this:

   > "Which ideas go together? As long as you do not talk, feel free to move any sticky note to any place. Move yours, and those of others, and feel free to do this. Do not be offended if someone moves yours to a place that you think it does not belong, just move it to where you think it does belong — but do this all in silence

5. Once the group has agreed on categories, have them group the post-its together and give names to each category.
6. Bring the groups back together. Have a spokesperson from each group share their categories. Together, reflect on what groups did and on the process:
   - What themes emerged across groups? Were there any surprises?
   - What dimensions might be missing? Any surprises?
   - How was this process? What worked well? What was challenging?
7. Consider taking these priority areas and using them as a basis for deeper action planning (see the Action Planning guide and templates).

Back to the Future

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative. Developed by Scott Murphy, August 2002. Revised June 2008.

Time Required

1-2 hours, spread out over multiple sessions if needed

Purpose

To expand the group's imagination about what it is trying to achieve and to develop potential actions that take account of realistic challenges, timelines, resources, and outcomes

Process

Make sure to reserve enough time to facilitate this protocol effectively. Depending on the size of the group and the focus, it could take between 1-2 hours. Facilitators should be judicious about the time required for each step.

Pre-Protocol

- Discuss with a leader the goal for this activity, especially its intended outcomes and what the school or organization intends to do with the thinking that is generated.
- Post in the room three pieces of chart paper

Protocol

1. **Overview** (5-10 minutes)
   Review the process with participants. Clarify the expected outcomes. If there are planning sheets or other materials, distribute them.

2. **Presentation** (5 minutes)
   A lead member of the group – for example, the principal or a teacher leader – describes what the team is trying to accomplish through this process as well as any expectations or parameters around the strategic vision.

3. **Clarifying and Probing Questions**
   The group asks the lead member clarifying and probing questions. The clarifying questions are intended to help the team better understand its task. The probing questions are intended to extend the lead member's thinking around their own hopes and expectations.

4. **Projection**
   The facilitator asks the group to imagine the future and to describe – in detail – what it looks, sounds, and feels like having accomplished the goals and vision laid out by the lead member. A member of the group (or facilitator) should record what is said on one of the pieces of chart paper, labeled "Projected Future." Some guidelines for this step:
   - Speak in the *present tense*, as this has already happened.
   - Describe *what is* in this projection. This is not a hope or a wish but a description of what is in place during a best case projected future.
   - Do *not* (yet) describe how it happened.
   - Focus on tangible things you can see, hear, feel, and know to be true in this future.

- Consider revisiting this projected future after Steps 5 and 6

5. **Looking "Back"**
   Ask the group – still in the projected future – to look back and describe how their school or organization looked when they started, based on the data they have examined and interpreted. When necessary, ask clarifying questions before writing ideas on the newsprint. These questions can help participants get more specific and clear. Some guidelines:
   - Speak in the *past tense*, as this was what was in place when first envisioning the future.
   - Speak to both the positives and the challenges that were a part of the school.
   - Try to remain as concrete and explicit as possible

6. **Connection**
   Link the "projected future" to the past by explicitly answering the *how* you (and the organization) moved from the past into the projected future. If the comments are general, ask participants to be specific regarding *what* was done and *how* to impacted the change. Some guidelines:
   - Speak in the *past tense*, as this represents the time period between the past as the projected future.
   - Directly and explicitly connect the two periods of time with things that were done to make this future happen.
   - Consider discussing and charting how, what, when, with what resources, and by whom when listing how the future came to be.

7. **Identifying Challenges**
   On cards or post-it notes, have team members write down some of the most pertinent challenges toward accomplishing this vision. Encourage participants to be honest and specific. Place cards or notes between the chart papers of the projected future and the chart paper noting how the future was accomplished. Leave space between them to represent gaps that allow for the team to maneuver through obstacles.

8. **Debrief and Next Steps**
   Next steps are crucial toward taking action. One approach for identifying next steps is to take the "how" poster and prioritize the items. They are then given dates, point people, and intended outcomes.

