DIFFICULT CONVERSATION SCENARIOS

Roles and Responsibilities

- Initiator—the person to initiate the difficult conversation.
- Colleague—the person with whom the Initiator is having the difficult conversation.
- Observer—the person responsible for observing the interactions, taking notes on the strategies the Initiator used and the reactions of the Colleague, and preparing feedback that will improve the Initiator’s practice using the provided form.

Protocol

Each person will role-play a different scenario. Initiators should be sure to videotape the role-play and debrief.

1. Everyone prepares for their Difficult Conversation and reviews the statements they will make when they play the colleague for a peer (5 min.)
2. Engage in the Difficult Conversation (5 minutes each)
3. Provide feedback: Colleague (2 min.), Observer (2 min.)
4. Reflect on the feedback and discuss what you will do differently next time or re-play an element of the conversation (3 min.)
5. Repeat process for the other scenarios until each person has been the Initiator.

Scenario 1: It’s not the lesson, it’s the kids.

During a corrective-instruction action planning meeting, you asked Teacher 1 to identify potential student misconceptions based on the item-analysis. You also ask Teacher 1 to think deeply about how they might adjust their instructional practice to address the misconceptions. Teacher 1 responds by saying, “There is no misconception here. I have a bunch of slow readers and they are just guessing on these interim assessments. These kids never get through all of the text. I really believe the lesson was effective.” As the team leader, you step in, and what do you do next?

**Initiator Objective:** Push the teacher to think about how his/her comments could negatively impact the team’s goal of building a culture of efficacy. Acknowledge the feelings of the teacher, while making your beliefs and expectations clear. Re-focus this teacher/the team and reinforce the belief that all students can achieve at high levels academically.

**Guidance to Colleague Engaging in the Role Play:**
Role – You will be playing the role of Teacher 1 based on the scenario outlined. Teacher 1 behaves in a passive-aggressive manner. Teacher 1 presents a position of low-expectations about certain students in the classroom. Remember not to steamroll the initiator, don’t be difficult to interrupt and stay away from personally attacking the Initiator’s leadership of the team in the role play.

**Phrases the Colleague Should Use in the Role Play as Teacher 1:**
“I’ve been teaching this lesson for years and I know it works. It’s the kids, they’ve changed.”

“Our student population is very different now.”

“Some of these kids just don’t have the ability to do what we are asking them to do on some of these interim assessments.”
Scenario 2: They are a bunch of troublemakers.

While a teacher leader is facilitating an item-analysis meeting with your team, a teacher on the team notices that her third-period class has scored the lowest out of all the classes on question #23. Also, the wrong answers for third-period are evenly distributed among the multiple-choice responses. The teacher says, “There is no hope for this class. They are a bunch of troublemakers. They’re just clueless. On a good day, they just don’t even try to do any work in my class. On a bad day, they try to make sure everyone else can’t do any work.” As the teacher leader, what do you do next?

**Initiator Objective:** Push the teacher to think about how his/her comments could negatively impact the team’s goal of building a culture of efficacy. Re-focus this teacher/the team and reinforce the belief that all students can achieve at high levels academically.

**Guidance to Colleague Engaging in the Role Play:**
Role – You will be playing the role of Teacher 1 based on the scenario outlined. Teacher 1 behaves in a passive-aggressive manner in this scenario. Teacher 1 presents a position of low-expectations and makes generalizations about certain students in the classroom. Remember not to steamroll the initiator, don’t be difficult to interrupt and stay away from personally attacking the Initiator’s leadership of the team in the role play.

**Phrases the Colleague Should Use in the Role Play as Teacher 1:**
“‘You know these kids come from a neighborhood that just doesn’t value education.’

“I have tried everything, but I cannot make up for what they are not being taught at home”

“They are all going to fail because they don’t care and that is just the hard truth”

Scenario 3: Dreads teaching the 9th graders.

While working with the English department to conduct item analysis, a teacher says that it doesn’t surprise her that this group of freshmen is performing well below proficiency on a number of standards. The teacher also alludes to the new feeder pattern having an impact on the “quality” of students she is seeing this year. Teacher 1 indicates, “They seem to be unmotivated – they have no plans to go to college and don’t seem to take any ownership for their learning. I am so frustrated and I really don’t know what to do with this group.” As the teacher leader, what do you do next?

**Initiator Objective:** Push the teacher to think about how his/her comments could negatively impact the team’s goal of building a culture of efficacy. Re-focus this teacher/the team and reinforce the belief that all students can achieve at high levels academically.

**Guidance to Colleague Engaging in the Role Play:**
Role – You will be playing the role of Teacher 1 based on the scenario outlined. Teacher 1 takes accountability for her shortcomings and is willing to adjust her practice, but is beginning to place blame on students out of sheer frustration. Remember not to steamroll the initiator, don’t be difficult to interrupt and stay away from personally attacking the Initiator’s leadership of the team in the role play.

**Phrases the Colleague Should Use in the Role Play as Teacher 1:**
“My freshman last year really got it. They were so motivated and showed so much promise. Teaching them actually motivated and inspired me”

“I feel like this group is just a lost cause”

“These kids put forth zero effort and they just have the worst attitudes. I really don’t know how I am going to make it through the entire year with them”