Attending to Affective and Relational Dynamics in Professional Learning Settings

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CADRE Learning Series
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Responsive Teaching in Science Home

Responsive teaching refers to the practices of attending and responding to the substance of students’ thinking. Instructional nest moves arise out of the teachers’ sense of what students have been saying and doing, and they often entail adapting plans and objectives within a particular lesson while still working toward larger learning goals. This website is a prototype of curriculum and professional development to support responsive teaching.

Learning Through Collaborative Design

Refining practice to foster productive student science talk (i.e., thinking in the service of making sense of phenomena).

Summer Professional Development

In-School Cycles of Collaborative Design (N=4)

CAREER: Cultivating Teachers’ Epistemic Empathy to Promote Responsive Teaching

This project investigates the construct of "epistemic empathy" and examines how it can be cultivated in teacher education, how it functions to promote responsive teaching, and how it shapes learners’ engagement in the classroom. Epistemic empathy is defined as the act of tuning into and appreciating another’s cognitive and emotional experience within an epistemic activity aimed at the construction, communication, and critique of knowledge.
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Blended online PD program for elementary and middle school science teachers centered on doing science

**FALL**

Course 1: Experiencing Scientific Inquiry

**SPRING**

Course 2: Experiencing & Teaching Scientific Inquiry

**SUMMER**

Course 3: Responsive Teaching in Science
Experiencing Scientific Inquiry in the PD

Science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking.

From the Course Syllabus

The course places you at its heart. ... Unlike curricula that carve out a predetermined path, this course relies on you to ask questions and generate tangible, sensible explanations about natural phenomena...
In the first few weeks of the PD...

I need to buy into this process more. I feel that we extended a topic for the time being and need to move on.

There was no way I could hold a candle to the ideas coming out of some people's mouths!... I was getting discouraged with how "smart" other people were

You asking us to think for three weeks about a helium balloon, I was done with that.
In the first few weeks of the PD...

I stopped reading what you two were writing because I felt stupid, quite honestly... I don't know if other people are kinda feeling that way

I really feel like I don't fit in - like I have nothing to contribute, and it frustrates me because I don't like feeling “stupid”. I am not sure if this is for me 😞

There's so many different things to be looking at. There's the forum, there's the journal, there's the notebook...it gets to the point where I can't remember which I commented on.
“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).
As PD interactions involve negotiations of power and knowledge, they invoke issues of who holds authority and whose expertise and beliefs are valued.

These contestations can provoke intense emotion and tensions that potentially hinder learning and engagement.

In other words, participating in PD can be a threatening experience for teachers, who may feel that they are being judged or exposed as deficient.

“Whereas the characteristics for high-quality PD reflect current thinking about the cognitive aspects of learning, they undertheorize the influence of affective and relational aspects of learning in interactions.”

(Finkelstein et al., 2019, p. 341)
What are some questions to consider with respect to affect and relationality in PD settings?

• How do affective and relational tensions around power, authority, and knowledge manifest within PD interactions?
• How might participant positioning and negotiation of expertise contribute to or alleviate these tensions?
• How might PD facilitators respond to these tensions in ways that foster learning and mitigate resistance?
So returning to these first weeks...

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Design considerations

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!
**Consideration 1:** Make room for participants to share their emotions, anxieties, and concerns

- Anticipate moments or experiences that might raise feelings of resistance or vulnerability and filter in time around them to check-in with participants
- Regularly seek out anonymous and public forms of feedback
- Provide opportunities for participants to check in with one another and reflect on how things are going together
Consideration 2: Attend and respond to participants’ affective and relational experiences

- Honor participants’ experiences and respond to them in ways that communicate care and build trust
- Name, validate, and normalize participants' vexations, and support them to introspect into their emotions and worries
- Pay extra attention to participants who express anxiety or frustration and personalize your communication with them to help them feel seen and recognized
Consideration 3: Humanize the PD... and allow yourself to be vulnerable!

- Acknowledge and recognize that this work is hard
- Approach the work with a stance of humility, openness, and curiosity
- Share your vulnerabilities, puzzlements, and excitements with your PD participants.

We’re in it together and we’re all learning!
... later in the PD

I wish [this science discussion] could have gone on for another two hours!!... The more I think about it, the more questions I have!... This class has definitely made me look at the world differently!

This class is messing with my head! (in a good and annoying way!!) I can't stop asking why and how come and looking for inconsistencies in things!.

how come two objects, regardless of mass, reach the ground at the same time when dropped from the same height?!?!?! This was making me crazy [...] I've taught this unit for 10 years and never noticed or wondered about this before! [...] This class is making me think about everything so differently!!! Thank you AND make it stop! ;)

Thank you!

Please feel free to contact me at:
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