

Professional Conversations

Every teacher has experienced the beneficial impact of professional conversations about the craft of teaching. And yet, read any policy on CPD, and you'll not find systems, protocols or theory that gives appropriate status to what Charlotte Danielson considers *"an essential technique to promote professional learning among teachers"*. This ViewPoint addresses the yawning gap.



“One of the major messages from Visible Learning is the power of teachers learning from and talking to each other.”

1

— HATTIE, J., 2013, VISIBLE LEARNING FOR TEACHERS, ROUTLEDGE, P.116

Professional Conversations

We say that talk is cheap. It’s certainly natural and occurs spontaneously.

Professional conversation is not quite the same as simple talking — it’s not a chat. It doesn’t come about at its productive best without careful orchestrating. And while it certainly isn’t cheap, to miss the opportunity of developing professional conversations is far more costly.

The sections opposite take you through the major distinctions of professional conversation to help you ensure they take place as often and as productively as you envision for your organisation.

SECTION	TITLE	PAGE
1 TEACHER TALK	Teachers Need To Talk	2
	Problem-Solving Talk	3
	Making Conversations Professional	4
2 TEACHER THINKING	Looking Deeper	5
	Theory of Action	6
	Teachers’ Theories of Action	7
3 TOOLS FOR THINKING	Theory of Action with HOW2s	8
	If > Then Reasoning with HOW2s	9
	HOW2 Theory of Action Lite	10
4 TOOLS FOR TALKING	The Tone for Conversation	11
	Balancing Advocacy and Enquiry	12
	Getting Past Getting Stuck	13
	Questions for Conversation	14
	Preparing for a HOW2 Conversation	15
	Online Conversations	16
	References	17

“Conversations about practice constitute a critical vehicle for professional learning.”

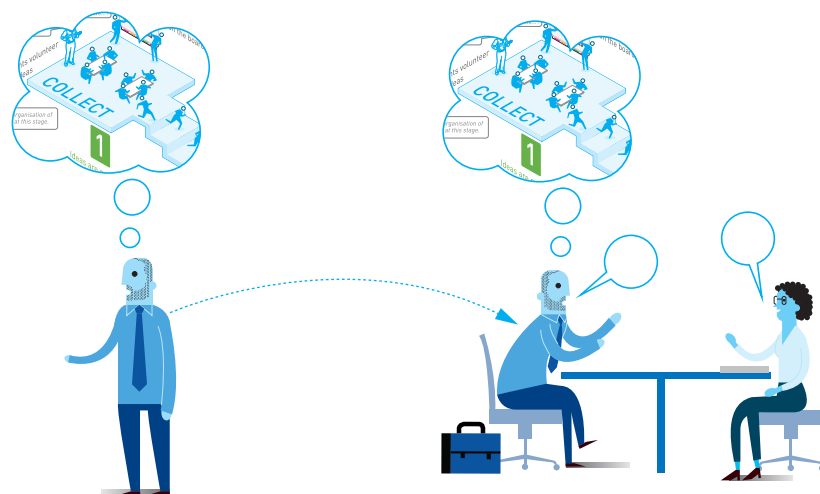
— DANIELSON, C, 2009, TALK ABOUT TEACHING, CORWIN PRESS

2

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Teachers Need to Talk

Teaching is both a practical and a cognitive profession. Sustained improvement can't happen unless both aspects are addressed. That happens through teachers talking and learning together.



IT'S A THINKING PROFESSION

Teaching is not a purely technical job — teachers are not merely skilled labourers of knowledge. As Mary Kennedy of Michigan State University recognises “*thoughts are intertwined with practice, so if we want to better understand practice, we need to also understand the thoughts that guide practice.*”

Which is why quality assurance systems based entirely on teacher performance miss the opportunity for the deeper learning central to transforming practice. Why, then, has there been so little focus on the significance of teacher thinking?

COLLABORATIVE REFLECTION

There is an assumption that professional reflection is a private and individual affair. But because personal reflection doesn't involve others, the opportunity to learn from alternative points of views is lost. Through not coming from a joint enquiry, the personal insights don't easily move beyond the individual teacher.

With the egg box structure of schools and colleges, we can understand why: teachers remain mostly isolated. So while teaching is a thinking profession, it is not yet a sufficiently social one to harness the power of collaborative reflection of practice.

LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

In his seminal book, *Learning Organisations*, Peter Senge asserts that organisations are only as good as the quality of their conversations. It is his view that professional conversation makes every member of the organisation a learner.

As teaching is a thinking profession with thought so intertwined with practice, it's ironic that thinking continues to be the forgotten, yet most important, variable in the education equation. Professional conversation can change this situation by unlocking the power of collaborative enquiry.

“Problem-solving, rather than feedback, yields productive conversations about teaching.”

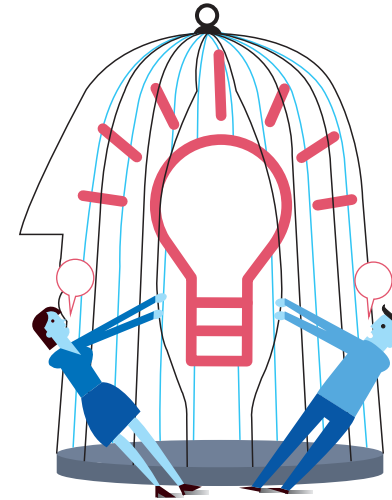
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— DANIELSON, C, 2009, WWW.POWERSHOW.COM/VIEW1/51AFC-ZDC1Z/TALKING_ABOUT_TEACHING_CONVERSATIONS_TO_IMPROVE_PRACTICE_POWERPOINT_PPT_PRESENTATION

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Problem-Solving Talk

Dylan Wiliam reminds us that teachers *“need to modify ideas developed by other teachers to make them work in their own classrooms”*. This problem-solving conversation by teachers produces more learning than any amount of feedback or other forms of *telling* by managers or experts.



THE LIMITATIONS OF FEEDBACK

Feedback, alongside coaching, has attained an unquestioned position as the salvation of professional learning. Maybe it's time we probed this assumption.

