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Attending to Affect and Relationality in Professional Learning: Insights and Considerations

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Mathematics professional development for elementary teachers: Building trust within a school-based mathematics education community

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“Teachers who are learning and changing their practices are in a potentially delicate position because they are vulnerable to their peers’ opinions, the professional developers’ perceptions, and their administrators’ expectations”

(Sztajn et al., 2007, p. 973).

Design considerations for attending to affect and relationality in PD settings

1

Make room for participants to share their emotions, anxieties, and concerns

2

Attend and respond to participants' affective and relational experiences

3

Humanize the PD... and allow yourself to be vulnerable!

Some questions that came up...

- How can we create spaces that encourage teachers to openly share their emotions and to reframe them in ways that support their learning?
- What do we do when certain negative emotions are expressed?
- How can we support teachers to channel their own identities as learners in ways that could help them connect with and make sense of their emotions?
- How do we design PD with affect in mind, especially in PD that centers issues of racial injustice and other educational inequities?
- How do we grapple with and control our own emotions as PD facilitators when epistemological and ideological tensions arise?
- How can we productively address affective and relational tensions around power, authority, and status that manifest within PD interactions?

Insights and considerations that we brainstormed...

1. Build relationships and trust from the onset!
2. Consider relevance and ownership of learning goals
3. Attend to epistemologies & ideologies when responding to affect
4. Anticipate and address tensions related to negotiation of expertise and ideologies
5. Consider teachers' identities and their intersections with the display, experience, and processing of emotions

1) Setting the stage: Trust and relationship building from the onset!

- Create opportunities to get to know one another *as people*, and do that early on.
- Make time and explicitly design for relationship building, trust, and transparency.
- Be willing to share your own positionality and motivation for the work that you do.

2) Relevance, agency, and ownership of learning goals

- Inquire genuinely and curiously about teachers' needs, goals, and interests.
- Regularly gauge whether the PD is satisfying teachers' needs and is relevant to their learning goals (“I gave what I was supposed to give”).
- When possible, consider ways to flexibly adapt and adjust the PD to foster its relevance for teachers and to support their agency and ownership of the learning goals.

3) Attend to epistemology & ideology when attending and responding to affect

- Teacher emotions are often entangled with broader epistemological and ideological configurations.
- This means that responding to teachers' affect might entail addressing underlying epistemologies and ideologies.
- Discussing and negotiating epistemological and ideological assumptions can be part and parcel of reframing teachers' emotional experiences within PD.

4) Multi-layered negotiations of (disciplinary & pedagogical) expertise and ideologies

- Tensions among participants, especially when the setting involves a range of backgrounds and experiences, can often lead to negotiations of expertise & ideologies.
- These negotiations can provoke intense emotions, not only for PD participants, but also for the facilitators.
- Make deliberate efforts to frame the space as one of learning and growth, instead of as about display of expertise.
- Acknowledge, sit with, and process these feelings, and when possible, be transparent about them with participants.

5) Intersection of teacher identities with the display, experience, and processing of emotions

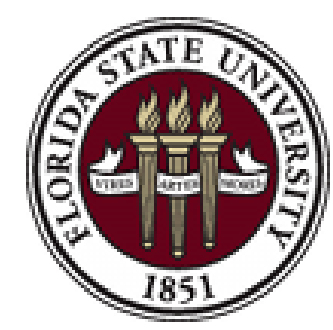
- It is important to attend to who the teachers are and how their various identities as STEM learners and teachers might shape how they display, experience, and process emotions (“I am more of a giver than a receiver”).
- Make room for teachers to interrogate and reflect on their own identities, and how they came to formulate certain perceptions about who they are as people, STEM learners, and STEM teachers.
- Model introspection into one’s identity; be open and willing to share about who you are and how you came to form perceptions about yourself as a learner/teacher/facilitator.

Important to attend to and elevate “emotion and affect as inseparable and critical dimensions of our life and practices, and of our learning as teachers” and teacher educators.

Need to design for, create, and study places of learning “where emotionality is expected, embraced, and processed in productive ways that are both felt and cognized.”



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Thank you!

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