



## ACTIVITIES to set up PLCs and facilitate inquiry & reflection



## COMMUNICATION DIMENSION

The power of questions: Navigating misunderstandings and  
sparking insight

# LeaFaP

Leading and Facilitating Professional Learning Communities  
in Schools towards an Inquiry-based and Reflective Practice  
KA220-SCH - Cooperation partnerships in school education

Communication Dimension	
1. Focus of the activity	Using language to avoid misunderstandings and enhance reflection (I): Clarifying and probing questions
2. Duration of practice	120-135 minutes (depending on the number of participants in the PLC)
3. Target group	All types of PLCs
4. Prior experience of the PLC	Early stages of the PLC establishment
5. Goals of the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To model and encourage participants to use clarifying and probing questions</li> <li>✓ To guide PLC participants in reflective inquiry related to their practices and/or observations</li> <li>✓ To engage the group in meta-conversations to reflect on and improve communication processes within the PLC.</li> <li>✓ To foster commitment to self-directed learning and continuous improvement.</li> <li>✓ To foster openness to feedback and continuous improvement of communication practices.</li> </ul>
6. Description of the activity	<p>Introduction:</p> <p>The facilitator (F) welcomes the group and announces the focus of the meeting: encouraging PLC members to communicate effectively and reflect deeply on the professional practices they have implemented or observed with the help of questions. F explains the difference between superficial exchanges, which are brief and surface-level conversations about teaching practices, and respectful, reflective dialogue, which aims to address unclear or incomplete information and promote deeper thinking.</p> <p>Phase 1:</p> <p>F invites a participant to share updates on her/his progress with their Action Plan (AP) or to comment on a teaching/professional concern. Once a participant has finished discussing their progress, F encourages the rest of the group to ask questions that clarify the message, foster understanding aligned with the speaker's intended meaning, and prompt the speaker to think deeper into the issues raised. Once questions have been made, s/he uses some of these questions to encourage clarification and deeper reflection (see Tool 1 with examples of questions).</p> <p>Phase 2:</p> <p>F provides a brief explanation about the role of clarifying and probing questions in effective communication and reflective dialogue within a PLC (see Tool 1 for a brief characterisation of both types of questions). After that, F provides a copy of Tool 1 to the PLC participants, allow them time to read it and clarifies any doubts. This tool can also be shared with PLC members before the activity, allowing them sufficient time to read it at their leisure and identify any queries.</p> <p>Next, F invites the rest of participants, one by one, to share updates on their progress with their AP or to comment on a teaching or professional concern. After each participant provides their update, F encourages the group to ask clarifying and probing questions, ensuring that all PLC members are involved in the discussion and that no one monopolises the dialogue. F may also continue to model these types of questioning, particularly after participants have asked their questions.</p> <p>Phase 3:</p> <p>F provides the PLC participants with the questions from Tool 2, 'Reflection on PLC development' for group discussion aimed at advancing effective and fair communication and fostering reflection within the PLC.</p>



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	<p>Phase 4: F provides the PLC participants with the questions from Tool 3, 'Reflection on own learning', for them to reflect on either at the end of the PLC meeting—if time permits—or at their own pace in a learning journal or similar document.</p> <p>Closure: F sums up the meeting and the PLC participants arrange time and place for next meeting.</p>
7. PLC dimensions addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Communication dimension</li> <li>✓ Inquiry and reflection</li> </ul>
8. Learning outcomes for the participants	<p>Knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Techniques for facilitating productive dialogue.</li> <li>o Effective communication principles, including active listening and assertive communication</li> <li>o Techniques for fostering reflective practice.</li> </ul> <p>Skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Ask probing questions to stimulate critical thinking.</li> <li>o Use questioning techniques to promote deeper thinking.</li> <li>o Guide members in reflective inquiry related to their practices.</li> </ul> <p>Attitudes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Encouragement of exploration of assumptions and of critical thinking.</li> </ul> <p>Further Learning Outcomes</p> <p>Knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reflection techniques and tools for professional development.</li> </ul> <p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct self-assessments and reflections to evaluate facilitation and leadership effectiveness.</li> <li>• Facilitate discussions to ensure all members can contribute and feel heard</li> <li>• Engage the group in meta-conversations to reflect on and improve communication processes</li> </ul> <p>Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to fostering a reflective culture.</li> <li>• Commitment to self-directed learning and continuous improvement.</li> <li>• Openness to feedback and continuous improvement of communication practices.</li> </ul>
9. Activity format	Whole group and individual
10. Materials & tools	<p>Tool 1. Clarifying and probing questions: Characterisation, categories, and examples</p> <p>Tool 2. Reflection on PLC development</p> <p>Tool 3. Reflection on own learning (for PLC participants)</p>
11. Room & preparation	<p>Room will be arranged in <math>\Pi</math> shape.</p> <p>Copy Tools 1, 2, and 3.</p>
12. Dimensions of inclusion	Diversity within a PLC: F should ensure that all PLC members present progress on their AP and that each member asks clarifying and probing questions to their peers. F facilitates by summarising the common ground achieved through reflection and discussions and identifies issues for further exploration within the group.

