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GLEN PEARSALL

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Session 2

Productive Coaching Conversations

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GLEN PEARSALL

Glen Pearsall was a teacher at Eltham High School and a board member of the Curriculum Assessment Authority in Victoria, Australia. He works throughout Australia as an educational consultant, specialising in feedback and assessment, workload reduction for teachers and instructional practice. He has a particular interest in the work of graduate and preservice teachers and has worked as a research fellow and tutorial leader at the Centre for Youth Research, University of Melbourne, Australia. He is a Cambridge Education associate and a master class presenter for TTA and has a long association with the Teacher Learning Network and a wide range of teacher unions.



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Hawker Brownlow Education
P.O. Box 580, Moorabbin, Victoria 3189, Australia
Phone: (03) 8558 2444 Fax: (03) 8558 2400
Website: www.hbe.com.au
Email: orders@hbe.com.au

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Productive Coaching Conversations

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The Principles of Effective Collaboration (Jim Knight)

<p>Equality: Collaboration works best when it is a true partnership.</p>	<p>Are you trying to persuade your colleague or learn from them?</p>
<p>Choice: Effective collaborators help their partners see the choices open to them.</p>	<p>Do you help your partner see the choices as open to them? Do you offer your colleagues a range of choices to help them see their own path?</p>
<p>Voice: Collaborations work best when everyone involved has their say.</p>	<p>Did you encourage your colleague to express their point of view?</p>
<p>Dialogue: Effective collaborators learn together through a dialogue.</p>	<p>Do you listen more than you talk when offering support?</p>
<p>Reflection: A rich collaboration is founded on reflection.</p>	<p>Did you help the person come to their own conclusions?</p>
<p>Practical Outcomes: Effective teacher collaborations are practical.</p>	<p>Did you help your colleague find ways to put their ideas into practice?</p>
<p>Reciprocity: At the heart of all of these principles is the idea of collaboration being a two-way process.</p>	<p>Did you learn from the person you helped?</p>

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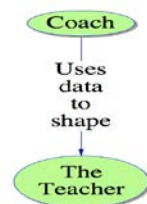
Reflection

Conversation is at the heart of coaching. Indeed, many definitions of teacher coaching describe conversation *as* coaching. De Haan calls it “a method of work-related learning that relies primarily on one on one conversations.” Christian Nieuwerburgh defines coaching as a “managed conversation.” Reflection is a crucial phase of the coaching cycle: The post-observation discussion is where many teachers clarify their thinking, affirm their practice or identify potential changes in technique.

It is the role of the teacher-leader to ensure that these conversations are as supportive and rigorous as possible. They set the parameters that shape the goals of peer coaching:

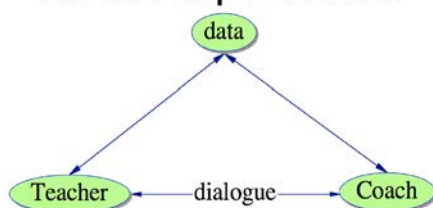
Coaching Conversations Should Be ‘Triangular’ Conversations. They are not conversations where a coach gives advice top advice to a colleague from a position of authority.

Top-down Feedback



They are collaborative conversations where colleagues investigating the data they have collected together. Coaching conversations take place, figuratively and literally, side by side with data between you.

Partnership Feedback



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Coaching Conversations Centre On Effective Questioning

Teachers are problems-solvers and there is an obvious temptation to treat a coaching session as opportunity to fix and instruct rather than explore and discuss. However coaches don't advise – they question and listen. Offering teachers model question stems is a powerful way to foster this. Providing peer coaches with clarification and elaboration questions reminds them of the key aspect of their role: encouraging their colleague's self-reflection. Good coaches help teachers find their own voice.

Many schools encourage teacher observers to keep a list of question stems in front of them during coaching session as way of ensuring that they concentrating on teasing out their colleagues thinking and giving them concrete means to help meet this goal. Below are examples of question stems list that you might find useful:

Tell me more...

How did you feel about that?

Was that a representative lesson with those guys?

What did you want to concentrate on from that lesson?

What were you pleased with?

