



R.E.A.L.[®] Discussion: A New Kind of PD

Embedded, Research-Backed, and
Impact-Guaranteed PD for your Faculty

R.E.A.L.[®] Discussion

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“As a school leader, when I look for PD for my teachers, I look for two things. First: a program that helps teachers achieve what they say they need most and gives them proven strategies to use immediately. Second: alignment with the School’s strategic priorities about learning and belonging. R.E.A.L.® provides both —and teachers love it.”

Cotter Donnell

Partnerships Director, R.E.A.L.® Discussion
Former Associate Head, Academic Dean, Department Chair

The Vision

Most schools first find R.E.A.L.® because they’re looking for ways to impact their students – and for good reason!

The R.E.A.L.® program, however, creates impact for multiple constituencies within a school community. R.E.A.L.® offers game-changing professional development (PD) for Humanities teams, the impact of which extends far beyond class discussions.

R.E.A.L.® PD was designed by independent school teachers and research experts in service of the belief that great professional learning requires more than “going to a conference,” “taking a workshop,” or joining a “Zoom cohort.” Research and experience agree: great professional learning is rooted in purpose, pragmatism, reflection, and efficiency.

In this case study, we’ll dive deep into our PD sequence: how it’s designed, what it looks like, and how it feels for faculty.

Three of the top words participants used to describe R.E.A.L.® PD last summer?

“practical, inspiring, innovative.”

Not One-and-Done

Energy, Impact, and Reflection – All Year Long!

Research and experience confirm that the best PD does not start and end with a conference. Adult learners thrive with an “action-reflection” cycle that gives them the opportunity to apply learnings in context, reflect together, then repeat the process. R.E.A.L.® PD takes advantage of this cycle, with PD that starts over the summer and continues all year.

R.E.A.L.® Certification (Summer PD)

R.E.A.L.® Certification is a summer PD experience required for any teacher using R.E.A.L.® in the Fall. Teachers can complete fully synchronous training in two days (“Sprint”) or opt for a combination of synchronous and asynchronous sessions throughout the summer (“Flex”). The Certification program assembles teachers across schools and includes async resources (e.g., video-based case studies of real classrooms), a comprehensive teacher guide, and interactive activities like mock discussions.

94%

would recommend
it to a colleague.

25+

have told us it's the
best PD of their careers.



“R.E.A.L.® PD was superbly organized, exceptionally clear, and thoroughly engaging, with laughter in the midst of deeply thoughtful points. Great blend of research and practical takeaways.

Moreover, the support has continued into the year, with materials, guidance, and PLC. We are already seeing a transformation in classes where we've implemented R.E.A.L.®”

Sumner McCallie

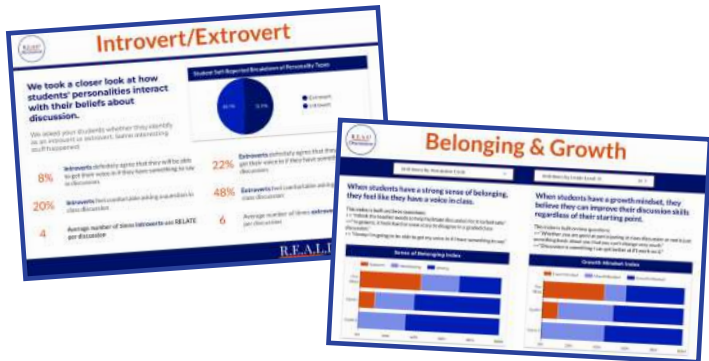
Dean of Faculty and Curriculum, McCallie School (TN)

Year-Round Support

R.E.A.L.® Implementation Resources (Year-Round PD)

R.E.A.L.® teachers and leaders receive year-round instructional support, which includes student-facing materials and ongoing PD, through:

- >> **R.E.A.L.® Dashboards:** Data on student skill development and sentiments of belonging.



- >> **Office Hours:** On-demand coaching calls
- >> **Study Sesh** (topical, monthly PLC for teachers) and
- >> **Round Table** (topical, monthly PLC for leaders).

Year-round support attends to individual teacher needs and connects those individuals to a broader community – another key feature of great adult learning.

 ***“This is like teacher therapy. Thank you.”***
- High school Humanities teacher



As **Erika Drezner**, Department Chair at Berkeley Carroll (NY) and Director of Klingenstein Summer Institute put it,

“This ongoing PD feels like a luxury. I’m a department chair and so support everyone; to have someone supporting me in my teaching practice is rejuvenating.”



