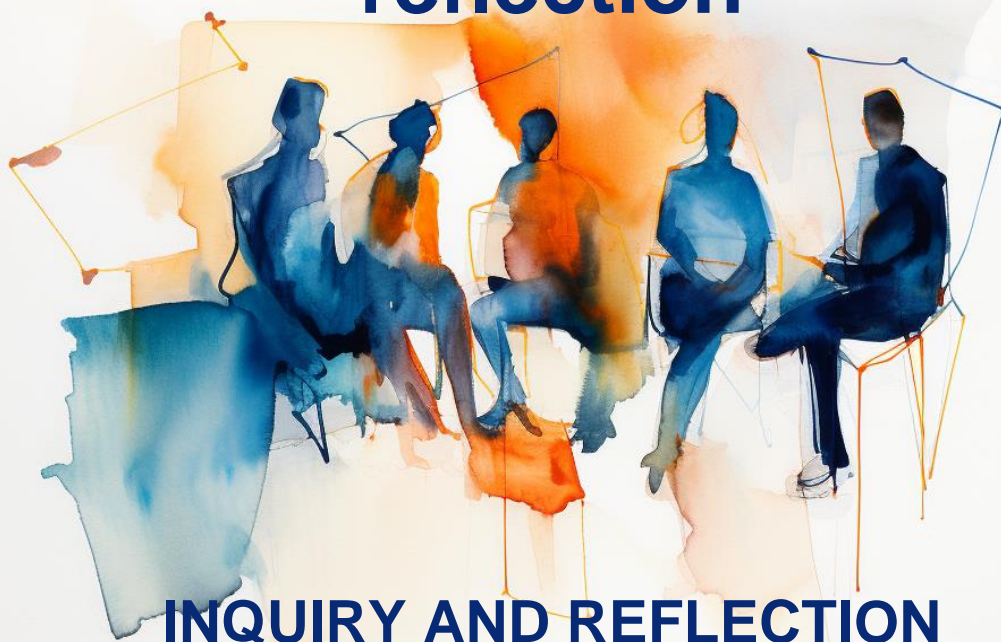




ACTIVITIES to set up PLCs and facilitate inquiry & reflection



INQUIRY AND REFLECTION

Explore. Reflect. Decide: Building an informed PLC culture

LeaFaP

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

Inquiry and reflection dimension	
1. Focus of the activity	Introducing inquiry and reflection as prerequisites for making informed decisions in a PLC
2. Duration of practice	appr. 120 minutes
3. Prior experience of the PLC	Middle step of a PLC (PLC members have identified the issue of concern and have shared and reflected upon their related beliefs and practices)
4. Goals of the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ To assist the group's reflection on their previous practices of detecting a school issue to be solved or improved ✓ To assist the group to realise the need for an inquiry of the educational context in order to understand the reasons of this issue, the related goals and content of their actions ✓ To introduce different research tools and their possible use in assisting the inquiry process
5. Description of the activity	<p>Introduction: The facilitator (F) welcomes the group and makes a summary of the results of their last meeting. F explains the aims of this meeting as shown above.</p> <p>Phase 1: F introduces tool 1 and asks PLC participants to fill it in individually writing short phrases and keywords, rather than a long text. Tool 1 assists participants to describe their prior practices when confronted with an issue to be solved/improved, the ways they documented its understanding and decided about the goals and content of their actions as well as the ways they evaluated the effectiveness of their chosen actions. If the group is small (5-8 members) F can ask the members to report their answers to the group and use a board or a slide in the computer to note down responses. If the group is bigger (10+ members), F asks members to exchange their answers in Tool 1 with another member and then discuss the similarities or differences they found in their answers. In both cases, F enhances reflection using prompting questions such as: Did you found something similar or different in the way other members have answered these questions? What is that? What did these differences make you think or possibly reconsider? Do we observe any dominant practices in how we make decisions?</p> <p>Phase 2: F presents an example of the need and ways of inquiry to make informed decisions within the PLC. The emphasis is given to how the results of inquiry can lead to different decisions than the ones taken without the use of inquiry. Tool 2 provides such an indicative example and asks members to form small groups and to use the information gained from inquiry to think about the goals and action plan based on the inquiry results with the use of guiding reflective questions. The groups can also compare the results of decision making with and without the use of inquiry. At the end of this phase PLC members discuss their reflections based on Tool 2 with the following indicative prompting questions "What is the new understandings gained from this example that could shape differently the decisions taken by you?" "What would you change in your previous practices based on this new understanding?".</p> <p>Phase 3: F introduces Tool 3 to provide spaces for reflection and a critical approach to their prior practices in terms of the types and process of documentation included in them or not. F asks each member to share their reflections with the group and focuses on their ability to question their prior practices and detect different ways they could have used.</p> <p>Phase 4: F asks members to sum up any confirmation or change of their prior beliefs and practices as part of the documentation process of the PLC progress and share them with the group. Indicative questions are: Did you reaffirm or validate some of your previous beliefs and practices in making decisions about the choice, goals, action and evaluation of the issue that concerns you? What is this? What assisted you in this reaffirmation of your beliefs? Are you convinced about the need for using inquiry in making decisions after our meeting? Why yes/no?</p> <p>Closure: F sums up the knowledge and understanding gained from this activity (how inquiry can lead to a revised understanding of the issue that concerns the group and subsequently re-orient the decisions about the goals, content and evaluation of the action plan.) PLC members decide about the time and place for next meeting that is convenient for all.</p>
6. PLC dimensions addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inquiry and reflection

