



## Framing Consultancy Dilemmas and Consultancy Questions

*Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.*

A dilemma is a puzzle, an issue that raises questions, an idea that seems to have conceptual gaps, something about process or product that you just can't figure out. Sometimes it will include samples of student or adult work that illustrate the dilemma, but often it is a dilemma that crosses over many parts of the educational process.

### 1. Think about your dilemma.

Dilemmas deal with issues with which you are struggling or that you are unsure about. Some criteria for a dilemma might include:

- Is it something that is bothering you enough that your thoughts regularly return to the dilemma?
- Is it an issue/dilemma that is not already on its way to being resolved?
- Is it an issue/ dilemma that does not depend on getting other people to change (in other words, can you affect the dilemma by changing your practice)?
- Is it something that is important to you, and is it something you are actually willing to work on?

### 2. Do some reflective writing about your dilemma.

Some questions that might help are

- Why is this a dilemma for you? Why is this dilemma important to you?
- If you could take a snapshot of this dilemma, what would you/we see?
- What have you done already to try to remedy or manage the dilemma?
- What have been the results of those attempts?
- Who do you hope changes? Who do you hope will take action to resolve this dilemma? If your answer is *not* you, you need to change your focus. You will want to present a dilemma that is about *your* practice, actions, behaviors, beliefs, and assumptions, and *not* someone else's.
- What do you assume to be true about this dilemma, and how have these assumptions influenced your thinking about the dilemma?
- What is your focus question? A focus question summarizes your dilemma and helps focus the feedback (see the next step).

### 3. Frame a focus question for your Consultancy group

Put your dilemma into question format.

- Try to pose a question around the dilemma that seems to you to get to the heart of the matter.
- Remember that the question you pose will guide the Consultancy group in their discussion of the dilemma.

### 4. Critique your focus question.

- Is this question important to my practice?
- Is this question important to student learning?
- Is this question important to others in my profession?

## Preparing to Present a Dilemma in a Consultancy Protocol

Come to the session with a description of a dilemma related to your practice. Write your dilemma with as much contextual description as you feel you need for understanding. One page is generally sufficient; even a half page is often enough. If you prefer not to write it out, you can make notes for yourself and do an oral presentation, but please do some preparation ahead of time.

End your description with a specific question. Frame your question thoughtfully. What do you REALLY want to know? What is your real dilemma? This question will help your Consultancy group focus its feedback. Questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no” generally provide less feedback for the person with the dilemma, so avoid those kinds of questions. (See the previous pages for a process for framing Consultancy dilemmas and questions.)

Dilemmas deal with issues with which you are struggling — something that is problematic or has not been as effective as you would like it to be — anything related to your work. Consultancies give presenters an opportunity to tap the expertise in a group, and if past experiences offer any indication, you will be able to rely on the people in your Consultancy group to provide respectful, thoughtful, experienced-based responses to your dilemma.

- A couple of caveats — we have found that Consultancies don’t go well when people bring dilemmas that they are well on the way to figuring out themselves, or when they bring a dilemma that involves only getting other people to change. To get the most out of this experience, bring something that is still puzzling you about your practice. It is riskier to do, but we guarantee that you will learn more.