

# Facilitating Professional Learning

## Facilitating Professional Learning - Partner Discussions

Effective professional learning is an essential aspect in the development of collaborative school cultures. In recent years, a number of innovative strategies for facilitating the sharing of craft knowledge have been developed (Bambino, 2002; Easton, 2002; Easton, 2008; Killion & Roy, 2009; Stoll, 2009). Some of the strategies that I have found to be the most useful will be described in this blog and upcoming ones. Let us consider, a very simple, yet highly effective one - partner discussions.

### Partner Discussion:

One of the most inclusive ways to facilitate discussions is to provide time for partners to discuss a particular idea or issue. Simply asking people to pair up with a person close to them is a simple and quick way to allow people to share their ideas and learn from each other. By using pairs rather than groups, one is ensuring that as many people as possible have an opportunity to reflect on a situation, share their ideas on it and benefit from the ideas and or feedback of other people.

One helpful suggestion is to provide a little individual “thinking time” before the partner discussion actually begins. In doing so, each person is given some time to reflect on their ideas and perhaps develop or select a few of them to share. People who are shy or relatively anxious about sharing ideas in group settings, often do not mind discussing ideas in such one-to-one situations.

Partner discussions do not have to take a great deal of time; for example, pausing to give partners even a few minutes to discuss a new concept during a meeting can sustain interest and ensure that people understand some of the key ideas being considered. Listening to the degree of “buzz” in a room can quickly indicate whether the partners are appropriately engaged, or whether the question or issue has to be more clearly defined to prompt a more active discussion. Such discussions can also be used as a lead up activity to sharing in a group or larger forum.

### References

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