Unlike the other protocols in this guide, action planning is considerably more open-ended and must be guided by the motivations and resources of each particular group. The previous protocols in this section are geared toward focusing a group's attention on areas for further attention or improvement, but they do not – by themselves – facilitate the process of concrete (and data-informed) improvement. Many worthwhile books have been written on this process (for example, Boudett et al., 2005; Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015; Krechevsky, Mardell, Rivard, & Wilson, 2013), but the essential point across all of them is that action planning must be deliberate, collaborative, and ongoing. With this in mind, the following steps and resources are meant to provide a *roadmap* for action planning. But a roadmap is different from a prescription. In order to be effective, a prescription must be followed exactly. A roadmap, on the other hand, offers multiple pathways to any one destination, each of which might be desirable depending on the time you have available and what you want to see and do on your way. For that reason, it is imperative that each group charts a path that best suits its needs, interests, motivations, and available resources.

Time Required
Multiple meetings with a core leadership team responsible for overseeing implementation of the action plan, with time in between for testing ideas and soliciting broad input
Purpose
To identify challenge areas and to use a collaborative process for developing and implementing solutions
Process
Each of these process steps could be the focus for separate meetings or work sessions. See Appendix F for accompanying templates.

1. **Define the problem.**
    a. First, the group engages in an open discussion about a previously identified and agreed-upon challenge area. (Many of the protocols and activities in this book may be effective at identifying challenge areas – for example, Data-Driven Dialogue, Affinity Mapping, or Back to the Future.) Specifically, the group grapples with different facets of the challenge area and multiple interpretations of its causes.

    b. Second, the group states the challenge area as clearly as possible in the form of a question. Framing the challenge as a question can help generate hypotheses about root causes.

    Result of Step 1: a defined challenge area in the form of a question

2. **Determine the causes of the problem.**
    a. First, the group brainstorms hypotheses for the challenge area. To do this, the group considers the challenge area from multiple perspectives, including those of students and parents. If needed, the group may gather additional data by talking to people connected to the challenge area and looking over relevant documents. With this more in-depth understanding,

the group is ready to generate hypotheses.

b. Second, the group prioritizes, tests, and aims to confirm hypotheses. For each hypothesis, the group should look for concrete evidence or data – perhaps repeating one of the data exploration protocols in this guide – in order to find a source of the challenge area. Additional data that may be useful could include classroom observations, student work, curriculum materials, or focus groups. Even if one hypothesis is confirmed, the group should continue testing hypotheses in order to understand the challenge area from multiple perspectives.

Result of Step 2: clearly defined cause(s) of the challenge area.

3. **Identify solutions.**
   a. First, brainstorm possible solutions, considering resources within and outside of the school. A variety of resources – including existing research, visits of other schools, and expertise from colleagues.

   b. Second, decide on a solution. Some key questions to ask when making this decision are the following:
      - Will the implementation of this solution address the challenge area?
      - What potential obstacles exist to the successful implementation of this solution?
      - Is the solution practical?
      - Are there enough resources?

   Result of Step 3: one or more clear solutions

4. **Develop and implement action plans**
   a. First, create an action plan based on the solution(s) and a realistic assessment of available resources. Having determined that the solution(s) will adequately address the challenge area, the group should outline a plan for implementation and guidelines for evaluating the plan. This plan – which is included in the tools in Appendix F – should include timelines, persons responsible, and resources required.

   b. Second, present the action plan to the broader school community. Getting input from stakeholders and generating broad-based buy-in is a critical resource for a successful solution. Make edits as needed.

   c. Third, implement the action plan as written and agreed on.

   Result of Step 4: an action plan that is implemented school-wide

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Appendix A: MCIEA School Quality Framework

Source: www.mciea.org

mciea
MA Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment

SCHOOL QUALITY MEASURES FRAMEWORK

1 Teachers and Leadership

1A *Teachers and the Teaching Environment*
1A-i Professional qualifications
1A-ii Effective practices
1A-iii Professional community

1B *Leadership*
1B-i Effective leadership
1B-ii Support for teaching development & growth

2 School Culture

2A *Safety*
2A-i Student physical safety
2A-ii Student emotional safety

2B *Relationships*
2B-i Student sense of belonging
2B-ii Student-teacher relationships

2C *Academic Orientation*
2C-i Valuing of learning
2C-ii Academic challenge

3 Resources

3A *Facilities and Personnel*
3A-i Physical space and materials
3A-ii Content specialists and support staff

