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**Linguistic Skills**

Establishing Rapport

Body language & tone of voice are as important as the words spoken to establish trust and rapport

* Leaning in conveys interest
* Be careful in what words are emphasized
* A sarcastic or skeptical tone of voice undermines rapport and respect
* Rapport is in the general culture of the school but reinforced or undermined as part of every conversation

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Using Positive Presuppositions

The manner in which a question is asked implies much about a question

* “when did you stop beating your wife?” assumes abuse
* “How do you learn about your students interests outside of school?” assumes effort
* “What patterns do you see from these student work samples?” suggests awareness

Be careful of negative presuppositions

* “Do these students always behave so badly?” vs “My, what a challenge you have with this combination of students!”
* Offhanded comments can be interpreted as veiled criticism
* Word choice is important

Inviting and Sustaining Thinking

An important purpose of professional conversations is to extend teachers’ thinking about their practice. A safe environment is critical.

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1. Nondichotomous questions:
   1. By avoiding yes/no questions, it indicates you are not interested in simplistic conversations
   2. tends to shut down thinking and be the end of a matter/topic
   3. if you receive a yes/no response, say “tell me more about that”

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1. Plural forms:
   1. Signal that there is not a single correct answer
   2. Implies multiple responses are worthy of consideration
   3. Can engage in deeper thinking
   4. i.e. “What factors did you consider when planning…?”

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1. Promoting analytic thinking:
   1. Ask questions that invite one to dig into their observations with the aim of learning more from them
   2. I.e. follow up questions to a statement about students failures to complete homework assignments on time, “Have you noticed any patterns to which days of the week seem to be more difficult?” or “Does this seem to be more of a problem they year than last?”
   3. This type of questioning requires you to compare one situation with another, identify patterns or interpret events.
   4. Using invitational language and tone suggests there is not one single correct answer.
   5. Questions structured with “would/if” cause the brain to create, dream, visualize, evaluate, speculate and imagine.

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1. Encouraging metacognition
   1. Refers to a person’s own thinking about events
   2. Enables you to extract general principles from their experience and see how their own thinking about it has evolved
   3. i.e. “I’m interested in how you describe your students’ understanding of place value. Are you seeing this differently than you did last week?”

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1. Examining assumptions and implications
   1. All classroom decisions are grounded in certain assumptions about learning and teaching. Most teachers are not accustomed to examining these assumptions or to exploring their implications for future practice.
   2. i.e. when student choice is used in designing learning activities, one might ask, “What’s your experience with this?” or Have you found it to be effective?” or “Because we know that mastery of complex content is very satisfying to students, I wonder whether there is any way this activity could be revised to tap into that natural drive?”
   3. Such questions don’t assume any single correct answer and open up important lines of communication

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Probing

When you probe thinking it encourages one to dig deeper about their thinking

* i.e. “Could you talk more about that?” or “Could you give me an example of what you mean?”
* Silence is a powerful approach to probing as silence can help extend their thinking
* Indicates someone has more to say on the subject

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* Models thoughtfulness and reflection

Paraphrasing

Repeating what someone said in a slightly different manner invites someone to hear what the listener thought they said and what was understood

* Paraphrasing sends 3 important messages:
  + Indicates you have heard what was said
  + Shows you understood what was said
  + And implies you care
* Showing you care helps to establish trust and rapport

Types of paraphrasing:

* Acknowledging & clarifying: “In other words…” or “Did you mean that…” or “so what you mean is…”
  + Acknowledges a situation and honors the persons perspective
  + Implies you want to see it from their point of view
* Summarizing & organizing
  + Shift upwards - interpret multiple specific comments into a more general principle or statement
  + Downward shift – invite someone who things in global terms or big picture to give specific examples or thing about how a concept or idea can be applied

**Settings for Professional Conversations**

* **Non-continuing Contract Teacher & Nonsupervisory Colleague**
  + Non-continuing contract teachers are
    - Vulnerable in positions
    - Likely sensitive to perceived perceptions of anyone in authority
    - More relaxed with non-supervisory colleagues, can admit weaknesses, ask for help
  + Non-supervisory colleagues
    - Are alert to teacher’s need for reassurance and support
    - Can provide coaching on general teaching skills
    - Discussions can focus on joint problem solving
* **Non-continuing Contract Teacher & a Supervisor**
  + Conversations fundamentally different from those with colleague
    - May not have contract renewed – supervisor plays big role in decision
    - Any interaction with supervisor can be stressful, impact conversations
    - Teacher may feel at risk until trust is established
  + Conversation between supervisor and non-continuing contract teacher should be a combination of support and challenge
* **Continuing Contract Teacher & Non-Supervisory Colleague**
  + Setting the most conducive to informal professional conversation
    - Teacher’s situation more secure
    - Colleague not in a supervisory relationship to teacher
  + Challenges
    - Making conversation sufficiently rigorous to be meaningful
    - Keeping the conversation from wandering – especially with friends
* **Continuing Contract Teacher & a Supervisor**
  + Has the potential to be very rich and rewarding
    - Supervisor has authority over teacher, but teacher has a high degree of security
    - Usually a low risk environment
    - Conversation more free to follow whatever direction that presents itself
  + Supervisor generally has responsibility of evaluating teacher’s performance
    - Conversations tend to be more robust and serious than with colleagues