

“5 Why’s” Protocol*

Introduction:

Most learning topics that we give to our students are taken directly from the textbook or from a curriculum guide and do little to engage students in the learning adventures that are in store. For examples, “Earthquakes,” “the US Constitution,” “Metaphors and Similes.” It is no wonder that teachers must prod, prompt and coerce students to get involved and immersed in the learning process. Take heart! Another way to galvanize learning and motivate students is through the framing of an “essential” or “guiding” question which serves to guide them through the instructional process.

Purpose:

The purpose of this protocol is to develop an “essential” or “guiding” question for each topic or theme that is to be taught by first asking “Why?” (What’s the point? Why bother? Who cares?). The method is called The 5 Whys and is adapted from Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*.

Process:

Teachers work in pairs, each participant with a writing pad and pencil.

1. Participants choose a content area or thematic topic that students will be learning or researching. For example, “the Oregon Trail.”
2. One participant asks his or her partner, “Why is it important to teach your students _____ (theme or topic?) For example, “Why do your students need to know about the Oregon Trail?”
3. The partner responds, “Because _____.” For example, “Because students need to know how the West was settled.”
4. First participant asks, “Why?” For example, “Why do students need to know how the West was settled?”
5. Partner responds, “Because _____.” For example, “Because they need to know what it was like to be a pioneer.”
6. Repeat this interchange 3 more times for a total of 5 “Whys/”
7. Frame the final response as a question. For example, “What does the Oregon Trail tell me about facing life’s challenges?”
8. Debrief the process and then switch roles. Start at Step 1.

Follow up:

After the protocol and the framing of the essential or guiding question, the next step is to align each question with the Washington EALR's. The next task is to design a product, project, or performance that will allow students to demonstrate that can adequately address the question.

This product, project, or performance should be assessed by a high stakes audience (Who cares?) and a rubric should be co-created to further guide the work, using EALR benchmarks or learning goals as criteria.

Now teachers are ready and poised to **plan backwards** and develop until and lesson plans which will provide the skills, knowledge, understandings, reasoning and dispositions necessary to succeed.

* Adapted from: Senge, Peter, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*