

Transforming Conversations in the Classroom

Recognize and Overcome
Four Ineffective Communication Patterns

Instructor: Ben Benjamin • AFMTE

Effective Education Requires Self-Reflection

- What is our contribution to our students' success (or failure)?
- What messages are we sending?
- How effectively are we responding to their concerns?
- How can we improve over time?

Dialogue



Effect vs. Intention

- How would you feel being in that student's shoes?
- What might the teacher's intentions have been?

Effect vs. Intention: The Disconnect

Good Intention → Negative Effect

Effect vs. Intention: The Disconnect

Good Intention → BEHAVIOR → Negative Effect

We Hear Complaining in Our Work

- **Students:** exams, homework, class length and time, teaching styles, problems with other students
- **Teachers:** workload, disagreements, problems with students
- **Administrators:** finances, enrollment, competing schools, internal disagreements

The Secret to Understanding Complaining

The focus is on something **external**:

Something in the outside world that seems to be unfair, too much, or not enough

BUT they're really expressing something **internal**:

1. The person wants something
2. They feel powerless to get it
(usually communicated through voice tone)

Consequences of Complaining

Repeated complaining can lead to:

- Failure to take productive action
- Feeling increasingly frustrated, hopeless, or resigned
- Irritating and alienating others

Unhelpful Responses to Complaints

1. Joining
"Yeah, things really are awful."
Typical result: Nothing but complaints
2. Arguing
"It's not that bad."
Typical result: Back-and-forth argument
3. Trying to help
"How about..." "Why don't you..."
Typical result: Arguing or more complaining

EXERCISE

Complaint Strategy: Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Complaint Strategy: Ask What You Want & How You Can Get It

The two issues underlying
your complaint:

1. You want something
2. You feel powerless
to get it

To transform your
complaint, ask yourself:

1. *"What do I want?"*
2. *"What proposal can I
make to help get that
to happen?"*

Complaint Coaching: Ask What They Want & How They Can Get It

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To help them transform their complaint, ask:

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2. "What proposal can you make to help get that to happen?"

Benefits of Complaint Coaching

Identifying what the person wants:

- Translates vague feelings of dissatisfaction into specific wishes or desires
- Provides a clear goal to aim toward

Making proposals:

- Replaces passivity with active effort
- Diminishes feelings of helplessness or hopelessness

Complaint Coaching: Skills Practice

Step One

- Person A: Complain for no more than one minute.

Step Two

- Person B: Ask Person A to go under their complaint and ask what they want. Then ask them to make a proposal to help get that to happen.

Repeat two more times, encouraging the person to go a little deeper each time.

Leading Questions: The Question Trap

When a Question Isn't Really a Question

Leading questions:

- Express opinions in question form
- Push for agreement, not new information
- Work well in cross-examinations, but not in most other contexts

Questions = Funnels of Information

- **Broad question**
Large funnel: asking for ideas and opinions
- **Narrow question**
Small funnel: asking for yes/no, either/or, simple fact
- **Leading question**
Tiny funnel: asking for agreement
- **Righteous question**
No funnel: just an attack

Spotting Leading Questions

- Aren't, don't, isn't, and other negative contractions
Isn't that interesting?
That was a great discussion, wasn't it?
- Right?
You understand what I'm saying, right?
This is important to you, yes?
- Really, honestly, truly
Do you really think that's the best use of your time?
Is that truly what you want?

Consequences of Leading Questions

- Put the listener in a bind
- Tend to evoke defiance or compliance
- Decrease the chances of getting accurate feedback
- Discourage creativity and innovation

Popcorn Coding

- **Broad questions:** asking for ideas and opinions
- **Narrow questions:** asking for yes/no, either/or, simple fact
- **Leading questions:** opinion in question form
- **Righteous questions:** attack in question form

EXERCISE

Leading Question Strategy: Separate the Opinion from the Question

Leading Question Strategy

Separate the opinion from the question, in one of four ways:

- Opinion only
- Opinion plus follow-up question
- Narrow question
- Broad question

Leading Question Strategy Practice

Step 1. Think of a situation in which you have a strong opinion that you hope someone else will agree with. Briefly describe it to your partner, and express your view as a leading question.

Step 2. Rephrase the leading question in four ways:

- Opinion only
- Opinion plus follow-up question
- Narrow question
- Broad question

Step 3. Identify your goal—do you want to give your opinion, get the other person's opinion (narrow or broad), or both?

Force Field



What do you notice?

Our Information About Other People

- **Facts:** Concrete, verifiable pieces of data
What we observe or what they tell us directly
- **Mind-reads:** Assumptions about the person
What we think we know about their thoughts and feelings

Empathetic Attunement is Great, But...

- We can't know the exact thoughts in someone's head
- Even if we accurately sense someone's feeling, we're often wrong about the reasons for it
- Many mind-reads stem from personal biases, not empathetic attunement

Mind-Reads in Education

- **Teacher-to-student:** "I can tell you're not really interested in this material." "I know you were annoyed about having to do this assignment."
- **Student-to-teacher:** "You don't think I'm trying hard enough." "You must be tired of having to explain this."
- **Teacher-to-teacher:** "It's obvious that you don't agree with my approach." "You know I'm right, but you don't want to argue with the Director."

