



Making Conversation by Fred Dust

Think you might want to read this book?

Meaningful conversations seem to be those that emerge organically. While this is sometimes the case, we often engage in conversations that we hope are meaningful but do not end up being so. In a technological landscape dominated by hand-held devices and social media, some educators and experts are concerned that young people are losing the skills to engage in face-to-face conversation

with others. In education, effective conversations are needed when talking to colleagues, students, and parents. Administrators and teachers will benefit from the insights in [Making Conversation](#), since it clearly lays out how to design conversations that move us from speech to action.

What would Socrates ask?

- What is lost when we leave the design of a conversation up to chance?
- What is the difference between active listening and creative listening? Why is effective listening difficult for so many of us?
- How can clarifying the purpose of a conversation lead to a more effective outcome?
- How can changing the context in which a conversation takes place make for better conversations?
- Can putting constraints around a conversation give participants more freedom to share their thoughts and ideas?

Research

- While there is controversy about the idea of “clean desk” policies in a workplace, studies do link unwanted clutter in the workplace to feelings of “emotional exhaustion” and decision fatigue. This is not an association that you want to bring into any creative conversation. Messy desk, fine – messy meeting space, not so much.
- Conversation brings us into community with others. Loneliness and isolation wear down the body; people who are lonely seem to age quicker and are more physically vulnerable.

Concepts

- We must be deliberate about shaping the outcome and impact of a conversation. This way the success of the conversation does not rely on the interpersonal power of the person leading the conversation.

- Effective conversations must be purposeful, work to resolve differences, explore hard issues, and be aimed at a positive outcome.
- Conversations go bad when:
 - There is an imbalance in power dynamics
 - There is a lack of certainty about the purpose of the conversation

- There is a collapse into critique

Commitment

- When we make conversation, we must be willing to evaluate our beliefs and decide which will accompany us into our conversations and which we can leave out.
- We need to be less a defender of our beliefs and be more a person committed to the process by which we manufacture beliefs: exploration, community, and conversation.

Creative Listening

- Listening is not passive. It's an exploration, a way to investigate the world around you so that you can discover something about yourself and others.
- The Quaker practice of listening seems parallel with current psychological research about the creative process which includes preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Significant new ideas often occur after the incubation period.

Clarity

- Giving a conversation a name can affect what happens in that conversation. Don't mask the intent of the conversation.
- Well-intentioned and highly motivated people frequently assume that they share the same assumptions, values, and goals. Assume that this is not the case.
- Be mindful of the place that the conversation takes place. Some spaces have a script embedded in them (e.g., courtroom).

Context

- Context includes the spaces we inhabit, the things in those spaces, and the positions we choose to take in those spaces. The right room shapes the conversation.

Constraints

- Constraints can ensure that participants feel free and safe in a conversation. Remember that even if you feel safe and free in a conversation there is a strong possibility that others might not.
- Build the constraints of the conversation together to establish community. Be sure to communicate that while rules restrict us, constraints free us. Write them out, display them, and don't forget them.

Change

- When you are making conversations to make change, establish some familiar and routine structures.
- Vow to make a change and avoid being a *zombie coalition*, or a group of people who get together to talk about a topic, agree to make a change, but don't do anything.

Create

- The future is something that we create, and we are better off working toward change than not trying.

- Consider building in some time pressure to get something done.
- Moving to action keeps us from “analysis paralysis” which occurs when we talk about something and become less, rather than more, sure of what to do.
- Remember that the minds that make ideas are not the same as the hands that make them happen. Consider who is best suited to continue the work and the conversation.

Quotes from the author

- “Conversation is always an act of creativity. We don’t have to just be participants in, or victims of, conversations. We can be the makers of the conversations that matter most.”
- “If we planned conversations better, if we put more creative thinking into them, we could find a resolution without it feeling forced.”

Quotes from others

- “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” - Simone Weil

Implement tomorrow?

- Move important meetings to the morning. When we are in all-day meetings, we usually have our most important conversations between 2:00 and 6:00 when we are least able to apply energy and focus to the conversations that need them.

Referenced books with the potential to impact leading and learning in education

Author(s) Last Name	Title
Pink	<i>When</i>

The applicability of this book to education is



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