

## YOU LEAD THE CONVERSATION!



### MAIN FEATURES

Strengthened skills	CONSTRUCT, LEAD, SUPPORT
Suitable for	Teachers, students
Difficulty level	Medium
Setting	Group
Number of participants	At least 2
Average duration	60 – 75 minutes
Special equipment/materials	Yes
Online version	No

## 1. Description

It is an activity inspired by Co.Le.C. (Conversation Lead by the Client), the methodology developed by Mikhalsky, Panayotov & McDonald (2019). The participants are divided into pairs, where in turn, one assumes the role of the Facilitator and the other the role of the client. The Client recounts a problem he is addressing in his experience of working with classes. At the same time, the Facilitator applies a specific set of questions to elicit the Client's self-questioning process (the list of such questions can be found in Step 1). The Facilitator only needs to ask the type of questions described in this table. You must avoid giving answers, ideas, suggestions and/or interpretations.

## 2. Objective / Benefits

The exercise trains teachers who take on the role of Facilitators to reflect on the attitude of leading "from one step back" (Cantwell & Holmes, 1994), while learning how even the choice to ask questions can actually influence the direction of the conversation. In addition, the activity could help teachers consider how just asking questions gives the Facilitator a role of power towards the Client. This could help them develop some useful insights into their role in the student and the classroom and how the way they ask questions can influence the classroom climate.

When taking on the role of Clients, teachers may have the opportunity to reflect on their personal activation and how they can actively develop the conversation with the Facilitator. This could help them consider how their behaviours contribute to the quality of the climate in the classroom and what actions they can take to facilitate improvement.

## 3. CRELATED SKILLS LUSTER (S)

No. 1 - CONSTRUCT, which in this case refers to the idea that teachers can consider having the power to influence the course of the climate in the classroom with their actions.

- The skill aroused in this cluster is the **Personal Agency** because the teacher who acts as the Client experiences that even in this position can have an influential role and help to conduct the conversation.

No. 2 - LEADERSHIP, which in this case refers to the idea that the teacher can have a leadership role in caring for the classroom climate and improving its quality.

- The skills aroused in this cluster are:
  - **Leading From One Step Behind**, while teachers acting as facilitators, experience how asking questions – and the type of questions asked – influences the course of the conversation.

- **Power dynamics in the relationship**, as teachers acting as facilitators are advised to pay attention to how their roles as "experts" change when their approach changes, from trying to support giving answers to trying to support by asking questions.

No. 4 - SUPPORT, which in this case refers to the idea that teachers, when assuming the role of Facilitators, are invited to let Clients tell their stories and use their own language to describe their experiences, treating them as if they were the experts in their lives.

- The skill aroused in this cluster is **curiosity**, understood as the attitude of supporting people who express their narratives by showing interest in the details of their stories. More specifically, in this activity, Curiosity is practised by asking Customers to express in detail, with their language, how they want to be helped.

#### 4. How to do the exercise

##### *Step 1 / Preparation:*

Divide the group into pairs. Explain to teachers that this activity makes them practice how to support the individual student and/or class by developing questions to help them reflect on their problems or problematic situations.

To this end, each member of the couple will have the role of Facilitator and Client.

When assuming the role of the Client, the teacher can talk about whatever he wants, while in the role of the Facilitator, he is only allowed to use the type of questions described in the following card (a copy of this table will be given to each pair):

TYPE OF QUESTIONS	EXAMPLES
"Questions that activate the mind"	<i>What's a question you'd like me to ask you now?</i> <i>What is the most reasonable question I could ask you now?</i>
"Questions to raise questions from your customers"	<i>What questions did you want to ask me?</i> <i>Answering what questions would be most helpful to you today?</i> <i>What questions have you often asked yourself but have yet to find the answers?</i>
"Time-oriented questions"	<i>What do you think is most helpful to talk about: your past, present or future?</i> <i>What question would you like me to ask you about your past/present/future?</i>
"Relationship-oriented questions"	<i>What question about your relationships would be the most helpful to answer for you now?</i> <i>What questions about people who are meaningful to you in relation to this topic</i>



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	<i>would you like me to ask you now?</i>
<b>"Beyond I-DO-NOT-KNOW questions"</b>	<i>Since you can't answer my previous question, what's a helpful question I could ask you now that you can answer?</i>
<b>"Questions to answer questions"</b>	<i>What helpful question do you think I could ask you that could help you answer the question you just asked me?</i>



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The exercise in pairs lasts 30 minutes. After 15 minutes of the set time the members of the couple exchange roles.

Explain that a possible pattern of conversation for each Facilitator could be:

- The Facilitator asks the first question.
- The Customer creates his question.
- The Facilitator repeats the question created by the Client.
- The Customer answers the question.
- The Facilitator asks another question.

*(The pattern repeats)*

Point out to participants that the types of questions represented in the table are not in a specific order. The Facilitator can choose any question that he thinks will help the Client at that particular moment in the conversation.

### ***Step 2: with Customer-Led Deposit***

Each starts the conversation, in which one assumes the role of the Facilitator, and the other assumes the role of the Client. They swap roles at half the set time. The trainer pays attention that each Facilitator merely asks the type of questions described in the table and nothing else.

### ***Final Round / Conclusion***

At the end of the stipulated period, each pair takes 10 minutes to discuss the exercise. Some questions you could provide at this stage to help participants reflect on the experience could be:

- *How was it for you, in the role of the Client, to try to develop your questions?*
- *How did it help you create your questions as you talked about the topic you wanted to discuss?*
- *How was it for you, in the role of Facilitator, to ask only questions to support the Client?*
- *What was it like for you, in the role of Facilitator, to ask those particular types of questions which aim to help the Client develop their questions?*

## **5. Final reflection**

This stage is a group discussion about the activity.

The goal is to help teachers in the group reflect on how they might apply this methodology while working with individual students or a class to improve the classroom climate.

To lead the conversation, here are some examples of questions you might ask:

- *Imagine that this experience has changed the way you approach the classroom: what aspects of your approach have changed? What? How might these changes help support students in improving the classroom climate?*

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- *Considering your personal experience, can you identify some situations and/or contexts where you could apply this methodology? If so, what is the first step you could take to start applying it? If not, what would happen if I tried to highlight this methodology anyway? How would the relationship you have with students change?*
  - *What are this methodology's critical issues and limitations if applied to your daily work? What are the situations/contexts that you think can benefit from the application of this methodology?*

You can invite participants to share their answers to questions with the group or invite them to write answers and reflect for themselves after the group session ends.

## 6. Special materials

- A copy of the table of questions for each pair.
- Pens and sheets of paper.

## 7. Tips and tricks

Do not force participants to do the exercise since it requires them to conduct a conversation in an unusual way, which could be considered quite strange by teachers, as it may require them to question and some dominant ideas about their role as experts in the conversation, some of them may not be willing to carry out the activity.

In this case, you could invite those who refuse to do the exercise to take on the role of tutor, supporting other colleagues who have agreed to do the exercise.

If the participants do not understand the rules well, you can propose a short warm-up session to show them how the exercise works.

## 8. On-line version

The activity can also be carried out online. A platform like MIRO ([www.miro.com](http://www.miro.com)), for example, allows you to create conversation rooms where participants can work in pairs and you can access them to monitor how they are doing.

## 9. Bibliography - Sitography

- Cantwell P. & Holmes S. (1994). Social construction: a paradigm shift for systemic therapy and training. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, **15**(1): 17–26.
- Mikhalsky A., Panayotov P. & MacDonald A. (2019) It will never be the same again. *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*, **3**(1), Arts7.