



NOW WE'RE TALKING!

21 Days to High-Performance
Instructional Leadership

Week 3: High-Impact Instructional
Conversations

Our Agenda

- Chapter 11: Going Beyond Data Collection and the Feedback Sandwich
- Chapter 12: Facilitating Evidence-Based Conversations
- Chapter 13: Bringing A Shared Instructional Framework Into the Conversation
- Chapter 14: Developing Skills for High-Impact Conversations
- Chapter 15: Handling the Toughest Conversations

The Plan: 500 Visits a Year

- 3 visits a day, ~10 minutes each
- Brief conversation afterward
- Every teacher every ~2 weeks
- 18 visits per teacher per year
- Consistent rotation
- Cluster by team/department/grade

Our Theme: Conversation

- Authentic, evidence-driven conversation
- Common framework language
- Professionally rewarding conversations



WEEK 3

High-Impact
Instructional Conversations



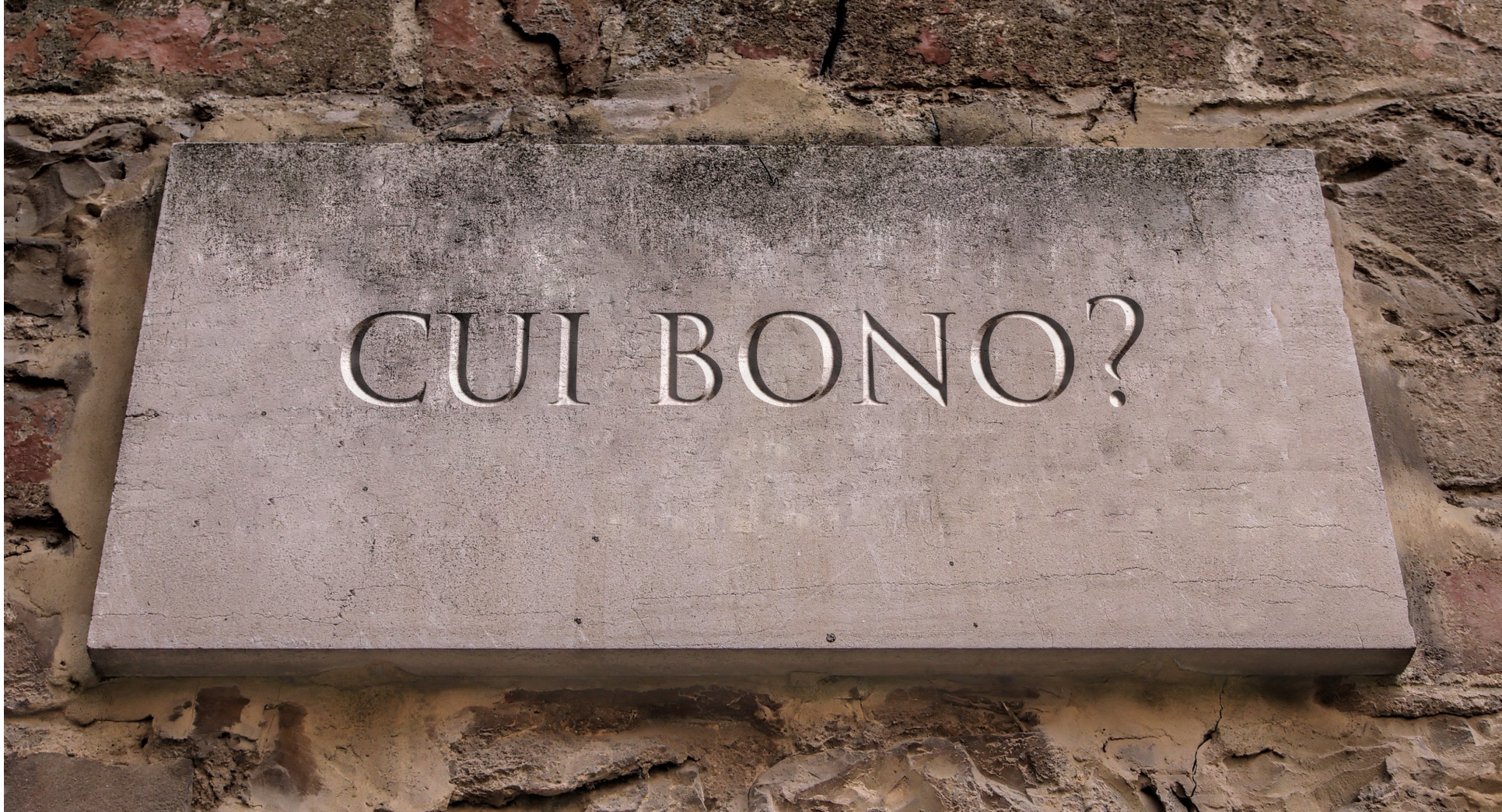
11

Going Beyond Data Collection and the Feedback Sandwich

Chapter 11 Overview

- Why data collection undermines professional conversations
- Why the feedback sandwich undermines professional conversations
- Avoiding feedback unrelated to teachers' goals
- Action Challenge: Breaking the "suggestion" habit

Who Benefits from Walkthroughs?



Who Benefits from Walkthroughs?

- District leaders?
- Yourself?
- Teachers?
- Students?

Difficulties Collecting Data

- We don't visit at random times due to our schedules
- People change their behavior when we arrive
- Our time is expensive

We have a holistic picture of what's going on—not data.