Charlotte Danielson, a leading light in professional learning, has already started. She writes that *“If one acknowledges, as one must, the cognitive nature of teaching, then conversations about teaching must be about the cognition.”*

Feedback is singularly lacking in this respect. With what she terms the toxic influence of hierarchy, little is learned by teachers in feedback led by managers.

MORE THAN SHARING BEST PRACTICE

Sharing best practice is another such taken-for-granted strategy. It is grounded in good intentions but contains some flawed concepts.

Simply transmitting information yields poor results. What works in one subject and class may not work in another and, counter-intuitively, may even have a negative impact.

But by engaging in joint enquiry about practice, ideas are explored in depth. In conversation, teachers discover new ways of thinking that can transfer across different contexts — the power of practical thought.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

When teachers work with evidence-based techniques, they adapt them to their classrooms, creating local knowledge. And when they do this with colleagues in joint problem-solving, previously tacit knowledge is brought to the surface.

Influential blogger Alex Quigley recognises this when he writes that *“It is this very knowledge which contextualises research evidence and makes it meaningful”*.

This local know-how is invariably developed when teachers have professional conversations about the problems of their practice.

“Knowledge is created through dialogue or conversations that make presuppositions, ideas, beliefs and feelings explicit and available for exploration.”

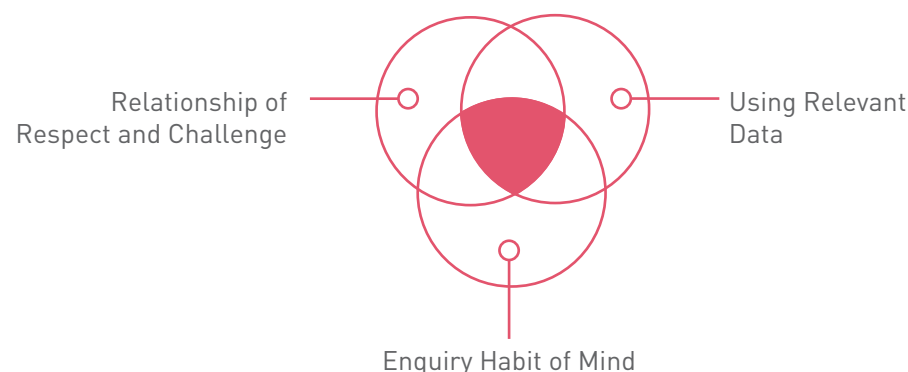
— EARL, L.M. & TIMPERLEY, H., 2009, UNDERSTANDING HOW EVIDENCE AND LEARNING CONVERSATIONS WORK, IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONVERSATIONS, SPRINGER

4

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Making Conversations Professional

What distinguishes a professional conversation is a shared commitment to revealing and unravelling the reasons behind teachers’ practice. No mere *support group talk*, this joint exploration of intent and impact demands honesty, rigour and respect.



Earl, L. M. & Timperley, H (2009)
Professional Learning Conversations, Springer, page 3

BRINGING TO THE SURFACE

As Dylan Wiliam frequently reminds us, teacher knowledge is tacit and rarely articulated. And yet in the face of the challenge, he encourages teachers to share their thinking.

But how to do this without the result being “*just talk*” as Timperley warns? What happens when there are disagreements of points of view? And how do you avoid superficial agreements that lead to inevitable *activity traps* (moving too quickly to action)?

To ensure the conversations remain professional and effective, protocols are needed.

A MODEL FOR TALKING

Helen Timperley has designed a model for professional conversations that balances support and challenge. She believes that true respect for a colleague is as much about challenge as it is about support — indeed, it is a mark of respect for their professionalism.

To achieve this level of relationship, something needs to exist that is higher than the relationship itself. That ‘something’ is a commitment to deep learning that springs from an enquiring habit of mind.

The necessary rigour is provided by references to, and interpretations of, a variety of relevant data.

A CULTURE OF ENQUIRY

A shared commitment to a *big idea*, asserts Charlotte Danielson, ensures there are no judgemental “*gotcha*” moments in the conversation. An explicit culture of enquiry is a *big idea* that elevates conversation beyond the limitations of friendly chat or the confines of managerial monitoring.

Within this explicit context that validates probing questions and joint exploration, teachers feel safe to confront and discard ideas that are found to be lacking in effectiveness. New ways of thinking are discovered that, in turn, are subject to shared scrutiny.

“Like a pane of glass framing and subtly distorting our vision, mental models determine what we see.”

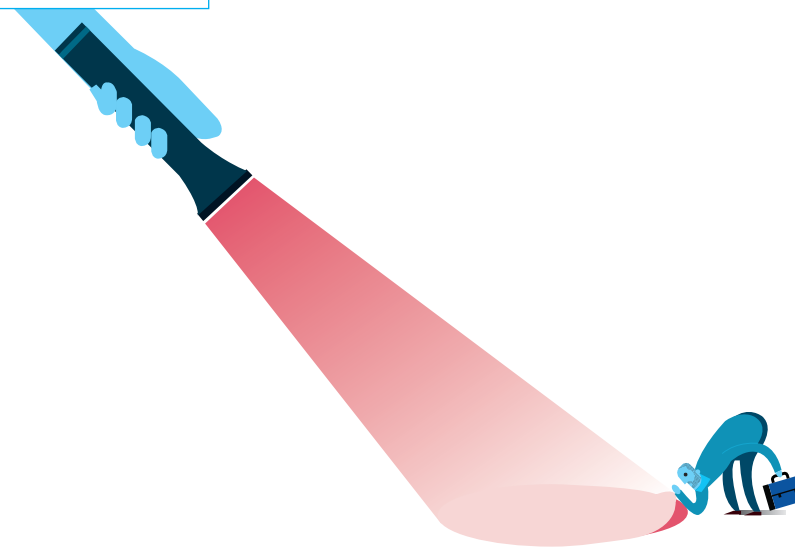
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— SENGE, P., 1994, FIFTH DISCIPLINE FIELDBOOK, NICHOLAS BREARLEY

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Looking Deeper

If we're serious about *sharing best practice*, then we need to look deeper. Expertise is more than the physical execution of skills. It stems from a way of thinking that is neither visible nor obvious. Without access to teachers' mental models, we're left with mere description.



