



VIRTUAL

INSTRUCTIONAL
LEADERSHIP
CHALLENGE

TRANSCRIPT

MODULE 3

Why Conversation Is What Really Changes Practice

Welcome to module three of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge. I'm Justin Baeder, and I wanna congratulate you and thank you for making so much progress in this program, and I wanna invite you to share with me the results that you're getting in your school, the learning and the impact that you're seeing from engaging in this work with your staff. And in this module, we're going to talk about one of the most important and fundamental practices that you engage in as an instructional leader to impact student learning through your work with teachers, and that is conversation.

I believe that conversation is absolutely fundamental to the work we do around instructional improvement especially when it comes to helping teachers improve their professional judgment, which I believe is our single greatest point of leverage as instructional leaders. So let's jump right in and talk about why it is that it's conversation not any kind of written feedback, or any kinda form that we fill out, it's conversation that ultimately changes teacher practice.

And I think it's true in general, in life not just in a professional context, but it's true in general as humans that when we change our beliefs, when we change our behavior, when we think of our practice in a new light, or our beliefs in a new light it almost always happens through conversation with someone else that we trust, that we respect, that we care about. Talking with one another and having conversations is really at the heart of how we relate to one another as human beings. And two major things happen through conversation that are relevant to our purposes here when we're talking about interactions between instructional leaders and teachers.

First of all, they allow us to develop and maintain relationships, right? The relationships that we have with teachers exist largely through the conversations that we have. And if it's been a while since you've spoken with someone, you may feel the need to kind of reconnect and chat with them a little bit, maybe some kind of informal chat is helpful at first to kind of rebuild that bridge and kind of, you know, warm people back up to that professional relationship.

And then when it comes to talking about substantive issues, it matters that we're not talking with strangers, right? We're people who know each other, who work together closely, and that relationship is both created and sustained through the many conversations that we have. Now also through those conversations we get something else that's equally important for our work as leaders, and that is information, right?

When people come and talk to you they share information with you, they bring things to your attention, they put things on your radar that may have gone to the back of your mind even if you were already aware of them, and this sense of what matters, what's important right now what we need to be focused on, it's a collective sense that we develop and update through conversation, right? We talk about what we're dealing with, what the most pressing problems are and how to solve those problems, we make those decisions largely as a result of conversation. So it's absolutely critical that we pay attention to conversation, that we invest the time that it takes, right?

We know that it's impossible to be a good leader if you don't make time to talk with your people, right? If your door is always closed, if you need people to make an appointment and you're never available for them to really sit down and talk with, we know it's going to be very difficult to be

an effective leader because of the importance of relationships and the importance of information flow. So in a normal year, right? We structure lots of things around that reality.

When we have lots of opportunities to talk with people informally, in the hallway, you know, before and after class, in the staff lounge maybe you're getting a cup of coffee, in the parking lot as you're arriving or leaving or doing bus duty, there are all these settings where we interact informally with people, as well as settings where we interact more formally in a meeting whether that's an IEP meeting, a hiring committee, you know, all these different settings where we work together in teams, maybe you have a leadership council, maybe you have all staff meetings in a typical year where everybody is getting together in one room for professional development or for making decisions.

And then of course we have the formal one-on-one meetings as well where we set goals with teachers and talk about their goals, do a pre-observation or a post-observation individual conference to discuss what we saw in the classroom or the the observation that we're doing. So in a normal year, we have lots of opportunities to develop and maintain those relationships and to sustain that critical information flow, but this of course is not a normal year. And what we gotta think about is not only how can we take these same settings and make them virtual, I think that's not a perfect solution to, you know, to simply take what would have been a face-to-face conversation and put it on Zoom, or you know, a video call of some sort, but also we have to think about not only how do we get the formal conversations and meetings to take place effectively given our current constraints, but also how do we make up for the loss of the informal interactions, right?

If we are, you know, somebody has quarantined, if we're working from home, or if school is closed and maybe some people are on campus and some people aren't, we're going to have fewer conversations face to face especially in those informal settings like the parking lot, the hallway, the staff lounge. And that can really have an impact, a negative impact on our relationships, we just lose touch with, you know, with each other, we lose the sense of camaraderie that we're used to, and it makes it much more difficult to communicate information in kind of a low friction casual way, right?

People can still send you an email, or call you, or set up a meeting, but it's just more work and as a result less information makes its way to us when we can't have those casual interactions. So in this module, we're going to talk about how to deal with that reality and make sure that those relationships and that information flow are sustained and maximize your opportunities to have feedback conversations that change teacher practice. So in this module, a couple of, kind of high points that we're going to hit on, we are going to talk very specifically about getting into a model, a conceptual model for why it is that conversations change teacher practice, not suggestions, not written feedback, not written comments, but it's actually the conversation itself where people decide to change.

We'll talk about some ways to make up for the loss of those informal interactions, and we'll talk about how to structure your overall process of conversing with staff very deliberately so that you don't leave anyone out, or lose track of people, or just kind of let people slip out of your mind. So with that, let's jump right into our kind of theory of action for why conversation is what really changes teacher practice. As we talked about in module two, I think the heart of this is what Weick calls sense-making, right? Sense-making is this process of making sense of what has happened to us and what we're experiencing by talking with other people, and it's based on our identity, it's

based on our relationship with other people, it's based on looking back at our recent experiences.

So when you have a feedback conversation with a teacher, you're not only talking about what happened in the lesson, you're talking about how you currently think about teaching and learning, how the teacher currently thinks about their students and their own practice and what they're doing. And we know so much of that has changed this year, so this is more important than ever for people to be able to make sense of what they're dealing with and be able to, you know, to come up with discoveries about, you know, insights about what they might want to change.

That process of sense-making and just kind of orienting ourselves and figuring out, okay, what does this mean? Where are we right now? Is very different as an explanation for how feedback conversations change practice than what I think is our default assumption that teachers change practice as a result of recommendations or advice or suggestions from instructional leaders. I wanna argue very directly here that it is not our suggestions that cause people to change their practice, it's the sense-making that they do in those feedback conversations, even if we don't make a suggestion at all that allows people to identify changes that they wanna make in their practice and allows them to improve their professional judgment.

So there's this myth out there that if we want to improve teacher practice that we really have to give people high quality feedback. And I know every year we put a lot of effort into providing high quality feedback, you know, we try to do calibration trainings and we train people on our evaluation criteria and we try to achieve inter-rater reliability so that if you got feedback from one person it would match the feedback that you would get from someone else who had been trained the same way, but I think a lot of that misses the point because people don't really change their practice just in response to suggestions or feedback, right?

And we're going to talk about why that is, the identity-based reasons that is. It fundamentally comes down to conversation and the sense-making practice that we take people through that determines why they change, when and how they're going to change their practice. Ultimately, it comes down to a decision that the teacher needs to make. You know, the teacher has to decide for himself or for herself whether they're going to change something and what they're going to change it to. And it's not simply a matter of having access to good ideas, and I think this was a hard lesson for me to learn as a new principal that, you know, it wasn't about me providing the perfect suggestion or the perfect idea or insight on how that lesson could have been better.

That was not actually the source of the changes that teachers made in their practice, but the role that I played as a conversation partner and as a knowledgeable conversation partner was still absolutely essential. And there's a key differentiator between staff members depending on where they are in their career that I call the locus of professional authority. This shifts over time as people become professionals, as they enter the profession and kinda get their feet under them and advance and start to trust their own judgment more, this matters hugely for how teachers change their practice in feedback conversations.

