

ENGAGING IN COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

The Ontario Leadership Framework, through one of its five Core Leadership Capacities, calls for school leaders to engage in “courageous conversations”.*

In educational leadership development, engaging in courageous conversations is about challenging current practices and fostering improvement and growth through conversation, listening to and acting on feedback, and providing feedback that will lead to improvements in student achievement and well-being. In courageous conversations, whether in the context of performance appraisal, mentoring, or coaching, individuals are encouraged to express their views openly and truthfully, rather than defensively or with the purpose of laying blame. *Integral to courageous conversations is an openness to learn.*

When two or more people converse to deepen understanding or make an informed decision, they are engaging in two types of conversations – dialogue and discussion.

- **Dialogue** is a reflective learning process in which two or more people seek to understand each other’s viewpoints and deeply held assumptions. It is a conversation in which talking and listening by all parties creates a flow of meaning. Out of dialogue emerges a new and shared understanding. Dialogue is a tool for collective exploration of meaning – not a search for the right answer or the best solution.
- **Discussion** is a conversation in which two or more people intend to come to some form of closure – either by making a decision, reaching agreement, or identifying

Questions for Discovering Possibilities

What outcomes do you want? What is the best thing that could happen? If you knew you wouldn't fail, what would you do? What have you observed that has worked for others? What is the area that, if you made an improvement now, would result in the greatest impact on student learning? What is currently impossible to do that, if it were possible, would change everything? What's the most important decision you are facing? What's keeping you from making it?

Questions for Planning the Action

Of all the options, what's the most compelling? What are you trying to make happen in the next three months? What do you need to do first?

Questions for Removing Barriers

Whom or what do you need to include to succeed? How will these actions contribute to achieving your goal? What might prevent you from succeeding? What's missing? What roadblocks do you expect or know about?

Questions for Review and Recap

What are you going to do and by when? What are you taking away from this conversation?

Six Characteristics of Effective Questions

Effective questions are:	They sound like this:	Not like this:
Open ended	Tell me about your teaching experience. What do you think about ...?	Where did you teach? Do you believe in ...?
Invitational	It would be great to hear about... Would you consider ...?	Why on earth would you ...? Why don't you ...?
Specific	How often does she ...? What does it look like when ...?	Does she ... much? What will happen if ...?
Evocative	What might this mean? Let's speculate about ...	What does this mean? What will happen if ...? What'sSt witO ...?
Positively or neutrally biased	What might you learn from ...?	What did you think would happen ...?

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS IN THE APPRAISAL PROCESS: TRANSFORMATIONAL COACHING⁴

-