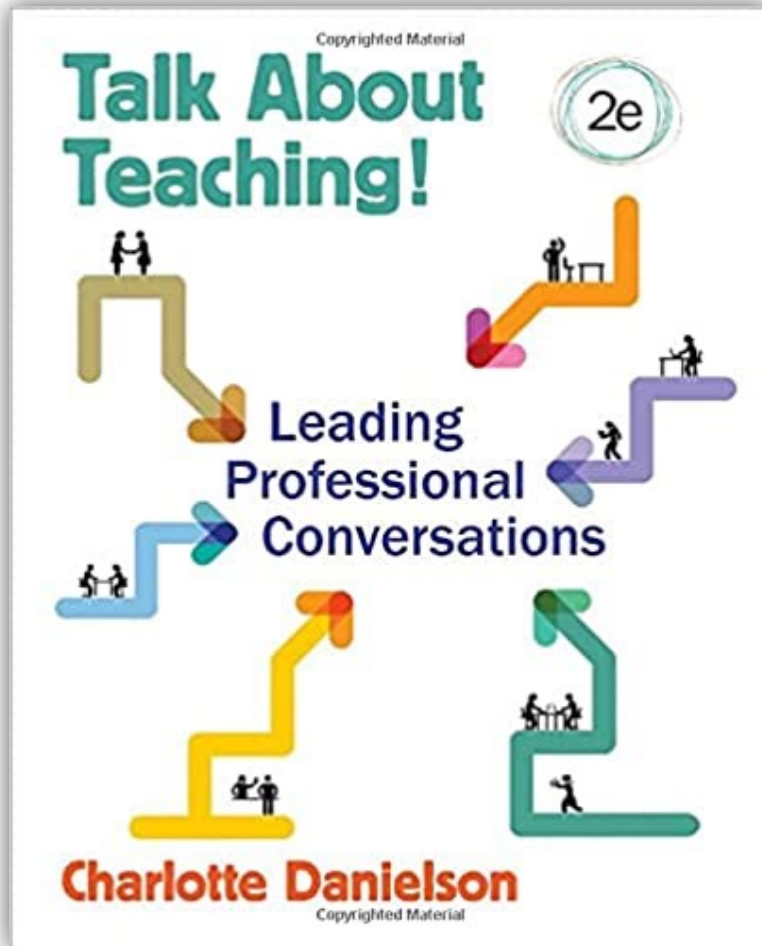
The Narrowing Effect



Instructional Purpose

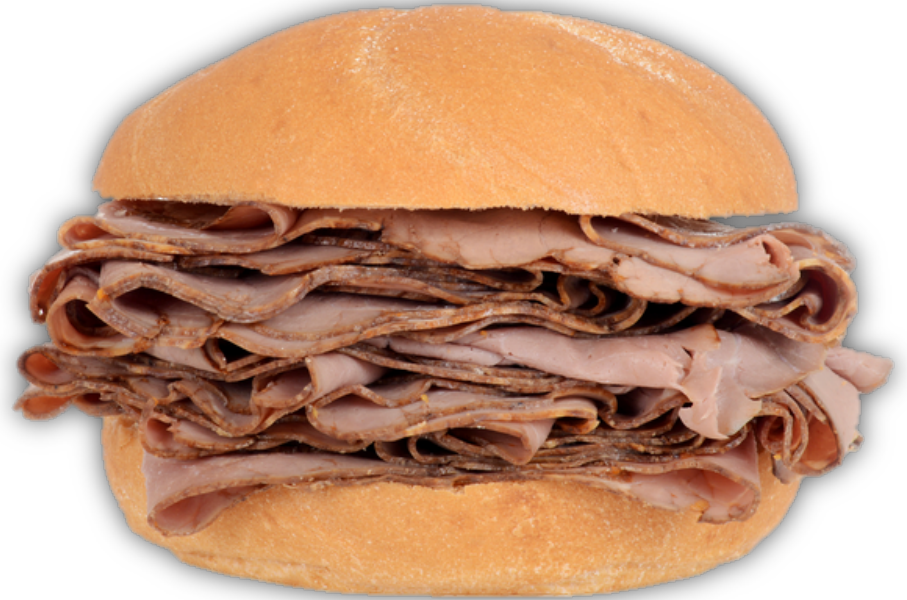


A Sounding Board



The Typical “Feedback Sandwich”

- Compliment:
“Good job ____!”
- Suggestion:
“You should ____.”
- Compliment:
“Good job ____, too!”



Imagine Getting A “Feedback Sandwich” About...

- The outfit you’re wearing
- A meal you’ve cooked for guests
- Your driving

Imagine Getting A “Feedback Sandwich” About...

- The outfit you’re wearing
- A meal you’ve cooked for guests
- Your driving

In our personal lives, we know the “feedback sandwich” is inauthentic.

A background image showing a group of people's hands raised in a circle, suggesting a collaborative discussion or meeting. The image is faded and serves as a backdrop for the text.

Discuss

What's wrong with the feedback sandwich, and why do we keep trying it in education regardless?

Does The Teacher Want This Feedback?



Suggestion: No Suggestions

- Is the teacher receptive to suggestions?
- Am I confident that I have good advice?
- Have we already had a good conversation?
- Has the teacher had a chance to think?





Discuss

**Why is it so hard to break the
“suggestion” habit?**

**What’s appealing about giving
suggestions?**

Chapter 11 Action Challenge

Break the Suggestion Habit:

- Strive to fully notice what the teacher is trying to accomplish
- Engage in open, authentic conversation
- Think about the teacher as a learner, able to make self-directed improvement decisions

Chapter 11 Highlights

- Feedback conversations allow us to serve as a professional sounding board for teachers
- We know more about teachers, students, and instruction when we regularly visit all classrooms
- Students are the main beneficiaries, and teachers the most direct beneficiaries, when we visit classrooms.
- District stakeholders who want data should not be the main beneficiaries of our classroom visits.
- Decisional information, not data, should be the output.

Chapter 11 Highlights

- Walkthroughs for data collection are expensive, unscientific, and distort the observer's attention.
- Rating or scoring single observations is misguided—we evaluate practice overall, not single lessons.
- If you need district-level data, partner with a university to have researchers collect data. Principals are too busy and unable to follow good sampling protocols.
- The “feedback sandwich” is an artificial structure that provides an inauthentic fixed ratio of two compliments to one suggestion.
- We often lack the context we need to give suggestions or evaluate the effectiveness of a lesson.
- Feedback must be based on the teacher's goals for the lesson, not a vision of the “perfect lesson.”



