

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Facilitator Notes for Leading the Routine (45 minutes total)

Overview and Purpose of the Routine

An outdoor science program can be an amazing laboratory for developing the “art of instruction” where instructors are trying out new activities and strategies and are engaged in ongoing discussions about teaching and learning. This activity is a routine that can help develop such a reflective learning culture on your staff. It helps instructors become more comfortable with being vulnerable and with sharing challenges they are having. It also encourages them to support each other as they come up with different ideas for how to handle challenging situations.

In this routine, one instructor volunteers to share a challenging teaching situation where they had to make a decision, and would like input from others to get more ideas about possible instructional moves that could be made in such a situation. The routine is carefully structured to avoid potential negative interactions, such as instructors criticizing each other, or defensiveness on the part of the instructor. The volunteer instructor is given at least a week in advance to prepare a focusing question about a situation that they then share with the group, without sharing what they did to deal with the situation. In small groups, and then in the whole group, staff discuss possible instructor moves, while the volunteer instructor silently listens. Finally, the instructor shares how they dealt with the situation, as well as what they have learned from the discussion. All participants leave with a variety of ideas on how to deal with similar situations. But more important, the activity helps kick off more vulnerable sharing of challenges and ideas among staff.

PREPARATION FOR LEADER

1. At least one week before doing the routine, explain the purpose and introduce the process to your staff.

- Emphasize the importance of the chosen instructor’s being willing to be vulnerable about their instruction with staff.
- Emphasize the importance of the staff’s making a brave space for them to share.

Why “brave space” instead of “safe space”? The term, “safe space” has often been used to describe an atmosphere for leaders to work toward in which participants feel comfortable sharing. Arao and Clemens (2013), in their article, “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” question if facilitators can truly make a space safe for all participants, and also note that participants sometimes use the “excuse” of a safe space to avoid entering into uncomfortable conversations. The term ‘brave space’ on the other hand, encourages participants to take risks and be vulnerable, while emphasizing courage instead of safety or comfort.

2. Choose a volunteer instructor.

- Recruit a volunteer to be the presenting instructor. Ask all instructors to think about instructional situations they might bring to the group for discussion.
- The first time you do this with a group, try to choose someone who’s pretty confident about their instruction.

PREPARATION FOR LEADER

3. **Meet with instructor.** Meet privately with the presenting instructor, and share the handout *Preparation for the Presenting Instructor* (page 5) with them.
4. **Check in with instructor.**
 - Check in with them more than once before doing the routine to see how they're doing with developing a focusing question and describing the context.
 - Review the routine as well as their written preparation before they present at the staff meeting.
5. **Check in with instructor.** Before diving into discussion, it's important to have established a set of group discussion agreements, to help keep the discussion productive, inclusive, and respectful. If you don't already have them, you'll need to introduce them (see two resources on how to do this below), or jointly create them, which will take more time but will probably get more buy-in from staff. Do this beforehand at a separate time from What Would You Do?
 - Anti Oppressive Facilitation for Democratic Process: Making Meetings Awesome for Everyone (2017). Accessed online: http://aorta.coop/portfolio_page/anti-oppressive-facilitation/
 - Garmston, R., and B. Wellman. (2009) *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*, 2nd edition. Accessed online: <http://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/norms-collaboration-toolkit/>
6. **Copy handout.** Copy and cut up the handout, *What Would You Do?* (page 6), so every small group will have an outline of the routine.

Agreements vs. Norms: Many books, programs, and schools use the term "discussion norms" to describe group agreements. We intentionally chose not to use the term "norms" because it can send a message that there is one "normal" or accepted way to participate in discussions. This can lead to a marginalization of students of color, because the "normal culture" is typically white, if it is unspoken (Solomon, et al., 2005). Group Agreements can be a way to shift the culture to be more inclusive, deliberately highlighting different ways of being and acting as acceptable, and placing value on hearing and integrating different perspectives. If "Group Agreements" will be a challenging term for your students to understand and apply, you could also refer to them as "practices" or as "ground rules."

Introducing the Routine (5 minutes)

1. Review agreements:

- a. Go over any agreements for discussion or collaboration that you use with your group.
- b. This should not be the first time you introduce these agreements.

2. Explain general purpose of the routine:

- a. The chosen instructor is going to share an instructional dilemma with the group.
- b. It will be a challenging teaching situation where they had to make a decision, and they would like input from others to get more ideas about possible instructional moves that could be made in such a situation.

