



**PINPOINT**



***Conversations about practice constitute a critical vehicle for professional learning.***

Charlotte Danielson

**The Ignored Element**

It's not as if teachers talking together has been ignored. Just witness the popularity of teacher learning communities. But simply working on getting teachers together isn't enough. The dynamics and protocols for professional conversations that change practice have only recently been the focus of serious study.



*If one acknowledges, as one must, the cognitive nature of teaching, then conversations about teaching must be about the cognition.*

Charlotte Danielson

**A Thinking Profession**

Teaching is not a purely technical job — teachers are not merely skilled labourers of knowledge. It is both a practical and a cognitive profession. Sustained improvement can't happen unless both aspects are addressed. That happens through teachers talking and learning together.



*Thoughts are intertwined with practice, so if we want to better understand practice, we need to also understand the thoughts that guide practice.*

Mary Kennedy

**Problem-Solving Focus**

Dylan Wiliam reminds us that teachers need to adapt ideas taken from research in order to make them work in their own classrooms.

This type of problem-solving produces more learning than any amount of feedback or other forms of telling by managers or experts.

When teachers work with evidence-based techniques, adapting them to their classrooms, they create local know-how. And when they do this with colleagues in joint problem-solving conversations, what was previously tacit, unspoken teacher knowledge is brought to the surface and shared.



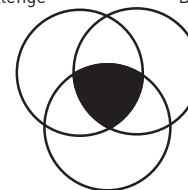
*If we ask enough of the right questions, people have their own aha.*

David Rock

**A Tested Model**

Professional conversations are not *just talk* as Helen Timperley warns. They're designed to reveal and unravel the reasons behind teachers' practice. And be tested with a variety of data. That's not always a comfortable ride. Which is why a shared commitment to collaborative enquiry strengthens the mutual bond of professional respect.

Relationship of Respect and Challenge      Using Relevant Data



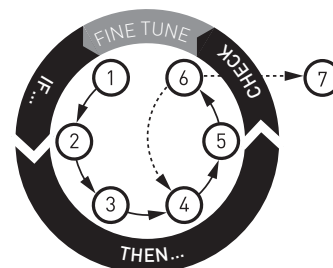
Enquiry Habit of Mind

Earl, L. M. & Timperley, H (2009) Professional Learning Conversations, Springer, page 3

**Teachers' Theories of Action**

Humans have theories about everything. And, unsurprisingly, teachers have theories about teaching. Theories of action structure this thinking and makes it available to colleagues for joint exploration.

The If>Then reasoning offers a clear framework for reflective conversations. The HOW2 Process (stages 1-7 opposite) matches this same sequence.



**Asking the Right Questions**

Asking the right questions, with the right tone, ensures the conversation is an exploration and not a test. There should be no "gotcha" moments as Charlotte Danielson warns. She suggests:

**Plural forms:** Asking for "some possible explanations" avoids the idea of there being only one correct answer.

**Promote analysis:** Ask questions that require comparisons between one situation and another.

**Invite speculation:** Structure questions around the Would/If format to prompt hypothetical thinking.

**Encourage metacognition:** Ask questions about the teacher's thinking not just the events being described.

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