12

Facilitating Evidence-Based Conversations

Chapter 12 Overview

- Ask evidence-based questions
- Ask genuine questions
- Ground conversations in specific evidence
- Understand the teacher's goals
- Seek context and withhold judgment
- Evaluate practice, not lessons
- Action challenge: refer to evidence

The Battle of Opinions



Evidence



Evidence-Driven Questions

Name	
Period/Subject	Date



10 Questions for Better Feedback On Teaching

1. **Context:** I noticed that you []...could you talk to me about how that fits within this lesson or unit?
2. **Perception:** Here's what I saw students []...what were you thinking was happening at that time?
3. **Interpretation:** At one point in the lesson, it seemed like [] ...What was your take?
4. **Decision:** Tell me about when you [] ...what went into that choice?
5. **Comparison:** I noticed that students [] ...how did that compare with what you had expected to happen when you planned the lesson?
6. **Antecedent:** I noticed that [] ...could you tell me about what led up to that, perhaps in an earlier lesson?
7. **Adjustment:** I saw that [] ...what did you think of that, and what do you plan to do tomorrow?
8. **Intuition:** I noticed that [] ...how did you feel about how that went?
9. **Alignment:** I noticed that [] ...what links do you see to our instructional framework?
10. **Impact:** What effect did you think it had when you [] ?

Genuine Questions

Avoid:

- Didactic questions
- Leading questions
- Single correct answer
- Questions to which you think you already know the answer

Do:

- Ask genuine questions
- Remain open
- Question assumptions
- State your thoughts directly

Open-Ended Questions



Evidence, Cycle by Cycle

- Cycle 1: No written notes or feedback
- Cycle 2: Verbal “noticings”
- Cycle 3+: Low-inference notes

Minimizing Teacher Anxiety

- Explain why you're going to take notes
- Keep your notes descriptive—no feedback or evaluation in writing
- Give a copy to the teacher right away
- Email > handwritten for legibility + ease of sharing

Announcing Notetaking

Hi everyone,

It has been a pleasure to visit classrooms over the past few weeks, and as our feedback conversations are getting more in-depth, I'm finding it helpful to be able to talk more specifically about the great things taking place in your classrooms.

For this reason, you may see me start to jot down notes as I visit. I will share these notes with you right away, so you have a copy and so we're on the same page when we talk. This will give you a chance to fill in additional context and help me notice anything I might have missed or misinterpreted.

Thanks! —Justin

Announcing Notetaking

- Do not say notes are “non-evaluative”
- Do not promise not to keep them to yourself
- Keep it casual & low-key

Seek Context & Withhold Judgment

- The teacher's goals are the basis for determining whether the lesson was successful or not
- We need more context than the lesson itself
- Evaluate overall practice, not single lessons
- Focus on conversation, not evaluation, in the short term

Chapter 12 Highlights

- Feedback conversations must be grounded in evidence of what took place in the classroom, or else they're just philosophizing.
- Ask open-response questions that refer to specific evidence, to get the teacher talking.
- If you already know the answer or are looking for a specific "correct" answer, don't ask it.
- The teacher's goals should be the main criterion for success.
- You need more context; don't evaluate prematurely.

Chapter 12 Highlights

- Avoid leading or didactic questions—state suggestions plainly, or avoid them altogether.
- Remain open to the possibility that your initial judgments are wrong—seek further perspective and context.
- Take detailed notes in cycle 3 and beyond, and share them with the teacher right away. The more legible, the better.
- Avoid putting judgment or suggestions in your written feedback—stick to low-inference notes.
- Your judgments may not be wrong, but they are likely premature. Give yourself time to understand the teacher's goals and thinking.

Chapter 12 Highlights

- Seek context and withhold judgment; improving teaching requires improving cognition, not compliance.
- Evaluate practice overall, not a specific lesson.
- Short visits are not true “sampling” in a scientific sense.
- Visit frequently over time to gain a truer picture.

Chapter 12 Action Challenge

Refer to Evidence:

- Cite specific things you saw and heard, but don't use the term *evidence* with teachers
- Send the message that you're paying attention to understand and learn, not judge
- Use the 10 questions to have evidence-based conversations and gain insight into teacher thinking
- Start taking written notes in cycle 3+ and give them to the teacher right away



13

Bringing a Shared Instructional Framework Into the Conversation

The Battle of Opinions



Conflicting Incentives

Leader:

- Demonstrate confidence
- Identify shortcomings

Teacher:

- Demonstrate competence
- Get it over with

Framework as Arbiter



Sources of Framework Language

- Teacher evaluation standards/criteria
- State education priority documents
- District/division/office initiatives
- Curricular programs
- Specific trainings/PD programs
- School—developed
- Team/department-developed

A background image showing a group of people's hands raised in a circle, suggesting a collaborative discussion or meeting. The image is faded and serves as a backdrop for the text.