MENTAL MODELS

All humans have mental models — the ideas and assumptions we have about the world in all its manifestations. Psychologists tell us that we act upon these mental models rather than the world itself.

Teachers are no different. They have beliefs and assumptions about teaching that directly and daily shape their classroom practice.

It's for this reason CPD expert Helen Timperley finds that teacher improvement rests as much on work on mental models as it does on developing teaching skills.

EXPERTISE IS SPECIALISED

When novice and experts are compared, we learn that experts have more connected mental models upon which to draw when making decisions.

These richer webs of knowledge, though, don't transfer automatically to all contexts. But when mental models do interact productively with new contexts, a *situated cognition* is said to emerge.

Expertise, then, is situation-specific. So what hopes are there for sharing teachers' expertise beyond a superficial mimicry? How can expertise be exploited so colleagues can absorb and adapt its reasoning?

ANCHORING AND SHARING EXPERTISE

Thoughts need a structure to give them shape and meaning. Without a unifying form, they remain abstract and ineffable. But when written down within a framework of reasoning, they become available for joint exploration and shared understanding.

The reasoning that emerges is the private thinking of a professional, revealing their intent and plans for impact. No mere philosophising, these hitherto hidden hypotheses disclose the practical plans to get from goal to execution. Through their exposure, it keeps the focus firmly on the thinking behind the performance.

“A theory of action connects the actions of teachers with the consequences of their behaviours — the learning and achievements of their students.”

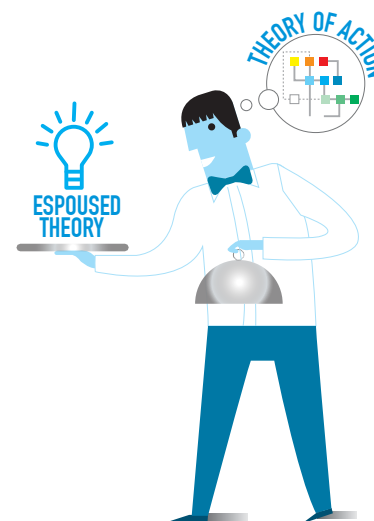
— HOPKINS, D., 2013, EXPLODING THE MYTHS OF SCHOOL REFORM, MCGRAW HILL

6

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Theory of Action

Performance doesn't happen by chance. It's the result of theories of action — frameworks of reasoning that link intention to impact. So to access a teacher's theory of action is to gain a type of cognitive x-ray. Theories of action are like mental models in motion.



TWO TYPES OF THEORY

Chris Argyris recognised that we have two sorts of theories of action. And that we tend only to be aware of one of them: those we like to present publicly. These *espoused theories* are the stories we tell others, and ourselves, about how we would act in certain situations.

Such theories are different to those that really govern our behaviour: our *theories of action*. Until the two are distinguished, there is little chance of any significant improvement. Awareness and honesty are essential for professional reflection on action.

TEACHERS' DECISION-MAKING

A theory of action is constructed in a series of If-Then statements linked by cause and effect reasoning: *if I take this X action, then Y will follow*.

When applied to professional practice, theories of action help teachers explore in conversation the assumptions and decision-making behind their teaching.

Without it, and with only observation feedback, there is little scope for any profound and transferable learning to take place. Theories of action prompt precise and rigorous reflection that change practice.

PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATION

A dialogue framed by a theory of action is highly productive, if maybe a little confronting at first.

It is based on an open approach to learning — not a defensive stance that justifies and withholds. The private reasoning made transparent, deepens the thinking and elevates the conversation professionally.

The emphasis away from the personal to a detached analysis of the reasoning is very practical. It makes expertise available to all. Such conversations identify the gap between the stated and the actual ways teachers act in their classrooms.

“Teachers are creating their own pedagogical principles. These short-range theories help make sense of what is going on and guide further action.”

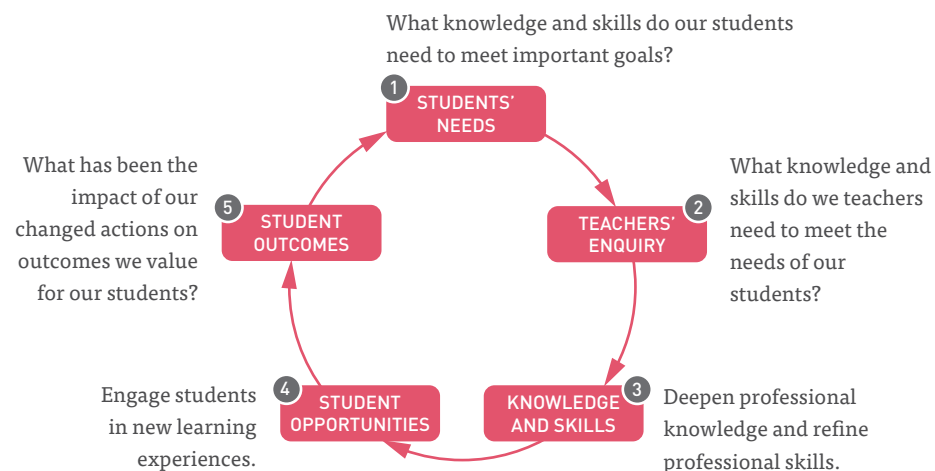
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— SPARKS-LANGER, G.M. & COLTON, A.B. (1991), SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH ON TEACHERS’ REFLECTIVE THINKING, EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, MARACH, 37-44

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Teachers’ Theories of Action

Theories of Action are not new. Teachers have always used them. The trick is to make them explicit. It’s in filling in the blanks with specific, classroom-based thinking, that we get to see the theory behind the action.



Timperley, H. (2011)
Realizing the Power of Professional Learning, OUP, Maidenhead.

MEDICAL ROUNDS

Medical rounds is a practice of open discussion among doctors of each others’ reasoning, subsequent action and results. There are several versions but, on the whole, groups of student doctors, their mentors and practising doctors visit patients together observing and discussing the evidence for diagnosis and possible treatment options.

