

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING DIALOGUE

1. Learn, internalize, and practice the partnership principles.

- Develop a deep understanding of the Partnership Principles

2. Employ the partnership communication skills.

- Listening authentically and empathetically
- Recognize and suspend the “stories” that might lead to preconceptions
- Work to build an emotional connection and a trusting relationship with collaborating teachers

3. Suspend the assumption that you’re right.

- Let go of the desire to be right
- Being right is irrelevant; what matters is to come to the right conclusion
- Dialogue begins with our own reflection on how we communicate

If we want to engage in dialogue, we need to pay attention to how we talk, to ensure that the purpose of what we say and think is to further communication and learning. As Isaacs says, dialogue “is not something you do to another person. It is something you do with people. Indeed, a large part of learning this has to do with learning to shift your attitudes about relationships with others, so that we gradually give up the effort to make them understand us, and come to a greater understanding of ourselves and each other” (1999, p.9).

1. Respect your partner’s opinion.

- Instructional Coaches must perceive that the opinions and ideas of others have equal weight; otherwise, dialogue is impossible.
- Dialogue is an act of will, like listening: a determined effort to engage in conversations fully committed to hearing and respecting what others have to say.

2. Balance advocacy and inquiry.

- Dialogue is not about withholding our thoughts and opinions. It is about sharing our thoughts and opinions in a way that doesn’t silence the person with whom we’re conversing.
- When we advocate from a dialogical perspective, our goal is not to push for our perspective, but to clearly understand and explain our perspective.
- Clearly communicate the assumptions that we hold in support of our opinion.

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Advocacy, by itself, does little to support learning; it leads to a competition of wills where the loudest or most aggressive arguer wins. Dialogue is a partnership activity in which two or more people communicate, not to win, but to achieve mutual understanding. We can encourage inquiry by asking our partners to explain the assumptions or the data that support their opinions, and we should hold our own opinions up to the same scrutiny.

1. Ask questions that surface your assumptions and your partner's assumptions.

- We can redirect a conversation from debate to dialogue
- Ask simple questions to uncover assumptions, such as:
 - What do you think the data suggests?
 - What leads you to believe....?
 - What are some other ways we can look at that?
 - What do you think your students think about this?

In dialogue, the goal of questions should be to move all partners further into the inquiry. Good questions should help partners learn together, and that, ultimately, should be the principal goal for both the IC and the collaborating teacher.