So let's explore that question now, how does the teacher's stage of development in their career impact how they respond to feedback? At the beginning of their career teachers who might think of as novices at this stage, look to a mentor teacher, or, you know, perhaps one of their professors, or, you know someone who played a formative role or is still playing a formative role in their career as their source of authority, right? So if you have a new teacher mentor assigned to that new

novice teacher, then that person might become that teacher's source of professional authority. And if that mentor says, you should do this, they're gonna say, okay, I wanna succeed, I don't want to mess things up, so I'm just gonna do what you tell me.

And of course it can be helpful to have good guidance like that, but you can't operate as a professional with that level of, you know, just kind of doing what you're told, guidance throughout your entire career. As you develop as teachers grow and become true professionals, they have to take on more and more responsibility and become their own source of authority ultimately. So at the beginning they're looking to a mentor teacher, the second stage which we call the pre-professional stage where people are really, you know, a member of a team, they're a member of the staff, they're not just on their own flailing and doing what their mentor tells them every time they throw them a lifeline, at the pre-professional stage people have started to internalize some of the shared expectations that exist in the profession and that exists among staff.

And probably, you know, a lot of that comes from locally shared expectations, you know, people on your staff who share kind of how they do things and what standard they do things to. People take a lot of cues from the people that they immediately work with, but they also take those cues from norms that they pick up across the profession maybe in professional reading, or on social media, or from their own experiences of school as students, or maybe from friends and family members who are teachers, you know, there's this sense of, this is how things are done that informs teachers when they're at that pre-professional stage.

And this is where we have a big opportunity to influence teacher practice through the shared expectations that we develop and articulate at the school or district level. But there's a third stage as well that I think we have to be very aware of when people advance to that true kind of professional level in their career, and I call this of course the professional stage, and this is where people start to trust their own professional judgment more than anything else. And that professional judgment can still be shaped, right? It's not fixed, it's not set in stone, it's still subject to change as a result of conversation, but it's not a source of authority in, you know, other people expectations aren't the same source of authority that they were in the pre-professional and novice stages, you know, a true professional starts to trust their own judgment more than anything else.

So if we arrange these in a table, we go from novice to pre-professional to professional, and we see this kind of taking on of that responsibility and that source of authority when it comes to making decisions. And this is as it should be, right? We want people to look to experts and to their mentors at the beginning of their career, we want them to go along with shared expectations and contribute to those shared expectations and the culture of the school and the norms of the profession as they advance, and then ultimately we want them to trust themselves and their own internalized values and beliefs and understanding of best practices. So if ultimately what we're trying to do here with improving teacher practice is improve teacher's professional judgment, we're going to have to do some intellectual work, right?

And this is back to the Charlotte Danielson quotes from module two that really teaching us cognitive work. And when we're trying to help teachers improve we're not just trying to help them improve the mechanics, you know, the observable behaviors, we're trying to help them improve the judgments that they're making behind the scene, that's why my friends conversation is so critical. Improving professional judgment is our single biggest point of leverage and conversation is the way to make it happen and we'll get into that throughout the remainder of module three.

For now I wanna invite you to get out your journal and do some reflection on this. Think about a time when you made a major shift of belief, or a shift of perspective, what was it that led up to that shift? What conversations did you have with other people maybe who were those people, what role did they play in your life that led up to that shift? This could be something that's outside of your professional practice, this could be a personal belief, maybe a belief about what's right, or what's just, or maybe a belief about politics or religion, you know who knows it could be anything, but I'm going to guess that you can think of numerous examples of times when you have shifted your perspective because of a conversation.

And I'd like you to just think and reflect for a moment on what that conversation was like and who you had maybe some of those conversations with. And then second, think about a teacher whose practice you would like to shift right now. Someone who you would like to help advance and improve their professional judgment, what conversations might need to take place with that person, and what evidence might be helpful in that conversation. When you've completed your journal, you're ready to move on to the next section. Thanks so much for taking this journey with me.

The Feedback Sandwich

Let's talk for a moment about the format of our feedback conversations. And I want to address what I see as almost a universal belief among instructional leaders. That feedback needs to be delivered in kind of a sandwich format. If you think about a barbecue sandwich you've got the meat in the middle and you've got a bun on either side of that meat. And we like to package our feedback in kind of a similar manner. Don't we, we have a compliment to open the conversation and to kind of start on a positive note. And then we have the meat of the conversation. We have the suggestion for improvement or the kind of constructive criticism in the middle. And then we wanna end on a positive note again. So we have another compliment. Have you experienced the feedback sandwich?

Have you given someone a feedback sandwich? I'm going to guess that the answer to both of those questions is yes. Because the feedback sandwich is everywhere. And I believe that that's unfortunate because I think it's actually an unhelpful format that causes us a number of problems. If it's our goal to actually change teacher practice and not just go through a process. If our goal was to just go through a process and give everybody a compliment, a suggestion and another compliment, well then this would be fine.

But if our goal is actually to change teacher practice we run into some problems with the feedback sandwich. First, I want to say there's nothing wrong with giving people compliments and praising what they're doing well and recognizing what they're doing well. There's nothing wrong with the intention of starting on a positive note and ending on a positive note and recognizing some of the bright spots or what you might call the wows of an observation. But we run into trouble if we give our compliments and praise in a confusing or misleading or inauthentic way.

And there are a number of ways that this can go wrong especially when everyone involved kind of knows that this format is what it is. They know to expect a compliment a suggestion and another compliment. And it starts to feel kind of insincere. It starts to feel kind of patronizing if you know the first compliment is really just to butter you up then you're probably not going to see it as especially sincere compared to something that is not fit within that, that preexisting format. If you just kind of make an offhand remark, hey that was really great how you did this, how you opened the lesson, that was really great when you stopped by that student's desk and just really got them going.

If you make an offhanded remark that is a compliment, it comes across a lot more sincerely than if it's part of just kind of a pre-packaged format. And people can really start to see those as inauthentic if we're not careful. It also can be difficult to make sure that our feedback is relevant. That it's actually focused on something that the teacher actually cared about. So I want to encourage you to not worry too much about the format and really just strive to have an authentic conversation regardless of whether you have packaged all of your suggestions for improvement between compliments.

And I actually want to discourage you from using that format because it creates a number of specific problems as we will see now. The first problem is the somewhat confusing ratio of compliments to suggestions. Whenever we have a fixed ratio like this, people come to expect, I'm going to get two compliments and one suggestion for improvement. One takeaway in this feedback

conversation. When it's expected that ratio of two to one we start to lose track of whether it's really authentic and whether we really need to take each of those elements seriously, or whether they were designed just to kind of fill a slot whether that slot is on a feedback form or just in, in kind of our mental expectation that we have two compliments and one suggestion. And by itself, what does that ratio even mean?

Does it mean that the lesson was two thirds good and one third of it needed improvement. How seriously should the teacher take that suggestion? If the compliments are really glowing, if the appraise effusive and the suggestion is minor how seriously should teachers take that? This is confusing. And I've noticed that it's confusing when I'll give a suggestion for improvement that's very minor. And then I'll come back later and I'll see that the teacher took it very very seriously far more seriously than I intended and spent a lot of time on something that was not all that central to their improvement. Not all that important to their practice.

So this gets confusing right off the bat and over the long-term we can end up with an even worse problem. The problem of apparently documenting excellent performance when that might not have always been the case. See, here's the thing. If you give everyone two compliments and a suggestion there's a certain kind of fixed ratio that's implied there. Again that there may be doing kind of two thirds of a great job even if we don't say so explicitly. If a teacher has a performance issue in the future. They become unsatisfactory.

They really stopped doing a good job and that needs to be documented. And the evaluation needs to reflect that. If that teacher can then pull out years and years of feedback from administrators that says good job with this good job at that. And then a suggestion in the middle especially if they have implemented the suggestion they're going to be able to show that the current administrator is breaking with a longstanding pattern. And if you've ever been in that situation where you're dealing with a teacher who really is struggling who really is not doing well. And had them pull out maybe your own words or the words of your predecessor to use against you to to weaken your case and say, no actually I'm doing a great job.