3B *Learning Resources*
3B-i Curricular strength and variety
3B-ii Cultural responsiveness
3B-iii Co-curricular activities

3C *Community Support*
3C-i Family-school relationships
3C-ii Community involvement, external partners

4 Academic Learning

4A *Performance*
4A-i Performance growth
4A-ii Performance assessment proficiency rates

4B *Student Commitment to Learning*
4B-i Engagement in school
4B-ii Degree completion

4C *Critical Thinking*
4C-i Problem solving emphasis
4C-ii Problem solving skills

4D *College and Career Readiness*
4D-i College-going and persistence
4D-ii Career preparation and placement

5 Citizenship and Wellbeing

5A *Civic Engagement*
5A-i Appreciation for diversity
5A-ii Civic participation

5B *Work Ethic*
5B-i Perseverance and determination
5B-ii Growth mindset

5C *Creative and Performing Arts*
5C-i Participation in creative and performing arts
5C-ii Valuing creative and performing arts

5D *Health*
5D-i Social and emotional health
5D-ii Physical health

Appendix B: The Danger of a Single Story

Source: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/

The Danger of a Single Story
Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche

I grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria. My mother says that I started reading at the age of two, although I think four is probably closer to the truth. So I was an early reader, and what I read were British and American children's books.

I was also an early writer, and when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out. [*Laughter*]

I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to. My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer, because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was...

What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books -- by their very nature -- had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Things changed when I discovered African books. There weren't many of them, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books. But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized.

Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.

I come from a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family. My father was a professor. My mother was an administrator. And so we had, as was the norm, live-in domestic help, who would often come from nearby rural villages. So, the year I turned eight, we got a new house boy. His name was Fide. The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner, my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family.

Then one Saturday, we went to his village to visit, and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them was how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them.
Years later, I thought about this when I left Nigeria to go to university in the United States. I was 19. My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my "tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey. [*Laughter*] She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove.
What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals.
I must say that before I went to the U.S., I didn't consciously identify as African. But in the U.S., whenever Africa came up, people turned to me. Never mind that I knew nothing about places like Namibia. But I did come to embrace this new identity, and in many ways I think of myself now as African. Although I still get quite irritable when Africa is referred to as a country, the most recent example being my otherwise wonderful flight from Lagos two days ago, in which there was an announcement on the Virgin flight about the charity work in "India, Africa and other countries."

So, after I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, I began to understand my roommate's response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fide's family.

This single story of Africa ultimately comes, I think, from Western literature. Now, here is a quote from the writing of a London merchant called John Lok, who sailed to west Africa in 1561 and kept a fascinating account of his voyage. After referring to the black Africans as "beasts who have no houses," he writes, "They are also people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts." Now, I've laughed every time I've read this. And one must admire the imagination of John Lok. But what is important about his writing is that it represents the beginning of a tradition of telling African stories in the West: A tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling, are "half devil, half child."

And so, I began to realize that my American roommate must have throughout her life seen and heard different versions of this single story, as had a professor, who once told me that my novel was not "authentically African." Now, I was quite willing to contend that there were a number of things wrong with the novel, but I had not quite imagined that it had failed at achieving something called African authenticity. In fact, I did not know what African authenticity was. The professor told me that my characters were too much like

him, an educated and middle-class man. My characters drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore they were not authentically African.
But I must quickly add that I too am just as guilty in the question of the single story. A few years ago, I visited Mexico from the U.S. The political climate in the U.S. at the time was tense, and there were debates going on about immigration. And, as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans. There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were fleecing the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border, that sort of thing.

I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then, I was overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself.

So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is *nkali*. It loosely translates to "to be greater than another." Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of *nkali*: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.

Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, "secondly." Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story.

I recently spoke at a university where a student told me that it was such a shame that Nigerian men were physical abusers like the father character in my novel. I told him I had just read a novel called "American Psycho" – [*laughter*] – and that it was such a shame that young Americans were serial murderers [*laughter, applause*]. Now, obviously I said this in a fit of mild irritation. But it would never have occurred to me to think that just because I had read a novel in which a character was a serial killer that he was somehow representative of all Americans. This is not because I am a better person than that student, but because of America's cultural and economic power, I had many stories of America. I had read Updike and Steinbeck and Gaitskill. I did not have a single story of America.