13. Promotion of democratic values and practices	All participants are encouraged to contribute their ideas, opinions, and perspectives. F ensures that these contributions are actively listened to and considered, and that each participant has the opportunity to speak without any single voice dominating, fostering balanced participation. Collective decision-making is promoted by focusing on questioning techniques that can be prioritised for future meetings.
14. Appropriation for digital PLCs	Tools can be shared in online communication platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet. An online whiteboard such as Padlet or Mural can be used for gathering impressions in conjunction with Tool 3: Reflection on PLC development.
15. References & suggested sources	Erasmus+ TePinTeach project (IO4 - Modules for developing communication strategies for effective PLC): <a href="https://www.tepinteach.eu/introduction-to-the-idea/">https://www.tepinteach.eu/introduction-to-the-idea/</a>
16. Appendix following	Yes

## Tool 1: Clarifying and probing questions: Characterisation, categories, and examples

### Clarifying questions

Clarifying questions are inquiries aimed at ensuring understanding and eliminating confusion. They seek to clarify ambiguous or incomplete information by asking for further explanation or details. These questions are often used in conversations to ensure that the listener accurately interprets what is being communicated, preventing misunderstandings and facilitating more effective dialogue.

#### Category 1. Request for confirmation of understanding

These questions are aimed at verifying whether the listener has correctly understood the speaker's message. They help ensure that there is no miscommunication and that both parties have a shared understanding.

- *You said that... Did I get it right? / Did I understand it correctly?*
- *Did I understand your point accurately when you said...*
- *... Did I summarise what you said correctly?*
- *Am I understanding you correctly when you say...?*
- *If I understand correctly, you're suggesting that...?*
- *Just to be clear, are you saying that...?*

#### Category 2. Request for elaboration

These questions seek further explanation or details to enhance understanding of a particular point or statement made by the speaker.

- *When you mentioned..., could you elaborate on that?*
- *Can you give us more information/ details about...?*
- *Can you expand on [you've just said]?*

#### Category 3. Request for clarification or rephrasing

These questions focus on understanding ideas, terms or concepts used by the speaker to ensure that their meaning is clear.

- *What do you mean when you say that...?*
- *Could you explain what you meant by...?*
- *Can you clarify what you meant when you refer to...?*
- *What exactly do you mean by [specific term/concept/idea]?*
- *Can you rephrase that, so I make sure I got it right?*

#### Category 4. Request for examples

These questions ask for concrete examples or illustrations to clarify ideas, making them more comprehensible.

- *Could you give me an example of what you mean by...?*
- *Can you provide an example to illustrate your point?*



### Probing questions

**Probing questions** are open-ended inquiries designed to encourage deeper reflection, exploration, and clarification of ideas, decisions, or experiences. These questions are used to elicit more detailed information, challenge assumptions, and promote critical thinking. In professional settings, probing questions help individuals to reflect on their practices, analyse underlying issues, and generate insights that can lead to improved performance and more informed decision-making.