See all these compliments I've been getting for years and years. And you think shoot, I didn't mean those compliments as evidence that there were no problems in your practice. There really can be some unintended consequences of this feedback sandwich ratio that we create. So I want to suggest that we let go of that predictable sandwich format and instead just have an authentic conversation. Let the evidence guide that conversation. And don't try to produce exactly two compliments per suggestion for improvement. And one way you can know if you're doing the right thing as a human being working with other human beings. Is to ask yourself is this something that I would do outside of work?

Because sometimes we invent bad ideas that are specific to the workplace, we think, well, I'm the boss here. I'm the principal and the assistant principal I'm the instructional leader. And I'm supposed to give people feedback including compliments and suggestions. And we end up doing that in ways that would seem very strange in any other context. And in fact, they're strange in the context that we're working in. We just don't realize it because we've kind of set up this expectation that it has to be this way. So ask yourself, would you use the feedback sandwich on someone in your personal life? Would you use it on your spouse or how would you feel if your spouse used it on you?

And to think of a personal example I'm responsible for loading the dishwasher in our house. I do all the dishes and I think I do it just fine. I don't have any particular goals for improvement. I think I'm just doing great. It's not really something I'm worried about. And that's true for a lot of areas of practice for any given teacher. There are a lot of things that they think they're just fine on. It's not their focus, but how would I feel one day if my wife came up and said to me, Justin you really do a great job of loading the forks in the dishwasher. The forks just always get clean. They never clunk together and make an unpleasant noise. They just always come out sparkling clean. So I just wanna compliment you on the great job you do loading the forks in the dishwasher. One thing that I've been concerned about lately is just that the bowls aren't really getting clean. I don't know if they're stacked on top of each other or they're too close together but what do you think about spreading the bowls out more so that they get more clean? Would that be something that you would want to try?

Okay, well, and Justin last but not least I just wanna mention, I really think you're doing a great job loading the spoons in the dishwasher. They're kind of like the bowls where they can nest together too closely but you really do a good job of spacing them out. So thanks for coming in today. I'm really glad we had a chance to talk. Now, if my wife had a conversation like that with me I would think, okay, what is going on here? Is there a hidden camera? Am I being pranked? Is this gonna be on TV? This is weird. It would feel weird if someone in your personal life used that artificial feedback sandwich format on you. It would be much more authentic if the person would have a conversation, be nice, be pleasant, get into that conversation a bit. They could still give that praise and still talk about those areas for improvement.

But without that artificial structure and especially if your spouse or someone else in your personal life started to use that artificial structure every single time it would start to feel really strange, wouldn't it? So I wanna challenge you to let go of that artificial feedback sandwich structure and allow your conversations to be more authentic. So grab your journal real quick here. And let's reflect on this a bit. First, think about a time when you received feedback that felt inauthentic. Maybe it was like my dishwasher feedback story that I just made up. What made it feel that way? Think back on your own experience when have you received feedback that felt inauthentic?

And then second think about a time that you received feedback that really did feel authentic. where maybe someone told you something that was hard to hear but that you needed to hear and they didn't do it in an inauthentic or strange feeling way. They did it in a way that really got through to you. What made it authentic? What made that feedback conversation get through to you think about some examples from your own life, whether at work or in your personal life, and when you've done that you're ready to move on to the next section.

The 3 Participants in Every Evidence-Driven Conversation

Let's talk now about who's involved in a feedback conversation, right? When we're talking with a teacher one-on-one, we have observed or we have looked at some form of evidence about the teacher's practice and we're there to talk about the teacher's practice and hopefully improve that practice. It's tempting to think that the number of parties in the conversation is simply two, right. There's the instructional leader, there is the teacher, isn't that it?

I want to argue that there is actually a third participant. Of course, there is the teacher, there is the instructional leader, but there is also a set of expectations, a set of shared expectations that I call an instructional framework. And we're going to spend all of module four talking about instructional frameworks. But for now, I wanted to introduce that instructional framework as a participant in your feedback conversations with individual teachers.

So if we think about it as something of a diagram, what we're talking about is the evidence and the parties that are talking about that evidence of practice, whether we're talking about an observation, a video, a teacher-created artifact, a teacher-curated artifact, or maybe we're looking at some student work, whatever we're talking about we're talking about it with the teacher, and we're talking about it with the framework or with the set of shared expectations.

So let's look briefly now at each of those three roles. It is the teacher's role in that conversation, not to passively receive feedback, not to simply accept compliments and suggestions, and justify their own decisions and promise to do better in the future, as can sometimes happen with the feedback sandwich, but it's truly the teacher's job to own the outcome. If we are talking about teacher practice, teacher practice is something that the teacher owns. I, as an instructional leader, cannot own the teacher's practice because, ultimately, moving forward, it's going to be the teacher's professional judgment, the teacher's decisions that determine what happens with student learning.

And it's the purpose of this conversation to shape that professional judgment, which again, is something that the teacher owns. In order to participate effectively in this conversation, the teacher has to be willing to examine the evidence honestly, and to be able to hear maybe things they were surprised by, to be able to hear maybe things they didn't want to hear from the instructional leader, to honestly convey what they need to know in terms of kind of where their own practice was so they can make some decisions about it.

I'll never forget when I was a new teacher, my principal, I had a wonderful principal and she was doing an observation of a science lesson that I was teaching to my middle school students. And I had to really force myself to examine the evidence honestly, when she said, "Justin, at one point, you know, "we're a couple minutes into the lesson "and you told the students not to stick their magnets "on the electrical outlets," which you know, was pretty important for safety. And I said, "Oh yeah, as soon as I saw them doing that, "I knew I had to say something "'cause it's a huge safety issue." And she said, "Well, Justin, "how long do you think they were doing that "before you noticed and said something about it?" And I said, "No time at all, "I immediately noticed and did something about it." And she said, "No, it was about seven minutes." And I had to examine that evidence honestly, right. And of course, trust plays a big role there.

But if we want teachers to examine that evidence honestly, they really have to own their own professional growth. That's a critical ingredient in a feedback conversation. For the leader's role, what are some of the factors that we need to consider for our own participation in these conversations? Well, one of the most important things that we do as leaders is present the evidence. We may actually be collecting the evidence just as my principal was timing how long it was before I said something about the magnets on the electrical outlets. We've got to actually be able to make that evidence available to the teacher so that we have something to talk about.

So documentation is part of that and kind of framing it and bringing it to the teacher's attention. And then it's not enough to simply present the evidence, we actually have to strive to develop what I call the insider's view of the teacher's practice and really seek to understand what's going on in that teacher's head, what's going on in their practice, and what they're striving to accomplish in the lesson. If we don't strive to develop that whole iceberg view, we're going to end up focusing on things that aren't really at the heart of practice and that aren't really even worth our time talking about. So we've really got to get at that insider's view of practice.

What was the teacher trying to accomplish here? How did that go and where do we want to go next in terms of making things even better? If our goal is to simply provide a feedback sandwich, then it's okay that we miss those substantive elements. We talked earlier in this module about how the feedback sandwich is an artificial structure with a compliment, a suggestion, and then another compliment. And once we've filled those three slots, we feel like our job is done. That is not a practice-changing conversation.

To really change teacher practice, we've got to get at the heart of it, we've got to get at the teacher thinking and decision-making because as Charlotte Danielson says, "This is cognitive work "and improving it involves and requires cognition." Now, a very important factor in that cognition is the language we use to think in, right? We think in particular language, we think with particular vocabulary, and having shared vocabulary is critical for shared sense-making, for shared understandings of what we're doing, what we're talking about, what happened with the lesson, what could have gone differently. We've got to have shared language and shared understandings in the format of a framework.