What have you done in similar situations?

Did the students respond as you expected?

What has worked in the past?

Go on...

Why was that?

What did you notice about the data?

What stands out when you look at that the data tool?

If you did that lesson again what would you do same?

If you did that lesson again what would you do differently?

If I taught lesson what would you advise me to be mindful of?

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Coaching Observations Should Be Non-Attributive.

Emphasizing the importance of questioning, ‘nudges’ teachers away from lapsing into ill-thought out appraisal. However, inevitably observers will be asked about their perspective of a lesson. This can be tricky. Characterizing other people’s experience, whether in a positive or negative light, involves a subtle level of presumption: *“This what you’re like.”* We call this *attribution*.

Attribution can make people uncomfortable. Witness for instance the way teachers often reject even low-level praise: this is not always modesty but sometimes “an instinctive response to being typecast – even positively,” by someone else. (Steve Forman <http://www.steveforman.com/robert-kegan/>)

Non-attributive praise by contrast “characterizes the speaker’s experience, and not the person being appreciated.” (Forman) A non-attributive observation involves describing your experience of the lesson rather than commenting on your colleague’s performance:

Attributive: “Your good at getting them to take turns”

Non-Attributive: “I noticed the way students always put their hand up.”

Obviously, using a data tool helps facilitate this approach. However it can feel counter-intuitive and takes practice to learn. Teacher can help teachers hone this skill by not only defining “attributive” and “non-attributive but by providing teachers with model non-attributive observations and exercises in which they can rehearse framing their observation in this way.

Asking teachers to identify attributive and non-attributive observations from a list of statements is a good way to introduce this:

- It was great how you got them to take turns
- That group was asked three times before they gave an answer
- I have had those lesson too – everything goes wrong from the outset
- Terrific lesson. Are they always that good in Maths?
- I noticed the way students always put their hand up
- Brilliant. There was nothing I could have done better.

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Inflection Points

Whenever teams are trying to adopt new habits or practices though, they will run into roadblocks. In the study of habit acquisition these roadblocks are called 'inflection points' (Duhigg 2012). Teacher-leaders need a toolbox of strategies for supporting their staff through the change process and pivoting around these inflection points.

This section of the notes explores a range of common roadblocks leaders who are managing change will encounter and offers practical strategies for supporting and challenging staff to help them overcome these inflection points.

The chart below lays out four common issues that arise when managing educational change and the key strategies we use to address these strategies. This is far from an exhaustive list, but the strategies listed here are core problem-solving skills for educational leaders and can applied in lots of other situations.

Common Inflection Point	Key Strategic Response
Deficit Thinking: Teachers and leaders have a deficit mind-set, becoming pre-occupied with what is not working, instead of building on what is.	A. Scaling Successes: Effective leaders take unevenly distributed successes and make these 'bright spots' a consistent part of team practice.
Narrow Framing: Teachers 'get stuck,' using the same narrow range of possible approaches.	B. Finding Alternatives: Effective leaders generate a wide range of potential solutions, helping staff see alternative methods for effective problem solving.
Impractical Goals: Teachers are unable to turn good intentions into practical actions for bringing about change.	C. Concrete Actions: Effective leaders offer teacher small concrete steps for fixing issues and realizing teacher goals
Closed Thinking: Teachers are caught in reductive arguments and defensive mindsets	D. Pivot Phrases: Effective leaders pivot around closed thinking and defensive mindsets to help teachers remain open to change

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Scaling Successes: Solution Focused Coaching Scaffold

