

Enablers for effective professional conversations

AITSL commissioned Professor Helen Timperley, University of Auckland, to undertake the *Professional Conversations and Improvement-Focused Feedback* literature review to draw together national and international research in relation to conversations that support professional growth. The purpose of the review was to examine the characteristics and impact of these conversations, synthesise the common themes and identify the enablers and barriers to effective professional conversations. The review looked at professional conversations that achieved real changes in teaching practice, improved student outcomes, created better solutions to problems or developed new practice.

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* and the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* are underpinned by a view of professionalism that goes beyond technical competencies. This view encompasses the type of individual who is driven by the moral imperative to promote the engagement, learning, and well-being of each of their students and continues to learn and improve their knowledge and skills. The analysis in *Professional Conversations and Improvement-Focused Feedback* was framed in terms of the type of professionalism the conversations promoted and collated under the descriptor of adaptive expertise.

Adaptive expertise is needed to navigate the constant societal and technological changes present in today's complex education contexts. Characterised by teachers and leaders developing agency for their own improvement, adaptive expertise challenges the belief that expertise is developed simply through repeated practice.

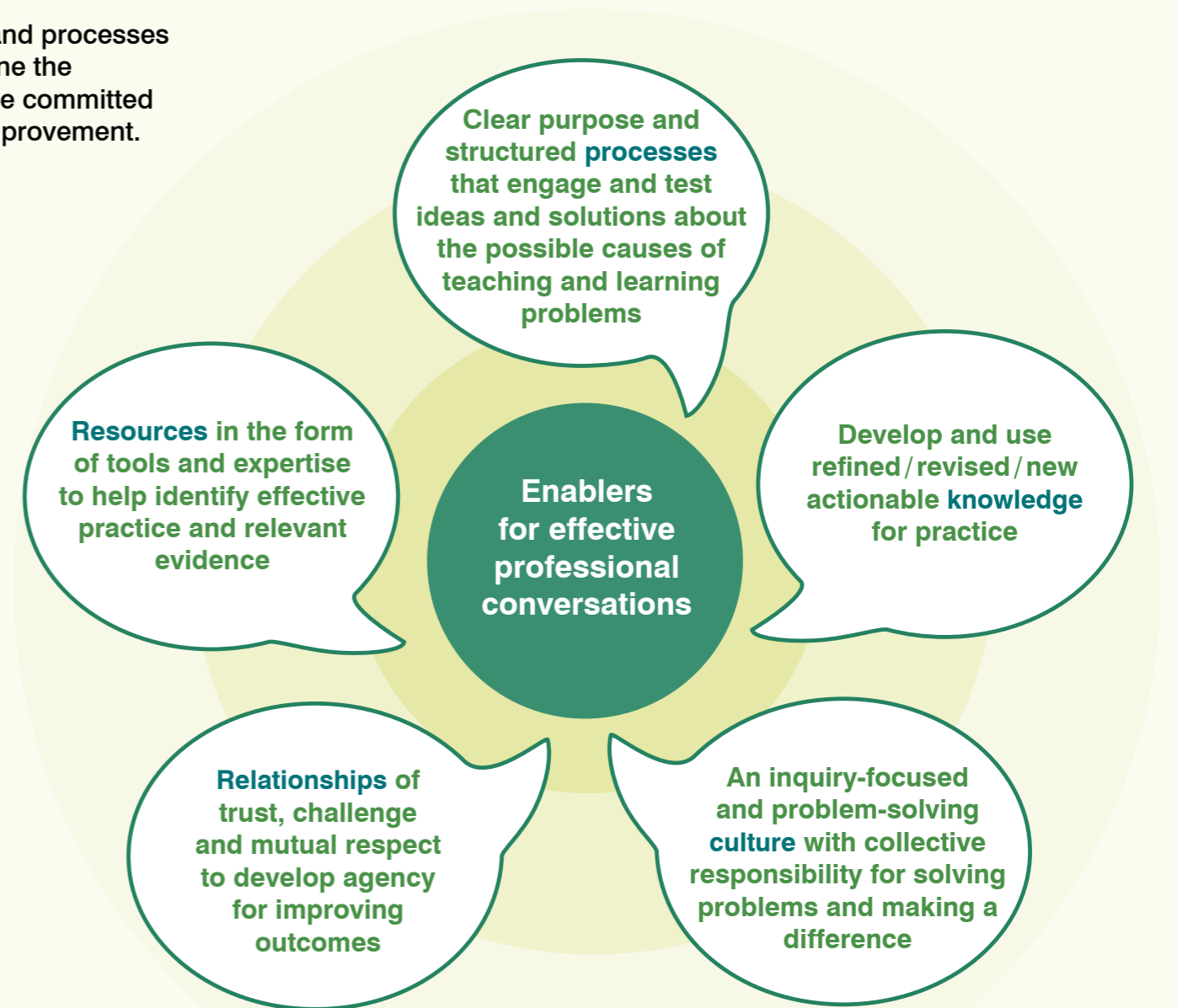
Key features of adaptive expertise include professionals:

- ▶ being focused on the moral imperative of improving a range of valued outcomes for students
- ▶ taking agency for the continued development of their knowledge and skills through self- and co-regulated learning
- ▶ creating self-awareness in terms of existing assumptions and when they might be helpful or unhelpful, and in this way becoming highly metacognitive.

These enablers are the conditions and processes that support professionals to examine the effectiveness of their practice and be committed to make appropriate changes for improvement.

Context forms the wallpaper for all the other conditions and processes and serves to shape the professional conversations but at the same time is shaped by them.

Contexts include national, jurisdictional, sector, region and school contexts, as well as the professional learning context in which the conversations are situated.



Resources

- ▶ Resources in the form of tools and expertise are essential in shaping the quality and direction of conversations.
- ▶ Tools and expertise bring high quality information to conversations, supporting participants to challenge each other to improve practice, solve problems and promote better outcomes for students.
- ▶ Expertise in conversational processes is essential for productive conversations.

Relationships

- ▶ Relationships are developed through conversations and do not necessarily exist prior to them.
- ▶ Relationships of trust and mutual respect need to be accompanied by challenge and high expectations for the conversations to be effective.
- ▶ Agency implies a commitment and a belief that it is within an individual or group's capacity to make a difference.

Processes

- ▶ Clarity is enhanced when the participants in a conversation have a shared understanding of its purpose and there are processes in place to achieve that purpose.
- ▶ Processes are sufficiently flexible to allow all participants to express, engage and test different ideas.
- ▶ Effective processes resolve the dichotomy of 'asking questions' versus 'telling' through treating all views as hypotheses, testing their validity through deep inquiry and developing integrative solutions.

Knowledge

- ▶ Knowledge is both an outcome of the conversation and a resource brought to it as participants come to see things in a different way.
- ▶ New knowledge arises from a mix of context-specific individual theories of practice, leaders', colleagues' and expert theories of practice or research-based theories.
- ▶ Knowledge must be directly applicable to the participants' contexts and actionable in that context if it is to be used.

Culture

- ▶ A culture focused on improving outcomes provides purpose and is both an enabler and an outcome of conversations as they develop over time.
- ▶ The culture can facilitate a shift from participants attributing particular problems to outside influences to participants focusing on their own interactions with others and what can be changed.
- ▶ Through this improvement-focused culture and the shifting of attributions, conversations create the professional agency needed to make progress towards achieving particular outcomes.

Source: Professional Conversations and Improvement-Focused Feedback
www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/literature-review---professional-conversations-and-improvement-focused-feedback



twitter.com/aitsl



facebook.com/aitsl



professionalgrowth@aitsl.edu.au

