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Suggestions for Bringing a Dilemma

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 just a dilemma that crosses over many parts of the educational process.

Some dilemma examples:

1. The teaching staff seems to love the idea of involving the students in meaningful learning that connects the students to real issues and work in the community, but nothing seems to be happening in reality. *Question: Why is interest/theory not translating into practice?*

2. The community is participating in visioning work, but the work doesn't seem to relate to the actual life of the schools and the community — it is just too utopian. *Question: How do you mesh dreams and reality?*

3. A lot of community people came to the first few visioning meetings, but now only a handful come and there is growing resentment on the part of those who do come about those that don't. *Question: How do you sustain interest in visioning?*

4. Teachers and community people love doing projects with the students, but they never seem to connect together or have very coherent educational goals or focus, they are just fun. *Question: How do you move from projects to deep learning about important concepts and still stay connected to hands-on work?*

5. You keep getting grants to do specific projects with students and the community, but when the money is gone, the work doesn't continue. Question: *How does sustainability actually work? What needs to change for it to work?*

6. No matter how hard you try to be inclusive and ask for everyone's ideas, about half of the people don't want to do anything new — they think things were just fine before. *Question: How do you work with the people who don't want to change without alienating them?*

7. There are many wonderful place-based learning efforts underway, but you are noticing that students are less and less competent at basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics. They are great at public speaking, using resources, creative planning, environmental and social concepts. *Question: How does a change in learning context change what become basic skills? How do we become more inclusive of a range of basic skills?*

So... What is YOUR Dilemma?

1. 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.

2. Frame your question thoughtfully. What do you REALLY want to know? What is your real dilemma? For example, with dilemma #7, the real question might be: *How do we explore what we actually mean by basic skills and come to consensus about what we mean?* A question that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" generally provides less feedback for the person with the dilemma, so avoid "yes" and "no" questions.

3. Make five copies of your dilemma.

4. If you prefer not to write it out, you can make notes for yourself and do an oral presentation only.