Strategy	Examples
<p>Solution Framing: Get the person to focus on the possible solution not the current problem.</p>	<p><i>Colleague: They are the worst class I've ever seen. The boys along the back row are just so disruptive. I am never going to be able to get them to pay attention.</i></p> <p><i>You: That's frustrating. How would you like them to behave?</i></p>
<p>Preferred Futures: Ask them to describe <u>in detail</u> what a successful version of this might look like. This is often done through 'miracle questions' where they are asked to consider instant success.</p>	<p><i>If you woke up tomorrow and this class had just miraculously improved, what would it look like?</i></p> <p><i>If I could snap my fingers and instantly improve this situation, what would be the markers of success you'd be looking for?</i></p>
<p>Scale: Have your colleague rank on a scale from one to ten how close they are to achieving their goal. If the score is very low acknowledge their challenging circumstances. If is higher ask them what successes, however small, they have had in reaching their goal.</p>	<p><i>You: How close are they, out of ten to meeting that standard?</i></p> <p><i>Colleague: I'd put them on zero, not one thing has gone right all term.</i></p> <p><i>You: How have you managed to put up with such a tough situation?</i></p> <p><i>Colleague: Maybe a five out of ten. Look they're nice kids individually, but they are just such a disruptive, dysfunctional group when they are together.</i></p> <p><i>You: Who are the students who do follow class protocols?</i></p> <p><i>* This is not an empty gesture. Empathizing with a person who sees the problem as very severe acknowledges their reality – but doing it this way also signals to them your response will be logical and incremental. Your work will be from zero to ten.</i></p>
<p>Helpful Inconsistency: Explore the 'exceptions to the rule' - the small successes within the problem that serves as minor but emblematic examples of the preferred future.</p>	<p><i>You: Tell me about one of the times they have been engaged then? What would you have to do to get that reaction again?</i></p> <p><i>You: Could you describe for me a positive change in behavior that you've seen? What led to this?</i></p>
<p>Incremental Achievements Plan the steps for capitalizing on these exceptions. Break the insurmountable task into small, reachable goals.</p>	<p><i>You: Could you use that strategy with all the students? What resources would you need to do that?</i></p> <p><i>You: If that is the lesson when they are more focused, let's use that lesson to introduce a new code of conduct. Perhaps we could just start with the rights and responsibilities part?</i></p>

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BA Alternative Approaches: *What strategies can you use to help staff consider a wider range of solutions?*

Strategy	Key Questions/Approach
<p>Widening the Frame</p> <p><i>Stuck between two options? Choose a third.</i></p> <p><i>Ask staff to consider the costs of 'hidden' costs of plans.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The Vanishing Options Test</u> <i>If we couldn't use either of the approaches we are debating about using what approach would we use?</i> • <u>Consider Opportunity Cost</u> <i>If we didn't use this approach, how might we use the time and resources that would've been devoted it?</i>
<p>Shift Between Mindsets</p> <p><i>Help defensive staff consider potential benefits.</i></p> <p><i>Help optimistic staff be more wary</i></p>	<p>Moving from a Prevention to a Promotion Mindset:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Identifying Preferred Futures:</u> Free up thinking by asking staff to describe an ideal outcome • <u>Exploring Preventions Factors</u> Show you understand potential problems of a new idea by listing them
	<p>Moving from a Promotion to a Prevention Mindset</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>'Pre-mortem' Questions</u> <i>If this approach fails, why would that be?</i> • <u>'Bookending'</u> Help staff be more realistic by considering <i>a range</i> of options
<p>Question Stems</p> <p><i>The right question can open up a teacher's thinking.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are your options?</i> • <i>Do you know another teacher who has been through a similar experience?</i> • <i>What has worked for you in the past? How could you use that strategy again?</i> • <i>What would happen if you did that now?</i> • <i>What would be the first step in this approach?</i> • <i>What else could you do?</i> • <i>If that obstacle didn't exist how would you proceed?</i> • <i>What criteria are using to evaluate your options?</i> • <i>If this approach didn't work why would it fail?</i> • <i>What is the best thing about that option? The worst?</i>