So that format, that framework plays a really critical role by being a third-party, right? You notice there's never a three-way tug of war? Like that's not really something that exists as a metaphor, but I feel like the tug of war metaphor is pervasive in feedback conversations, even if we don't state it as a goal, it really is how a lot of these conversations operate, especially the ones that we feel like kind of don't go very well. There's an adversarial nature to feedback conversations that I think is inherent in the way we set them up if we're not careful. So let's say it's your goal as an instructional leader to help the teacher identify something that they want to improve.

That goal stands in direct contrast to the teacher's goal of looking competent, right? Of course the teacher probably wants to improve, but a much more immediate and pressing goal for the teacher is to be satisfactory, right? To not be unsatisfactory, to not be seen as incompetent. And those diametrically opposed goals can lead us into some very difficult and unnecessarily awkward feedback conversations, because we are not allowing the third-party in that conversation to do its job.

When we don't allow the framework, the third-party to be the standard of excellence, to be the vocabulary, to be the rubric by which we judge practice and examine evidence, then we place

ourselves as instructional leaders in a role that we should not occupy. We should not be the standard, we should not own the standard for professional practice. It should exist outside of ourselves and it should exist outside of the teacher as a third-party, a neutral third-party that can serve as the arbiter and as the standard of effective practice. So the framework's role is really critical here, and that's why we're going to talk so much about frameworks and how to develop them in module four. They really are the vocabulary, but they're not just words, they're not just terms, they're actually expectations that are aligned, that are arranged.

So for example, Charlotte Danielson's framework for teaching is a four level rubric that's broken into domains and components with very specific descriptions so that when you see practice, you can look at that rubric, you can look at that framework and figure out what level of performance fits the evidence that you're seeing. Those qualitative descriptions that clearly distinguish between levels of performance allow the framework to do the heavy lifting, they allow the framework to be the bad guy. So that if practice is poor, you don't have to be the one to say, "You know what? 'I didn't like that today, I thought it was crummy.'" That's not your job when the framework has a seat at the table.

You are able to point to the evidence and point to the framework and ask, "Where do you think we are? 'What level of performance does this evidence align with?'" The framework gets to be the bad guy and you get to be a conversation partner, a thought partner, a supporter, and a planner with the teacher to identify those next steps for improvement. And if you're using a well-designed rubric, like the Danielson framework, the rubric itself creates the next step, right? It creates a road-map for growth, because if someone is at a level two, all you have to do to figure out what do we need to do next is look at level three and level four. Where does this teacher's practice need to go?

It is probably spelled out if we're using a high quality rubric. So we want that rubric to be shared, we want it to be something that we're all invested in, that we all believe in and trust as an arbiter to describe and judge what good practice looks like. And we want people to internalize that over time, right? Ultimately we want people to do the right thing and to use the best practices because they've internalized them, but until they get to that point, we want to establish those expectations as shared expectations, right?

We don't want people to just look to their mentor teacher for what to do. We want to have a shared organizational set of expectations at the school or district level that provide that standard and serve as that third-party in the conversation, because chances are good that a majority of your staff is in that pre-professional stage and this is really where you have the biggest opportunity to establish shared expectations. For you to have an influence on people's own kind of internal locus of control. If they're looking to that sense of shared expectations already, you can influence what those shared expectations are much more than you can influence what a mentor teacher says or what somebody on the internet says, in an article that a teacher's reading, or what that teacher's own professional judgment is.

This is our big opportunity to give the framework, to give the shared expectations, a seat at the table in those feedback conversations. And it's important that we articulate these clearly, because so often our shared expectations have never been made explicit. They're only implicit, they are implied, they're in the back of our minds, they color everything that comes up in the conversation, they are the vocabulary that we use, but often we use that vocabulary without ever defining it and without ever putting it in writing and saying, "This is how we do things, this is what the expectation

is. "This is what good looks like, "this is what great looks like." If we're never explicit about it, it's going to be very hard to use those shared expectations in the way that we can if we have them in writing.

So again, we'll talk much more about that in module four, but for now, go ahead and pull out your journal and reflect with me for a moment. In your school, what tacit expectations are teachers working from right now that have never been stated outright? Teachers believe that they are supposed to do X, or if they do X, they're doing a great job, but it's never actually been stated outright. What tacit expectations do you see teachers working from? And then second, what expectations do you have that you've never actually put into writing?

Maybe you've said things that were based on those tacit expectations, but you've never really articulated, this is what I expect you to do, or this is what I believe a best practice looks like. Search your own feedback that you've given recently, and ask yourself what were some of the expectations that I really need to make more clear and state outright so that we can have better feedback conversations? When you've done that in your journal, you're ready to move on to the next section.

Structured Cycles of 1:1 Conversations

Let's talk now about why it's so critical to have structured cycles of one-on-one conversations with teachers, whether you are physically able to get into classrooms or not. And of course, if you are able to get into classrooms, absolutely go right ahead, continue getting into classrooms. We recommend getting into classrooms three times a day, every day, so that you establish a consistent roughly two week rotation of getting around to every teacher that you supervise.

But if you can't get into classrooms, if for some reason you're unable to, perhaps your district is all virtual or perhaps you're quarantined, or maybe you're stuck at home for a while, or maybe you have teachers who are out for quarantine. If it's not possible to get into a teacher's classroom, whether it's just one teacher or everyone, substitute one to one phone conversations instead. But what we don't want to do in these cycles is be too casual about this. It is absolutely essential that these cycles of conversations be structured. They must be intentional because what's happening right now is that we're losing a lot of the casual and informal and incidental interactions that provide us with information and that allow us to sustain our relationships.

On campus, you run into people, you see people here and there and they share a little things with you. That happens naturally. But when it doesn't happen, when it can't happen, because we're not there in person to interact casually, then we have to be very deliberate and very intentional about how we make up for those deficits in terms of both relationships and decisional information. So we have got to make sure that we are engaged in a continuous cycle of one-on-one conversations, whether those are observation and feedback conversations, or just phone calls to keep up the communication. And in those conversations, whatever type we're able to have at the moment, we will no doubt touch on both instructional and non-instructional matters.

We'll sometimes talk about logistics and supplies and sanitation and all of the nuts and bolts that we need to deal with as part of operating a school. And sometimes we'll talk about practice. It's going to vary. We're gonna touch on a variety of both instructional and operational issues. And that's fine. It has to be that way because it's our job as instructional leaders to address both. It does not work to say, "Well, I am only an instructional leader "so all that operational stuff, "I just don't need to worry about." No, if you recall our definition from module one, instructional leadership is the practice of making and implementing operational and improvement decisions in the service of student learning.

They are deeply integrated and we need respect that integration and make sure that it's reflected in our practice of one-on-one conversations with teachers. And we're setting this up as a cycle, not just as a thing you try to do, not just as a practice, but as a deliberate cycle. And here's what I mean by cycle. I mean that over and over and over again, throughout the school year, you are specifically setting aside time to check in with each teacher. Visiting their classroom if you can, or calling them on the phone if you can't visit their classroom. And a cycle means something very specific here, it means you talk with everyone. It means you don't skip anyone and say, "Oh, they weren't here today "so we'll just get them next time around. "We'll catch up with them in a couple of weeks." No, you don't skip anyone.

You make sure that you check in with every single person, every single time, which requires a great deal of intentionality. It requires that you keep track. It requires that you keep a list and I'll share

some tips with you on how to do that in just a moment. But you keep track, you keep a list, you work through your list in a specific order and you keep that same order every cycle so you don't skip anyone. And you just repeat throughout the year.

