



## Microlab Guidelines

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*These guidelines and questions were adapted from those developed by Julian Weissglass for the National Coalition for Equity in Education based at the University of California, Santa Barbara.*

The purpose of the Microlab protocol is to address a specific sequence of questions in a structured format with small groups, using active listening skills. The Microlab is useful for team-building and democratizing participation because it asks that participants equalize communication and withhold judgment. It affirms people's ideas and build community while addressing specific content issues.

1. Each person has equal time to talk.
2. The listener(s) should not interrupt, interpret, paraphrase, analyze, give advice or break in with a personal story while the speaker is talking.
3. Confidentiality should be maintained, unless the group decides to debrief the content of the questions.
4. The speaker should not criticize or complain about the listener(s) or mutual colleagues during his or her turn.

*These guidelines are also appropriate for Equity Diads.*



## Microlab Suggestions

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*Developed from a listserv conversation among facilitators, February 6-8, 2007.*

Suggestions for a series of questions for use with Microlabs:

1. Why did you decide to become an educator and why do you stay?
2. What are you currently working on in your practice as an educator? How are you trying to improve?
3. What do you hope to gain from working with colleagues in this way?

1. What were your relationships like as a young person with people of different cultures?
2. What was helpful to you in forming relationships across racial lines?
3. What assumptions, values, and practices of people and institutions of the dominant culture serve to disadvantage faculty members and students from the non-dominant culture?

1. Given who you are, why are you involved with or starting a small high school?
2. What will you offer or what are you offering each student in your small high school that is not a replication of the large traditional high school?
3. Given who you are what does your leadership look like and sound like in order for each student and each adult to be successful in your small high school?

1. Why did you decide to become a teacher (or an educator)? What drew you into this profession?
2. Why do you stay? What keeps you coming back, year after year?
3. What matters to you in your work? What is at the heart of what you do? What is the one thing you won't compromise?
4. What will you go to the wall for?

1. If you could be a fly on the wall in someone else's classroom, what would you want to observe?
2. What's one thing you wish people could see you or your students doing in your classroom?
3. If you knew that a colleague would come into your classroom — and that his or her being there would make a difference for you and your students — whom would you ask in, what would they do while they were there, and what would you want the conversation to look like afterwards?

Suggestions for other questions for use with Microlabs:

- Describe a time when you were part of a learning community. What made it so? What were its characteristics?
- What do you believe about the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement? What led you to these beliefs?
- How do these beliefs play out in your practice? What, if anything, would need to change for you to have a closer match between what you believe and what you do?
- Who is the one teacher — inside or outside of your formal schooling — who stands out as having made a difference in your life? If you could write to him or her right now, what is the one thing you would like to tell him/her? OR

- Think about your career as an educator. Describe one student from whom you learned something significant about your work as an educator. What did you learn? How did you learn it?
- Why did you decide to work in education? What were your early aspirations?
- In terms of your practice, what do you want your legacy to be?
- What were your hopes and aspirations as you began your work as an educator?
- When you tell friends and family members “what you do”— what do you say to them?
- When you think about your work, what one aspect/element of it would you give up last? What’s at the heart of what you do?
- In terms of your practice, what are your hopes for this year?
- Come next June, what would you want your students to say about their learning this year under your stewardship?
- If there were only one thing for you to learn this year — and you knew that one thing could make a difference for your students — what would it be?
- As you think about the upcoming school year, what are you looking forward to? What excites you?
- What’s one thing of significance — related to your work or teaching — that you learned last year? How did you do that learning? What made the learning significant?
- When you think about your practice, what one element of it won’t you give up? What’s at the heart of what you do? What do you stand for?



## Microlabs

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*Developed by Julian Weissglass for the National Coalition for Equity in Education based at the University of California, Santa Barbara; adapted in the field by educators.*

### **Purpose**

Microlabs addresses a specific sequence of questions in a structured format with small groups, using active listening skills.