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Coaching Suggestions List

<p>Help the teacher who tends to ‘escalate’ conflicts with students & lose sight of learning goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial low-intensity interventions such as non-verbal signaling & cross praise • Explore techniques to help students save face such as tactical ignorance or ‘rethink’ offers (“Did you mean for that to happen?”) • Practice ‘pivot phrases’ (“That’s not the issue right now”) to help teacher concentrate on behavior not be distracted by disagreements 	<p>Help the teacher avoid unthinking rejections of new educational practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify recent developments in research into learning and the brain that substantially alter the way we understand learning • Use the analogy of how we expect other professionals such as surgeons and pilots to keep up to date on new research • Emphasize that trailing things in the everyday classrooms is the best way to their validity
<p>Help the teacher see the value of standard procedures and curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the non-negotiable aspects of school level procedure • Encourage them to consider a system-level perspective: Discussing how standard procedures ensure fairness and equity or that curriculum frameworks are designed through a rigorous review of contemporary research and system-wide data • Explore the importance of public agreements where colleagues take a unified approach to a shared challenge 	<p>Help the teacher target tasks and student ability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data representations such as a Guttman chart analysis to identify strengths and skill gaps, targeting their students’ zone of proximal development • Review key concepts around differentiation. Explore strategies for modifying content, process, product & learning environment • Question underlying assumption about differentiation: it is not about making work easier but more accessible, it is not for just those that are struggling but also extending those who need challenge
<p>Help the teacher provide clear directions & structure for students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model the use of learning instructions & success criteria • Explore rubrics, criteria sheets and other materials for clarifying objectives • Establish class routines for issuing and receiving instructions. Emphasize the importance of establishing instructional clarity. Discuss strategies (rallying calls or transition scaffolds for example) for realizing this goal • Provide scaffolds for effective lesson planning 	<p>Help the teacher be more alert to immediate student need and avoid ‘over planning’ lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore Hattie’s work on the features of expert teaching, pointing out its emphasis on responsiveness • Model strategies “that provide a general as opposed to specific structure.” Thinking routines and graphic organizers are good examples. (Kise 2006) • Emphasize the importance of creating curriculum space for metacognition & addressing student need in a timely fashion • Model fast formative feedback strategies for quickly assessing student performance

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<p>Help the teacher maintain professional distance around curriculum change issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame change discussions around the hypothesis model: they aren't debating whether to change long held ideals but discussing what to 'test' next against these ideals • Unpack the personal and professional component of their position • Teach them pivot phrases they can use to acknowledge the logic of others and signal to colleagues they are passionate but have perspective on their own goals 	<p>Help the teacher avoid over-committing their time and resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish workload limits, reminding them that innovations of practice are driven by limitations not annexing more time from your personal life • Emphasize the internal factors driving their behavior. Note that while goals are often imposed, the pathway to the goal is usually a product of their choices • Help them seek out models of committed teachers who meet goals within workload limits
<p>Help the teacher see the value of standardized materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how using standardized materials might suit the needs of individual students • Review how standardized curriculum materials offer students a shared point of reference for students and teachers a common frame for collaboration • Explore how the teacher might employ the extra time created from using these materials to help other students • Remind teacher that standardized curriculum materials can be delivered in a wide range of ways 	<p>Help foster a collaborative approach to curriculum development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create multiple contexts in which teachers share best practice lessons • Teach active listening skills and the hidden thought protocol to help them tease out the thinking of their colleagues • Ensure team meetings have well established protocols for appropriate conduct • Ensure Professional Learning Teams focus on students work – the locus of curriculum planning should be students, not teachers
<p>Help the teacher trial new instructional strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model strategy in your own class. The other teacher observes providing feedback using data tools. • Use chunking - break an activity into its constituent parts • Establish a shared vocabulary for describing the nuances of new technique • Discuss the common 'inflection points' teachers face when implementation this strategy. Offer strategies to address these 'road blocks.' 	<p>Help the teacher avoid letting past experiences color their attitude towards new practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore why similar initiatives 'failed' in the past • Separate in-principle rejection of a new practice from logistical concerns. • Identify operational concerns and methodically address them • Encourage teacher to articulate 'implicit contracts' that shape their work practices. Is the school aware of these beliefs?

Pivot Phrases

For all the careful planning and considered action leaders take there will still be instances where members of their team are reactive or reductive in response to challenge and change. In these instances, it is important that leaders have well-practiced techniques for helping teachers avoid closed thinking. Pivot phrases are a good example of this kind of technique. A pivot phrase is a carefully crafted expression that can be used to interrupt or divert an unproductive turn in a coaching conversation.