- c. This is a gift to the group, because everyone gets a chance to think about and discuss a complex instructional decision.
- d. This will help us all learn and improve our instructional practice by broadening our experience with teaching in similar situations, while giving us more tools to make better decisions.
- e. The routine is meant to encourage self-reflection among instructors in an ongoing process of trying out new things and improving practice.
- f. It's also meant to inspire ongoing reflective discussions among staff, to help the team become a healthy learning community for development of instructional practice, where all instructors are working on parts of their practice and are sharing issues and ideas with others.

3. Explain the vulnerability of the instructor:

- a. The instructor is putting themselves in a vulnerable position by sharing their challenging experience or teaching dilemma.
- b. They had to make a decision on the spot, without a chance for consultation and discussion with others.
- c. They didn't have the luxury of time and consultation we will all have today as we are discussing their dilemma.

4. Emphasize treating the instructor respectfully and keeping an open mind. Explain:

- a. Please keep all this in mind while we discuss this issue. Participate with respect, kindness, and thoughtfulness.
- b. Please keep an open mind, so we have a productive discussion and everyone feels they have something to contribute.
- c. Try to remind yourself that this is a chance for you to learn too.
- d. It can be useful to set a personal intention in advance, to look for an opportunity to change your mind or expand your thinking about something during the discussion.
- e. Instead of saying, "what I do is this...", which may sound condescending, try saying, "an idea of what to do might be this..."

Leading the Routine (40 minutes)

1. Instructor presents the situation. (5 minutes)

- a. Pass out one copy of the handout What Would You Do? to every small group.
- b. Ask the instructor to present the teaching situation they've chosen to the group, including the context and goals they had for the learning experience.
- c. Make sure the instructor stops short of describing the instructional move they made and what happened afterward (student response, the reasons behind or limitations for making their choice, etc.).
- d. Ask the instructor to share their focusing question to help the group understand the question they have about the dilemma, and how best to address their concern.

2. Group asks clarifying questions of instructor. (5 minutes)

- a. The group asks brief questions of the instructor to better understand the challenging situation and the teaching context, as well as to understand the focusing question.
- b. The questions should be simple "yes or no" kinds, not leading questions like "why did you do this?"
- c. The instructor answers the questions, without telling why or what they did, or what happened afterward.

- 3. Small groups discuss the dilemma, while instructor listens. (10 minutes)**
 - a. Each small group discusses the instructional dilemma and tries to answer the focusing question.
 - b. They come up with different moves that the instructor could have made.
 - c. They discuss the pros and cons of each move, as well as the rationale for how to make a decision.
 - d. The presenting instructor moves from group to group and listens in as people share their ideas.
 - e. The presenting instructor does not participate in the small group discussions, respond to comments, or answer any more questions about the teaching situation.

- 4. Small groups share ideas with whole group. (10 minutes)**
 - a. A leader from each small group shares one or more of their ideas, along with their rationale, with the whole group.
 - b. The instructor listens and takes notes on ideas they think are most promising.

- 5. Instructor shares what they did, and what happened afterward. (5 minutes)**
 - a. The facilitator reminds the group that the instructor had to make an on-the-spot decision without the chance to discuss ideas, like the group just had.
 - b. The instructor shares what they actually did in the situation.
 - c. They describe what happened with the students after their instructional move.
 - d. They also share with the group what they gained from others' ideas, and how that has influenced their thinking.

- 6. The facilitator debriefs the process with the whole group. (5 minutes)**
 - a. Ask one of the following questions:
 - b. How or to what extent did the routine help support improvement of teaching practices?
 - c. What did you gain from this routine today?
 - d. Check in with the group about how well they think the agreements were followed and whether there might be room for improvement.
 - e. Ask if there is anything they'd want to adjust or change about the routine for next time.
 - f. Thank the instructor profusely for being vulnerable and willing to share their experience.

PREPARATION FOR PRESENTING INSTRUCTOR

Overview and Purpose of the Routine

This routine will be a chance for you to tap into the “group brain” for ideas on how to handle a challenging teaching situation you’ve experienced. It’s an opportunity for everyone to collectively think and learn to improve their instructional practice. It also helps set a tone of ongoing reflective practice within the group. It takes vulnerability and openness to other ideas for it to work well, so thank you for being willing to take a risk and share with your fellow instructors. The goal is to hear multiple ideas about how to deal with the situation, so that the next time a similar challenge comes up everyone will have more ideas on how to deal with it.