Every year at the principal center, we hear back from leaders who have been consistent about that over the course of the entire school year. And as a result, have visited more than 500 classrooms in a year. Now this year, many of those visits may not be, many of those interactions may not actually be classroom visits. They may be phone conversations. And that is absolutely fine. I guarantee, if you commit to this process of one-on-one cycles of conversations, then looking back, it will be incredibly rewarding.

You will have justified every moment you spend in those conversations with teachers. So see this as a longterm commitment, see this as something that needs to be deliberate and structured. And one thing you can do to set yourself up for success is give yourself a little bit of a pattern. Say, "Okay, I'm going to start with this grade level "and work my way up "or first I'm going to visit this department, "make sure I get to everybody in that department, "and then I'm going to move on to this other team "or department."

It doesn't really matter what order you visit people in, but it does matter that you get consistent about it and that more or less you stick with that same order in every cycle so that you're not visiting some people back to back over and over and giving other people weeks and weeks and weeks where they don't see you. You want to be consistent about this because here's the temptation that we face. If we don't have a consistent cycle of instructional leadership interactions with our teachers, what will happen is that we will avoid people who are difficult to catch because of their schedule.

Maybe they're only on campus one day a week or maybe their schedule moves around and it's just difficult to find them. I remember it was always difficult for me to catch up with our instrumental music teacher who was itinerant and only worked in our school on Fridays or Friday mornings. It was a very narrow window of time when I could even find this particular teacher. And those patterns make it difficult to intentionally get around to people. But if we are intentional, then we can very easily solve some of those problems.

If I know I've got to talk I've got to talk to the music teacher on Friday morning, I can make it happen. I just have to be deliberate about it. We also tend to avoid people who are just far from the office. And this one is so simple. It's almost embarrassing to admit, but we all do this. We visit the teachers who are at the top of the stairs or the teachers who are right across from the main office who are easy for us to get to. And we avoid people who are far away, way down in the portables or on the far side of campus. We've got to be really deliberate to make sure that that doesn't distort our visits.

We also tend to avoid people who are not doing well because it's more work to observe them. It's more challenging to figure out, what do I do? How do I prioritize with this particular person who's struggling with so many things? And of course, we avoid people who want to be avoided. We're tempted to leave people alone if they're unpleasant, but we've got to get over that. And we've got to be intentional about not skipping them, because if we're not intentional, we will over engage with everybody else and leave aside that first group of teachers. So what are we tempted to pay more attention to? Who are the people that we're tempted to over visit and over engage with?

Well, if it's easy to reach someone, we're more likely to spend disproportionately too much time with them and not enough time with other people. If they are just always available, they're right there, they're convenient, their classroom's nearby or they always pick up the phone, if they are high performing, if they're always doing great, there's never anything big to work on, you ever have to write a letter of reprimand or an improvement plan when you observe this person, if they're nice, if they're pleasant, that makes a big emotional difference in our personal motivation to visit those individuals. But that is not what this is about.

We need to set aside all of those characteristics because really the only two things that matter here are relationships and decisional information. We need to visit people, we need to check in with people, talk to them on the phone to maintain relationships and to gather information so that we can do our jobs effectively. It doesn't matter how far away the classroom is. I still have the same need to get information and to sustain the relationship. And we might even argue that when things are not going well, it's even more critical. However, I am not going to suggest that you over visit the people who are struggling and under visit the people who are fine.

So I recommend that you visit everyone equally, maintain a consistent cycle and get around to everyone on equal frequency. So what you gotta do is keep track. You can use a staff roster, you can use a stack of note cards, which I'll provide to you if you would like, and you can use our Repertoire app, which is available to you. So if you wanna use the note cards, I recommend that everyone do this because it is just such a foolproof system and you can get your office staff to help you. You can get your admin team to kind of cheer each other on using these note cards. And the physical reminder is a huge part of people's success with the note cards. You simply write out one note card per teacher.

You can use our PDF template at PrincipalCenter.com/notecards-pdf and write out the teacher schedule. So you know, "Okay, first period, "they're teaching this, "second period is their prep, "or they go to recess at this time "and they have lunch at that time." So if you know when they'll be available, that eliminates a lot of those challenges of people being out of the classroom and you just kind of not being able to find them. Write out the schedule, have your office staff help you with that so that you have every single person's schedule at your fingertips.

And as kind of a tip for these one-on-one phone calls, when we can't get into classrooms, simply write "Call" down at the bottom, you can even put their phone number on there, if you would like, as a subject so that when you know you can't get into the classroom, you can just call that person at that number and you can log the date and time of your call or your visit right on the note card. Every day, what you do with these note cards, you may have heard me talk about this in other settings, you take three note cards off the top of your stack, you go and visit those people or call them on the phone. And when you have done that, you put those note cards on the bottom of the stack. And then the next day, you repeat. You take the first three note cards off the top, contact those people, go visit them, whatever you need to do, and then put the note cards on the bottom of the stack.

If you can't get to someone, leave their note card on the top of the stack and try again tomorrow. This is especially important when people are quarantined, when people are out of the building, when they're impossible to get to for some reason, leave them on top of the stack, you may get to them a day late, but you won't skip them entirely. And that is crucial. All right. So use the note cards even if you are also using our Repertoire app. So our Repertoire app will keep track of who

you have visited and who you've not visited using the next up button. It will look back on your past entries that you've saved and say, "Hey, it's been two weeks since you visited Mary. "You've seen everybody else in the meantime. "Now it's time to circle back to Mary." And then you can go and see Mary. And of course, if you are using the note cards to tell you that, you can simply search for that teacher's name, you can say, "Okay, I need to go see Mary, "which Mary? There it is." And then you'll have the right person pulled up in Repertoire.

What I recommend that you do when you are doing phone calls in Repertoire is still mark that interaction as feedback, because that's going to tell Repertoire that that person counted in your rotation. Now, you can also record things in Repertoire as just an email if you have kind of a one-off thing that you're not including in this cycle, in that case, you could say, "This is just an email." But if it's a phone call that you're doing because you're not able to get into classrooms in person, still market as feedback so that it counts in your rotation and Repertoire will keep track of who you need to visit next based on the date of everyone's last observation that's recorded in Repertoire.

So if you're not set up or if you need help with that, please reach out. We're happy to get your staff roster imported as well as any other documents that would be helpful in terms of feedback language. Send us an email at info@PrincipalCenter.com with your staff roster and we'll get you set up right away. I also want to encourage you to get your note cards set up so that you can visit everyone on a consistent two-week rotation, not skip anyone and keep track day by day so that you're always focused on that next interaction with the right person. So now let's do some planning.

Pull out your journal and I'd like you to respond to these two questions. First, how will I group teachers as I plan my next cycle of visits? Are you going to visit people by team, by grade level, by department? Perhaps you're going to visit people based on where they are on campus, what floor they're on or what building they're in, figure out a system that's going to work for you so that you can efficiently visit everyone on campus when you're on campus. Then of course, if you are making phone calls, it doesn't matter so much where people are physically, but do something that makes sense for you so that you won't skip anyone, and so that you can get some momentum as you reach out to your staff.

Second, I want you to reflect on how you're going to keep track of your visits. Make a specific plan for how you will keep track. I recommend that you use the note cards, but of course, you could also use a staff roster and you may want to get set up with our Repertoire app. So make your plan, update your journal. And when you've done that, you're ready to move on to the next section.

Agendas for 1:1 Cycles of Conversations With Teachers

Let's talk now about developing specific agendas for upcoming cycles of one-on-one conversations with teachers. It's not enough to be intentional about who you're going to visit, it's also essential to be intentional about what you are going to talk about. Now, if you're visiting classrooms in person, it works to just show up. You can simply show up and pay attention, and notice what's going on, and have a feedback conversation based on what you see.

