

In the know ...

This is the second part of an article by Tom Sherrington about 10 essential discussions that you need to have in any department or teacher team. Part 1 focused on numbers 1-5 and this article looks at the next five.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



10 essential discussions: 6-10

6. Have we got assessment right, balancing formative and summative information and workload?

How is the team doing in discussing all the issues related to assessment: the optimum frequency and nature of tightly focused low-stakes formative testing and broader summative tests; the use of cumulative tests; the use of exemplars to model standards; the commitment to using the same tests to facilitate meaningful comparisons between classes and cohorts year on year. Does everyone know what we mean by 'making progress' in the language of our subject? What do we track in our mark books vs what information is usefully shared centrally? All of this needs to be explored... otherwise we become slaves to the machine and data loses meaning and value.

7. Are we clear what our first-line interventions are? If Michael is behind, what do we do about it?

Regardless of which names come out in flashing lights on the data tracker, do we have a good understanding of the types of interventions that work when students fall behind? Do we have that built into our teaching so it's not always about extra sessions after school? What can students practice, re-learn, redraft, re-visit? Do we have resources ready to support them?

8. Have we got a sustainable, effective marking and feedback policy in place?

Imagine your Headteacher has said – just tell me what you'd like in your marking and feedback policy. Do what you like as long as you can sustain it and it is effective in enabling students to make progress. What would you do? Is there a sensible diet of feedback of various forms including marking that works in your area? Have you taken workload into account? Have you made sure it's more work for students than for teachers? Have you agreed a protocol for students using lesson time to improve their work? Do you have an agreed language around feedback and marking that everyone understands – e.g. 'green penning', 'whole class feedback', and 'deep marking'. Don't assume people know.

9. Are we clear on the parameters and processes of quality assurance – securing high quality outcomes whilst retaining a strongly supportive team culture?

What is the role and nature of lesson observations, learning walks, work scrutiny, student voice, data tracking – the menu of QA processes that go on in the

team? Do we all understand their status, how they feed into performance management or professional development... no surprises? Is the spirit right – i.e. are people being treated as professionals, engaging in work scrutiny collectively? Are people getting helpful developmental feedback; is there an opportunity for a more intense coaching approach; is there a good way to share and learn from each other?

If there is a tight compliance regime in place – do people at least understand the rationale and have a chance to discuss that to secure buy-in? What are the expected standards for observable routines in lessons and in books? It all needs to be discussed fully and often.

10. Are we clear on our immediate priorities and the longer term vision for the team?

With a big and/or busy and ambitious team, there's always a long agenda; it's all too easy to focus on too many things and end up doing none very well or for people to be pulling in different directions choosing what to focus on. Priorities are priorities – there can't be too many at any one time and that needs agreement and discussion. At the same time, every team should have a sense of direction – an idea of what the longer term goals are with curriculum development, assessment planning and so on with some sense of what the milestones will be.

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