

Text Based Seminar

In a text-based seminar of 40 minutes to one hour, a team examines an issue from an outside point of view by focusing on a specific article or excerpt from a book. This seminar helps build a culture of discourse in a school by creating a safe place for individuals to approach difficult issues. Participants read a short article or excerpt from a book that is related to teaching and learning and engage in a discussion about the text. The purpose of the discussion is not to persuade other group members of a particular point of view but to clarify, build upon, and enhance understanding of the actual text. Text-based seminars give participants an opportunity to extract different meanings and ideas from a text and discuss important issues related to the text.

Procedure

1. Select the Text

Choose an article or book excerpt that will have implications for teaching and learning. The article may be selected by the team facilitator or by an individual member of the team.

2. Read the Text (10 – 15 Minutes)

If the text is long, the facilitator may distribute it before the meeting, or a shorter text may be read for the first time during the meeting. In either case, 10 –15 minutes of seminar time are devoted to reading or reviewing the article. While reading, participants may take notes, underline or highlight important ideas, and record questions the text raises for them.

3. Begin the Discourse (5 –10 Minutes)

There are two effective ways to begin the discourse. Each member of the seminar may take turns reading aloud a sentence or two that has particular significance to them. Or, the facilitator may present a framing question to start the discussion.

4. Discuss the Text (20 – 30 Minutes)

The facilitator leads the discussion. He or she should remind participants to refer to the text to support their comments. Groups may want to follow these guidelines:

Listen actively

Build on what others say

Expose/suspend your assumptions

Don't step on other's talk. Silences and pauses are OK

Emphasize clarification, amplification, and implications of ideas

Converse directly with each other, not through the facilitator

Let the conversation flow without raising hands, as much as possible

Text Based Seminar (Continued)

Make references to the text and encourage others to do the same

Watch your air time for how often you speak and how much you say when you speak

5. Close the Discussion (5 Minutes)

The facilitator closes the discussion about the text, highlighting two or three main points of discussion and thanking participants for their perspective. The result is that all participants leave the seminar with a deeper understanding of the text.