It is important to note that pivot phrases aren't a tool for manipulating conversations with a colleague, so much as getting the most out of that exchange. Keeping someone from the closed loop of an old argument or defaulting to patterns of ineffective behavior isn't manipulation. It is profoundly supportive behavior. Leaders who have a well-rehearsed bank of these phrases can employ them in a responsible and responsive fashion.

Typically, leaders develop these phrases over extended period of trial and error. However, having a representative list of phrases (See Below) can speed up this process and provide a model for the kind of wording and types of situations in which they are most effective:

Pivot Types

1. Building Independence

Sharing the Problem

Sometimes people in crisis default to their school leaders as a way of finding a solution to their problem. They just want you to fix it. Often you are much more capable at addressing the type of issue involved. However, your own competency can be a trap. It might fix the immediate problem for you to provide a solution but this means you miss an opportunity to empower your colleague.

Pushing the onus back on the teacher who raised the concern can be effective though there is a danger that your colleague will feel you downplayed their concern and/or dodged your responsibilities. This reaction often occurs if they are highly stressed. A good 'stepping stone' strategy then is to offer to solve part of the problem while getting them to also take a role:

"Ok I will talk to John about this. Could you ensure that he also gets a written report?"

"Perhaps I could contact her parents. Would you mind speaking to her?"

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"I have no control over that decision but is there something we could work on together? Perhaps I could..."

Encouraging Assertive Behavior

Calmly and assertively raising an issue can be very difficult for some people. Indeed, this is the area where your colleagues are most likely to try and 'handball' an issue to you. Again, this can be disempowering for them. Particularly if they don't even realize they have a skill gap in this area. One effective solution is to help your colleagues recognize that the underlying issue is that they are unable to raise their concerns with their colleague:

"What did you say when you told them that?"

"Do you want to discuss/role play how you will explain this to them?"

"Shall we go and talk to the Principal about this together?"

"Was that hard to raise with them?"

Hinting at Skill Gaps

It is not only in the area of assertive behavior where a teacher's skill gap might be leading to problems. Busy teachers often overlook familiar strategies or are unaware of new practices that might allow them to address classroom concerns. Sometimes merely talking about best practice solutions is enough to open up new possibilities for them:

"What strategies did you use so the student could save face?"

"What non-verbal signals are you using? Did you try cross-praise?"

"So employing a pivot phrase was unsuccessful?"

2. Acknowledging Perspective

Honoring Experience

Leaders must differentiate for different levels of experience. It is disingenuous to treat experienced teachers as though they don't have rich experience of past school changes initiatives and shifts in educational theory. However, neither must we allow teachers to cite experience as shorthand way of dismissing an idea without critical examination. Recognizing prior experience and then seeking to learn from it is the formulation that tends to work best:

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“Why didn’t it work in the past?”

“If we had to try to institute the same kind of program what would you do different this time?”

“How have you successfully addressed a problem like this one in the past?”

Acknowledging Emotion (“You Statements”)

Leadership is a test of empathy. When in a coaching role teacher-leaders need to be able to acknowledge the complex feelings and situations that shape their colleague’s behavior. This empathetic response needs to be clearly signaled to your colleague. This can help them avoid falling into the resistant routines that sometimes become a pattern of behavior for staff who are underperforming.

One highly effective strategy for helping teachers avoid this trap are ‘You’ statements. In this technique you recognize your colleagues emotional situation with a brief, direct acknowledgement. You do not follow this with an instruction of any kind as this might blur the content of your message. Allow the person the space to articulate their feelings:

“You seem frustrated...”

“You look as though you are uneasy about this...”

“You appear upset...”

3. Focusing on Evidence

Asking for evidence

Schools are collaborative work places built on trust. Unusually for such a collaborative environment much of the work is actually done outside of the sight of our colleagues. Sometimes this leads to a culture where assertion replaces evidence. It is important to establish standards for the use of data and evidence in everyday interactions. Routinely pivoting to evidence during debriefing sessions helps teachers take a more data-driven and protected approach to professional reflection.

“What are you basing that on?”

“How do you know that’s what will happen?”

“Can I get some student examples of that to show the others?”

