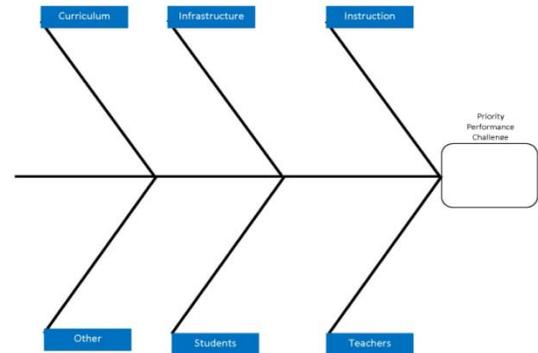# Using a Tree Diagram to Brainstorm within Categories

Purpose: A tree diagram can be used to structure the thinking of a group when they want to brainstorm within pre-defined categories. Within the context of Unified Improvement Planning, this strategy can structure team brainstorming about explanations for their priority performance challenges.

Materials: Large paper, flip chart page, or dry erase board; markers, pens, and sticky notes.

Steps:

1. Clarify the question that will focus the brainstorming activity
The question that will focus brainstorming activity when using this strategy to brainstorm explanations for priority performance challenges should be some variation of: Why do we have the performance challenges we have identified as a priority? What adult actions help to explain this pattern of performance?

2. Identify the pre-defined categories the team will use
Several different options are available to use as the "pre-defined" categories within which to brainstorm causes of school or district performance challenges. These include:

- Levels of Root Causes (Preuss, 2003)
- Marzano Factors (various Marzano publications)
- Causal Theories (Wellman & Lipton, 2012)

Teams can select from these options, or come up with their own categories.

3. Set up the "Tree Diagram"
Once categories have been determined, the team can develop the Tree Diagram that they will use to brainstorm. This can be drawn on a large sheet of paper, dry erase board, flip chart page, etc. See example on this page. Each pre-defined category should be added to a branch of the tree diagram. One branch should be reserved for "other".

4. Brainstorm within categories
Each team member independently captures their ideas on sticky notes (one idea per sticky note) then posts them on the "branch" of the tree where he/she believes they belong.

5. Summarize within categories
After each team member has placed their ideas within the categories, then the group should create a short description summarizing the explanations for each category.

Curriculum

Infrastructure

Instruction

Priority Performance Challenge

Other

Students

Teachers