

Coached UPDATE

MARCH 2022

Enhancing the quality of conversations in education communities

TIME TO READ: 5MINS+

5 CONVERSATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

These last weeks we have been 100% focused on preparing for and hosting our 7th Coaching in Education Conference. So, we are digging into the archives for our Short Read this month. We are featuring an article which just happens to be our most downloaded article in recent years. It's by Dr Kris Needham, a long-term GCI Associate.

5 Conversations for Professional Growth

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

'Professional conversations', 'learning conversations', 'professional learning conversations', 'coaching conversations', 'feedback conversations' – these terms are in frequent usage, but are we sure what they mean and what the differences are, if any? Writers use the terms in a variety of ways, sometimes contradictory ways, and their meanings can become a bit fuzzy. How can we work with this?

It's helpful when we use these terms in discussions with others, if we have some awareness of the potential for confusion and make sure we look for some shared meaning and consistency. Getting clear on terminology is important, particularly when talking about coaching conversations. Imagine the clarity this could bring when:

- Signing up for a professional development program
- Reading the research literature
- Knowing what sorts of initiatives in say, feedback conversations, might complement and build on previous coaching
- Comparing the added value of one mode of PD against another

Here's the way we see some of these frequently used terms having small but important differences and how they are different to 'coaching conversations'. You might like to see how our take on this matches up with your own concepts.

"Professional conversations" – as defined by Helen Timperley in her recent [literature review](#) covers most of the workplace conversations about teaching and learning:

"formal and informal dialogue that occurs between education professionals including teachers, mentors, coaches and school leaders and is focused on educational matters."

"Learning conversations" tend to be those where new knowledge or understandings are generated which are then translated into teaching practice. This term has more usage in the UK. For instance, the [General Teaching Council](#) defined it as:

"a planned and systematic approach to professional dialogue that supports teachers to reflect on their practice. As a result the teacher gains new knowledge and uses it to improve his or her teaching".

Professor Louise Stoll has written extensively about learning conversations as a form of professional learning and her definition is similar:

"...how educators make meaning together and jointly come up with new insights and knowledge. These conversations lead to intentional change to enhance practice and pupil learning".

For engagement in these conversations, inquiry mindedness is important, and respectful challenge of the thinking underpinning the conversation is a critical feature.

"Professional learning conversations" is a term coined by Lorna Earl and Helen Timperley in their book "Professional learning conversations: Challenges in using evidence for improvement", to describe a particular form of evidence-informed conversation:

"it includes more than conversations with some attention to evidence. Instead, it is an iterative process of asking questions, examining evidence and thinking about what the evidence means in the particular context".

They advocated three qualities required for these kinds of conversations: having an inquiry habit of mind, using relevant data, and relationships of respect and challenge. The concept of dialogue is integral - mutual understanding of each contributor's claim and the values, together with the reasoning and data, on which they are based.

This leads us onto **"feedback conversations"**. Feedback is a process we use to affirm or modify our thinking or behaviour. Feedback can be internal or external – when it is external, delivered to others, it is usually in the form of a conversation. Giving effective feedback is one of the skills of coaching, and one of the most challenging to master.

Here are a few links to read more about feedback:

- [More on the Feedback Question: 4 Ways to Make it Work](#)
- [The Other Half of a Feedback Culture: Tips for RECEIVING Feedback Well](#)
- [A year of giving \(and receiving\) feedback?](#)

So finally on to **"coaching conversations"** – how can these be distinguished from other forms of conversations? While all of the above conversations could contain elements of coaching, there are some particular aspects which we believe separate coaching conversations. At GCI, our working definition is this:

"a one-to-one conversation focused on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate" (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012, p.17).

Here there are several defining features. First, there is the intent and purpose of learning being the outcome. There is also attention to the way this learning occurs – through some reflection (self-awareness) and through taking responsibility. The emphasis on the learning being self-directed is important – the coach is a facilitator of this, not telling or informing. There is also an emphasis on the nature of the conversation – particularly the kind of questioning and the kind of listening – which you would hear as different if you were to witness coaching. Finally, there needs to be a particular relationship, a trusting relationship, which fosters this learning and allows appropriate challenge to be part of the learning mechanism. You can read more about the difference between "coaching" and "a coaching approach" [here](#).

So can we see that all these related terms have some overlap, as well as subtle, but significant differences. They are not mutually exclusive, and their meanings will change over time as language always does. Our interpretation of them may differ from yours. The important thing, we believe, is to have some agreement and consistency with those you converse with, in your own school context, when using these terms.

How important is this terminology to you in your communications with other educators? How can you develop more consistency in usage of these "conversations" terms?

Here are some suggestions for working towards that agreement and consistency:

- When you read these terms in articles and books, ask yourself "what does the writer mean? Is there a definition?"
- Next time you hear someone use these terms, explore what they take them to mean. Ask, "when you say 'x' what do you mean by that?"
- In meetings at work, explicitly define what you mean when you use these terms, so others are clear and everyone understands what that term means in your school context. From then on, try to encourage consistency.