But if you pick up the phone and call people, because you're not able to get into their classrooms, if you have a phone conversation with someone, you're going to find that these conversations can quickly get off track if you don't have an agenda. So what we're talking about in this section is how to develop an agenda for an upcoming cycle of phone calls, especially for when you cannot get into classrooms and need to just talk with people, to stay connected, and to gather decisional information.

And I wanna reiterate once more that this is absolutely at the heart of instructional leadership, even if we're not getting into classrooms and talking about practice, even if we're just picking up the phone and talking about a set of agenda items that we've determined matter. This is absolutely the work of instructional leadership because instructional leadership is all about making and implementing operational and improvement decisions in the service of student learning. And that means we need information about things that may not necessarily be instruction, but that matter for our students. So here's how to factor those in to your call agendas.

To develop an agenda for an upcoming cycle of one-on-one conversations with teachers, you want to ask yourself four questions. First of all, what is my purpose for this cycle? The purpose can be very simple. It can be something as simply as breaking the ice or connecting, but you do need to identify your purpose.

Second, think about what information that you need to convey. Obviously we can convey a lot of information over email, we can make announcements, we can mass broadcast certain types of information, but there may be certain types of information that you want to share one-on-one. You just have to kind of decide based on what's going on in your school and how much time you have, whether there is something that just needs to be an individual conversation.

Third, what information do you need to gather? Again, obviously people can email you anytime and they can request a meeting, but these cycles of conversations are all about you being intentional. So if you know you need to ask each teacher individually, a very important question to get information from them, make sure that you put that question on your agenda.

And then fourth, what specific questions are you going to ask?

And three types of questions that you may want to ask are connection questions, reaction questions, and input questions. So let's think first about purpose. You may want to differentiate the purpose based on where you are in the year, and based on how many of these conversations you've already had. For your very first cycle, it's likely that the purpose will be very simple, right? You're probably not going to start with something especially heavy, your goal will likely be just to get

started, to break the ice, to have that first, kind of awkward conversation.

Maybe people are not used to an in-depth conversation on the phone with their administrator. So break the ice. In your first cycle, that may be your only purpose, and that's totally fine. Beyond that, you want to focus your attention more on sustainability and on consistency. So in the second cycle, your main purpose may be just to get going, to build that momentum, to keep moving, to go a little bit beyond breaking the ice, and to really start to get deeper in those conversations and talk a little bit longer, get more information, do a better job of updating those, you know, maintaining those relationships.

And then in your third cycle and beyond, that's where you can really start to dial in to your specific goals for improvement, for helping teachers make better decisions, and for getting better information to help you make decisions as a leader. So whatever is going on in your world that you need to talk with teachers about, bake that in to the purpose for your cycle of conversation. In your first cycle, again, this might be a pretty simple, some other ideas for, kind of elaborating on that purpose for your first cycle. You may want to also think about how you're sending the message to your staff, that this is something you're going to be doing more. Like simply doing this the first time will send the message that you're going to be reaching out more, that you're going to be connecting more, and that teachers should expect to hear from you.

Don't make some big announcement though. Don't say, hey, from now on, I'm gonna do this whole big thing, and it's gonna be really consistent, and you're gonna love it, it's gonna be great. Don't do that, just get started and send the message by doing what you said to yourself that you were going to do, and get over that awkwardness, and just break the ice, and get going. You wanna keep this easy, you wanna keep this low stress for your first cycle. For your second cycle, the message you're sending really here in your second cycle is that you're following through, right?

You don't have to make a big announcement, hey, I did this once, now I'm going to do it a hundred more times. Just do it again. Just follow through, be consistent, and show people that, you know, if your intention was to talk to them by phone every two weeks, if you can't get into classrooms, then do it, right? Don't make a big promise, just get in the groove, and keep on going. So most of what we're talking about here with purpose really starts to kick in in the third cycle. You want to really start to be intentional about figuring out what information you need, what information you need to make decisions for the school, but also what information you need about individuals as you move into your third cycle and beyond.

For example, you may want to get a sense of how teachers are doing, what's their mental health situation, what's their physical health like. What's the level of student engagement looking like in their classroom? How are they feeling about student learning? What are their students struggling with? Which students are struggling? We may need to pull together a list of students of concern and have some professionals put their heads together about how we can better reach those students. You may have a goal of providing feedback in those conversations.

Even if you can't physically get into classrooms, there are other forms of evidence available to you that you can talk about on the phone. And you may want to also just give yourself the opportunity to provide general feedback as you normally do when you get into classrooms. So think carefully through your purpose, especially for the third cycle and beyond. If you've already gotten your first two cycles going and you didn't really have much of a purpose or agenda, that's fine. Because

again, the goal was just to get started. Even in your third cycle and beyond, you don't have to have an ultra-specific purpose. Your goal can just be general improvement, but you want to come up with specific questions or else your phone calls will just not go very well if you don't have a specific set of questions to ask.

And the three types of questions that I want to encourage you to think through as you prepare your agenda for your next cycle of calls are first, connection, second, reaction, and third, input types of questions. Connection questions are all about just maintaining the relationship and checking up on people. Reaction questions are about getting feedback from people, and input questions are getting their thoughts on upcoming decisions.

So let's look at some examples of each. To connect with each staff member, when you talk to them, you probably want to have a first question that you ask to just get them talking, to break the ice, to initiate the call, and get them to start sharing, and start doing the talking. You can ask simple things like, how are you doing? What's working for you right now? Or what are you most proud of from the past week or two? Or you could ask more of, you know, a family question, a loved one's question. How's your, how's your family doing? How's your dog doing? You know, how's your sister doing? Depending on what you know about the person and who matters to them, you want to connect on that relational level.

So beyond connection questions, we have reaction questions. And this is where we really start to get into the informational needs that we have as leaders. You wanna get feedback on things that have already happened and decisions that have already been made and are being implemented right now. So how's the new dismissal procedure working for you? The new app that we got for silent dismissal, how's that working for you? You know, get their input on that. What are your thoughts on this proposal to change our homework grading policy that we've been talking about?

You know, get private input, that one-on-one honest feedback on upcoming decisions. We can also get input on things to stop doing, right? Would you miss it if we eliminated the continuous improvement committee? Can we suspend that for a year? What do you think about that? Like, these are things that, of course you can talk about as a whole staff, but that you may get better information on if you talk about them one-on-one. Similarly with input questions, hey, what do you think we should do for this upcoming?

You know, we always do an assembly this time of year, it's not safe to do assemblies right now, what are some ideas you have on alternate ways to approach that? Or we're trying to decide between this math app and that math app, what do you think we should, you know, what do you think we should do based on your experience? Or what do you think we need to do on our upcoming professional development day? How do we need to use that time? There are always tons of issues that you need staff input on, and this is a great chance to get people's direct and honest feedback on them. So put that into your agenda for your next cycle of classroom visits.

Now it's time to pull out your journal and actually commit to yourself on paper. So respond in your journal, in your current or next cycle of one-on-one conversations with teachers, and let's assume that you can't just do general feedback. We're thinking about times when you actually have to pick up the phone and talk to people rather than visit their classroom and observe. First, what's your purpose? What do you wanna accomplish in this cycle?

Second, what information do you need to convey? What do you need to pass on to teachers? Third, what information do you need to gather? And fourth, what specific questions will you ask to achieve those earlier three purposes? When you've responded to those prompts in your journal, you're ready to move on to the next section.

