

Appendix 2

A professional development template

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Most of what we advocate in this book relates to the promotion of innovative change in assessment in schools, through helping the individual teacher to develop his or her own practices. The questions at the end of each chapter are therefore designed to facilitate deeper thinking about the issues raised and the insights offered. They imply the need to get beneath the rhetoric of 'change', 'good practice' and 'reflective practice', to go beyond the mere following of suggestions and guidance to in-depth self-assimilation of the purpose and meaning of the change.

There is a variety of one-to-one models of professional development that can avail of these questions as prompts for discussion. These include mentoring, coaching, modelling and co-teaching. However, the design being proposed here is for a form of collaborative group inquiry with mutually supported action in trying out ideas and new practices. As Chapter 6 sets out, key dimensions of any successful professional development activities will include strong leadership endorsement, appropriate resourcing, engagement by the teachers at all stages and opportunities to experiment.

With these provisos, this appendix offers a simple 'snowball' template for collaborative group inquiry whether in a school or in a cross-school setting such as a local authority continuing professional development (CPD) event. A 'snowball' event is one in which the unit of discussion progressively increases (like a snowball rolling down a snow-covered hillside). This proceeds from individuals to pairs to foursomes to the whole group in a structured series of discussion opportunities.

Depending on the nature and context of the setting, some questions may be more relevant than others. The extent of reading required will also depend to some extent on the setting but mostly it will be the case that the chapter in question will provide the main stimulus for discussion. Clearly, other sources will provide additional, even alternative, insights

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and these may enrich the process. We recommend careful scrutiny of the References section for materials to extend the participants' knowledge base and breadth of perspective.

A typical 'snowball' session would typically involve 20 participants and should proceed as follows:

Pre-reading:

- This will include the chapter that addresses the topic of the session and any appropriate materials or publications from the reference list.
- The pre-reading should be provided at least one week in advance of the session.

Initial stage:

- The facilitator(s) should enable participants to discuss as a whole group what they hope to achieve from the session. This should be expressed in terms of questions to answers.
- This stage may take 20 minutes or more and it is important not to rush or over-manage it. The session must proceed on the basis of what the participants want.
- The end-of-chapter questions should *not* be allowed to dominate the discussion as it would not be surprising if the participants' aspirations did not coincide completely with them.
- However, the questions do encapsulate the issues raised in the chapters so they should continue to act as a basis on which to work, suitably amended and contextualized to ensure a good fit with the participants' wishes and needs.
- When the content of the key questions has been agreed by the participants, they should be made visible and accessible throughout the subsequent discussions by whatever means is convenient (projection, handouts, etc).

Snowball stage 1:

- Participants should be facilitated to reflect individually on the questions for 10 minutes.
- During this time they should note anything relevant that they think is important including personal perspectives, 'questions on the questions' (e.g. for clarification), ideas to share, relevant experiences and classroom relevance.

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Snowball stage 2:

- Participants should be facilitated to join in pairs to discuss each other's notes on the questions, in a session period of approximately 20 minutes.
- It is generally a good idea to ensure that there is a good mix within the pairs; for example, by gender, age, subject discipline or pupil phase (e.g. Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2). However, this is not an imperative.
- Generally, this one-on-one discussion will resolve some 'questions on the questions' while others will be refined for further discussion. The sharing of ideas, experiences, perspectives and views on classroom relevance will find varying degrees of consensus and overlap, while individualistic aspects will remain discrete.
- The joint notes should proceed to the next stage.

Snowball stage 3:

- The participants should be facilitated to join in groups of four (i.e. joining two pairs) to discuss the pairs' and individuals' contributions.
- This part of the session may take 30 minutes or more to complete.
- A verbal report, with key points on flipchart or other medium, will be needed from each group of four covering at least the following:
 - relevance of the questions and their focuses to the classroom;
 - interesting ideas and experiences for sharing;
 - proposed practical activities for trying out;
 - proposed follow-up to evaluate the new activities.
- To facilitate the reporting back and recording of key points each group should nominate a key point writer and a rapporteur (the roles could be combined but the spirit of collaborative inquiry would usually demand as much sharing as possible).

At this point there have been at least 80 minutes of intense discussion and there will probably be signs that participants need a little bit of time for reflection and assimilation of the various issues raised, and most importantly a comfort break!

Snowball stage 4:

- This stage should facilitate whole group (or plenary) discussion of all the various insights, experiences, ideas and remaining questions, as presented by each group of four in turn.

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- There is virtue in brevity in this reporting back stage, primarily because of the number of groups (e.g. in this case five groups of four). However, time must be allowed for a brief verbal report on the key points from each group's deliberations, followed by whole group discussion of the points made and ideas shared as appropriate. For five groups there should be five minutes for the verbal report and another five for discussion.
- Careful note requires to be taken of all the issues and ideas emerging, especially ideas for new practices to be trialled. This note is particularly important for leaders (senior management teams, etc.) to ensure they can assess any resources needed and how best to support any follow-up activities.
- Finally, the facilitators should wind up the session with a recap of all the major discussion points and proposals. They must also prepare a short summary note of the proceedings as both a record for everyone involved and as a means of focusing follow-up discussion among participants and the school leadership team.