Choosing and Framing the Situation

Reflective writing to choose an instructional situation. Do some reflective writing about challenging instructional situations you’ve been in. Try to come up with a situation that you think the group will learn from, that you yourself will learn from, that is important to your practice, and that is relevant to issues you are working on in your teaching. Choose a complex situation in which you had to make a critical instructional decision. The challenging situation you choose should involve a decision that was perhaps not as effective as you would have liked. It should be a decision or situation where you are still not clear on how to provide the most productive experience for your students. This activity doesn’t work as well if it’s an issue you feel like you’ve already solved and have a clear strategy in place for.

Write about the teaching context in detail. Once you’ve chosen the teaching situation to present, write out any relevant context in detail. For example: the people/students involved, where you were, what happened before this situation, what your goals were for the experience, what made you aware of the challenge, and so on.

Come up with a focusing question. Finally, think of a focusing question for the group that captures what you really want to know about this situation. For example, “What moves can I make to help a special needs student be more integrated in a group?” or “How can I make sure my discussions stay more on track when dealing with science ideas?” or “How would you approach, in a positive and empowering way, a cabin leader whose actions were negatively affecting students’ experiences?” Make sure your question meets the following criteria: It’s important to your teaching and to student learning, it’s relevant to other instructors, and it’s something you’re willing to work on to improve your instruction.

Steps of the Routine

- 1. Facilitator reviews discussion agreements.** First, the facilitator reviews discussion agreements with the group, setting a tone of a brave space for everyone sharing ideas, but especially for you (the instructor who is sharing). (5 min.)
- 2. You describe the situation and share a focusing question, but not the move you did.** You’ll present the teaching situation you’ve chosen to the group, including the context. Then you’ll share a focusing question about the situation for the group to consider. You’ll stop before describing the instructional move you actually made, or telling how the students responded afterward — that comes at the end of the routine. (5 min.)
- 3. Group asks you questions.** The group asks you brief clarifying questions, to better understand the challenging situation and the teaching context. (5 min.)
- 4. Small group discussions, as you listen in without comments.** Small groups discuss the instructional dilemma, and come up with possible moves you could have made. They discuss the pros and cons of each move, as well as the rationale for each choice. During these discussions, you’ll move from group to group to listen in as people share their ideas, but you will not participate in the small group discussions, respond to comments, or answer any more questions about the situation. (10 min.)
- 5. Each group shares ideas with the whole group, as you listen and take notes.** Facilitators from small groups share their best ideas and rationale with the whole group. As this is happening, you’ll take notes, without responding. (10 min.)
- 6. Share what you did, and how other’s ideas have influenced your thinking.** Finally, you’ll share what you actually did in the situation, and what happened with the students. You’ll also share with the group what you heard from others’ ideas, and how it has influenced your thinking. (5 min.)
- 7. The facilitator debriefs the process with the whole group.** (5 min.)

HANDOUT: WHAT WOULD YOU DO? OUTLINE

Print and cut out along the dotted line. Each small group gets 1 copy.

What Would You Do?

Steps of the Routine:

1. Facilitator reviews discussion agreements. (5 min.)
2. Volunteer instructor describes situation and shares focusing question, but not the move they did. (5 min.)
3. Group asks instructor brief clarifying “yes or no” questions. (5 min.)
4. Small groups discuss possible instructor moves, generating pros and cons for each move, while citing their rationale and how it will help to address the instructor’s focusing question. Instructor listens in without making comments. (10 min.)
5. Each group shares ideas with whole group, as instructor listens and takes notes. (10 min.)
6. Instructor shares what they did, and how other’s ideas have influenced their thinking. (5 min.)
7. The facilitator debriefs the process with the whole group. (5 min.)

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR PRESENTERS

Building a Culture of Reflection

An outdoor science program can be an amazing laboratory for developing the “art of instruction” where instructors push themselves and each other, focus on developing teaching skills, consistently try out new student activities, and continually reflect on teaching and learning. In this kind of setting, becoming a good instructor involves more than just learning a “shtick” and being able to consistently present it in an entertaining way. When a teaching staff has a healthy, reflective learning culture in place, you can feel it. It’s exciting and stimulating to be part of a community trying out new approaches and discussing successes and challenges with peers. Program leaders who support this kind of reflective culture help young field instructors develop into thoughtful educators who go on to have rewarding careers in science, education, and beyond, and who continue to impact the world in meaningful ways. Establishing a reflective learning culture provides a foundation for growth and change within your program. Research on teacher learning argues strongly for including reflective practice for both new and veteran teachers. And, it just makes sense that instructors who actively think about the effectiveness of their teaching, discuss these issues with colleagues, and develop strategies to improve will make more progress than those who aren’t given these opportunities and structures for collaboration and ongoing support.

