Critical Conversations
Teacher leader initiates critical conversations with his/her colleagues.

**Key Method**
Teacher leader addresses challenges by strategically structuring critical conversations with colleagues.

**Method Components**

**Identifying and Planning a Critical Conversation**
- Recognize that critical inquiry may be uncomfortable, but it will move the work forward more than congenial conversations.
- Clearly identify the challenge and the stakeholders involved.
- Reflect on why the challenge is preventing you and/or your team from reaching your goals and/or vision.
- Identify some possible solutions that may help address the challenge.
- Set up a meeting with the person or people involved in the challenge.

**Strategies for Structuring a Strategic Conversation**
- Ground the conversation in the vision and goals.
- State the challenge in a way that is hard on content and soft on people.
- Describe how the challenge is preventing you from reaching your vision and/or goals.
- Distinguish between the different types of talk: “dialogue” and “discussion.” Engage in “dialogue” to help the group better understand the challenge. This includes providing space to ask questions and suspending judgment. Engage in a “discussion” after “dialogue” has taken place to advocate for solutions.
- Ask the other stakeholders to suggest solutions to the challenge.
- Seek consensus on next steps from all stakeholders.
- Ask the other stakeholders if they are facing any challenges they would like to address.
- Set up a check-in timeline to ensure that the challenge has been addressed.

**Supporting Research**

Collaborative inquiry groups, such as professional learning communities and lesson study groups, are proliferating in schools across the United States. In whatever form, the potential for impacting student learning through this collaborative work is expanded or limited by the nature of teachers’ conversations. Polite, congenial conversations remain superficially focused on sharing stories of practice, whereas collegial dialogue probes more deeply into teaching and learning. Examples of talk taken from collaborative teacher inquiry
groups are used to illustrate these important differences. Specific recommendations are provided, including the role that teacher leaders can play in adopting and modeling specific strategies that support the use of more substantive professional conversation.


Challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, poor administrative and parental support, loss of control in the classroom, and bureaucratic red tape are enough to make any teacher abandon the fight for educational excellence and run for the ridge. This article discusses five crucial conversations that drive educational excellence while preventing teacher burnout. These crucial conversations can be tricky to navigate, and all require skill. Some approaches that will help reduce stress and increase the chance of a good outcome are presented.


When stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong, you have three choices: avoid a crucial conversation and suffer the consequences; handle the conversation badly and suffer the consequences; and discover how to communicate best when it matters most. This guide gives you the tools you need to step up to life’s difficult conversations.

**Resources**

- Crucial Conversations Resources
  https://www.vitalsmarts.com/crucialconversations/

This new edition gives you the tools to: prepare for high-stakes situations, transform anger and hurt feelings into powerful dialogue, and make it safe to talk about almost anything. Be persuasive, not abrasive.

- Critical Friends - Deborah Bambino
  http://bit.ly/1OaPPVZ

By providing structures for effective feedback and strong support, Critical Friends Groups help teachers improve instruction and student learning.

**Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria**

To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1 and 3 and a “Yes” for Part 2.

**Part 1. Overview question**
(300-word limit)

- Please describe the challenge that you identified and how it is preventing you from reaching a vision and/or goal. Please describe how you plan to address that challenge with others through conversation.
  - **Passing:** The description of the challenge and plan to address the challenge is clear, with sufficient detail to know why and how the educator will engage in a critical conversation.

**Part 2. Work examples/artifacts**
Please submit several artifacts that were created while planning for and having a critical conversation with a colleague (such as links to writing, audio, images, video, or other products) including such items as:

- Meeting agenda with next steps
- Evidence of a change that emerged from the meeting
- Video clip of the meeting
Annotated photos of the meeting

Your artifact will be assessed on the following rubric. You must earn a “Yes” on this portion of the submission in order to earn the micro-credential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Almost</th>
<th>Not Yet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence indicates the teacher leader effectively planned and initiated a critical conversation. The meeting resulted in a change that addressed the challenge.</td>
<td>Evidence indicates the teacher leader planned and initiated a critical conversation. The meeting did not result in change that addressed the challenge.</td>
<td>Evidence does not indicate the teacher leader has engaged in a critical conversation.</td>
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**Part 3. Reflection**  
(300-word limit)

Provide a reflection on what you learned using the following questions as guidance:

- What was most challenging about initiating a critical conversation?
- How might you approach a critical conversation differently in the future?
  - **Passing**: Teacher leader reflects on what he or she has learned while engaging in a critical conversation. The educator describes how this experience will change his or her future practice.