Stimulating Learning Conversations: Creating the Change

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Conversation is like playing tennis with a ball made of Krazy Putty that keeps coming back over the net in a different shape.
Learning: the Treasure Within (UNESCO)

To know  To live together
To do      To be

Delors et al (1996)

7 Survival Skills

• Critical thinking and problem solving
• Collaboration across networks and leading by influence
• Agility and adaptability
• Initiative and entrepreneurship
• Effective oral and written communication
• Accessing and analysing information
• Curiosity and imagination

Professional learning community

... an inclusive and mutually supportive group of people with a collaborative, reflective and growth-oriented approach toward investigating and learning more about their practice in order to improve pupils’ learning.

Learning network

a group of schools that join together to plan, implement and monitor activities that will enhance learning and teaching within and across their schools . . . . . as well as creating capacity for learning and sharing knowledge between schools.

Crandall and Stoll (2005)
When it comes to being intelligent it is clear that there is much more than simply what we can do as an individual; how we interact with others is a crucial element of how smart we are in the real world.

Lucas and Claxton (2010)
“Which 2 strategies have you found most powerful in helping teachers share their knowledge and ideas? Please rank your top 2 in order of priority”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning conversation</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching/mentoring</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>Networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Videos of practice/audio examples</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Verbal presentations</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher designed materials</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written stories and reflections</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web resources</td>
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Responses from GTC Teacher Learning Academy March 2008
What’s the difference between talking to each other and sharing practice, and participating in a learning conversation?
Learning conversations

... how educators make meaning together and jointly come up with new insights and knowledge. These conversations lead to intentional change to enhance practice and student learning.

Stoll (2010)
Intentional action/change

Knowledge creation

Reflection that challenges thinking

Learning conversations

Purpose and process

Engagement

Stoll (2010)
### Purpose and process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus – evidence or ideas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience + external knowledge/theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protocols and tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitation</td>
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Connecting three fields of knowledge

Protocols and tools

What We Know
Knowledge of those involved
People’s experience

New Knowledge
Knowledge created together through learning conversations

What Is Known
Knowledge from theory, research and best practice

Adapted from NCSL (2006)
Engagement

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Enquiry-mindedness</th>
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<td>Respectful challenge</td>
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<td>Risk taking</td>
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Regimented minds cannot grasp the concept of confrontation as an open exchange of major differences with a view to settlement through genuine dialogue

Aung San Suu Kyi
Reflection that challenges thinking
Intentional action – change in practice

Knowledge creation
It is in these conversations that new ideas, tools, and practices are created, and the initial knowledge is either substantially enriched or transformed during the process.

Earl and Timperley (2008)
Example 1:
The Ealing Professional Learning Community
The Ealing Professional Learning Community

Leading schools
All the district’s 13 secondary/high schools and all 5 special schools

Vertical teams

Learning reviews in all schools

Workshop sessions

Intranet community
Appreciative Inquiry

Based on Cooperrider, and Srivastva (1987)

- How can we act reflectively and positively?
- When are we at our best?
- How can we construct the future together?
- What would we really like to do?

Destiny
Discover
Design
Dream
Focus: Personal Learning and Thinking Skills

INDEPENDENT ENQUIRERS
CREATIVE THINKERS
REFLECTIVE LEARNERS
TEAM WORKERS
SELF MANAGERS
EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATORS

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2007)
Possible Areas for Ealing Professional Learning
Community Review Team Investigation

Lesson observations

Staff interviews

Student interviews

Curriculum resources – work schemes and plans, student work

Wider learning opportunities – school productions etc

Other relevant information

Further information on protocols can be obtained from Carrie Sharman – CSharman@ealing.gov.uk

Evaluation report from Louise Stoll
Come up with two questions you would ask students to understand more about their learning.
What risk(s) did you take in this conversation?

- Bearing all and sharing all
- Trust - unknown people
- Challenging questions
- Report enables questioning
- Risk of silence
- Risk of talking openly about one’s school
- Sharing weaknesses with other schools
- New style of working

Members of Ealing PLC (2010)
It [the PLC and learning review process] gets teachers to reflect really. The more reflective somebody is, you’ve developed capacity for them to go away and improve their own practice. . . . The learning community has contributed massively to that in school - it means that all the other stuff we do will have much more impact. It’s got people talking about teaching and learning.

Headteacher
Ealing Professional Learning Community (2010)
Example 2:
Creative Leadership Learning Project
Creative leadership

. . . collaborative, imaginative and thought through responses to opportunities and to challenging issues that inhibit learning at all levels. It’s about seeing, thinking and doing things differently in order to improve the life chances of all students

Creative leadership is both:

➢ being creative leaders yourselves

➢ providing the conditions and opportunities for others to be creative

Stoll and Temperley (2009)
Creative Leadership Learning Project aims

- to help Senior Leadership Teams explore and develop capacity to create conditions in which learning-focused creativity of teachers best thrives
- to provide tools to assess contexts and needs and help them assess impact
- to stimulate them with inspirational and ‘different’ ideas, as bases for school- and network-based enquiry
- to create time and space for them to engage in learning conversations on how to enhance learning to learn through promoting creativity
- to support enquiry and development through critical friendship strategies

Stoll and Temperley (2009)
“As we were talking, I realised I needed to have this conversation and how important they are”.

Senior leader, Creative Leadership Learning Project
Example 3: 

*Networking for Learning simulation*
Purposes of Networking for Learning

- To raise and promote understanding of critical issues involved in developing sustainable learning networks and deriving benefit from them
- To facilitate colleagues’ reflection on these issues in the context of developing learning networks
- To provoke dialogue among colleagues that informs network planning, initiation, development and sustainability
- To promote collaborative learning
- To help colleagues consider the extent to which their networks are focused on learning and what approaches at different points in time are likely to have the best chance of success

Crandall and Stoll (2005)
Two content goals:

Move members of five diverse schools through stages of change associated with development of a sustainable learning network

Produce as many pupil benefits and as much increased capacity as possible through improvements in learning and teaching growing out of network progress and success

Leadership learning goal:

Deepen their own learning and understanding about successful networks for learning and teaching, and discuss issues and challenges presented in a risk-free environment

Crandall and Stoll (2005)
Learning conversations

Culture of trust and enquiry

Diversity

Time and space

Development of dialogic skills

PLC supporting conditions
Dialogic skills

Listening
Questioning
Challenging
Probing
Connecting
Building
Critical Friendship Questions

Supporting colleagues to explore their experience, and challenging them to think creatively and critically about their practice. Notice what effect they have when you use them.

- What are you thinking?
- Why do you think that?
- What were you basing your decision on?
- What made you go about it in that way?
- What evidence do you have for that?
- What is your theory of action?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- What are you/have you been noticing?
- What are some of the possibilities?
- What surprised you?
- What might you be overlooking?
All of the things I thought I deeply understood, I understood because I was looking at them though other people, with other people... Both of our understandings grew closer because we were able to discuss as we went through... I feel the professional learning community is all of those little conversations rather than the big, holistic 'this is the learning review'.
• Do you have stimulating learning conversations?

• Are you stimulating learning conversations?