Throughout, there is an understanding that the focus of attention is on the medical practice and not on the practitioner. As a result the discussion is objective and forensic in its analysis of the thinking behind the action.

INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS

Taking their inspiration from medical rounds, schools in America have replicated, with some adjustments, this process of interrogating their theories of action.

The leaders of this movement state that it hinges on teachers constructing explicit theories of action and to test them against the realities of their work.

In this context, it is important to note that theories of action must be:

- Based on statements of causal relationship (if/then)
- Empirically falsifiable based on evidence gathered
- Open ended and iterative in nature.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF TEACHING

Theories of action promise to resolve, once and for all, the thorny question of whether teaching is a science or an art. It is both.

When teachers choose their techniques from a pool that comes from a global evidence base, we establish its scientific credentials.

And when these teachers test the effectiveness of a selection of these techniques in their individual classrooms, we establish the art of the practitioner. An art because it is individual and tested, through theories of action, on specific and not general contexts.

“We focus a significant amount on getting participants to construct explicit theories of action and to assess these theories against the realities of their work.”

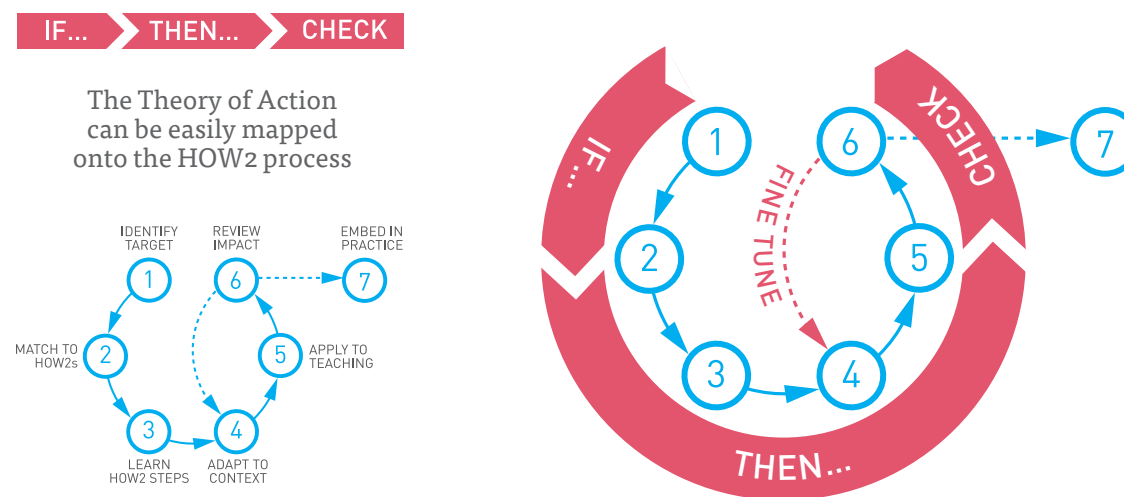
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— CITY, E., ELMORE, R., FIARMON, S. & TEITEL, L. 2011, INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS IN EDUCATION, HARVARD EDUCATION PRESS

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Theory of Action with HOW2s

The theory of action sequence maps very well onto the HOW2 process. This holds no surprises as the HOW2s were designed with this approach to practice.



THE HOW2 PROCESS

HOW2s offer teachers a highly convenient and precise access to what the research has proven to work best in classrooms. They are classroom-ready.

However, as educational leaders are now saying, that in itself, does not guarantee success in every single classroom. Each context — culture, psychology, history — is different. It is in the personalisation of the HOW2s that teachers apply their local knowledge to find their own proof. But that adaptation needs to be based on sound reasoning and captured in order to yield productive discussion and reflection.

IF...THEN REASONING

The core architecture of theories of action are the sequence *If...Then* causal statements.

In the HOW2 Process the first *If...Then* statement concerns the learning needs of the students and the subsequent choice of HOW2 for the lesson.

The next *If...Then* looks at the need for possible adaptations (based on the students profiles) and the consequent choice of changes.

Finally, the *If...Then* of its execution and, if all goes to plan, the desired outcomes.

CHECKING AGAINST REALITY

Of course, the theory of action needs to be tested. Did the careful and logical plan lead to the intended results?

If not, which aspect was faulty and needs work on? Were the assumptions or choice of evidence about the learning needs of the students accurate? And was the choice of the HOW2 the most appropriate? Also, were the adaptations both needed and effective? Finally, there's the question of execution.

Was it a faulty theory or was it poorly executed? Or does it need further refinement and testing again?

“A theory of action is at its core, a simple IF, THEN statement...
Its power lies within the specificity of thought, in the explicit reasoning.”

9

— RASMUSSEN, H.T., WHAT'S A THEORY OF ACTION AND WHY DO WE NEED ONE? [HTTP://WWW.ABEOSCHOOLCHANGE.ORG/BLOG/WHATS-A-THEORY-OF-ACTION-WHY-DO-WE-NEED-ONE/](http://www.abeoschoolchange.org/blog/whats-a-theory-of-action-why-do-we-need-one/)

