



Framing Consultancy Dilemmas

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Purpose

The structure of the Consultancy helps presenters think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma. The Consultancy protocol has 2 main purposes – to develop participants' capacity to see and describe the dilemmas that are the essential material of their work, and to help each other understand and deal with them.

Framing Consultancy Dilemmas and Consultancy Questions

A dilemma is a puzzle: an issue that raises questions, an idea that seems to have conceptual gaps, or something about process or product that you just can't figure out. All dilemmas have some sort of identifiable tension in them. Sometimes the dilemma will include samples of student or adult work that illustrate it, but often the dilemma crosses over many parts of the educational process.

1. Think About Your Dilemma

Dilemmas deal with issues with which you are struggling or that you are unsure about. Some questions for helping you select a dilemma might include:

- Is it something that is bothering you enough that your thoughts regularly return to it
- Is it something that is not already on its way to being resolved?
- Is it something that does not depend on getting other people to change - in other words, can you affect the dilemma by changing your practice?
- Is it something that is important to you, and is it something you are willing to work on?

2. Do Some Reflective Writing About Your Dilemma

Some questions that might help are:

- Why is this a dilemma for you? Why is this dilemma important to you?
- What (or where) is the tension in your dilemma?
- If you could take a snapshot of this dilemma, what would you/we see?
- What have you done already to try to remedy or manage the dilemma?
- What have been the results of those attempts?
- Who needs to change? Who needs to take action to resolve this dilemma? If your answer is not you, you need to change your focus. You will want to present a dilemma that is about your practice, actions, behaviors, beliefs, and assumptions, and not someone else's.
- What do you assume to be true about this dilemma, and how have these assumptions influenced your thinking about the dilemma?
- What is your focus question? A focus question summarizes your dilemma and helps focus the feedback.

3. Frame a Focus Question for Your Consultancy Group

- Try to pose a question around the dilemma that seems to you to get to the heart of the matter.
- Remember that the question you pose will guide the Consultancy group in their discussion of the dilemma.

4. Critique Your Focus Question

- Is this question important to my practice?
- Is this question important to student learning?
- Is this question important to others in my profession?

Some Generic Examples of Dilemmas — with framing questions

- My teaching team seems to love the idea of involving students in meaningful learning that connects students to real issues and an audience beyond school, but nothing seems to be happening in reality.
Question: What can I do to capitalize on my team's interest, so we can translate theory into practice?
- No matter how hard I try to be inclusive and ask for everyone's ideas, about half of the people don't want to do anything new — they think things were just fine before.
Question: How do I work with the people who don't want to change without alienating them?
- I am completely committed to the value of play for children's learning in my early childhood classroom, but am often feel pressured to spend more and more time on academic work.
Question: How do I incorporate play into my 1st grade classroom, while keeping the demands of the academic curriculum in mind?