The 13th International Conference on Thinking: Curious Minds Think and Learn by Exploring the Unknown

Abstract: Proposal for Interactive Workshop

Title: Getting Teachers Thinking

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Objectives of Interactive Workshop

- To introduce Learning circles as a teacher professional development model
- To demonstrate an effective learning circle and its implications for both teacher and student metacognition
- To share current research that reinforces the effectiveness of this model

Introduction

This interactive workshop would demonstrate a method of professional development for teachers that has been developed, researched and applied in a New Zealand urban primary school in 2005.

As a school we encourage students to develop their metacognition and reflection skills. This workshop will demonstrate how the teachers at Remuera Primary are also encouraged to identify and critique their own levels of thinking through a specific Teacher Professional Development Model – Learning Circles.

Remuera Primary School uses Learning Circles as a model for Teacher Professional Development. Our whole school philosophy is firmly based on Thinking Skills and Habits of Mind, or dispositions towards teaching and learning. Learning Circles embody this philosophy in small groups of facilitator – led reflective teacher discussion across the school.

Video Presentation (5 minutes) Learning Circles

Learning circles have been developed from a US business model in the 1960’s and introduced into the education sector in New Zealand by Stewart & Prebble (Stewart & Prebble, 1993). The video presentation shows learning circles in action as a professional development mechanism.

Current Research

Current research confirms that in order for professional development to be effective, teachers need to share ideas about their practice within a collaborative, non-threatening environment where they can openly reflect critically on their learning and professional practice. Educational organisations need to provide the time and opportunities for their
teachers to engage in effective teacher talk (Annan et al., 2003). Teachers need to engage in conversations where they critically reflect “on practice rather than a comfortable collaboration in which ideas are simply shared” (McNaughton, Lai, MacDonald, & Farry, 2004, p.188). This model provides structured opportunities for teachers to critically reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching practice, as evaluated by an analysis of their own students’ specific achievement data.

**Learning Circle Guidelines**

Practical guidelines and descriptions for expectations of learning circle participant behaviour.

**Teacher Talk Analysis**

To optimize the effectiveness of professional development, discussion in learning circles needs to be at a level where teachers talk about their practice, share their ideas, reflecting and developing strategies that will improve their own teaching practice (Annan et al., 2003, ; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, ; Hawley & Valli, 1999, ; Lieberman & Miller, 1990, ; Timperley, 2005).

**Demonstrating Levels of Teacher Talk**

This is commonly referred to as “Teacher Talk”. Educational organisations need to provide the opportunities for their teachers to engage in effective teacher talk, and there are several models that attempt to facilitate this.

**Practical Session**

A role play would take place and workshop participants would be encouraged to evaluate the levels of teacher talk in the learning circle discussion.

**Research Findings**

The findings of the research project based at the school in 2005 would be outlined and discussed.
Bibliography