7. Learning outcomes for the participants	<p>Knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Theoretical framework of inquiry based learning o Types of valid data (open-ended questionnaire, peer observation, etc.) <p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Introduce inquiry as a necessary process for professional learning. o Give examples to understand how inquiry can inform practice. <p>Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Commitment to evidence-based practices
8. Activity format	Individual, dyad/small group, whole group activities
9. Materials & tools	<p>Tool 1. Exploring prior practices of decision making</p> <p>Tool 2. The need and role of inquiry in making informed decisions: an example</p> <p>Tool 3. Reflection tool about previous practices</p> <p>*The phrasing of questions in Tools 1 and 3 vary for the group of head teachers and the group of in-service teacher trainers or out of school facilitators.</p>
10. Room & preparation	<p>Room will be arranged in Π shape that will allow both whole team and groups to work successfully.</p> <p>Copy Tools 1, 2 and 3 for all participants. Have a board or a computer connected with a projector to note down the responses of the group. Tool 2 may also be chosen to be presented as a ppt and to copy only the questions provided in it for the participants to note down their responses.</p>
11. Dimensions of inclusion	Diversity within a PLC: F has to make sure that diversity of beliefs and practices are accepted and held with respect by all participants. F at the same time assists participants to share their perspectives in dyads/small groups and whole group and thus encourages spaces for dialogue. F assists in summing up the common ground achieved through reflection and discussions and issues for further exploration among the group.
12. Promotion of democratic values and practices	Participants will have an active role to co-shape understandings. Time will be shared among participants to communicate their concerns, suggestions and proposals to achieve the goals of the activity. F pays attention to avoid criticism of any opinion heard and choose open and clarification questions to encourage dialogue.
13. Appropriation for digital PLCs	<p>Tools can be shared through shared online word documents in online meetings.</p> <p>Breakout rooms can be used for group work.</p>
14. References & suggested sources	
15. Appendix following	yes

Appendix: Tools used in the activity:

Since tools can be used with two different groups (head teachers and in-service teacher educators) questions in Tools 1 and 2 have been slightly changed to fit into the role of each group participants.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOL HEAD TEACHERS

Tool 1. Exploring prior practices of decision making

Based on the ways you have worked in your school to solve / improve a situation that concerned you, please answer to the following questions. If some of the questions are not applicable in your case you can leave them unanswered (blank).

Issue of concern:.....

Why did you choose this issue of concern?	
What information did you have to identify what needed to be improved/changed? (How did you decide about the goals of your actions?)	
Who did you receive information from?	
What were the ways to receive this information?	
On what basis/how did you choose your action plan to resolve / improve this issue?	
How did you become aware of the results of the action plan you implemented?	
Did you collect specific information to evaluate the results of your action plan?	
Did you collect specific information to evaluate the results of your action plan or did someone else provide this information?	
What was this information and how did you collect it?	

Tool 2. The need and role of inquiry in making informed decisions: an example

This tool describes two different ways of handling the same issue of concern at the school level (1st and 2nd case), this being “the relationships among teachers and pupils”. Please compare the two different ways of actions and answer the questions taking into account the results of inquiry conducted in the 2nd case.

1st CASE - DECISION MAKING WITHOUT INQUIRY

1. WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Teachers have observed that pupils often fail to pay attention in class, frequently make noise or misbehave in the classroom and this leads them to make remarks to them and feel distressed during teaching. The result of this is to have conflicts with their pupils which affect a negative classroom climate and poor relationships among teachers and pupils.

