

## THE INSTANT BUCKET POLL ACTIVITY

Does anyone want to know what our colleagues *\*collectively\** think about something, and what, collectively, we should do about it?

Here is a description of a completely free professional learning activity that is designed to elucidate the collective thinking of participants about an issue or opportunity that may occur in a given environment, such as a school.



The Center for Positive Practices (CPP) has used this activity to help teachers and staff in schools to unpack their Teacher Self-Assessment Scales (TSAS) results and participants report that they consider it engaging and useful, and also kind of fun.

It can also be customized and adapted for other topics, especially when the democratic or collective perspective is important. Here are some recommended procedures and considerations for conducting the activity.

**Objective Option 1:** Your people are discovering an issue (or opportunity) of collective responsibility that exists in your environment, and you wish to learn about the reasons why.

**Objective Option 2:** Your people know what's behind a given issue (or opportunity) of collective responsibility that exists in your environment, and you wish to learn what collectively you should do to address it.

**Materials:** One or two buckets, or any deep container. Index cards, ensuring that every participant can submit at least two cards. Cut up card stock would work well.

**External facilitator (optional):** In many cases, an external facilitator may be helpful to coordinate the activity and be a neutral discussion leader.

**Time:** Allow sufficient time for this activity (+/- 59 minutes). You'll need time to...

- **4 min.** — Explain what the group will be doing and why this activity may be beneficial to the cause. Icebreakers are often good if it's a tough crowd.
- **5 min.** — Explain that the activity is designed to be confidential, so you're looking for honest and sincere responses. Occasionally, it may help to ask the group to think constructively and withhold any gripes or emotional responses.
- **6 min.** — *Let them know this:* What every individual puts on his or her card(s) is considered the truth (for that person), but there's also a greater truth, and that truth is the collective wisdom of the group. By participating, everyone's voice is heard, and the collective voice provides for the best group analysis and group planning for the greater good.
- **22 min.** — Conduct the **Analysis Task** described below.
- **22 min. (Optional)** — Conduct the **Strategy Task** described below.

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## ANALYSIS TASK

1. Distribute two or three blank cards to all participants.
2. Ask them to write down on separate cards the reason(s) they believe that the issue or opportunity exists (one card per reason).
  - a. For example, when analyzing *Teacher Self-Assessment Scales* results, teachers are asked to provide the reasons that the school participants rated themselves lowest on a particular item, such as NMTEACH Element 1D. *Designing Student Assessments*.
3. Have everyone put their cards stating their reasoning into a bucket. For privacy, they may wish to fold their cards before dropping them into the bucket.
4. The group leader(s) or facilitator(s) and at least one volunteer assistant now take the cards out of the bucket, one-by-one, and begin sorting them into piles based on emerging categories. The group may discuss what to call each category.
  - a. *Note*. This is a form of *Open-Coding* and *Axial Sorting* (see, for example, Strauss and Corbin, 1990).
5. Once the cards are sorted into piles (categories), look at which piles are the largest and assign them some rough percentages. In some cases, one or two piles will emerge above the rest. For example, you may find that the biggest pile/category represents 30% of the responses, and so it is fair to make statements like the following:
  - a. We collectively agree that the biggest reason(s) for this issue is/are XYZ.
  - b. The majority of us agree that...
  - c. There is a lot of variation in our collective reasoning, but it is clear that...
6. And, finally, the most important part. You've got the basic stats above, but it's up to the group to make sense of it all and to generate a collective wisdom. Also, remind everyone that the individual truth remains important, and that each person in many cases can act on his or her truth on their own. But, the collective truth has the potential to yield the greatest results. It's the principle for true democracy.

## STRATEGY TASK

The Strategy Task follows the same procedure as the Analysis Task, but would logically come afterward. The task objective could be to determine the collective wisdom of the group for formulating a strategic plan of action.

## ENDNOTES

The **Instant Bucket Poll Activity** is similar to a survey, but much faster and easier, and possibly more fun and engaging. It also facilitates spontaneous discussions and is generative because the findings, interpretations, and recommendations come from within.

*Would this activity work with children in the classroom? You tell us!*

Strauss, A, & Corbin. J (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Vol. 15. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

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