When I learned, some years ago, that writers were expected to have had really unhappy childhoods to be successful, I began to think about how I could invent horrible things my parents had done to me [*laughter*]. But the truth is that I had a very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family.

But I also had grandfathers who died in refugee camps. My cousin Polle died because he could not get adequate healthcare. One of my closest friends, Okoloma, died in a plane crash because our fire trucks did not have water. I grew up under repressive military governments that devalued education, so that sometimes, my parents were not paid their salaries. And so, as a child, I saw jam disappear from the breakfast table, then margarine disappeared, then bread became too expensive, then milk became rationed. And most of all, a kind of normalized political fear invaded our lives.

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.
Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes: There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them.

I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.
So what if before my Mexican trip, I had followed the immigration debate from both sides? What if my mother told us that Fide's family was poor and hardworking? What if we had an African television network that broadcast diverse African stories all over the world -- what the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls "a balance of stories"?
Now, what if my roommate knew about my friend Funmi Iyanda, a fearless woman who hosts a TV show in Lagos and is determined to tell the stories that we prefer to forget? What if my roommate knew about the heart procedure that was performed in the Lagos hospital last week? What if my roommate knew about contemporary Nigerian music, talented people singing in English and Pidgin, and Igbo and Yoruba and Ijo, mixing influences from Jay-Z to Fela to Bob Marley to their grandfathers? What if my roommate knew about the female lawyer who recently went to court in Nigeria to challenge a ridiculous law that required women to get their husband's consent before renewing their passports? What if my roommate knew about Nollywood, full of innovative people making films despite great technical odds, films so popular that they really are the best example of Nigerians consuming what they produce? What if my roommate knew about my wonderfully ambitious hair braider, who just started her own business selling hair extensions? Or about the millions of other Nigerians who start businesses and sometimes fail, but continue to nurse ambition?

Every time I am home I am confronted with the usual sources of irritation for most Nigerians: our failed infrastructure, our failed government, but also by the incredible resilience of people who thrive despite the government, rather than because of it. I teach writing workshops in Lagos every summer, and it is amazing to me how many people apply, how many people are eager to write, to tell stories…

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.
The American writer Alice Walker wrote this about her Southern relatives who had moved to the North. She introduced them to a book about the Southern life that they had left behind. "They sat around, reading the book themselves, listening to me read the book, and a kind of paradise was regained."

I would like to end with this thought: That when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.
Thank you.

Note: This transcript has been edited slightly for length.

Appendix C: Appreciative Inquiry Questions

Ask your partner the following three questions. As they talk, take detailed notes.

1. Think about your experiences working at this school. Looking at your entire experience here, try to recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, or most excited. Tell me the story of that time. What made it an exciting experience? Where was it? What were you doing? Who was involved? Describe the event in detail. (*Backward-looking*)

2. What do you think makes that experience stand out from other experiences? What made it feel meaningful to you? (*Inward-looking*)

3. Mindful of your own experience and what made it meaningful, if you could have three wishes for this school, what would they be? (*Future-looking*)

Appendix D: Sample Inquiry Agendas

Ideally, inquiry should be an ongoing process (although we recognize that sometimes a one-time introductory session is important, too; see Appendix C.) However, there is no one-sized inquiry process. Just as schools have unique strengths and needs, so too do groups looking at data. For this reason, facilitators should learn as much as they can about the context in which the group is working.
For example, here are questions to consider before planning a session or series of sessions:

- How comfortable is the group with data and data analysis?
- How have they used data before?
- How long has the group been working together?
    - If they are a long-standing group, what are their strengths? What are their blindspots? What prepares them to take on this new inquiry role?
    - If they are a new group, what are members' roles? How well do they know each other? How were they chosen for this group?
- What decisions are this group empowered to make? What decisions are they *not* empowered to make?
- What does the group hope to get out of the data inquiry process?

Taking these and other questions into account, below are some sample five-session sequences.

Note: Many of the activities in the sequences are described in this guide. Some of them are general topics for group discussion. All of them may need slight adjustments to accommodate schedules.