#### Category 1. Request for introspection

These questions focus on reflecting on personal experiences, motivations, and emotions related to practice. It encourages self-awareness and deeper introspection.

- *What is/was your intention with this?*
- *What made you feel particularly proud or.... (reference to different emotions)?*
- *Can you explain why you feel/felt that way?*
- *What do you think influenced your view of how the lesson went?*
- *What do you think your statement/your didactic approach/etc. implies about your understanding of student learning/wellbeing?*
- *What assumptions are/were you making here (about student learning, classroom management, professional learning...)?*

#### Category 2. Request for reflection on problem-solving and decision-making

These questions prompt the interlocutor to analyse challenges, identify root causes, and explore solutions. It encourages PLC members to reflect on the decisions they have made, examine their problem-solving approaches, and consider potential changes.

- *What do you think is at the root of this problem/situation?*
- *What would you need to change or do differently to achieve what you need/want?*
- *How did you come to this conclusion/solution to this concern of yours? Did you collect any evidence?*
- *How did you come to that decision?*
- *How can you gain more certainty about the sources of the problem and the actions you are suggesting?*
- *What do you think would happen if you tried a different approach?*
- *Can you walk me/us through your thought process?*
- *Next time, what can you change to improve the outcome?*

#### Category 3. Request for reflection on impact and outcomes

Questions in this category enquire about the results and effects of actions taken. They encourage teachers to think about the outcomes of their decisions -both expected and unexpected- and to anticipate the impact of future actions.

- *What sort of impact do you think this has/can/will have?*
- *If the outcome didn't go as planned, what went wrong, what factors did you not anticipate?*
- *What do you predict will happen?*
- *What is your biggest concern regarding the effect of this course of action?*

#### Category 4. Request for reflection on learning and improvement

Questions in this category focus on continuous professional growth and development. The questions encourage reflection on successes and failures, the application of lessons learned, and exploring ways to enhance professional practice.



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- *What have you learned from this experience?*
- *What do you think you need to do differently to improve?*
- *Why do you think it worked well (or didn't)?*
- *What do you think was the key to your success?*
- *What factors contributed to its success?*
- *What theories (e.g., of learning, student development, group dynamics) can you use to explain and evaluate your success (or lack thereof)?*
- *Why do you think it didn't work?*
- *What factors do you think contributed to it not working as expected?*
- *What do you plan to do next?*

### Category 5. Request for comparative analysis

This category includes questions that compare current situations or experiences with past ones. They help PLC members to contextualise their practice by drawing on previous knowledge and identifying patterns that can inform future actions.

- *What does this remind you of? (previous teaching experiences, as a student teacher, or as an observer, or as a student?)*
- *How does this situation compare to previous experiences you've had?*
- *In what ways did the students' responses in this class differ from previous lessons? Why do you think that happened?*
- *How does this teaching strategy compare to other methods you've tried for similar topics?*
- *What differences did you notice between the outcomes of this lesson and similar lessons you've delivered in the past? Why do you think these differences occurred?*
- *What similarities and differences do you see between the challenges you faced in this lesson and those in earlier lessons? Why do you think these challenges persisted or changed?*
- *In what ways did the students' understanding of the material differ from what you observed in previous classes? Why do you think this difference occurred?*
- *How does the classroom dynamic in this lesson compare to other times you've taught similar material? What happened differently this time, or what did you do differently?*

**Note:** The categories described above are not mutually exclusive. Professional practice and reflection in the field of education often involve overlapping elements, so certain questions may touch on multiple aspects of experience, decision-making, impact, learning, and comparative analysis.



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### Tool 2: Reflection on PLC development

**Collective reflection** (the PLC group discusses their answers to the following questions):

- How effectively did the PLC use clarifying and probing questions?
- In what ways did the questions help in understanding and analysing the progress in the AP shared and/or other members' concern?
- What can we improve our questioning techniques for future meeting?
- How can we improve our questioning techniques for future meeting?





**Tool 3: Reflection on own learning (for PLC participants)**

**Individual reflection:** Take time to thoughtfully answer the following reflective questions:

- What did you learn from the clarifying and probing questions used today?
- What assisted you in this learning and how?



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