2. WHAT ARE THE GOALS?

- To clarify the rules that need to be respected by all to avoid remarks and conflicts with the pupils.
- To enforce stricter measures or consequences of children’s misbehaviour when this persists.
- To make parents aware of this problem and ask for their assistance.

3. WHAT IS THE ACTION PLAN?

- ✓ Teachers prepare a sheet of paper with the rules and present it to children and ask them to sign it showing that they have become aware and agree to follow them. This sheet of paper is also put on the classroom wall for pupils to remember.
- ✓ Teachers also inform the children about the measures/consequences decided after the second remark pupils receive from the teacher.
- ✓ Teachers prepare a letter to inform parents about the issue and the measures taken and ask for their assistance to confront it by speaking to their children about their behaviour in class.

4. HOW IS THE ACTION PLAN EVALUATED?

- ✓ The staff discusses whether children’s attention in class and behaviour have been improved based on what happens in their classrooms.

2ND CASE - DECISION MAKING BASED ON INQUIRY OF THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

1. WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Teachers have observed that pupils often fail to pay attention in class and make noise in the classroom and this leads them to make frequent remarks to them and feel distressed during teaching. Teachers decide to inquire further into this situation. Thus, teachers decide:

- A) to explain to their pupils that their opinions and suggestions regarding this matter are crucial to make a common decision/plan about how to deal with this situation.
Thus they decide to ask their pupils during a lesson to give anonymised responses either hand written or in an electronic form, first about what they like and do not like during teaching or more generally in their school and what they would like to change and, secondly, about how they feel when noise or disruption of the teaching is made and what they suggest to deal with this issue (open-ended questionnaire).
- B) To help each other understand the reasons for this situation by exchanging visits to each other’s classrooms and observing when and why children lose their attention or make noise (peer observation). Teachers meet after peer observations and exchange information and reflections.

Indicative results of inquiry A) show that pupils feel that their teachers are only concerned with teaching the content of textbooks, rather than considering their emotions or addressing any learning difficulties they may have in order to provide support. Some children also feel that it is impossible to follow the lesson because of its difficulty and mention that they have received criticism from their teachers when they asked them to explain the lesson once more.

Indicative results of inquiry B) show that teachers tend to not wait enough time for children to respond to their questions and thus children lose interest when the children that respond quicker are always chosen by the teacher to answer them. Teachers give positive feedback only to correct responses. After the first ten minutes teachers fail to ensure children’s participation. Group work is very rarely chosen as a mode for children’s participation.

- 1. WHAT IS THE NEW INFORMATION? Based on the results of inquiry, what are the dimensions / information that teachers failed to take into account in the first example as reasons that affect their relationship with the pupils?

2. HOW WILL THE GOALS BE SHAPED BY THIS INFORMATION?

What are the goals you would choose based on the results of inquiry?
How different are they from the ones in the 1st case and why?

3. WHAT WILL THE ACTION PLAN BE?

How is the action plan expected to be different from the one in 1st case?

4. HOW IS THE ACTION PLAN EVALUATED?

Teachers decide to repeat the open-ended questionnaires to children and peer observation and compare the results with the initial results. Teachers also share the results with their pupils and ask them to verify their understandings or/and further make proposals for the improvement of their school experience.

Tool 3. Reflection tool about previous practices

Based on the way you answered the questions in Tool 1 and after we processed Tool 2 how confident are you in your previous decision-making practices? What reasons support your level of confidence? Do you think you needed to do something differently?

How confident are you about your previous decisions and why?	PREVIOUS PRACTICES RELATED TO:	I needed to do/could have done something differently....
	Your decision to work on the specific issue of concern	
	The goals you set to change or improve the situation	
	The appropriateness of your action plan to change or improve the situation	
	The ways you evaluated the results of your action plan	

TOOLS FOR IN-SERVICE TRAINERS OR OUT OF SCHOOL FACILITATORS

Tool 1. Exploring school decision-making practices

Based on your communication and collaboration with the schools you support, list the dominant practices of schools using the second column in the table below. In the third column you can write if there is anything that concerns you about these practices or something that you are trying to recommend differently in schools.

	DOMINANT PRACTICES	REFLECTION OR PROPOSAL OF ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY
1. How are the issues of concern to schools chosen? What is the procedure followed?		
2. Are there specific goals for schools to change or improve issues? If so, how and by whom are the objectives of the school's actions to address the issues decided?		
3. On what basis/in what ways is the action plan to resolve/improve this issue organised? How and by whom are the actions to be taken decided?		
4. Are the results of the action plan being implemented evaluated? If so, by whom and in what ways?		

