



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE COURAGEOUS DIALOGUE

"Reflective thinking turns experience into insight."

—John C. Maxwell

OVERVIEW

Faculty and staff will foster practical wisdom by identifying three goals, two for themselves and one for the school that they can work on based on the topic discussed during a faculty and staff meeting.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To encourage the practice of reflection
- At the end of meetings
- To help foster practical wisdom, or the ability to know what is needed in a given situation and act accordingly
- To encourage greater participation from all individuals

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤15 minutes

LEVEL

- Adults

MATERIALS

- N/A

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Faculty and staff will:

- Reflect on what was said during a meeting
- Propose three goals for how they and the school should move forward
- Practice expressing their views with regards to how well they and the school are doing in working towards their goals

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Practical Wisdom
- Reflection
- Courage

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused Attention
- Non-Judgment
- Open Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Before starting the meeting, take a moment to take a few deep breaths and check in with yourself about how you're feeling. Then, call to mind something you're looking forward to. Does this brief moment of taking care of yourself give you a more positive outlook towards the upcoming meeting?

INSTRUCTIONS

- This practice is intended to be used at the end of faculty/staff meetings.

- Invite each teacher and/or staff member to use small post-it notes of different colors to jot down their key takeaways and post them onto three different boards: “Something to reflect-on goal,” “ Personal next-step goal,” and a “Suggested next-step goal for the school.”
- Share a Google document that captures the aggregate of the three lists and invite additional input.

CLOSURE

- Check-in: After some time has passed, go over the Google document with faculty and staff to see how they feel about the progress they have made on their own goals and the progress the school has made.
- You might consider using an anonymous survey to get initial responses and displaying the responses on a screen prior to providing a space for group discussion. This will allow everyone to feel more comfortable expressing their views, encouraging greater courage during the group discussion.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Have you noticed a difference in how faculty and staff approach decisions? Are they more reflective?
- Did you notice a difference in how open faculty and staff were during group discussions? Were they more willing to voice their opinions?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Practical wisdom](#) has been described by scholars as the master virtue, because it guides you in enacting all other virtues. [Practical wisdom](#) allows you to know what is needed in a given situation and to act accordingly—even in situations where two or more virtues might be pitted against each other. For example, although you value humility and respect during discussions with colleagues, you may also rely on courage and empathy as you argue against a school policy you believe is unfair to your students.

Practical wisdom is what Aristotle referred to as the good sense that helps us to choose well. While little empirical research has been done on it, scholars suggest that practical wisdom includes [reflection](#). Reflection allows individuals to consider the situation and identify which virtues are needed to achieve one’s own ideal of a good life. Reflection is a skill that can be practiced in everyday situations. Furthermore, some scholars suggest that a wisdom perspective can be developed by [practicing character traits](#) such as empathy, openness, and fairness.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Educational professionals face multiple and often challenging decisions on a day-to-day basis. At school, teachers may need to decide what grade to give a student, how to respond to a misbehaving student, or whether to encourage a student to apply to their dream school. At times, such questions can pit some of our virtues against each other, leaving us to wonder if we are making the right decision. [Practical wisdom](#) is the tool that allows us to understand what actions we need to take in a given situation in order to attain our valued goals (e.g., being fair, supporting a struggling student, etc.).

Practical wisdom can help foster strong school communities where teachers and staff are better equipped to respond to each other in affirming ways while responding to challenging situations.

SOURCE

[Courageous Dialogue Toolkit: Practical Wisdom for School Leaders](#) by Barbara Whitlock & Karen Bohlin with Deborah Farmer Kris & Gabrielle Landry

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