Discuss

What other sources of shared language are relevant in your school?

How might you use this language in your feedback conversations?

Quality, Not Quantity

- Avoid checklists
- Avoid frequency-oriented rubrics
- Focus on the *nature* of the practice
- Identify appropriate circumstances for using a particular practice
- Keep "grain size" in mind

Accepting Non-Closure



Dealing with Disagreements

- Share your notes/evidence
- Remain open/humble
- Use framework language *in* your descriptive notes
- Conduct multiple observations/walkthroughs
- Postpone rating/evaluation

Chapter 13 Highlights

- Teachers have an incentive to be defensive, and instructional leaders have an incentive to be critical, in an effort to appear competent.
- To avoid opinion-based conflicts over expectations, a framework can serve as a neutral third party or arbiter.
- The teacher knows the most about what to do next in order to grow.
- Your instructional framework is a collection of various documents outlining shared expectations for practice.

Chapter 13 Highlights

- Instructional framework documents can include teacher evaluation criteria, practices taught in professional development, practices embedded in curricular programs, and school- or district-developed expectations.
- Detailed criteria with levels of performance are ideal, but not essential for every type of expectation.
- Common language that allows for triangulation with evidence is what matters most.
- Beware of emphasizing quantity or frequency of strategies used, without paying attention to quality.
- Consider the appropriate circumstances for using a practice—teachers can't do everything all the time.

Chapter 13 Highlights

- Don't be afraid to adapt expectations for specific subject areas/departments that have unique pedagogy (e.g. math).
- Avoid checklists of expected practices or behaviors, and focus on quality and appropriateness instead.
- "Grain size" matters—the appropriate unit of analysis is usually not a single lesson, especially for evaluation criteria.
- Curriculum- and school-based expectations can be used to evaluate single practices or lessons. The key is to make decisions when you have an appropriate amount of information, not prematurely.

Chapter 13 Highlights

- Don't expect closure or clear follow-up actions after every conversation—it's ongoing.
- If teachers have inflated views of their performance, triangulate the evidence with your instructional framework.
- Approach disagreements about performance with epistemic humility—both leader & teacher have incomplete knowledge.
- Use terminology from specific leveled descriptors when discussing evidence.
- The more evidence you have, the easier it is to make a defensible judgment about performance.

Chapter 13 Action Challenge

Use Instructional Framework Language:

- Gather documents describing shared expectations
- Use language from these documents in feedback conversations
- Use leveled descriptors to describe evidence—without stating a judgment or issuing a rating.
- Continue visiting 3 classrooms a day and talking with teachers



Developing Skills for High-Impact Conversations

Good Feedback Conversations Are Win-Win



Discuss

What do you get out of a great feedback conversation?

What does the teacher get out of a great feedback conversation?

When Teachers Request Feedback

- Stay focused on the teacher's goals
- Avoid off-topic feedback
- Only raise other concerns if very serious

Defensiveness



- Defensiveness is a natural, *rational* reaction to a perceived threat to one's employment status.
- It's our job to prevent it, not teachers' job to avoid it.

A blurred background image showing several people's hands and arms raised in a meeting or discussion, suggesting an active and collaborative environment.