3 Roles Instructional Leaders Play in Feedback Conversations

There are three primary roles that instructional leaders can play in feedback conversations with teachers. And I find that perhaps because of training and perhaps because of our own preferences, often we default to a coaching role, and certainly instructional coaching is a big aspect of instructional leadership, but there are two other roles that we need to keep in mind, because the situation may call upon us to play one of these two roles. And if we choose the wrong role in a feedback conversation with a teacher, we miss the opportunity that's before us to actually change that teacher's practice.

So let's jump right in the three roles that we're going to talk about in this section are the boss, the coach, and the leader. And the first is probably the one that we prefer the least, right? We don't love to play the boss, but sometimes we need to. If we have someone who knows what they need to do, and simply is not doing it, or perhaps there has been a coaching conversation, the person has made a commitment to change their practice, and now they just need to follow through. And further coaching will not replace the fact, or will not substitute for the fact that they need to just go ahead and do what they have already decided to do through those previous coaching conversations.

So sometimes we have to be the heavy. And if you are in an administrative role, sometimes your coaches will be looking to you to go in, and have those accountability conversations, and say, "You know what, we've talked about this, you know what to do. We've built the skills we've provided the resources. Now you have to actually act differently. You have to change your practice." So this is what we call the Boss role. And the type of feedback that we're delivering in the boss role is directive feedback. We're saying, "You need to do this. We've talked about this, you understand it. Now it is the time for action." And this is truly where we hold people accountable. If you have ever tried to skip this role, if you've tried to say, "Well, I'm just going to be a coach. I wanna be collaborative, I don't want to be the heavy."

Eventually you're going to run into someone, and you've probably experienced this, who loves the coaching relationship, but does not love the boss role. Because the coaching role, the coaching mindset that we approach that conversation with allows the other person to escape accountability. So if you have someone who's doing that, if you find that they are avoiding accountability, it may be time to play the coach role. And you say, "You know what? This is not advice at this point. This is a directive. This is what I need to see you doing." Do not be afraid to put on that boss hat when you need to, and get people to actually follow through on a change.

The second role that we're going to look at today is of course, the Coach role. And this is where we want to be in most of our feedback conversations with most teachers, most of the time, right? 80% of the time. I would prefer to be coach and to be a collaborator with the teacher to have an evidence-based conversation about the teacher's practice, where they do most of the thinking. As Charlotte Danielson says, "Teaching is intellectual work, and it's work that we cannot do for teachers." You know, the work of reflecting on practice and improving practice is mostly teachers work. So most of the time we want to be wearing that coaching hat, and giving reflective feedback, right? Saying, "Here's what I saw. Tell me about what, you know, what you thought about that, and what you might want to do differently." We have, you know, different coaching ap-

proaches that we use to get the teacher thinking and talking, but our goal there is not for ourselves to be the source of the ideas for change, right? We wanna be a partner and we want most of the decisions and the thinking to really come from the teacher when we're wearing the coaching hat. And certainly a lot of what we're talking about in this program is around some of those coaching conversations.

But there's one more role that we need to consider. And that's especially relevant in cycles of one-to-one conversations that don't involve feedback on direct observation, right? So we've been talking about how important it is when you can't get into classrooms to pick up the phone, and call people so that you stay in touch with them, so you maintain that relationship, and so that they continue to provide you with the information you need to do your job. In that kind of situation, we may be especially called upon to play the third role, which also applies to face-to-face feedback conversations, but especially when you're not able to observe. And that is the Leader role. In the leader role you're not trying to necessarily change the teacher.

You're trying to listen and be a, you know, make that a two-way street. So we call this type of feedback in the leader role reflexive feedback. And the idea of reflexivity is the idea that this goes both directions. It's a two-way street. So the, you know, I might give feedback to the teacher. The teacher may also give feedback to me, especially about the conditions under which they're working. Let me give an example of reflexive feedback.

One time I was talking with our primary teachers about a new curriculum that they had been asked to use. It was a district requirement. The materials had been provided, the training had been provided, and yet making time in the day for it was proving to be a real struggle. And I was there in that conversation to problem solve, and to help teachers figure out how they could fit this conversation in. But what we kept coming back to was that recess was just at a terrible time for this particular team. It was just right in the middle of an instructional block. It really disrupted the flow, and made it difficult for them to get through the lessons in the new curriculum. And of course they could have tried harder.

They could have divided it up differently. They could have been creative, but I realized in that conversation, and they weren't complaining, they were just telling me what was really going on, I realized that the best solution that would best support teachers in succeeding with that curriculum was to actually move their recess by a few minutes. So what we ended up doing was partnering that team with a different grade level that they didn't normally go to recess with, this was kindergarten. And we moved their recess so that they could go out with fifth grade, and they happened to have buddy classes. So the teachers said, "Hey, that actually works really well because they will love to be out there with their buddies. And, you know, the kids play differently, they're not going to get in each other's ways." So it actually turned out to be a great solution that didn't really require the teachers to change anything.

It required the circumstances to change. And that is often one of our biggest contributions that we can make as instructional leaders. As you may recall, our definition of instructional leadership at the principal center is the practice of making operational, and improvement decisions in the service of student learning, both making and implementing those decisions. So the leader role is where we truly have an opportunity to do that in a way that supports teachers, and allows the conditions to be more supportive of the work that teachers are doing.

So again, in a lot of our one-to-one conversations where we're not observing, that's the primary role that we're going to play, we may, of course also need to play the coach role when we are engaging in some sort of a feedback about practice that we observed. And sometimes we need to play the boss role, especially when we're following up on something that we've talked about previously.

When you are engaging in these feedback conversations, it's essential of course, to ask good questions, and later in this module, we'll look at some questions that you can use to refer to specific evidence. And in the next module, we'll be looking at instructional frameworks. And we'll talk about how to pull instructional frameworks into those conversations. So that you're using a common vocabulary. You're taking advantage of that vocabulary. And you're building everyone's familiarity with that vocabulary. And as you'll see, as we get into some specific questions, the goal of these conversations really is to get the other person talking.

We've talked a little bit about preparing your agenda and being sure to ask certain things, you know, convey certain information, gathered certain information, build that relationship. But for the most part in these conversations, we want the other person to be doing the talking. So with that, you can move to your journal, and answer these two reflective questions. First, which teachers, in your school, most often put you in the position of needing to play the boss, and give directive feedback to change behavior?

And second, in what situations like the example I gave, have you played the leader, and changed something other than the teacher? Maybe change the circumstances under which teachers were working. Do some reflection on those questions in your journal, and when you've done that, you're ready to move on to the next section.

Using Evidence-Based Conversations to Reveal the Whole Iceberg

Let's talk now about how to use evidence-based questions to reveal the whole iceberg of practice. As you may recall in module one, we talked about practice as an iceberg. When we go into a classroom and we see a teacher teaching what we're seeing is not everything. What we're seeing is just the tip of the iceberg. And the 90% that's hidden beneath the surface is where a lot of the most important aspects of teaching especially when it comes to opportunities for improvement can be found.

So if we want to know what's going on behind the scenes we can't rely on direct observation because we simply cannot see the thinking, the professional knowledge, the decision-making that's going on behind the scenes. But we do have the opportunity to get insight into what's going on behind the scenes in a teacher's practice by engaging in conversation. And specifically by engaging in evidence-based conversations that get the teacher talking.

Because when a teacher is talking we have direct insight into how they're thinking. And that's where we have the biggest opportunity to improve professional judgment and improve professional practice. But we have to be careful here because if we ask questions that are too direct we're going to distort the process and we're going to lead people along and simply get them to tell us what we want to hear. And this is a natural rational response on the part of teachers. If we're telling them in no uncertain terms what we want to hear, of course, it makes sense for people to try to tell us what we want to hear. And that of course is going to undermine the goals of these conversations.

