

### **Step 1: Determining Staff Readiness**

- Does the staff have set norms and regularly references them during the PD space?
- Are the staff comfortable with using protocols to guide discussions & decision-making processes (ie: SRI protocols?)
- Does the staff regularly engage in reflections on their practice and are comfortable with feedback?
- Are conversations about school improvement more focused on what the trained adults in the room can do VS what students/families *need* to do?

#### **IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO THE FOLLOWING...**

*Then they are possibly ready to have students in their PD space*

### **Step 2: Priming the staff/space for student Empathy Interviews**

When introducing CI to staff make sure to emphasize the use of empathy interviews and student feedback. Here is some language I use to introduce empathy interviews particularly during the **“PoP and Identifying Change Action”** part of the CI process:

- *As adults, we often make assumptions without pausing to ask our experts, our clients - our students - what their experience has been, what has worked and what has not worked to support their learning.*
- *Empathy interviews can be challenging for some. The process is slower and narrower than surveying and the conversations can feel uncomfortable. However, they are a powerful tool to unearthing the root causes of gnarly problems*

Once teachers identify a **“PoP & Change Action,”** they are then tasked to do the following:

- *Identify 2-3 students to interview regarding the POP and Change Action. Questions to possibly pose could be:*
  - *I want to get better, and I think a key issue to address is .... What do you think?*
  - *I think the main reason this is a problem is because.... (Insert Root Cause). What do you think?*
  - *I think I should.....(Insert Change Action), what do you think?*

Teachers are then to return to the following PD with key quotes and insights they got from those interviews and post them on a JamBoard or mentimeter (*for groups who lean more towards anonymity in these types of discussions*) or in pairs (*if they do well with sharing*) or both.

Once teachers get into the process of asking their students for feedback independently, they are then ready to have them in their PD space (*fingers crossed lol*)

### **Step 3: Determining *WHEN* to bring Students and *WHICH* students to bring to the PD space**

#### ***Thoughts on When:***

I find that the best time to bring students into the PD space is at key transition moments. Either the end of the semester OR right after midterms. These are times where everyone pauses and reflects and so student empathy interviews are more likely to be heard and leveraged into larger PD goals. It might be helpful to have one at the end of the CI cycle, to reflect more on what worked and didn't.

Sometimes I pose the following essential question: ***“How might we leverage reflection to guide our final month of instruction?”*** and utilize student empathy interviews as one of several reflection protocols that will be introduced during the PD space.

#### ***Thoughts on Who:***

This is the more difficult part of the process. You want to ensure the right students are there, that are representative of the school body and will guide the larger conversations around the PoP or change actions.

You don't want to ask your super high achievers or super engaged students because they are more likely benefiting from the structures and practices in place (*unless that is your PoP or focus area such as differentiation for high achievers*) but also, not the students who never speak, or come to school because it will yield limited data, particularly if they don't come to school that day (*trust me, it's happened lol*).

You also want to ask enough students so that a conversation gets flowing amongst them, but not too many that it becomes a bit overwhelming for the teachers to follow (*because they need to be able to use the data*). You also will need to account for a student possibly being absent or unavailable. The number we usually land on is 4-5 (*to account for one being absent*).

Usually in consultation with the principal or lead teacher four to five 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders (in total) and four to five 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders (in total) are identified and asked to attend with limited information other than: *“We are asking select students to come to the PD and have a quick conversation with each other on how to help us, and the teachers find out how to make school a bit better.”*

\*\*\*\*Ensure there is a mix of gender, culture/race, and “grouping” (athlete vs artist vs class clown). With the first 20-30 minutes dedicated to the lower grades and the second 20-30 minutes of the PD dedicated to the upper grades.\*\*\*\*\*

#### **Step 4: Implementation**

##### **Setting the Stage**

The empathy interview in the PD space operates more as a fishbowl discussion. Teachers are asked to stay quiet, take notes and observe while the facilitator places the students in a circle at the front of the room and attempts to guide a “natural” conversation amongst the participants.

THIS WILL BE WEIRD FOR ALL!!! Own and name it for everyone in the room. This is not something we do regularly. In many schools, students are rarely asked their opinion so openly and they are not in the habit of giving feedback directly to their teachers. Honor the very hesitant and apprehensive feelings for all and ask everyone to lean in just a little on the weirdness and discomfort. \*If you are a school that already practices **Circles** (a typical RJ practice) you can leverage some of those language/norms in this space. \*

##### **Possible Empathy Interview Questions:**

- Tell me about the part of your school experience that you feel the best about or most success in? Why?
- Tell me about the part of your school experience that you feel the worst about or least success in? Why?
- This is the last month or so of the semester. What do you think teachers should do to help get students over the finish line and successfully pass their classes? What do you think students need most?

After the first session (lower grades) make sure to have teachers write down what they heard, make notes of what stood out and what thoughts are brewing in their mind. Make sure to dedicate 5 minutes or more for that so that they can then ready themselves for the second session (upper grades). At the end of the empathy interviews make sure to give individuals more thinking/processing time (5 minutes) before engaging in a larger group discussion.

##### **Larger group discussion questions/prompts for Teachers:**

- What defining words did you hear?
- What story is being told?
- How might we use this data to inform our next steps?

Depending on the culture of your staff, it might be best to start with a mentimeter or small group discussion before transitioning to the larger group. Make sure to take notes of this discussion and share it with the staff, and principal/lead teacher particularly as they begin planning for next steps.