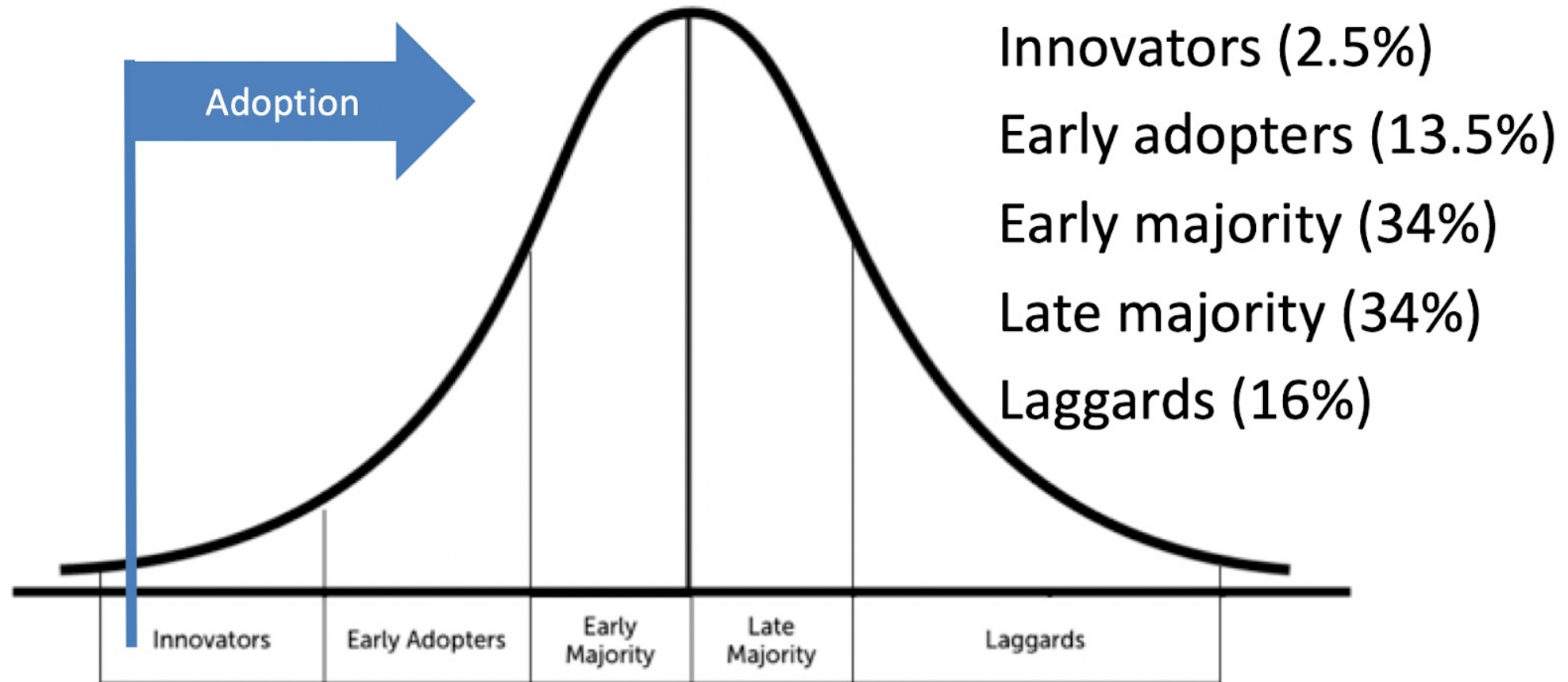
Discuss

When/why do teachers get defensive? What tends to trigger defensive reactions?

Set Conversations Up for Success

- Ask: "Is this an OK time?"
- Let the teacher choose a focus
- Ask a specific question
- Get the teacher talking
- Use the 10 questions
- Accept non-closure