The Trouble with Mind-Reads

Mind-reads are

- **Potentially annoying:** May irritate people when spoken aloud
- **Not real:** Create imaginary friends, students, colleagues, clients, etc.
- **Misleading:** Bias our actions and communication

AWARENESS EXERCISE

Mind-Read Spotting

Mind-Read Spotting: Mind-Read or Look-Alike?

1. I can tell that you're really good at connecting with people.

Mind-Read Spotting: Mind-Read or Look-Alike?

2. Are you angry with me?

**Mind-Read Spotting:
Mind-Read or Look-Alike?**

3. I could tell from your tone of voice that you were upset about something.

**Mind-Read Spotting:
Mind-Read or Look-Alike?**

4. I'm sure he didn't mean to insult you.

**Mind-Read Spotting:
Mind-Read or Look-Alike?**

5. I know you're trying to be helpful, and you want what's best for me.

Mind-Read Spotting: Mind-Read or Look-Alike?

6. You're going to be furious when you hear what happened.

Mind-Reading Inventory

Think of a several mind-reads you have:

- You think you know someone else's thoughts and feelings, but they haven't stated them to you
- About you or about something else
- Positive or negative

Mind-Read Strategy: Trading Mind-Reads for Reality

Mind-Read Strategy: Get a Reality Check

- State your mind-read—as your thought, not a fact
- Ask a yes-or-no question

EXERCISE

Mind-Read Strategy Practice: Trading Mind-Reads for Reality

Mind-Read Strategy Practice Step 1: Analyze the Impact

Person A, tell your partner your mind-read.

Person B, Ask the following questions:

1. What is the impact of not checking out the mind-read?
2. What would be the impact of checking it out and learning it's true?
3. What would be the impact of checking it out and learning it isn't true?
4. Would you like to check out the mind-read in reality?
If so, when could you do that?

Mind-Read Strategy Practice Step 2: Get a Reality Check

Person A, come up with the words to test your mind-read:

- State your mind-read—as your thought, not a fact
- Ask a yes-or-no question

Step 1: Analyze the Impact

Person A, tell your partner your mind-read.

Person B, Ask the following questions:

1. What is the impact of not checking out the mind-read?
2. What would be the impact of checking it out and learning it's true?
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Step 2: Get a Reality Check

Person A, come up with the words to test your mind-read:

- State your mind-read—as your thought, not a fact
- Ask a yes-or-no question

Yes-Buts: Polite Fights

Well-Intentioned Yes-Butting

- **Feedback:** Trying to make difficult information easier to hear
- **Disagreements:** Wanting to acknowledge the other person's idea first
- **Complex problems:** Thinking through both sides of the issue

The Problem with Yes-Buts

- **Two conflicting messages:**
Token agreement (yes) + different point of view (but)
- **Contradiction** makes it difficult to hear both messages at once
- Nobody hears the little "yes"
- All that comes through is the big "BUT"

Yes-Buts Are Contagious!

- One isolated yes-but isn't cause for concern
- Yes-buts attract other yes-buts
- Arguments can continue indefinitely

Yes-Buts May Be Hidden: Stealth-Butting

- I understand where you're coming from. However...
- I see your point. Nevertheless...
- That may be true. Still...
- I know that seems like the obvious solution. And yet...
- You could say that. On the other hand...
- While that's one way to look at things, have you considered...
- You're absolutely right. It's just that...

EXERCISE

Yes-But Spotting

Yes-But Spotting: Yes-But or Look-Alike?

1. The services you describe sound great; however, they are rather costly.

Yes-But Spotting:
Yes-But or Look-Alike?

- 2. I'd like to continue coming in four days a week, but reduce the number of hours I work.

Yes-But Spotting:
Yes-But or Look-Alike?

- 3. I'm very impressed with effectiveness of this modality, and at the same time I have concerns about the level of discomfort it causes.

Yes-But Spotting:
Yes-But or Look-Alike?

- 4. You just don't have the persistence it takes to succeed in this profession.

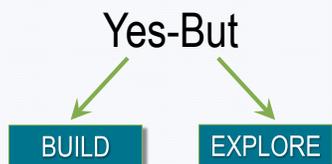
Yes-But Spotting:
Yes-But or Look-Alike?

- 5. I can't seem to fix this problem, however hard I try.

Yes-But Spotting:
Yes-But or Look-Alike?

- 6. I totally understand why having this surgery seems like a good idea; still, you don't understand all the risks that would be involved.

Yes-But Strategy: **Build & Explore**



Building: Fleshing Out Your “Yes”

- Three specific things you genuinely like, agree with, or can add to
- Often requires a mental and emotional shift
- Typically leaves the other person more relaxed and receptive
- Must be sincere

Exploring: Asking Instead of “Butting”

- Brings your concern into the discussion, so it doesn't get lost
- Uses a broad (open-ended) question to ask for the other person's ideas and suggestions
- Encourages creative thinking and constructive problem solving

EXERCISE

Yes-But Strategy Practice: Build & Explore

Build & Explore: Skills Practice

1. Yes-but
2. Builds
3. Broad question

Build & Explore: Skills Practice

Round One

- Person A: State an Opinion (or proposal).
- Person B: Yes-But the Opinion (or proposal).
- Person A: React naturally.

Round Two

- Person A: Repeat the same Opinion (or proposal).
- Person B: Translate your Yes-But into three Builds and a Broad question.
- Person A: React naturally.

Dialogue: Redo