An extended version of this paper is now available as a Centre for Strategic Education Occasional Paper ([Professional conversations through a coaching lens by Kristine Needham](#)).

Reference

LEarl, L.M. & Timperley, H. (Eds.) (2008) Professional learning conversations: Challenges in using evidence for improvement. Netherlands: Springer.

Stoll, L. (2014). Stimulating professional learning and learning conversations. Paper for International Association for Scholastic Excellence Educational Leadership Summit, Singapore, 17 April 2013.

Timperley, H. (2015). Professional conversations and improvement-focused feedback: A review of the research literature and the impact on practice and student outcomes. Prepared for the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, AITSL, Melbourne.

GTC. (2004). The learning conversation: Talking together for professional development. Birmingham: General Teaching Council for England.

Van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2012). Coaching in education



Coaching in Education Podcast

Our featured resource this month is the latest edition of the GCI Podcast. In this edition host **Richard Reid** interviews **Amanda Samson**.

Are you an aspiring or emerging school leader? Or are you already in a leadership role and want to expand your reach or move to a leadership role in another school? If it's a 'yes' to any of these then you will find this 30 minute GCI Podcast interview of particular interest.

And, we have a favour to ask...if you find this a worthwhile listen, please leave a rating and a review. It helps people to find us.

[Listen to the Podcast here.](#)



Upcoming Courses

REGISTRATION FOR THE FOLLOWING ONLINE AND FACE-TO-FACE COURSES IS CLOSING SOON:

• Advanced Coaching Practice with Prof. Christian van Nieuwerburgh

This course is for experienced coaches who are interested in taking their practice to the next level. It is designed to support active reflection on your current coaching practice leading to new insight and awareness. For more information and to register visit the link [here](#)

• Online Coaching Accreditation Program

Our flagship coach training course with Prof. Christian van Nieuwerburgh, delivered fully ONLINE over 6 months with a GLOBAL cohort and a pathway to individual European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) credentials. Our next cohort commences in September. For more information and to register visit the link [here](#)

Online:

Introduction to Leadership Coaching

2 x 1 day workshop - 4 & 5 May 2022
 6 x 2hr weekly workshops - Online AEST Commencing 18 May 2022
 6 x 2hr weekly workshops - Open Global cohort (AEST) Commencing 18 May 2022

Advanced Coaching Practice

3 x 2hr fortnightly workshops
 Commencing 3 May 2022

Introduction to Leadership Coaching Intensive

6 x 2hr workshops 8am to 10am and 11am - 1pm daily
 Online Intensive AEST Commencing 13 - 15 July 2022

Coaching and Supervision

Scheduled to suit you

[Click here for NZ courses](#)

In-person:

Coaching Accreditation Program Phase 1-3 (4-days)

Adelaide - Commencing Monday 28 March 2022
 Perth - Commencing Thursday 19 May 2022
 Brisbane - Commencing Thursday 19 May 2022

Introduction to Leadership Coaching 2-day

May 24/25 Sydney May 24/25 Geelong
 May 24/25 Melbourne May 26/27 Brisbane
 August 3/4 Melbourne

Video Peer Coaching

Sydney - Commencing Thursday 5 May 2022
 Melbourne - Commencing Thursday 5 May 2022

The Impact Cycle Program 2-day

Busselton - Commencing Thursday 5 May 2022
 Busselton - Commencing Thursday 26 May 2022
 Melbourne - Commencing Wednesday 1 June 2022
 Sydney - Commencing Wednesday 1 June 2022
 Perth - Commencing Thursday 2 June 2022

Be sure to [click on the dates](#) to visit the registration pages!



Complimentary Professional Learning

Curious Convos

Our Curious Convos Series will resume later in 2022. Watch for more inspiring, interesting speakers.

Meanwhile, if you missed our last webinar with **Dr Richard Boyatzis** the developer of Intentional Change theory, you can catch the recording [here](#).

Available Now

GROWTH COACHING INTERNATIONAL | **7TH COACHING IN EDUCATION CONFERENCE** | GOING GLOBAL: CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES | 1 & 2 March 2022

POST-CONFERENCE ON-DEMAND PACKAGE

Our recent 7th Coaching in Education Conference was an overwhelming success. With presenters and participants from all over the world it was a truly global event that delivered on the conference theme – 'Celebrating International Perspectives.'

Plans are already underway for the 2023 event so watch for details about this soon.

Meanwhile, if you missed this one you might want to take advantage of this post-conference package...

POST-CONFERENCE ON-DEMAND PACKAGE

Missed the live conference? Fear not, for just \$75 AUD you can have access to the following conference recordings, available to anyone worldwide:

- **FOUR 75-minute** Keynote Presentations by internationally renowned thought leaders
- **TWELVE 60-minute** implementation case studies
- **FOUR 60-minute** research stories
- Recordings will be available until **2nd April 2022**

[Visit this link to access our Post-Conference On-Demand Package](#)

*Price does not include GST.