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Seek Evidence of Change

An 'assertion culture' is particularly problematic when seeking change to someone's practice. Especially if they can't see their own limitations or are disingenuous when talking about their teaching. It is not enough for a colleague to say they are doing something better – they must be encouraged to demonstrate how they have acted differently. Establishing review practices and procedures addresses this concern:

"What date shall we set to review this?"

"Maybe once you're comfortable doing this I could come in and observe how the students respond?"

"If we can't reach this benchmark what should we do next?"

"If this working how will I know we have been effective?"

4. Framing Experience**Making Statements of Value**

Teacher-leaders need to be wary of untested assertions and knee-jerk presumptions undermining carefully conceived planning. As a teacher coach, I have seen important initiatives fail simply because a false presumption about an initiative has become the received wisdom of a teacher team. Teachers-leaders must contest these presumptions, making clear statements about key values and underlying concepts. Many problems can be addressed more efficiently by addressing their underlying logic in this way. Establishing norms through both formal and informal discussions is a powerful way to clearly articulate the values that shape a team's practice:

"Managing workload is very important. We must carefully prioritise our time. I think this program should be a priority..."

"In a collective endeavor we have to have standard procedures. It is a professional courtesy we must all adhere to..."

"It is a legal requirement that you are there on time. We must ensure our legal responsibility that we are "in loco parentis."

"Year 12 has no prerequisites and we can't resolve the matter by shifting them to another class – that wouldn't be fair to the student or your colleague."

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Labeling the Problem

Labeling a concern allows to both raise and deconstruct a problem. A label helps define a problem. It can also help to identify a solution. 'If you name it, you can train it.' As is the case with establishing norms, a clear articulation of key ideas can be very effective for helping teachers see their own experiences through a productive framework:

"What other strategies do you use to ensure your professional distance?"

"Professional collegiality means extending that courtesy to everyone we work with..."

"Is there a danger here of an over-commitment of time?"

"We must clearly distinguish between under performance and professional misconduct. What you are describing is underperformance and we have a formal process for addressing that with staff."

5. Exploring Disagreement**Flagging Dissent**

One of the most important roles that coaches have is providing perspective to their colleagues. It is a kind of real compassion for someone to take the time to remind someone that not everyone views a situation as they do. This is particularly important when a group of teachers are getting together and are endorsing each other's limited perspectives. This creates a kind of 'echo chamber' effect, where group perspective narrows and unhelpful viewpoints go unchallenged. Simply providing an alternative viewpoint can be very helpful in deconstructing this cliquish behavior. "Flagging" that you are doing this normalizes disagreement and provides a coach a helpful opening line for raising a concern.

"I am going to challenge that."

"That's interesting – I have a completely different view..."

"My first impulse is to take a different position..."

N.B. Teachers who employ these pivot phrases need to be mindful of how their body-language, expressions and tone of voice communicate these dissents. Nothing should confuse the message that respectful disagreement is everyday part of professional discussion.

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Extending Logic to Illogical End

Teacher-leaders develop all sorts of strategies for teasing out fallacious logic. One powerful example is simply teasing out these unreasonable statements to their logical conclusion. Often seeing their own premise in this extended form is enough to cue teachers to reevaluate their reasoning:

“Are you saying there is nothing more to learn in this area of the curriculum...”

“Are you suggesting that this is the only way to approach this?”

“So, they are motivated solely by self-interest?”

6. Seeking Solutions**Envisaging Success**

The central premise of solution focused coaching is that asking people to identify a goal instead of describing a problem helps them address their difficulties in a more productive fashion. Solution focused pivots can have the same effect, taking people towards solutions that may have been missed in the immediacy of the problem:

“If this could be properly addressed how would the class act in numeracy lessons?”

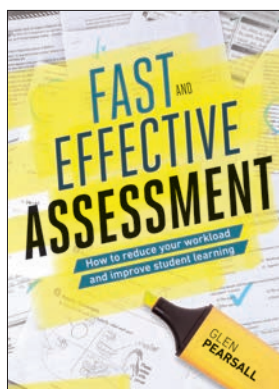
“What would a positive outcome look like here?”

Which of these pivot phrases would help you or a team mate be more open to reflection?

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