Erasmus+ Project LeaFaP

ACTIVITIES
to set up PLCs and facilitate inquiry & reflection
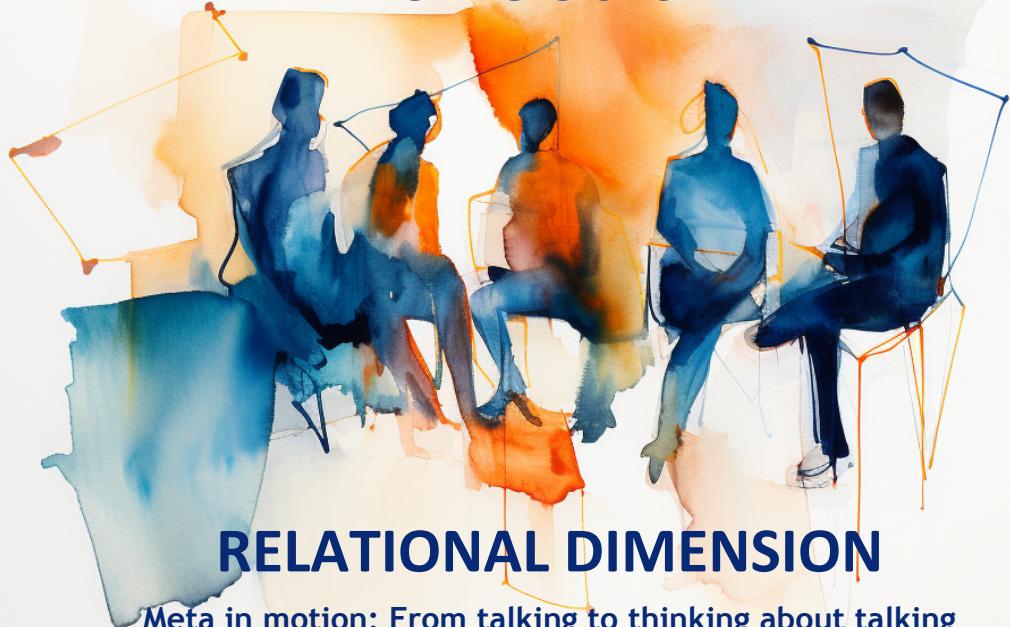
RELATIONAL DIMENSION

Meta in motion: From talking to thinking about talking

LeaFaP

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

Relational Dimension

1.	Focus of the activity	Reflecting team - a common source and starting point for meta-communication
2.	Duration of practice	Ongoing activity during a PLC-meeting
3.	Prior experience of the PLC	Participants who have some previous experience and are familiar with being part of a PLC.
4.	Goals of the activity	✓ Utilize a reflecting team as a resource for learning, ✓ Promote personal reflection among educators ✓ Empower educators to take responsibility for their own professional development. ✓ Enable educators to clarify their thoughts, draw meaningful conclusions, and gain deeper insights into their practice.
5.	Description of the activity	At least two (preferably more) of the PLC group members withdraw from the group and take on an observer role. Their task is only to observe and listen to <u>the communication</u> in the group. **Step 1:** The PLC group starts their meeting as usual, and regardless of the structure of the meeting, or content being focused on, it is important that the group has begun their discussions and reflections before the meeting leader decides to call a timeout. The reflecting team observes and listens actively: • Are they just sharing experiences and stories about what they do, or are they challenging each other by asking why questions – why did you do it that way, why that choice? • Is evidence being requested, or is the conversation characterized by what they believe and assume about consequences and results? • Are open or leading/loaded questions being asked? • Does the conversation jump from one topic to another, or is someone trying to summarize, check their understanding, and capture different perspectives that are not being addressed? • Are they quick to give advice without spending time to delve deeper first? • Are there any good questions being asked that help the discussions go deeper? • Are there areas where they see that more depth could have been explored? **Step 2: Reflection (10 minutes)** The leader of the PLC group calls a timeout where the PLC group stops and only listens. During the timeout(s), the members of the reflecting team have a conversation about what they noticed in the PLC-group. The other group members are not allowed to talk/comment when this is happening. They should be completely silent and only listen to what the reflective team has noticed (max 10 minutes each time). The reflective team shares their thoughts on the communication and how they talk about the issue/topic. The members of the reflective team address each other – not the group. The leader ensures the discussion stays focused on the conversation and avoids turning it into a debate about good or bad. The question is not whether the communication is good or bad, but to get feedback on whether they are at a superficial level or if the group is able to go deeper. Whether they can challenge each other in a way that promotes reflection and learning. This is very important! Once they've reflected back what they've observed, the participants are allowed to think to themselves for a few minutes, and then the conversation moves on. **Step 3: Feedback (maximum 5 minutes)** At the end of the meeting, everyone participates in a meta-communication. Eeach PLC participant can briefly comment on what they heard during the reflection round. They can also share any ideas and thoughts they had on how to contribute more to the exploration of practice and the challenging of each other in the meetings. Those who have been the reflective team in the meeting also participate in this conversation. Step 2 and 3 can be repeated once or twice during the meeting. . Being a reflective team takes turns between the participants in the PLC.