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

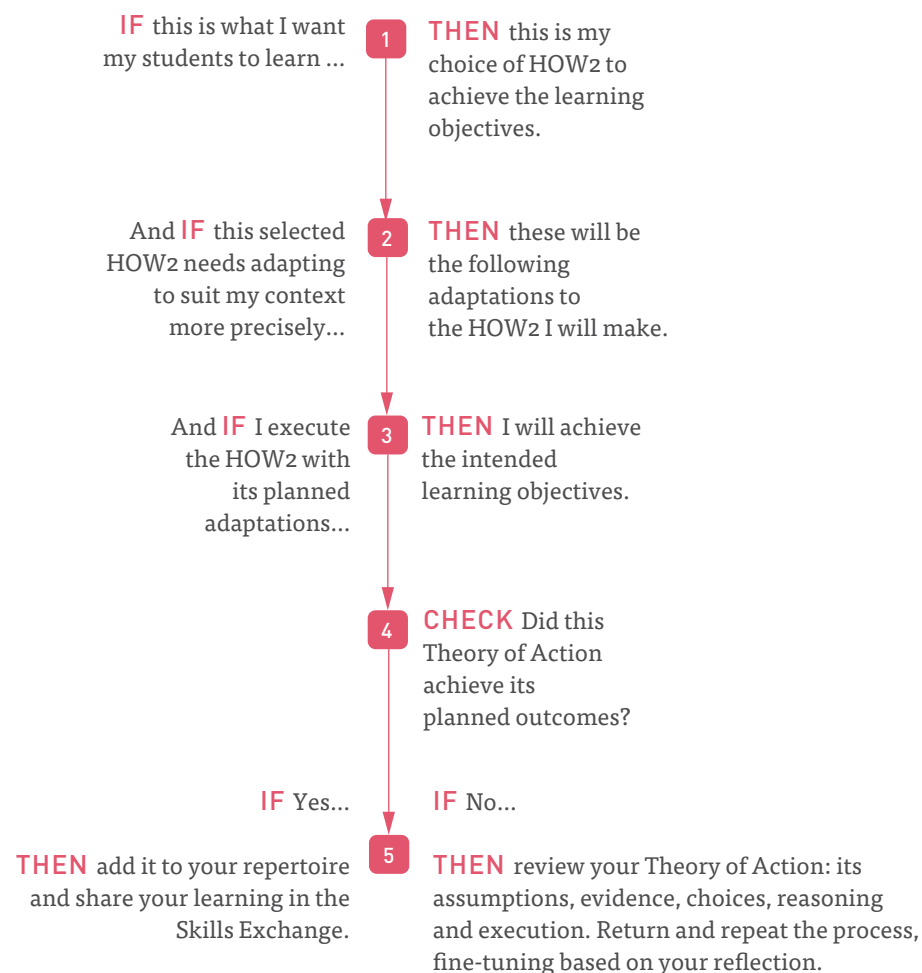
If...Then Reasoning with the HOW2s

By stating a theory of action in If...Then statements, teachers establish a clear route from intention to the goal of impacting student learning. Importantly, the statements are testable and, so, subject to change.

READY FOR CONVERSATION

We've now arrived at a position where the normally tacit and hidden teacher reasoning is made explicit. Being so, it is available for joint explanation and exploration.

The theory of action provides the framework for professional conversations. Classroom-ready HOW2s ensure evidence is applied in real contexts, the reasoning is clear, practical and testable, and the process tilts teachers towards an iterative way of working. This *thinking in circles* is praised by Helen Timperley for its use of feedback loops.



“We ask them to write down their theories of action in simple, descriptive terms. They then discuss those theories of action with their colleagues.”

10

— CITY. E., ELMORE, R., FIARMON, S. & TEITEL, L. 2011, INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS IN EDUCATION, HARVARD EDUCATION PRESS

SECTIONS | 1: TEACHER TALK | 2: TEACHER THINKING | 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING | 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

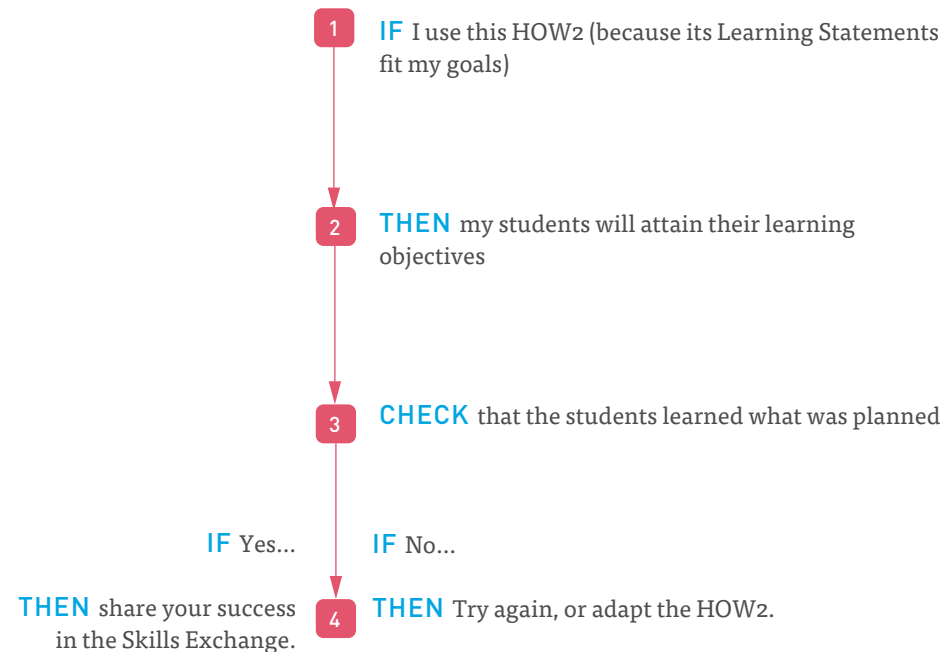
HOW2 Theory of Action Lite

The advantages of a lite version of the theory of action is that it starts teachers off gently. And, however reduced in its steps, it remains testable and ready for adapting.

TOWARDS PRECISION

This lite version will not appear foreign or confronting to teachers. Nor would it seem unreasonable to ask teachers to explain their teaching plans in this way. Indeed with the end of graded lesson observations, it may well become the norm.

It retains the core function of being testable and open to serial adaptation. And it forms the basis for a gradual build to more complex reasoning for the choice of practical steps from initial intention to final impact. Most importantly, its structure is what is needed to start a professional conversation.



“The problems that even the most practical organisations have... can be traced directly to their inability to think and talk together.”