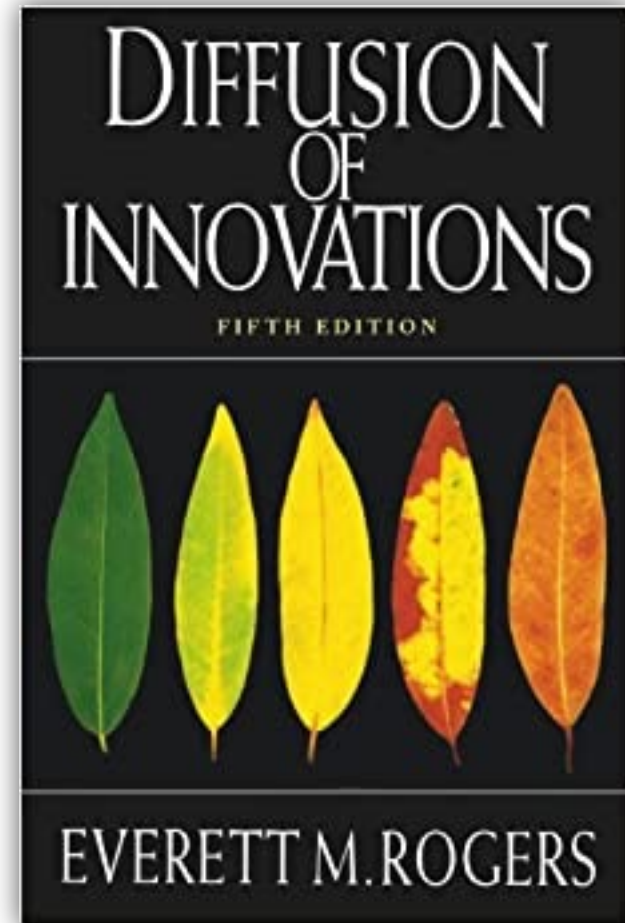
Understanding Adopter Types



From *Diffusion of Innovations*, by Everett Rogers, 1962, 2003

How Different Adopter Types Respond to Feedback

- Innovators
- Early Adopters
- Early Majority
- Late Majority
- Laggards



Decisional Information

- What does our staff need more training on?
- Where have I not communicated as clearly as I thought?
- What do teachers need more time with?
- How are teachers managing with this?

Chapter 14 Highlights

- Ensure that your conversations are professionally rewarding for all involved, so it's not an uphill battle to continue them.
- Decision-improving information makes conversations inherently rewarding.
- Suggestions often are not rewarding. The teacher should do the majority of the talking.
- When teachers ask for feedback on specific aspects of practice, stay focused on those specifics.
- Don't be directive if you want the teacher to be reflective, or the teacher will deflect.

Chapter 14 Highlights

- Defensiveness is a natural, rational reaction to a perceived threat to one's employment status.
- It's the leader's job to avoid triggering defensiveness, NOT the teacher's job to avoid becoming defensive.
- Make sure it's an OK time: "Do you have a minute to talk?"
- Allow the teacher to frame their instructional purpose.
- Refer to specific evidence, and ask open-ended questions that get the teacher talking.
- Don't worry about inflated self-assessments.
- Lack of closure or action items is normal in human conversation.

Chapter 14 Action Challenge

Engage Without Defensiveness:

- Inquire more deeply into teachers' goals & thoughts on their lessons
- Practice getting teachers to talk without triggering defensiveness
- Identify effective phrases for sharing evidence without putting teachers on the defensiveness (see p. 105)
- Ensure that each conversation is professionally rewarding for both parties



15

Handling the Toughest Conversations

Discuss

- What thoughts did you have about tough feedback conversations as you read Chapter 15?
- Where do you anticipate the most difficulties with teachers?

Chapter 15 Highlights

- Set yourself up for success by using the 3-cycle plan and asking open-ended questions.
- When teachers resist, focus on your responsibilities more than your power or rights. Teachers are busy—timing may be the main issue.
- Express interest in understanding the context of what you saw—teachers want to be seen in the best light.
- Communicate that you're visiting everyone, not singling anyone out.
- Use positional power as a last resort.

Dealing with Teacher Avoidance

When teachers don't want you to visit, or don't want to talk with you:

- Focus on your responsibilities, not rights
- Ask when would be a good time to talk
- Explain your desire for context

The Impromptu Dog-and-Pony Show

Teacher stops teaching

OR

Uses a pet strategy



Keeping Conversations On Track



- Venting
- Philosophizing
- Excuses
- Blaming students

Keeping Conversations On Track

- Avoid vague questions like “How’s it going?”
- Avoid “Why?” questions
- Refer to evidence
- Use framework language
- Focus on what’s within the teacher’s control



Chapter 15 Highlights

- Discourage impromptu performances for your benefit, so you can see what's already going on.
- Beware of expectations that teachers "show" you a specific strategy the moment you walk in the room.
- Keep conversations on track by mentioning specific evidence. Avoid vague questions like "How's it going?"
- Use precise, leveled language to describe specific happenings from the lesson, without rating it.
- Get the teacher to look at the framework.

Chapter 15 Action Challenge

Prepare for Challenging Conversations:

- Identify the most reluctant or resistant teachers
- Distinguish between types of resistance
- Keep the focus on the evidence
- Visit everyone equally, and communicate with everyone about your visits to all teachers

Action Items

- Listen to Chapters 16-21 of *Now We're Talking*
- Set up notecards if not already done
- Send us your roster for Repertoire