

Questions for promoting effective discussion in PLCs



School resources

The following questions can help facilitators participants to guide and reflect on discussions in PLCs.

Questions about student learning

- Who is learning? Who is not? What are we doing about it?
- What is it we expect students to learn?
- What is the pedagogy that helps students learn?
- What instructional practices help student learn?
- What assessment tools help us know if students learned or not learned?
- What is the thinking involved in students when they have learned or not learned?

Questions about problems of practice

Discussions should identify **problems of practice** – any classroom interactions that teachers find challenging, confusing or unusual – as this enables the development of teacher learning. These problems of practice may be 're-framed' during discussions as teachers ask questions and evaluate explanations.

- Do we routinely ask questions to elicit additional information including seeking opinions and feelings?
- Do we seek information in order to identify and evaluate multiple explanations for the problems that surface?
- Do we use questions to clarify our understanding?
- Do we express uncertainty about what the problem is?
- Do we offer alternate versions of the problem?

Reactions and responses

The nature of teaching is often emotional, and this should be acknowledged in discussions, while enabling a safe space for questioning each other's ideas, expectations and explanations. It is important that teachers feel they can take responsibility for learning together, and that everyone expects to consistently learn from their teaching practice.

- Can we safely express the emotions that arise due to teaching?
- Do we feel comfortable being questioned by others?
- When a teacher shares a problem of practice, do others:
 - avoid reassuring others and then moving on?
 - question and challenge each other as part of discussions to enable learning?
- Do we take responsibility by:
 - avoiding apportioning blame or using put downs?

- avoiding concluding that the problem is beyond the teacher's control?
- Do we celebrate knowledge advancements and practice improvements?

Analysis

To promote teacher learning, discussions should avoid trying to solve problems of practice through information sharing or quick fixes. Analysis of problems should involve discussing **student actions and classroom practice** (as this illustrates specific and practical examples of practice) *and* **general principles of teaching** (as this leads to teacher learning).

- Do we resist giving one another reassurance or quick fixes?
- Do we use questioning and discussions to uncover and analyse problems?
- Do discussions include both specific accounts of student actions and classroom practice and the general lesson or principle underlying them?

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