

ECET² San Diego

**Difficult
Conversations in
Service of Students**

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#ecet2 #15

New Leaders 



Do Now – As a Teacher Leader...

What makes a conversation with peers or colleagues difficult?



Who Are We?

Tyree Barnes

- Teacher, Newark Great Oaks Charter School
- New Leader Emerging Leader 2015-2016

Stephanie Vargas

- Teacher, Newark Public Schools
- New Leader Emerging Leader 2014-2015

Delvin Burton

- Senior Director, New Leaders
- Newark Emerging Leaders Program Director

Session Outcomes

ECET²

participants
will:

Understand principles for engaging in difficult conversations aimed at changing adult attitudes and actions towards students.

Experience engaging in difficult conversations in order to change adult attitudes and actions in support of increasing academic achievement for ALL students.

Engage in observation and provide peer feedback on practice

Agenda

1. Why This Topic?
2. Principles for Engaging in Difficult Conversations
3. Analysis of a Difficult Conversation
4. Application: Difficult Conversation Role Plays
5. Final Thoughts and Wrap-up

WHY THIS TOPIC?

Why This Topic? Have You Heard...

- “My third period students are gems, but there is just no hope for my fourth period. They don’t care about their education!”
- “I think we are setting our students up for failure when we say that they ALL should be college and career ready. Why do we give some of these kids false hope?”
- “All these resources, projects, and initiatives and at the end of the day these kids still don’t care about their education. If they are not going to try I am not going to try either!”
- “I really think we should be focusing more on the students that are showing that they want to learn.”

Why This Topic?

**“Difficult conversations are important because
the cost of not having them is too high.”**

-ECET2 Seattle Participant

- In a culture of shared responsibility and leadership, teacher leaders must not only be about building **SKILL** in others but also need to be prepared to address issues with **WILL**.
- Challenging negative beliefs, mindsets, and behaviors takes **COURAGE!**

One way to demonstrate **COURAGE** and address **WILL**
is to engage in **DIFFICULT AUTHENTIC CONVERSATIONS**.

Honest and open conversations that push your peers and colleagues to consider the impact that negative attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs have on students and efforts to improve a school community and/or district.

PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGING IN AUTHENTIC CONVERSATIONS

Principles for Engaging in Authentic Conversations

Time and Place—Choose an appropriate time and place to have the conversation.

Address Directly Address the person who prompted the conversation; don't speak to someone else about it first.

Name The Situation/Issue —Start out by recounting what happened.

Truth Assumption—Don't assume you or the other person holds the truth; there can be one or more sides to the story.

No Judgments—Don't make assumptions about intentions; assume best intentions as a default.

Avoid the Blame Game—Don't blame the person.

Inquire and Listen to Learn—Ask open-ended questions. Really listen.

Acknowledge Feelings—Make the person feel heard and understood.

Say What You Mean—Don't rely on subtext. Start with what matters most. Be professional and direct.

Problem-Solve— Invent options together.

Watch Your Non-Verbals – don't let your actions undermine your words.

Adapted from EPIC video [Principles for Having Difficult Conversations](#), KIPP DC: KEY Academy (Charter), Washington, DC, and from Stone, Patton and Heen, [Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most](#), Penguin Books, 2010.

PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

ANALYSIS OF AN AUTHENTIC
CONVERSATION

The Flow of Authentic/Difficult Conversations



Authentic Conversation Practice: Roles & Responsibilities

Initiator—the person initiating the authentic conversation.

Colleague—the person with whom the Initiator is having the authentic conversation.

Observer—responsible for observing the interactions using the provided form and timekeeping.

Role Plays will be done in trios and each person will assume each of the above roles once.

Authentic Conversation Scenarios

Scenario 1: It's not the lesson, it's the kids.

During a corrective-instruction action planning meeting that you are facilitating, you asked your colleague to identify potential student misconceptions based on the item-analysis of the most recent assessment. You also ask your colleague to think deeply about how they might adjust their instructional practice to address the misconceptions. Your colleague responds by saying, "There is no misconception. I have a bunch of slow readers and they are just guessing on these assessments. These kids never get through all of the text. I really believe the lesson was effective. It's not my instruction, it's the kids." As a teacher leader you decide to schedule a follow-up meeting with your colleague to discuss their comments. What will you say and/or do during the meeting?



Initiator Objective: Push the teacher to think about how his/her comments could negatively impact the team's goal of building a positive culture rooted in a growth mindset. Acknowledge the feelings of the teacher, while making your beliefs and expectations clear. Re-focus this teacher and reinforce the belief that all students can achieve at high levels academically.

Guidance to Colleague Engaging in the Role Play:

You will be playing the role of the teacher/colleague based on the scenario outlined. This teacher behaves in a passive-aggressive manner and presents a position of low-expectations about certain students in the classroom. Remember not to steamroll the initiator, don't be difficult to interrupt and stay away from personally attacking the Initiator's leadership of the team in the role play.

Phrases the Colleague Should Use in the Role Play:

"I've been teaching this lesson for years and I know it works. It's the kids, they've changed."

"Our student population is very different now."

"Some of these kids just don't have the ability to do what we are asking them to do on some of these interim assessments."

Conversation Role Play Protocol (3 rounds)

Steps	Timing
1. Identify another participant to work with. Within your pair assign yourself a number – 1 or 2. The number corresponds to the scenarios on the handouts.	1 min
2. Everyone individually prepares for their authentic convo as the Initiator.	5 min
3. Everyone reviews the statements for the scenario for which they will assume the Colleague role.	2 min
4. Engage in the Authentic/Difficult Conversation Role Play.	4 min
5. Colleague and observer provides feedback. Initiator reflects and transition to next role play	4 min.
6. Repeat Steps 4-5	16 min

CLOSING

Quiet 2 – Reflections and Action Planning

- What are your take-aways from this session? What will you use or apply in your school?
- What next steps will you take as a result of today's session? What is your first step?

OBSERVATIONS
AND
PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT ACTION

BE PROFESSIONAL

BE DIRECT

BE COURAGEOUS

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Please complete session survey

Mission

Our mission is to ensure high academic achievement for all children, especially students in poverty and students of color, by developing transformational school leaders and advancing the policies and practices that allow great leaders to succeed.

Vision

We envision a day when there is educational excellence and equity in America – when our country's public schools ensure that every student is prepared for success in college, careers and citizenship.

www.newleaders.org

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