Tool 2. The need and role of inquiry in making informed decisions: an example

This tool describes two different ways of handling the same issue of concern at the school level (1st and 2nd case), this being “the relationships among teachers and pupils”. Please compare the two different ways of actions and answer the questions taking into account the results of inquiry conducted in the 2nd case.

1st CASE - DECISION MAKING WITHOUT INQUIRY

1. WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Teachers have observed that pupils often fail to pay attention in class, frequently make noise or misbehave in the classroom and this leads them to make remarks to them and feel distressed during teaching. The result of this is to have conflicts with their pupils which affect a negative classroom climate and poor relationships among teachers and pupils.

2. WHAT ARE THE GOALS?

- To clarify the rules that need to be respected by all to avoid remarks and conflicts with the pupils.
- To enforce stricter measures or consequences of children’s misbehaviour when this persists.
- To make parents aware of this problem and ask for their assistance.

3. WHAT IS THE ACTION PLAN?

- ✓ Teachers prepare a sheet of paper with the rules and present it to children and ask them to sign it showing that they have become aware and agree to follow them. This sheet of paper is also put on the classroom wall for pupils to remember.
- ✓ Teachers also inform the children about the measures/consequences decided after the second remark pupils receive from the teacher.
- ✓ Teachers prepare a letter to inform parents about the issue and the measures taken and ask for their assistance to confront it by speaking to their children about their behaviour in class.

4. HOW IS THE ACTION PLAN EVALUATED?

- ✓ The staff discusses whether children’s attention in class and behaviour have been improved based on what happens in their classrooms.

2ND CASE - DECISION MAKING BASED ON INQUIRY OF THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

1. WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Teachers have observed that pupils often fail to pay attention in class and make noise in the classroom and this leads them to make frequent remarks to them and feel distressed during teaching. Teachers decide to inquire further into this situation. Thus, teachers decide:

- C) to explain to their pupils that their opinions and suggestions regarding this matter are crucial to make a common decision/plan about how to deal with this situation.
Thus they decide to ask their pupils during a lesson to give anonymised responses either hand written or in an electronic form, first about what they like and do not like during teaching or more generally in their school and what they would like to change and, secondly, about how they feel when noise or disruption of the teaching is made and what they suggest to deal with this issue (open-ended questionnaire).
- D) To help each other understand the reasons for this situation by exchanging visits to each other’s classrooms and observing when and why children lose their attention or make noise (peer observation). Teachers meet after peer observations and exchange information and reflections.

Indicative results of inquiry A) show that pupils feel that their teachers are only concerned with teaching the content of textbooks, rather than considering their emotions or addressing any learning difficulties they may have in order to provide support. Some children also feel that it is impossible to follow the lesson because of its difficulty and mention that they have received criticism from their teachers when they asked them to explain the lesson once more.

Indicative results of inquiry B) show that teachers tend to not wait enough time for children to respond to their questions and thus children lose interest when the children that respond quicker are always chosen by the teacher to answer them. Teachers give positive feedback only to correct responses. After the first ten minutes teachers fail to ensure children’s participation. Group work is very rarely chosen as a mode for children’s participation.

- 2. WHAT IS THE NEW INFORMATION? Based on the results of inquiry, what are the dimensions / information that teachers failed to take into account in the first example as reasons that affect their relationship with the pupils?

3. HOW WILL THE GOALS BE SHAPED BY THIS INFORMATION?

What are the goals you would choose based on the results of inquiry?

How different are they from the ones in the 1st case and why?

4. WHAT WILL THE ACTION PLAN BE?

How is the action plan expected to be different from the one in 1st case?

5. HOW IS THE ACTION PLAN EVALUATED?

Teachers decide to repeat the open-ended questionnaires to children and peer observation and compare the results with the initial results. Teachers also share the results with their pupils and ask them to verify their understandings or/and further make proposals for the improvement of their school experience.

Tool 3. Reflection tool on past practices

Based on how you answered the questions in tool 1, how confident are you now about past decision-making practices in the schools you support or your own view of these practices? What reasons support or not your sense of confidence? Do you think something needs to be done differently with regard to schools and/or your own practices to support them in the decision-making process?

How confident are you about past decision-making practices by schools and why?	PRACTICES	What needs to be done differently in relation to existing school practices?	What needs to be done differently in relation to your way of supporting schools in relation to these practices?
	1. Selection of issues by schools		
	2. Choosing goals and identifying what needs to be changed by schools		
	3. Appropriateness of schools' action plan to change or improve the situation		
	4. How to evaluate the results of your action plan		

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