So imagine for a moment that you're sitting in an airport and imagine that you're traveling again you're headed somewhere, and you're just sitting in the terminal waiting for your flight and you strike up a conversation with someone and they, you mentioned your your hometown and they say no way, that's where I'm from. And you say really we're thousands of miles from there that's remarkable. And they start to, to just kind of really get enthusiastic and really kind of identify with you and resonate with you. And the more you share, the more they seem to have in common with, oh, that's my favorite sports team too. And you start to get suspicious. So imagine you're in the airport.

This person is really trying to strike up a rapport with you. And just everything you say, oh that's, they go right along with them and say, I'm from there. That's my favorite football team. And you start to wonder, am I being conned? Is this person about to set me up for something, what's going on here? We see this in the movies all the time The con job, if you go on and on and on and share all this information, "Hey I went to West Side High School. I don't remember you, did we grow up in the same town? Did you go to East Side High School? Oh yeah, I went to East Side High School. That must be why we don't know each other." The more information you feed the other person in the conversation, the less you're going to be able to tell what they're really thinking.

Now I don't believe that teachers are setting out to con us in our feedback conversations. I don't believe there's any kind of ill intent, but when we create a situation where we tell people what we want to hear and then set them up to feed back to us what we want to hear. It should be no surprise that we're going to miss the opportunity to really see what people are thinking. So I want to give you a different way to approach these conversations and avoid the danger of asking about

teacher practice too directly. Because the more we talk and the more we tell people what we want to hear, the more we're just going to get parroted back to us, the buzzwords.

The expectations, the criteria, and the less we're really going to get a sense of how the teacher's thinking is really working. So rather than looking at our criteria and saying, hey, I noticed in a two A, it says, the teacher does this and that and the other thing, do you do that? And the teacher say, yes, of course I do that. Yeah absolutely, thank you for asking. Instead, if we start with what we notice we start with the evidence and say I noticed such and such happened in the lesson. Talk to me about how you use what you taught yesterday to inform today's planning or talk to me about how you used formative assessment in this particular lesson. When we start with evidence and then we ask a question that prompts the teacher to elaborate on a particular aspect of their practice.

There's no opportunity to fake it. There's no opportunity to say, Oh yeah, I'm from your hometown. I went to the other high school and that's my favorite team. There's no opportunity for people to feed back to us what we've already told them we want to hear. So what I'm going to share with you now are some questions that are evidence-based but still open-ended in order to get at teacher thinking, in order to get the teacher talking so that you gain the insight you need into their thinking and practice. And you can download these on our website. I'll give you the link in just a moment. But I want to walk through them very quickly and give you a sense of the structure. So if you like these questions as is you can use each of them right out of the box and just plug in your own evidence for your situation. But you can also see them as a model there's no need to follow them strictly if you have a sense of how that structure works.

So in each of these 10 questions, you'll see that they start with evidence, and then they ask an open-ended question that gets the teacher talking about that evidence. So we're starting at a certain point we're identifying the evidence and then we're sending the teacher in a certain direction but they are the one who runs with that question. And does the talking and does the thinking.

So the first question is context. So if we are able to observe directly we can use these questions to ask about specific evidence that we saw. And we'll talk elsewhere in this program about using other forms of evidence, besides direct observation.

If we're looking at an artifact, if we're looking at a learning management system or student work, we can look at some other ways to talk about those. But if we're able to observe directly we can start by just sharing what we notice. And then asking a question perhaps about the context. Talk to me about how this fits within the lesson or unit.

We could also ask about the teacher's perception. Here's what I saw students doing. What were you thinking was happening at that time?

Interpretation at one point in the lesson it seemed like such and such was happening. What was your take? So we're getting the teacher to talk here. We're getting the teacher to elaborate so that we can gain a window into the teacher's thinking.

Number four, decision. Tell me about when you decided to X what went into that choice?

Number five, comparison. I noticed that students were doing such and such. How did that compare with what you had expected to happen when you planned the lesson?

Number six, antecedents were asking what happened outside of the portion of the lesson that we observed. I noticed that such and such. Could you tell me about what led up to that perhaps in an earlier lesson.

Number seven, adjustment I saw that such and such occurred. What did you think of that? And what do you plan to do tomorrow based on that?

Number eight, intuition. I noticed that such and such. How did you feel about how that went? What was your intuitive take?

Number nine, alignment. I noticed that such and such occurred. What links do you see in that situation to our instructional framework? What language or expectations does that bring up for you?

And number 10, impact. What effect did you think it had when you such and such?

So those 10 questions are, again, just a model for how you can share specific evidence that you saw from that a portion of the iceberg that's floating above the surface, what you can directly observe. And use that as a window into the portions of teacher practice that are hidden beneath the surface. You can download those questions from PrincipalsCenter.com/10q print out that PDF. Or if you're using our classroom visit note cards you'll find that those questions are already printed on the back for you. Just print that double-sided and you'll have those questions available to you.

Now, these are going to be the most useful when you're able to observe directly. But even if you're not able to observe directly I want to encourage you to use that format of starting with evidence and then asking an open-ended question that sends the teacher in a certain direction to share their thinking and get out of that pattern that we often find ourselves in of telling people what we want to hear and then waiting and listening while they feed it back to us.

And then thinking that something helpful occurred. If you want to change teacher practice you've got to get an authentic window into what teachers are currently thinking and doing. And this is the best way to do that. So pull out your journal, if you will. And the two questions that I wanna challenge you to reflect on and write a little bit about here are.

First, when in a recent conversation, have you asked questions that suggested a correct answer, rather than eliciting the teacher's own thinking? When have you fallen into that trap of telling people what you want to hear? I bet you can find an example in either a feedback conversation or some other kind of conversation where you kind of fed people, the response that you wanted.

And then second, what questions could have helped you get the teacher talking more authentically to reveal the rest of their iceberg of practice? What would have been a better way to start with evidence and then prompt them into discussing and sharing with you where their thinking and practice truly was. When you've done that you're ready to move on to our action challenge for module three.

So here's what I wanna challenge you to do. And you may have done some of these steps already, depending on how much you've already put into motion I really want to challenge you to get specific about this, and to set up a system for keeping track of your feedback conversations.

And if you are able to get into classrooms on a consistent basis do that get into classrooms in person have these feedback conversations face to face, and keep track on your note cards or in your Repertoire App. You can email us, we'll set up your roster and get your framework language imported to Repertoire so you can get going having these conversations and tracking them in the app. But I also wanna challenge you to set up the note cards, because many of our app users say it's really helpful to have the physical note cards in my hand, on my desk so that I remember to get into classrooms and talk with teachers. And certainly if you're not able to physically get into classrooms right now, for whatever reason.

If you're virtual, or if you have people quarantined then absolutely pick up the phone and call instead and just talk. And you won't be able to talk about the evidence in the same way. You may find that you are tending to play the leader role more than the coach or the boss. And that may be exactly what teachers need. So get into classrooms, pick up the phone have those conversations to stay connected with your staff and to get the information you need to do your job effectively. And again, this is not something that we just do casually when we feel like it.

This is something that I want to challenge you to be disciplined and consistent about and set up as a series of cycles where you get around to every classroom or you pick up the phone and talk to every staff member. And I especially want to challenge you to set an agenda for your next cycle of calls. So if you have maybe just kind of checked in with people informally, I want you to actually outline what you're actually going to say on those calls to share information, convey information, to gather information, and to get people's feedback on things and reconnect.

So outline a little agenda for your next cycle of calls and then get started. When you've done that you have completed module three and in our next module we'll talk about instructional frameworks and how a common vocabulary can make your feedback conversations with the teachers far more impactful, and how in that vocabulary is organized into a rubric. It can create a roadmap for growth. Thanks so much for being a part of the virtual instructional leadership challenge. I'm Justin Baeder and I will see you in module four, take care.