National
School
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Center

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Questions and Assumptions

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.

1. Look at the first guiding question of this week's seminar. In pairs, ask participants to spend 3 minutes brainstorming questions about the guiding question, writing down as many as possible. With whole group back together, briefly explain the concept of assumptions and of suspending assumptions. (5 minutes)

   Give an example of a phrase with embedded assumptions, i.e. education reform. Assumptions: there is such a thing as education, that it needs reform, that it is possible to reform it, etc. Explain the concept of suspending assumptions: Could mean banishing them or pretending they don't exist, like suspending a kid from school. Suspend could also mean "hanging" them out there for everyone to see, like laundry or drapes.

2. Ask participants to return to pairs, now listing as many of the assumptions embedded in this question as possible. With whole group back together, report out some of the assumptions they "suspended." (5 minutes)

3. Ask participants to take out the dilemma they brought to the seminar and generate one question (a big question) about their practice. (5 minutes)

   Sample prompts: What is the one question that you ask yourself over and over on the way home at night? What philosophical dilemma about your practice is still unresolved for you?

4. In pairs, ask participants to spend 5 minutes brainstorming questions about each other's questions, writing down as many as possible. (5 minutes)

   Prompt: What questions do you need to ask about your question in order to begin to answer it?

5. Ask participants to return to pairs, now listing as many of the assumptions embedded in their questions as possible. (5 minutes)

6. Bring whole group back together for debrief: (5 minutes)
   What did you discover about assumptions? What did you discover about questions? Encourage a few to share examples of questions and assumptions. Emphasis should be on the concepts rather than the individuals' questions.