

## Working with Working Papers

### **Introduction**

The Working Papers series is meant to be a support for and prompt to reflective practice in school and teacher education. With this in mind, we would like to suggest the following working format, though of course, you may have other or even better ideas.

### **Initial awakening**

It can be helpful to flag up a theme or topic in advance of actually working with it in a teachers' meeting. Just outline the issue without discussion and without taking any particular position: "we thought it would be important to talk about...because...". Then monitor the responses. There is no point introducing a topic in the face of strong opposition, it would only polarize. It is also not necessary to take a vote or seek vociferous support. It is sufficient to note that there is enough initial interest (and no major opposition).

### **Reading up**

It may then be helpful to offer some recommended literature and/or one of our working papers and give people a month to read up on the themes.

### **Preparation - sounding out**

It can be helpful to ask colleagues to conduct some informal research on the theme, making notes of what they have read, or what they have learned in conversations with others, organizing their own thoughts and observations before starting any discussions. It always helps to come prepared to discussions. Some teachers may find that posing the question of this topic as a contemplative exercise may help unlock some of their deeper experiences (see Rawson, 2012)

### **Case study**

One way of working with a theme is the case clinic method based loosely on a Theory U tool (see <https://www.presencing.org/resource/tools>).

In a teachers' meetings groups of 5-6 people are formed and roles are distributed: presenter, time and rule keeper, active participants/coaches (perhaps also a note-taker). For larger groups up to 12 people, we suggest a fish-bowl structure of six in the inner circle actively participating, six in the outer circle actively listening and observing.

A case presenter (who has prepared this in advance) presents an experience related to a certain pedagogical topic. The task is to describe the situation as vividly as possible including details and sense impressions. Context is described if necessary for the understanding. This description can take 10-15 minutes.

After a 2-minute reflective pause, the coaches mirror what they have witnessed and the thoughts, images, and feelings they had while listening - without judging or offering advice. They can ask informative questions if necessary.

This is followed by a generative dialogue starting between the coaches, following the flow of the conversation, building on what has been said, adding personal experiences with similar situations – again without judgement or giving advice – fully in the mood of sharing (also for 20 minutes).

After another 2-minute reflective silence, the session concludes with the case giver sharing what resonated with her and what she will take with her.

As you might have noticed, there is no discussion of right or wrong. The case giver is listened to and is offered the gift of reflection and sharing. She can take this with her, let it work inside and decide what she will be doing with it.

Afterwards individuals write up their thoughts in their journals.

### **Follow up**

A week later another case clinic to a related topic can be taken, or a prototyping process (see also Presencing Institute website) can take the topic further leading to action, which then becomes an action research cycle.

### **Meditative contemplation**

It can help at each stage of the process if participants take a theme from the chosen topic as a focus for contemplative meditation during the week before and after the discussions.

### **References**

- Rawson, M. (2012). Contemplative practice and intuition in a collegial context: An action research project in a Waldorf school. *Research Bulletin of Waldorf Research Institute*, 17(1), 47-54.
- Rawson, M. (2014). Practices of teacher learning in Waldorf schools: some recommendations based on qualitative inquiry. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 3(2), 45-68.
- Rawson, M. (2018). The case for illuminative practitioner research in Steiner Education. *Research on Steiner Education*, 8(2), 15-32.