Comfort With Data Analysis

	Comfortable with Data Analysis	*New to Data Analysis*
Session 1 *60 minutes*	• What's in a Name • Discussion: Norm-Setting/Goals • Three Levels of Storytelling	• Fears and Hopes • Discussion: Norm-Setting/Goals • Microlabs
Session 2 *60 minutes*	• Connections • Appreciative Interviews	• Connections • Three Levels of Storytelling
Session 3 *60 minutes*	• Connections • ATLAS: Looking at Data	• Connections • Data-Driven Dialogue, pt 1
Session 4 *60 minutes*	• Connections • Discussion: Reflect on takeaways from ATLAS • Revisit Success Analysis	• Connections • Data-Driven Dialogue, pt 2
Session 5 *60 minutes*	• Connections • Back to the Future	• Connections • Nametags

Comfort With Each Other

	Knows Each Other Well	*New to Each Other*
Session 1 *60 minutes*	• The Paseo • Discussion: Norm-Setting/Goals • Microlabs	• What's in a Name • Discussion: Norm-Setting/Goals • Microlabs
Session 2 *60 minutes*	• Connections • Microlab: Gap Analysis	• Connections • Three Levels of Storytelling
Session 3 *60 minutes*	• Connections • ATLAS: Looking at Data	• Connections • Data-Driven Dialogue, pt 1
Session 4 *60 minutes*	• Connections • Revist Microlabs • Nametags	• Connections • Data-Driven Dialogue, pt. 2
Session 5 *60 minutes*	• Connections • Back to the Future	• Connections • Nametags

Appendix E: Sample Overview Sessions

For parent council (30 minutes):

- (10 minutes) Introduction and Overview of MCIEA and the MCIEA Web-Tool
- (15 minutes) Model Description and Interpretation of Data, using ATLAS protocol
- (5 minutes) Debrief and How Data Could Be Used for School Improvement

For a one-time all-staff school meeting (45 minutes):

- (10 minutes) Introduction and Overview of MCIEA and the MCIEA Web-Tool
- (20 minutes) Microlabs
- (5 minutes) Debrief Microlabs
- (5 minutes) Preview one piece of school data from the web tool
- (5 minutes) Next steps

For school leadership team (45 minutes):

- (10 minutes) Introduction and Overview of MCIEA and the MCIEA Web-Tool
- (10 minutes) Small Group Exploration
- (20 minutes) One round of Success Analysis
- (5 minutes) Debrief

Appendix F: Action Planning Templates

These templates are adapted from the Center for Collaborative Education's (2001) Turning Points Guide to Data-Based Inquiry and Decision Making.

Step 1.

Define the problem
What is the initial definition of the problem area?
How can the problem be stated in the form of a clear, focused question?

Step 2.

Determine the Causes of the Problem		
Steps 1. *Brainstorm hypotheses.* Consider all possible reasons why the problem area exists. 2. *Refine and test hypotheses.* Review the list of hypotheses to eliminate those that are least likely to be the cause. Test those that are most plausible. 3. *List causes.* From the tested hypotheses, list two or three causes that could be used in developing solutions.		
Hypothesis (Why does the problem exist?)	**How will we test it?**	**After testing it, is the hypothesis feasible?**
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
Cause(s). After developing and testing hypotheses, indicate the cause(s) you have identified for why the problem may exist.		
1. **2.** **3.**		

Step 3.

Identify Solutions
1. *Brainstorm solutions*. Consider all possible solutions to the problem. Take into account input from multiple stakeholder groups. 2. *Refine and test solutions*. Go through the list to eliminate those that may not be practical. 3. *Select the best solutions from which to develop an action plan.*
Cause(s)
Potential Solutions
Questions for Identifying Feasible and Appropriate Solutions • Will the implementation of this solution help address the problem area? • What barriers are there in implementing the solution? • Who can assist with implementing the solution? • What resources do we need to implement this solution? • What changes will this solution bring about and are the changes likely to be sustained? On what does sustainability most depend?
Selected Solution(s) for Developing an Action Plan

Step 4.

Develop and Implement Action Plans			
Problem Area			
Proposed Solution			
Strategies/Tasks	**Person(s) Responsible**	**Timeline**	**Resources**