6.	PLC dimensions addressed	✓ Relational dimension ✓ Communication dimension ✓ Collaborative dimension ✓ Learning- and knowledge-building dimension ✓ Reflection and inquiry dimension ✓ Organizational Dimension
7.	Learning outcomes for the participants	Knowledge the participants are going to develop: - Effective communication principles, including active listening and clear, respectful expression of ideas. - Moderation and facilitation techniques. - Techniques to encourage equitable participation. - Techniques for fostering reflective practice. - Techniques for facilitating productive dialogue. Skills the participants are going to develop: - Promote active listening - Paraphrase and summarise key points and decisions from discussions concisely and clearly - Commitment to inclusivity and fairness. - Make use of the group's previous knowledge and experiences to foster reflection and critical thinking. - Deliver feedback that is specific, actionable, and supportive. - Structure the outcomes of inquiry results and reflective discussion. Attitudes the participants are going to develop: - Being receptive to different perspectives and ideas during discussions. - Openness to feedback and continuous improvement of communication practices. - Commitment to inclusivity and fairness. - Valuing critical analysis as a tool for improvement. - Encouragement of exploration of assumptions and of critical thinking.
8.	Activity format	Group activity
9.	Materials & tools	Tool 1: Inquiry Question Table. Tool 2: Reflective Questions Table on Behaviors. Tool 3: Reflecting on Our Practices: More, Less, Start, Stop, and Keep doing.
10.	Room & preparation	No special requirements for rooms.
11.	Dimensions of inclusion	If desired, a reflective team can also observe how the group manages to take care of everyone - but the main focus is on communication and how it affects the participants' reflection and engagement.
12.	Promotion of democratic values and practices	If desired, a reflective team can also observe how the group manages to maintain democratic values and practices - but the main focus is on communication and how it affects the participants' reflection and engagement.
13.	Appropriation for digital PLCs	This activity can just as easily be carried out in a digital meeting.
14.	References & suggested sources	- Andersen, T. (1987). The reflecting team. Fam Proc 26: 415 – 428. - Earl and Timperley, 2008 - Killen, K. (2012). Profesjonell utvikling og faglig veiledning. Oslo: Gyldendal - Le Fevre, D. M., Robinson, V. M., & Sinnema, C. E. (2015). Genuine inquiry: Widely espoused yet rarely enacted. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 43(6), 883-899. - MacPhail, A., Tannehill, D. & Ataman, R. (2021). The role of the critical friend in supporting and enhancing professional learning and development. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19415257.2021.1879235?scroll=top&needAccess=true#abstract - - Ulleberg, I., & Jensen, P. (2017). Asking Questions in Supervision. Supervision of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice, 45-67.
15.	Appendix following	Appendix 1: What is a Reflective Team?

Appendix: What is a Reflective Team?

What is a Reflective Team

The concept of reflecting teams originated in the 1980s through the work of family therapists, who observed that involving families in the therapists' discussions could broaden their perspectives and advance their thinking (Andersen, 1987). Reflective teams are also used in schools and kindergartens, where they serve as a method for professional meetings (Ulleberg & Jensen, 2017, p. 189). Through a regular structure, new good ideas can be developed, and all participants can be engaged in a positive way. The structure can be used as a workshop or during common and development time for staff groups, as part of organizational development. In LeaFaP, we suggest reflective teams as an activity for providing introspective support in a PLC that has been established for a while but is struggling to develop communication norms that promote reflection and learning. In conversations characterized by a critical and challenging discourse, participants' practices and perceptions become visible and subject to testing (Earl and Timperley, 2008). In order, to get more critical reflection, there must be a willingness to challenge and to be challenged.

In a study on the use of critical friends in teachers' professional learning, MacPhail et al. (2021) argue that a willingness to be challenged is an attitude that means one either welcomes and integrates critical feedback or is willing to challenge themselves by giving meaningful critical feedback (MacPhail et al., 2021). However, many questions are not driven by curiosity or a desire to learn, but by the desire to communicate one's own viewpoint in an indirect rather than a more direct way (Le Fevre, D. M., Robinson, V. M., & Sinnema, C. E., 2015).

What distinguishes this activity from reflective teams as we know them from healthcare is the potential for double-loop learning. The reflective team provides important feedback on how the group communicates, which is crucial for developing communication norms where challenging each other is the norm. At the same time, it also trains those in the reflective team to listen genuinely, as they do not need to think about contributing to the conversations themselves. They better capture nuances, and when they return as "regular" members, they can use these experiences to become active listeners.