

## Tool: Educators Peer Support Group

As educators, undertaking such a transformative journey individually can be isolating and exhausting. To alleviate this and foster the formation of a community of practice, we encourage you to build small teams. By embarking on this journey together and convening regularly—according to your own schedule—you can engage in group reflections and sense-making. This guide is intended for educators to facilitate the creation of an effective and safe peer support group. If you require assistance, please reach out to your local i5 PRME coordinator. Be courageous, give it a try and learn from it, there is no right or wrong here, just doing.

### **Purpose of supporting each other**

Working in a complex environment (e.g., prototyping newly designed pedagogies) is often hard and stressful but a key to success is having a community of practice where individuals can exchange opinions, ask questions, support and learn from each other. A community of practice can be defined as *“groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”*. One of the key elements of the i5 pedagogy application and its assessment approaches is to develop a more reflective space that will enable you to dive in deeper and support each other as fellow educators and experimenters. This peer support group structure is a space for a small group (approx. 3 - 4 participants) to meet on a regular basis during the implementation journey of i5 and offer a supportive practice for each other to enable deeper reflection through peer mentoring and supportive dialogues. We encourage you to reach out to other fellow educators, get to know either from your own institution or from other PRME related events and establish such a peer support group.

### **Co-creating a “Safe Space” ... Renaud ... Pauline kurt**

As with all reflective processes, one of the key cornerstones is that of creating a “safe space”. Here are a few guidelines to consider:

***Declaring it is safe does not make it a safe space*** – it is a common mistake to declare a meeting a safe space. A safe space is co-created. It is not a thing, but something that is actively created – an activity. Creating a safe space involves granting each individual the authority to determine its safety at any point, allowing them to opt out of activities or conversations and to exit the space as needed. We all have our own personal backpacks filled with our history, both our treasures and hurts. On any given day, some topics may feel safer to discuss than others. Please always remember that you have control over what you deem safe or not and if another team member chooses that the space is no longer safe for them, you can support them with compassion in that decision. Take some time to reflect on the key elements you need for you to call a space safe (e.g. active listening, confidentiality, compassion...)

***What is safe for one is not always safe for all*** – after reflecting on what you yourself need to co-create a safe space, take some time to listen to what your group mates need. Keep in mind that the highest level of safety attainable for all is determined by the least common denominator. Take some time as a team to agree on the minimum requirements for your collective safe space.

**Trust is key** – Having a shared experience is very helpful when cultivating trust. In this way as i5 educators and friends, you can all lean into your common experience from the i5 journey, interventions, or other events. Even in your group or amongst your i5 allies, there are always multiple realities of different experiences in different roles. Some of you love reflections, inwards looking or deep conversations, some of you dreaded them and there is a spectrum in between. Take time to speak out about your own personal comfort levels in smaller, more intimate settings. What do you need to trust both yourself to honestly show up in this space and from your group mates so that you can trust them with your own learning edges?

**How do you want to show up for your peers?** While it is important to understand for yourself what you would like and need from these support circles, it is equally important to think about how you want to show up for the others in your group. What have they voiced is important to them? How can you best support them?

**You can only safely hold what you are willing to go through yourself** – We have seen this time and again when holding space, that you yourself can be triggered by what is spoken into a circle (Zoom-Room). In order to sit and be present with another, you need to be willing to journey with them through their experience. If you are terrified of going there in your own life, it may be very hard for you to hold a safe space for another on that topic. Being willing to sit in discomfort (both your own and others) is key to holding a supportive space. Think about what personal practices you might lean into to support you if you get triggered by a group mate's experience.

**There is no perfect "safe format"** – there is a need to co-create a format that will enable a safe space for each of your group members. Everyone has their own comfort zones and triggers, take some time to contemplate what you yourself need from the format to help you to feel safe to share and be authentically present to your group mates when they share.

**Creating a space for vulnerability** – being an educator at least publicly, interacting with students and others, often requires a certain persona. These peer support groups are a chance for you to show up in an authentic way, whether it is feeling on top of the world that day or hiding under the covers. Having places where we can give space to our more vulnerable sides, gives us space to breathe as humans and also gives our spirits a chance to see different perspectives and emerging possibilities, that we might not be able to see if we chose to hold back the learning edges that make us tremble. Take some time to contemplate what your personal learning edges (in the context of the i5 learning journey) might be and ask for what you might need to be brave enough to share them with your group. Also, pay attention to what you might need from the collective in order to hold each other in vulnerable spaces so that together you can foster an environment that enables each other to be brave together.

