

Issue 6

Can Social Marketers Benefit from Professional Learning Conversations?

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Professional learning conversations are a useful strategy used by educators and education leaders that may benefit social marketers. Learning conversations are different from a “normal conversation” as they have a focus and a protocol that frames the rules of engagement. This approach involves professionals engaging in a focused, evidence-informed dialogue with the intention of helping make sense of evidence, to scrutinise how each other make decisions from the evidence to solve a puzzle, improve decision-making and enhance practice. The process is iterative—asking questions, examining evidence, reflecting and considering not only what evidence is being assessed, but challenging how it is being interpreted.

References

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The underpinning critical approach can reveal ineffective problem-solving habits unconscious to participants, encourage self-assessment and support reflection-in-action. For new ideas and learnings to emerge, participants need to subscribe to an inquiry habit of mind (i.e. using evidence to make decisions) and have or develop a relationship of respect and challenge where judgement is suspended, time is taken to understand other viewpoints, the meaning is probed, and others reasoning is queried.

In essence, participants become “critical friends”, which is a related practice among educators. A critical friend is more than a sounding board, but a colleague whose role is to ask provocative questions and offers alternative points of view to support, encourage and stretch another so they can become more effective in their thinking, re-thinking and practices.