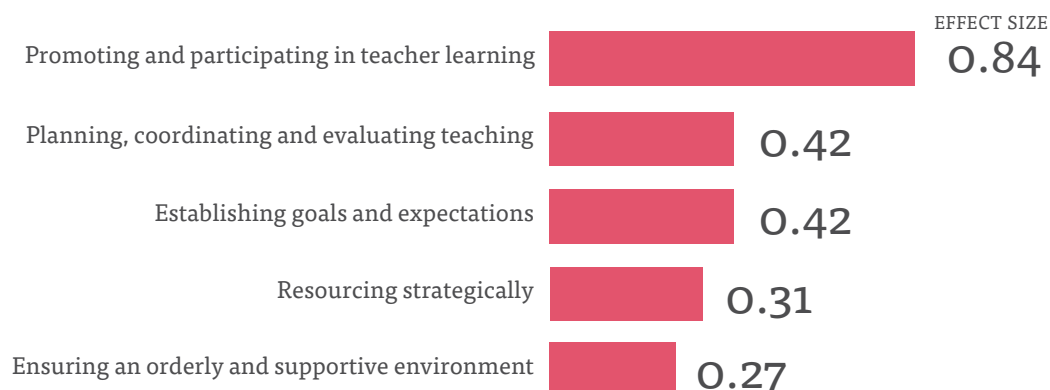
— ISAACS, W. (1999), DIALOGUE AND THE ART OF THINKING TOGETHER, CURRENCY

11

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

The Tone for Conversations

Collaborative problem-solving conversations about practice between teacher and manager won't happen as a matter of course. Openness depends on teachers feeling safe and respected.



Robinson, V.M.J., Lloyd, C. & Rowe, K.J. (2008) The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Type, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5): 635-74

SENSING SAFETY

Professional conversations, as defined here, are no informal chats among colleagues. Nor are they the defensive dodges of formal meetings between teacher and manager.

To talk with the openness necessary for productive reasoning requires teachers to feel safe. The threat of evaluation needs to be absent — a challenge in the face of the systemic tension between the professionalism of the teacher and the authority of the manager. The responsibility to break this impasse lies with managers who must demonstrate their authenticity.

SENIOR MANAGERS' RESPONSIBILITY

As teachers easily detect negative presuppositions, leaders and managers should be acutely aware of the often toxic effect of power. Chris Argyris puts it this way: “Until senior managers become aware of how they reason defensively and the counterproductive consequences that result, there will be little real progress.”

Authority figures, because of their positions, need to lead in creating relationships of trust. As Jim Collin's highly researched book *Good to Great* shows, the best leaders work with humility. Gargantuan and defensive egos do not make great leaders.

THE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The direction and tone of an organisation's culture is in the hands of its leaders and managers. This shift to humility and respect takes skill and practice.

Tim Hurson writes that “When it comes to developing new skills of any kind, the major challenge is generally not learning them but making them stick.”

Managers can change culture by showing deep curiosity about teaching and learning, on a daily basis. As the above study on leadership shows, doing this is by far the most effective thing they can do. It builds rapport and trust.

“Balancing inquiry with advocacy, like many other skills, seems easy — until you try it.”

— ROSS, R., ROBERTS, C & KLEINER, A. (2000), BALANCING ADVOCACY AND INQUIRY, IN SCHOOLS THAT LEARN, NICHOLAS BREALEY, PP219-222

- SECTIONS
- 1: TEACHER TALK
- 2: TEACHER THINKING
- 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING
- 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Balancing Advocacy and Enquiry

Professional conversations shouldn't feel like interrogations. But nor are they mere presentations. They are a subtle interplay of advocacy (the explaining) and enquiry (the asking).

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

In simple terms, a professional conversation about practice involves a teacher laying out their reasoning and encouraging the other to question and challenge it.

Yet to limit it to such a back-and-forth switch from assertion to question, is inadequate. To move the conversation forward for deeper learning, there must be more than just one person finding out about another's views. Both parties need to express their views through learning about the other's.

Here are some ideas for doing this.

PROTOCOLS FOR IMPROVED ADVOCACY	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
<p>State your assumptions and describe the evidence that led to them.</p> <p>Make your reasoning explicit.</p> <p>Encourage others to explore your theory, your assumptions, your evidence.</p> <p>Reveal where you are least clear in your thinking. Rather than making you vulnerable, this defuses the force of advocates who are opposed to you and invites improvement.</p>	<p><i>“Here’s what I think and here’s how I got there.”</i></p> <p><i>“I came to this conclusion because...”</i></p> <p><i>“What do you think about what I just said? Or... Do you see any flaws in my reasoning?”</i></p> <p><i>“Here’s one aspect that you might help me think through...”</i></p>
PROTOCOLS FOR IMPROVED ENQUIRY	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
<p>Gently talk people through their assumptions and find out what evidence they are operating from.</p> <p>Use unaggressive language, particularly with people who are not familiar with these skills.</p> <p>Draw out their reasoning. Find out as much as you can about why they are saying what they're saying.</p> <p>Explain your reasoning for enquiring and how your enquiry relates to your own problems of practice.</p>	<p><i>“What evidence do you have for that statement? Or... What leads you to say that?”</i></p> <p><i>“Can you help me understand your thinking here?”</i> Rather than <i>“What do you mean?”</i> or <i>“What’s your proof?”</i></p> <p><i>“What is the significance of that?” Or... How does this relate to your other concerns?”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m asking you about your assumptions here because...”</i></p>

Ross, R., Roberts, C & Kleiner, A. (2000) Balancing Advocacy and Inquiry, in Schools That Learn, Nicholas Brealey

“As a rule, when things go wrong in human relationships, everyone has contributed in some important way.”

— STONE, D., PATTON, B. & HEEN, S. (2000), DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS, PENGUIN

SECTIONS	1: TEACHER TALK	2: TEACHER THINKING	3: TOOLS FOR THINKING	4: TOOLS FOR TALKING
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Getting Past Getting Stuck

However grand our aspirations for conversations, there are going to be some sticky moments. How they are resolved can further deepen respect.

TOWARDS PRECISION

Although not a negotiation, the difficulties found at some point in professional conversations have similar dynamics at play.

In their seminal book on the topic, Fisher, Ury and Patton offer this advice: *“If the other side has big guns, you do not want to turn a negotiation into a gunfight.”*

Instead of reinforcing one’s point of view, the aim is to move back to the evidence and discover where the interpretation of it comes from. And what the motive behind it is. The phrases and questions opposite help guide you towards this approach to openness.