**There is no "should" in a safe space** – be mindful that the phrase "You should..." has no place within a safe space. In order to give each the space to be authentic and show up in the group with attention and care, there needs to be an agreement that you don't offer assistance and help unless expressly asked for input. Peer support group meetings are a time to listen to each other and reflect back what you hear, so that you can help those expressing themselves to find their own answers. Similar to this, be cautious of getting hooked into the story that is being told; instead, seek to understand the underlying behavior or pattern. Asking probing questions

that enable the person sharing to see the deeper patterns at play gives space for them to see deeper truths that might be invisible to them. Treasure these moments as gifts of a safe space.

***A circle without a coach*** – Now as fellow i5 journey participants, you sit equal within your peer support groups. Take some time to think of roles you might want in each of your meetings (host, time keeper ...). Sometimes having defined roles helps to create safe spaces as it allows the mind to trust that there is a design or plan. Sometimes, having an assigned role adds rigidity to a space where a flat equal structure can give more “safety”. Take some time to feel into what your personal preferences around structure are. Discuss your preferences within your group and come up with some collective agreements.

***Safe space is only possible with boundaries*** – often people mistake boundaries with being closed or not compassionate. Instead, having clear boundaries within yourself enables you to deeply respect your own learning journey and thus have the space to hold another in theirs. Another way of saying this, is when you give too much, you yourself run dry. Reflect on which personal boundaries you wish to hold firm within these small group settings and the overall journey in general. These may be simple like: I don’t want to work late; or more delicate to measure like: I wish to honor my personal process and not reach for perfection on day one. Without these clear boundaries, it can become easy to feel overwhelmed and blame your groupmates when you overstep a personal boundary. If you feel vulnerable around this, we invite you into an honest conversation with your team to help you find your own boundary edges which will create the safe space you seek to dive into this reflective space together.

***Intention leads the way*** – Vision comes first. So too, it goes with intention. Take some time to set your own personal intentions for this i5 learning journey. What is it you truly wish to achieve? Then take the chance to share these intentions together as a group, remembering that it is not important that you all have a shared similar intention, instead safety emerges from the collective harmony of multiple intentions living together through the process.

### **Our intention for you**

We are delighted to invite you into your peer support group. May your conversations be filled with treasures and leave you inspired and foster a shared sense of togetherness in your own personal i5 learning journeys. May you be brave to show up in vulnerability and strength. Approach your interactions with the curiosity of a child, eager to explore and learn collaboratively. May you be filled with awe at the amazing humans in your peer support groups and know that in our eyes you are all rock stars.

### **Gentle reminders**

Some of you may have heard these earlier, possibly many of you operate from these principles on a daily basis, and for some these things are totally new. So, as a reminder.

- Have an intention or call for each meeting
- Practice group agreements
- Checkin and checkout
- Listen with attention (are you listening or waiting to speak)
- Speak with intention
- Use talking pieces (like an object/stone etc.) or other visible signs

- Breathe into the silent spaces
- Stay curious
- Suspend judgment
- Have fun 😊

### **Possible Peer Support group topics**

- Your Interventions
- Your own reflections about your interventions (see chapter above)
- Your struggle, questions to share about the practices/pedagogies
- Personal i5 journey challenges
- Context specific case clinics
- Reactions from students to i5
- Reactions from colleagues / my institution to i5
- i5 impact on myself as an educator and as a human
- Whatever you choose 😊

### **Possible dialogue methods**

#### **Circle dialogue**

This is best suited to an open or topic specific conversation where there is no lead or specific person in the center of the topic. Two links to external sites:

<https://www.artofhosting.org/the-circle/>

<https://www.edutopia.org/sites/default/files/resources/stw-glenview-circles-overview.pdf>

#### **Presencing Institute / U-School Case clinics**

Case Clinics are a process in which a case giver presents a case, and a group of 3-4 peers or team members help as consultants based on the principles of the U-Process. They are person centric and you might want to pick a different meeting for each person to give everyone a space for their personal topic. Here is a link to know more and a page from which you can download a [2 pages pdf](#) description:

<https://www.u-school.org/case-clinic>

#### **Peer to Peer Coaching circles**

Similar to above Case Clinics, these support circles assist individuals when dealing with a specific issue they are facing. So, they are person centric and you might want to pick a different meeting for each person to give everyone a space for their personal topic. Links to external sites:

<https://management30.com/blog/coaching-circle/>

<https://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/pod/docs/coachingcircles.pdf>

<http://www.integrallead.com/our-offers/peer-to-peer-coaching-circles/>