

SUPPORTIVE CHALLENGE

A collaborative practice to challenge thinking.

Supportive Challenge talk moves are designed to assist collaborative and coaching conversations about student learning. They support colleagues to have equity-centered, anti-racist conversations in schools by paying close attention to how we talk and how we listen. When integrated and practiced between colleagues, Supportive Challenge helps colleagues honor each other's hard work while also enabling them to examine the ways bias and values drive their actions to rethink and disrupt patterns that are producing inequitable outcomes. By reimagining "challenge" to be supportive, Supportive Challenge consciously builds Adult Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills in community to create the conditions for stronger adult learning cultures. This tool is designed to supplement any collaboration protocols and coaching conversations.



For more information about the practice, read chapter 2 of the **Lead by Learning Playbook in Adult Learning**.

STEP INTO PRACTICE

PREPARE: Identify an upcoming collaborative conversation in which you'd like to introduce and use Supportive Challenge.

REVIEW: With your colleagues, review talk moves, example language, and rationale. Notice your reactions. Depending on the goal of your conversation, you may choose to focus on a subset of talk moves.

- What talk moves do you already use and which are new?
- How might certain moves help further your team's equity goals and respond to the equity traps we commonly hear?
- What talk moves do you feel are missing that your team needs?

PRACTICE: Engage in a conversation to practice talk moves. This can be a collaboration protocol or a dyad or triad conversation.

When first using the moves, it can be helpful to have colleagues name their moves. For example, "I am going to center data, and in the data I saw ..." to help both colleagues build self-awareness.

REFLECT: With your colleagues, create awareness and hold space for individuals' racial and sociopolitical realities and how this might impact their experience of Supportive Challenge.

- What did you notice in yourself as you used and received these moves?
- What did you notice in others when using these moves?
- How did this conversation center equity?

PERSONALIZE: Add, change, and revise example language to meet your team's needs. This includes making visible other equity traps and other talk moves.

PRACTICE: Continue to practice and reflect on your collaborative conversations. Supportive Challenge is a skill that takes time to develop.

OVERHEARD IN SCHOOLS: COMMON EQUITY TRAPS

DEFICIT THINKING

- Our students can't...
- Those students can't...
- Most students are...

BLAME GAME

- If only the student...
- If only their guardian/parent...
- If only their community...

EXCUSE THE DATA

- My data isn't ready...
- We had a bad day in class, so...
- The assessment is not valid...

RELINQUISH RESPONSIBILITY

- That's not my job...
- I've tried everything possible...
- If only our school/district/program had...

SUPPORTIVE CHALLENGE TALK MOVES

SUGGESTED SENTENCE FRAMES

EQUITY RATIONALE

CLARIFY & UNPACK CONCEPTS

What do you mean by...
I heard you say... tell me more.
What would success look like...

The language we use can feel clear to us but not to our listeners. By asking for clarification, we allow our learner/colleague to unpack their thinking further to reach a greater level of specificity needed for next steps and actions. Pausing for clarification also supports the listener to not make assumptions.

PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

I'm noticing...
How might you...?
Have you considered...perspective...?

We need others to help us see what we can not see on our own. Providing an alternate perspective supports learners/colleagues to see a different vantage point and develop their empathy muscle.

CENTER DATA

In the data, I saw (heard) ...
A strength I see is ...
I'm curious about...

We rationalize our data without even realizing. This common equity trap, unknowingly or knowingly, can reinforce stereotypes or place blame on the learners we are intending to support. Supportive listeners can challenge their colleagues to return to the data.

UNDERSTAND & SURFACE VALUES

It sounds like ... matters.
A value I am hearing is ...

Our values drive our behaviors, actions, and choices. By surfacing what matters most, we support our colleagues to make instructional changes grounded in values and moral imperatives for learner success. It is important to listen for disconnects and name biases as they emerge. Sometimes what we say we value does not connect to what we actually do or vice versa. Pointing this out to our colleagues supports building self-awareness.

CHALLENGE AN ASSUMPTION

An assumption I am hearing is...

Assumptions are normal and human. However, if we don't challenge biases we may mistakenly follow these assumptions in ways that stunt our learners' progress and our own. Interrupting mental models is key to growth and change.

MOVE FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION

What do you think is an equitable next step?
What might you try tomorrow?
How might ... look in practice?

Analysis is important and so is action. Whenever we are in collaborative conversations we want to have a mix of both. As a listener, it is important to notice the balance and support your colleague to name actionable next steps that can show up in their practice and learning spaces immediately.

ACKNOWLEDGING TENSION WHEN IT SURFACES

The tension I'm hearing or noticing is...
It sounds like you are grappling with...

Tensions are to be expected. Surfacing tensions for our colleague allows them to see options more clearly and also affirms their experience within that tension.

ADD YOUR OWN



These conversations are complex and it can be challenging to examine a bias. Pay attention to the emotions and reactions that emerge as you practice these talk moves, including discomfort, anger, confusion, or fragility. They can alert you to your core values, your belief systems, or your relationship to the learner, the data, and the system.

In a culture of trust, the right question asked at the right time is a powerful tool for challenging thinking.