

#8 STIMULATING TEACHERS TO CONDUCT SMALL SCALE EXPERIMENTS FOR SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

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Practical questions for which this card offers SUGGESTIONS:

- How do I ensure that teachers' experiments contribute to school development?
- How do I ensure the meaningful participation of teachers in conducting small scale experiments?
- How do I use our teachers' talents, their experiences and beliefs, knowledge and skills for conducting small scale experiments?

Why is it important to work with small scale experiments?

When collaborating with teachers on professional and school development, for example improving the instructional skills of the teachers, it is important to use evidence-informed tools. We deliberately speak of evidenced-informed and not evidenced-based tools, since education is too complex to simply apply research-based knowledge. It's the context that matters. Teachers should have the opportunity to adjust this knowledge to their situation, with their students, within their context and aligned with their own knowledge and belief system. You can stimulate teachers using the evidence from research to design and perform small scale experiments. If teachers get the opportunity to discover what is working in their own situation and are also invited to figure out why it works, it can become part of their professional knowledge and instructional repertoire and therefore it leads to sustainable educational improvement.

Teachers can learn by experimenting, especially if they do this together. When teachers are given lots of opportunities to conduct experiments, it becomes a natural and meaningful way of professional learning through improving their instructional, inquisitive and

collaborative skills. It enhances their agency and contributes to their job satisfaction. Professional learning does not happen outside school, but is an essential part of teaching. Conducting experiments aligns professional learning and school development.

What is needed to work with small scale experiments?

- Work with a jointly drawn up annual plan with clearly defined, substantiated themes for improvement and concrete objectives.
- Create and plan time for collaboration and joint reflection.
- Offer teachers the space to give substance to the experiment in their own situation. An experimental environment is about creative experimentation and creation.

Consider discussing the following questions with teachers:

- *What is the first thing they would like to try out that they think contributes to the concrete objective?*
- *What kind of situations do they want to change? Why?*
- *How could they design or organize these situations differently?*
- *What is the smallest thing they could do differently themselves?*

- Appreciate teachers' professionalism and let them sense that you are confident they will do what is best for their students. Appreciate initiatives. Give teachers space and ownership to experiment.
- Monitor and evaluate the experimental environments for results and process, making it clear why the chosen solution does or does not work and what the result is.

Steps to be taken for conducting an experimental design

Step 1) Choose a theme and find out who wants to set up an experimental design

- Which theme and intervention do you want to set up the experimental design for?
- Which element of the intervention do you want to try out in an experimental design?
- Check with the team who wants to set up an experimental design. You can also collaborate with internal and external specialists. Discuss the following questions:
 - *What are we already doing very well and what can we develop?*
 - *What results do we want to achieve?*
 - *What do we want to try?*
 - *What do we as teachers actually do?*
- Discuss the role of the participants (teachers, specialists) and explain your own role.

Step 2) Set the frame of references

What is the playing field in which the experiment will be conducted?

- How do you, as a school leader, facilitate that participants can work in the experimental design?
- Determine together with the teachers (or have them come up with a proposal) the substantive frame of references (vision and goal, what we already know about this subject, who we want to involve), organizational frameworks (how much time we spend on it, how it is communicated, established, presented) and financial frameworks (what is the budget). In this way, as a school leader, you give direction and you offer the teachers guiding frameworks.

Step 3) Monitor progress and evaluate

To what extent has the experiment contributed to the improvement? Have the goals been achieved as we envisioned them?

- Does it fit within your own context? What differences did we see in the elaboration of the experiments? What do we want to continue, what needs to be done differently? What has the team learned from this? What worked well and what worked less well? How can we explain that? What are the working mechanisms? What does this mean for our instructional activities? Do we want to set up a follow-up experiment?
- Ask for feedback from students. How did they experience working in the testing grounds? What feedback and feedforward do they give to the teachers?

Spreading the joy of experimenting

Dissemination is always difficult, since teachers need to take the steps themselves. What teachers have learned during experimenting is part of their own learning. But the enthusiasm they feel while experimenting can be contagious and is essential for their students' learning. For spreading the joy of experimenting within your school you can find further ideas in HEADstart#5 LEADING CHANGE PROCESSES.