PROTOCOLS FOR FACING A POINT OF VIEW WITH WHICH YOU DISAGREE	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
Make sure you truly understand the other person’s view.	<i>“If I follow you correctly, you’re saying that...”</i>
Explore, listen and offer your own views in an open way.	Ask <i>“Have you considered...”</i> and then raise your concerns and state what is leading you to have them.
PROTOCOLS FOR WHEN YOU’RE AT AN IMPASSE	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
Embrace the impasse and tease apart the current thinking on both sides.	<i>“What do we both know to be true?” Or... “What do we both sense is true, but have no evidence for yet?”</i>
Look for information that will help people move forward.	<i>“What do we agree on and what do we disagree on?”</i>
Consider the other person’s mental model as a piece of a larger puzzle.	<i>“Are we starting from two very different sets of assumptions here? Where do they come from?”</i>
Don’t let conversation stop with an <i>“agreement to disagree”</i> .	<i>“I don’t understand the assumptions underlying our disagreement.”</i>

Ross, R., Roberts, C & Kleiner, A. (2000) Balancing Advocacy and Inquiry, in Schools That Learn, Nicholas Brealey

“If we ask enough of the right questions, people have their own aha.”

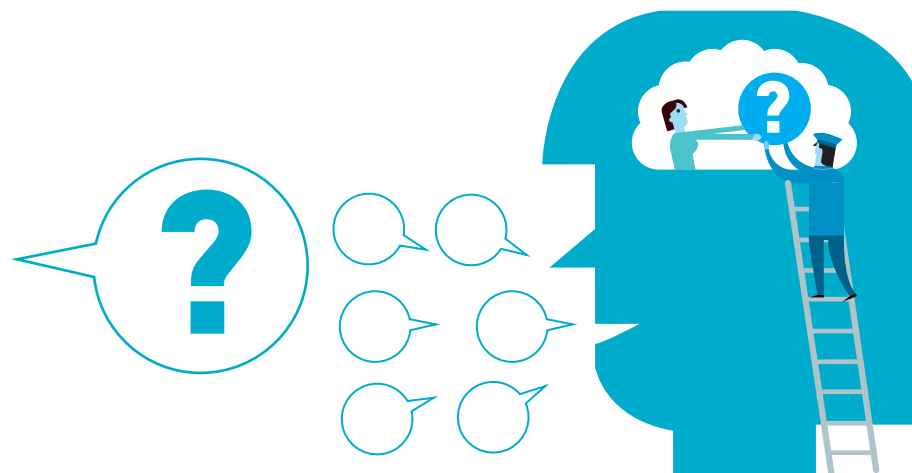
— ROCK, D. (2006), QUIET LEADERSHIP: SIX STEPS TO TRANSFORMING PERFORMANCE AT WORK, COLLINS

14

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Questions for Conversations

Questions can either open up or close down exploratory thinking. To be inviting requires the questioner to show humility towards the challengingly complex task of teaching, and a keen interest in how it is approached.



BODY DYNAMICS

Much has been written about body language that we don't need to repeat. What is far less well known is the impact of body positioning.

While sitting face-to-face is often recommended, it can make the experience feel like a meeting, even an interview. Sitting side-by-side, by contrast, evokes a feeling of collaboration and equality.

Furthermore, by adding a shared visual focus — the Theory of Action and its HOW2 — comments are directed towards them and not each other. This keeps the focus on the reasoning and not the person.

NO SURPRISES

Another characteristic of interviews that should be absent in professional conversations are surprises. As Charlotte Danielson bluntly explains, there should be no “gotcha” moments.

The very questions posed in the conversation should be, pretty much, the same ones the teacher used herself in constructing her theory of action.

That's not to say that the conversation is a set-piece with no spontaneity or exploration. But with this shared platform of questions, the two participants safeguard their trust to explore in more depth.

DEEPEN THE THINKING

In addition to the established skills of open-ended questions, paraphrasing, acknowledging, clarifying and summarising, Danielson offers these approaches.

Plural forms: Asking for “*some possible explanations*” avoids the idea of there being only one correct answer.

Promote analysis: Ask questions that require comparisons between one situation and another.

Invite speculation: Structure questions around the *Would/If* format to prompt hypothetical thinking.

Encourage metacognition: Ask questions about the teacher's thinking not just the events being described.

“By demonstrating respect for the teacher’s perspective...a principal or supervisor can assume a problem-solving rather than an authoritarian approach.”

— DANIELSON, C, 2009, TALK ABOUT TEACHING, CORWIN PRESS

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Preparing for a HOW2 Conversation