### **Time**

About 8 minutes per question — this works best with a series of no more than 3 questions.

### **Group Format**

Form triads — either with the people you're sitting near, or find others in the group you don't know well.

### **Getting Ready**

The Facilitator spends time developing a sequence of questions that are appropriate to the purpose or focus of the conversation. The questions and their sequence are important. Consider how one question leads to another and increases reflection and risk.

### **Process**

The facilitator says, "A series of questions will guide our discussion. Each person will have one minute (or sometimes, 2 minutes depending on the group and the questions) to respond to the question when it is their turn. While the person is speaking, the other two in the group will simply listen. When the time is up, the next person speaks, and so on. I'll let you know when it is time to switch." (It may be helpful to have a chime or audible signal.)

Emphasize the importance of honoring time: both bringing responses to a close when time is called and allowing for silence when a responder does not fill their time. Ask participants to number off within their triad #1, 2, and 3. Read the first question aloud twice. Offer a minute of "think time" to think and/or write in preparation. Be certain to tell the participants which order they will speak, and you might vary the order of each question. For example, begin with person #1, then #2, then #3. On the second question, begin with #2, then #3, then #1. On the third question, begin with #3, then #1, then #2.

### **Debrief**

- What did you hear that was significant? What key ideas or insights were shared?
- How did this go for you? What worked well, and what was difficult? Why?
- How might your conversations have been different had we not used this protocol?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of using this activity? When would you use this protocol?
- What would you want to keep in mind as someone facilitating this activity?

Where have you failed as a teacher, and what are you doing (or did you do) about it?

What do you have in common with the teacher(s) you most admire?

What teaching skill would you like to have that you do not currently have?

In what ways do you give back to your community as a teacher?

Give a recent example of when you demonstrated good communication skills as a teacher.

Which of your teaching traits would people notice immediately?

How are you an ethical teacher? Give an example.

What previous job experience best prepared you to become a teacher? Explain.

What is your purpose in life, and how does it tie into how you teach?

What needs to happen in order for you to feel successful as a teacher?

Who are the key people at work that make up your "core" support group?

Does your spirituality affect the way you teach? If so, how?

What future teaching experience would you still like to have?

What are you doing to develop the skills and abilities of the students you teach?

What has been the most significant and/or difficult change you have had to deal with as a teacher?

What is the most recent thing you have done as a teacher that has made a difference for others outside your grade level?

What are you doing as a teacher to continue to grow and develop?

When was the last time you had to make an unpopular decision? What happened?

How has being a teacher made you a better person?

What 3 things would you recommend that teachers do to maintain a positive attitude?

As a teacher, how do you demonstrate effective conflict resolution?

Is your ability to teach getting easier or more difficult as you evolve as a teacher? Why?

If you could become a famous teacher for a day, who would you become and why?

What do you do to stay inspired as a teacher?

What traditions are meaningful to you as a teacher and why?

From a teaching perspective, where would you like to see yourself in five years?

In what way does your self-image affect your ability to be a teacher?

What present issue or concern is challenging you most right now as a teacher?

Who has been your biggest fan as you have evolved into a teacher? Please explain.

As a teacher, how do you maintain, or try to maintain, a healthy balance in your life?

What role does humor play for you as a teacher?



What was the first teaching experience of your life, and how would you describe it?

As a teacher, who are your teachers and mentors today?

From your experience, describe what makes an *ineffective* teacher.

If you were to receive recognition for a job well done, how would you want it done (e.g. from whom, where, and when)?

It is often said that teachers are individuals who make ordinary people do extraordinary things in the face of adversity. What does this mean to you, and does it apply for you as a teacher?

In what ways are you trustworthy as a teacher? How do you establish a climate of trust?

When you are not teaching effectively, what is happening?

What do you do to truly empower others?

## Written Responses

1. Write about your strengths as a teacher.
2. What are the gaps in student learning that concern you?
3. What is the one thing you know you need to get better at, but you strive to keep that a secret?