

Conversations in Schools that Improve Student Achievement

Schools that make the most learning gains for students have leaders who ensure the frequency and quality of professional conversations. *Conversations among adults about teaching and learning permeate the building. That means they happen at all times of day, in formal and informal settings, and all the adults involve themselves.* The conversations:

- are substantive
- use recent information about student performance
- spring from questions that assume responsibility and capacity to improve student learning
- are non-defensive
- enable people to know things about each other as people
- reach out to Professional Knowledge
- lead to action

Listen in as you walk around the building....meetings, teachers' lounge, hallways. If you hear conversations like this, you can be sure the school is improving student results.

“Substantive” means they are talking concretely about teaching and learning itself, and the issues, decisions and actions teachers are taking in daily practice with specific students.

“Based on recent information” means teachers bring specific and timely evidence about how students are doing to the table. It could be from yesterday's work as well as quarterly assessments, writing samples, test scores: whatever will illuminate where students are and what they need next.

“Spring from questions” means the conversations are asking questions about the connection between teacher action and student results with an assumption that it is our job to improve student results, and that we are able to do so.

“Non-defensive” means that when students don't learn, teachers face the evidence squarely and accept responsibility for their part. They don't get hung-up in guilt or blame of themselves or of the students. Thus they are always working on how to adjust their actions to improve student results.

“Each other as people” means that staff members come to know one another as individuals who have life histories and interests and commitments.

“Reaching out to Professional Knowledge” means that these conversations do not happen in a vacuum. The teachers are aware that there is a vast reservoir of Professional Knowledge created by peers over the past century; and they need to bring this Professional Knowledge into their planning and their problem solving in order to maximize student success.

“Lead to action” means the conversations go beyond being interesting and satisfying for the participants. They lead to changes in instruction that benefit students. These changes can be seen, heard, and measured in their positive results.

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