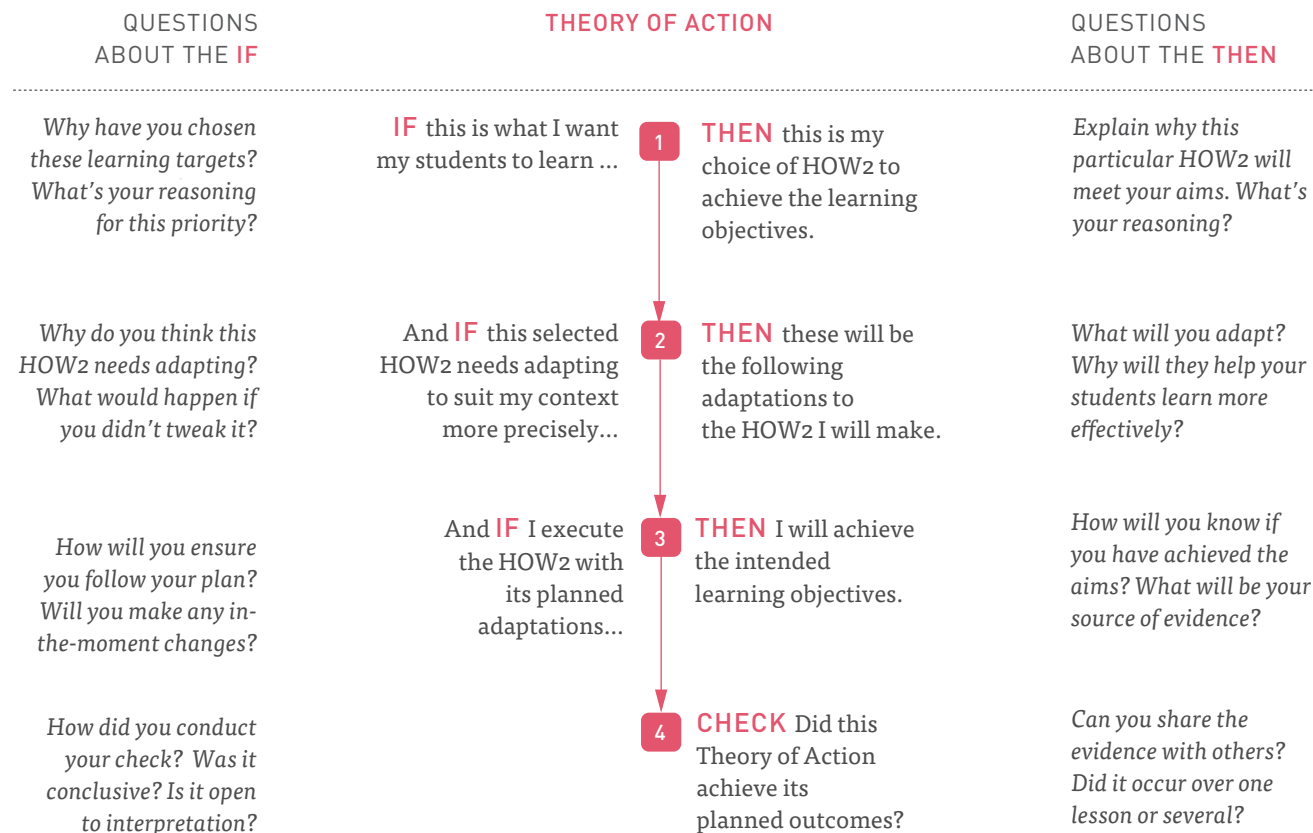
Theories of action are answers to questions teachers pose themselves. When both parties are familiar with the questions, the conversation starts with a firm basis of understanding.

MAKING THE THINKING EXPLICIT

The professional conversation a teacher engages in with a colleague is not a test. It is not a monitoring strategy or an opportunity even to *fix faults*.

It is an invitation to see the classroom from an individual teacher’s point of view. The invitation to the colleague is therefore to learn. Knowing the questions that formed the theory of action and the answers given, helps her gain an insight into the teacher’s way of reasoning.

The drive is to understand the teacher not to evaluate her. Questioning helps gain the insights.



“Professional learning activities do not need to be face to face.”

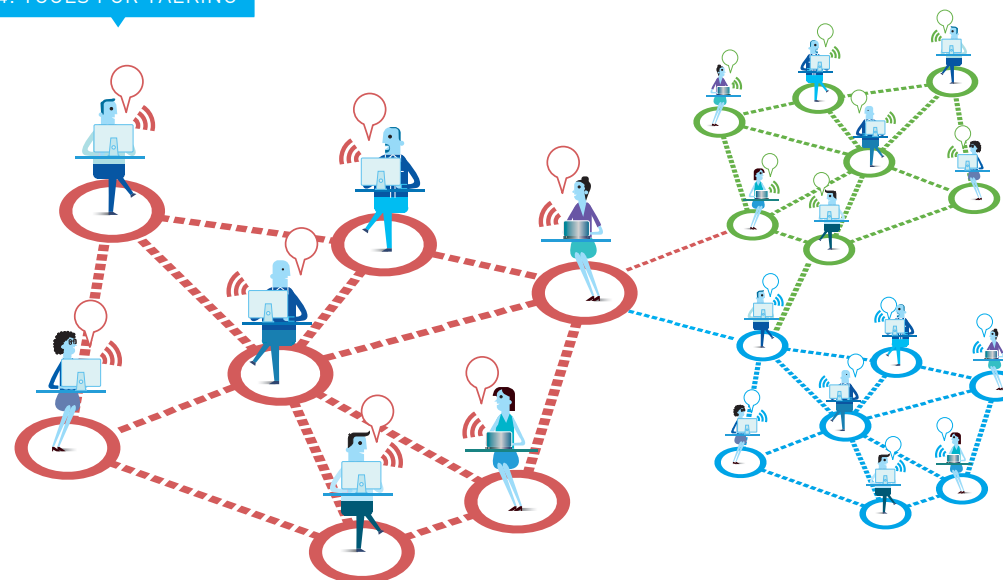
— TIMPERLEY, H. (2011), REALIZING THE POWER OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, OUP

16

SECTIONS 1: TEACHER TALK 2: TEACHER THINKING 3: TOOLS FOR THINKING 4: TOOLS FOR TALKING

Online Conversations

Online solutions liberate teachers from the training room chair and the transmission of information. It opens up a new world of learning directly from fellow teachers — their thoughts intertwined with practice.



LEARNING ONLINE

One-on-one coaching is too expensive to be scaled up. Courses are increasingly viewed as being irrelevant. Teachers' own classroom know-how is belatedly acknowledged. And teachers lead hectic lives.

Put those stresses on professional learning together and you have an urgent need to develop collaborative online learning.

Now location no longer matters. Expertise is available elsewhere when not close by. It's cheaper, faster, more responsive and personalised. Oh, and everything is automatically archived and accessible!

THE SKILLS EXCHANGE

The HOW2 Skills Exchange gives teachers what they need and want. It provides them with contact with each others' classroom expertise when and where they like — at their convenience.

It is an *always-on* platform of shared understanding and exploration. HOW2s present evidence in practical classroom-ready formats that take just minutes to learn.

The Notes can contain teachers' theories of action, full of details of how they planned and executed their HOW2s, ready for online professional conversations.

A CONSTELLATION OF PRACTICE

By uniting teachers across large organisations with commonly understood teaching techniques along with personalised accounts of how they're applied, the Skills Exchange is poised to build not just a community but a constellation of communities of practice.

Sharing thoughts about applied HOW2s within an organisation rapidly multiplies its teaching power. Within larger college organisations, subject-focused users can communicate productively with colleagues from other departments. Soon, these communities will form a larger, global HOW2 constellation of practice.

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