“R.E.A.L.® is my favorite PD. It’s what every teacher should have learned in grad school. Now it’s my third year with the program, and the R.E.A.L.® Dashboard continues to make me happy. It helps me see my power as a teacher, and PLC is inspiring. I am so grateful.”

Alli Jordan

Middle School English, Pembroke Hill School (MO)

Built for Teams: Balancing Alignment & Autonomy

R.E.A.L.® PD gives teaching teams a common language across classrooms while coaching teachers to adapt materials for their unique purpose, content, and style. **Although common language is critical from equity and skills perspectives, R.E.A.L.®'s flexibility is why it works.**

Alignment

Department leaders generally choose to use R.E.A.L.® to achieve either 1) vertical alignment within a department or 2) horizontal alignment across a grade level. Some schools do both!

Department Chairs and Division Heads report that after R.E.A.L.® trainings, their departments are more aligned than ever. For some folks, R.E.A.L.® demonstrates the power of alignment in the first place.



"I had been searching for a common language for my Department to use to articulate Discussion standards across middle and high school – which felt urgent after COVID and aligned to all-school DEI efforts. R.E.A.L.®'s emphasis on authentic feedback complemented Penn Charter's values as a Friends (Quaker) school.

Ultimately, R.E.A.L.® has created a shared language for us as a team – and is informing conversations about assessment and curriculum design as well!

–Nora Landon, English Department Chair,
William Penn Charter School (PA)

Autonomy

R.E.A.L.®-certified teachers can adapt the R.E.A.L.® framework to their own style, content, and students. We've seen faculty adapt the program to emphasize equity, purpose, or community-building. Our Certification process guides teachers not just to learn the R.E.A.L.® framework, but to develop a game plan for personalizing it.

R.E.A.L.® is flexible enough to be embraced by early career and veteran teachers alike. Certified teachers say:



"I've been teaching for 30 years and don't really try new things. I was surprised this worked, but I love hearing every girl's voice!"

– Ann Ramsey, MS History Teacher, Agnes Irwin School (PA)

"It should be required training for early career teaching Humanities in independent schools."

–Veteran 7th grade teacher

"It's 'foundational' for the first years in the classroom."

–10th grade English teacher

Research-Backed; Impact-Focused

By The Book

R.E.A.L.® is high-impact because it stands on the shoulders of research giants. We built the R.E.A.L.® system over a decade and integrated published research from four key areas:

Learning Science
Socio-Emotional Learning
Belonging / DEI
Future of Work

Our system operationalizes what experts say works best: from metacognitive routines, to engaging Gen-Z learners, to culturally responsive teaching and portfolio-based assessment. Our PD structures teachers for success, and it's designed to align with best practices in adult learning – like purpose orientation, choice-making, and action-reflection cycles – too!

In Real Life

We created our PD programs after conducting extensive intentional action research and countless interviews with teachers. From 2013 to 2021, we piloted R.E.A.L.® in diverse independent, international, and charter schools. Since our official launch in 2021, we have tracked student growth and adapted the program accordingly.

We are grateful for our partners' contributions to making discussion teachable and know that this on-the-ground feedback is key to designing tools that actually work.

Promise to Stay on the Cutting Edge

We are research nerds who will continue to update our PD to empower R.E.A.L.® teachers to respond to the challenges of the day. This spring, for example, we have spent a massive amount of time “talking to” ChatGPT, hosting PLC events on the topic, and developing fresh PD content with best practices related to AI and Class Discussion.



“This is everything I looked for and didn’t find in Harkness for decades. It’s a game-changer for conversation and community in my classroom — and the Dashboards are 🔥!”

Linda Rodriguez

Upper School History, St. Andrew’s Episcopal School (MO)

Promise to Guarantee Student Impact

Unlike any other PD, R.E.A.L.® guarantees impact.

We are confident that if your team engages fully with the training and materials we provide, your students will demonstrate increased skill development, stronger belonging, and improved senses of purpose and relevance, as measured by our dashboard system. Your teachers will feel more confident in their impact, too. If this is not true for your school after six discussions, we will offer a full refund in exchange for thoughtful feedback.



“I have used R.E.A.L.® in two very different schools – and it just works. It makes discussion teachable and learnable for kids. They are so proud of themselves as they master the conversational ‘moves’ they need to go deep with each other. They learn the power of their voices and of listening to others. And I get to keep learning alongside them!”

Patrick Farmer

Middle School Humanities Lead, Nativity Preparatory School (MA)

R.E.A.L.® Discussion is a new kind of PD, and it’s powerful: continuous, built for teams, research-backed, and impact-guaranteed. We hope you’ll start the discussion about discussion today. Book a time to talk:

www.REALdiscussion.org // hello@REALdiscussion.org

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