Working toward a common goal. Establishing a somewhat formalized “professional learning community” can encourage instructors to adopt new approaches to teaching and learning. The central idea is that every member of the community is working toward a common goal of figuring out the best teaching approaches and strategies to reach the audience for the program, and that there is a regular structure in place to help everyone work together. A professional learning community must establish a clear goal, like “creating the best possible learning experiences for our students.” Programs that actively cultivate openness and growth among staff explicitly state that they have a goal of staff’s exploring various strategies to improve instruction. They also provide meeting time for staff to share examples of student work or debrief how a new activity went in order to learn what works best. Professional learning communities use specific discussion protocols that structure conversations to ensure an attitude of learning from practice rather than merely evaluating performance. When all staff are focused on achieving common goals, and when program leaders are equally focused on providing necessary support to instructors through coaching and mentoring, a learning community can form that leads to improved performance and increased job satisfaction.

Encouraging a growth mindset among instructors. An essential characteristic of a professional learning community is that members adopt a growth mindset. This means they understand that the abilities of individual learners (their students and themselves) can change and are not fixed or primarily due to innate talent. For example, an instructor who leads an unsuccessful discussion might then decide to not try leading discussions again because they’re “not good at it” or they are convinced “their students can’t do it.” By contrast, an instructor with a growth mindset is more likely to think about what didn’t work, look into the sorts of abilities they can develop to overcome that issue next time, and try again (and again, and again...). When instructors and program leaders truly believe that teaching abilities can grow (and that we all have room to grow!), they’re more willing to make adjustments to their instructional practices and to try out new strategies and approaches. Program leaders who nurture a growth mindset create an environment of receptivity that helps instructors build and then improve their teaching skills.

Creating structures for coaching and mentoring staff. Studies of professional learning models report that a critical aspect of improving teaching practices is receiving timely feedback from more-experienced educators and peers. Observing an instructor and engaging with them in discussion about teaching strategies and approaches can be a highly effective way to improve specific teaching practices. BEETLES Reflective Teaching Tools assist program leaders to observe students, then provide feedback that can help instructors meet their goals and make adjustments to teaching.

Field instructors often have opportunities to lead the same activities with different groups of students and, when given appropriate feedback, they can effectively fine-tune their teaching skills. Providing reflective time during staff meetings, creating paid opportunities for staff to get together and discuss their teaching, and organizing a structure for peer-coaching (among other things) supports continual improvement and allows instructors to learn from each other’s experiences.

Differentiating between evaluation and coaching. It's important to distinguish performance evaluation efforts from coaching. Evaluation efforts primarily focus on informing the program or individual about how well they're meeting specific goals and expectations. Coaching, on the other hand, usually has the distinct purpose of improving practice.

- **Evaluation:** When observing instructors for evaluation purposes, the criteria for success should be clearly communicated well in advance and can take the form of a checklist of teaching or student behaviors. The evaluative feedback provided is intended to let the instructor know how well they're meeting expectations.
- **Coaching:** Coaching, or mentoring, focuses on making observations rather than evaluations or interpretations. The coach asks the instructor to choose a particular teaching strategy or technique they'd like to work on by receiving observational feedback about what actually happened. Program leaders have emphasized that instructors are much more open to feedback about their teaching when it feels like a collaborative discussion and when they have permission to try new, challenging things that they might not succeed at the first time. Coaches can support instructors to make their own thoughtful adjustments and improvements. Both negative and positive evaluative feedback during this kind of learning process can actually undermine instructors' success.

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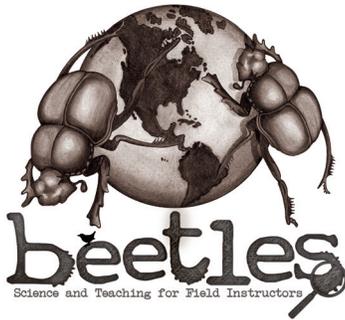
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Note: This activity reached us through two pathways. It is based on the Consultancy Protocol developed by the National School Reform Faculty (Thompson-Grove, Evans, & Dunne, 2019), and has been used extensively in contexts where classroom teachers take instructional dilemmas to a group of their peers and then receive feedback. Members of our team have used it with classroom teachers for many years. It was later suggested and described to us in the outdoor science program staff context by Ray Cramer, Senior Faculty for Teaching Practicum of Islandwood.



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