# Appropriating Tools to Foster Productive Professional Learning Conversations

Tianwen Li, Lindsay Clare Matsumura, Rip Correnti, Dena Zook-Howell

University of Pittsburgh

University of Pittsburgh | Learning Research and Development Center

## RESEARCH PURPOSE

Engaging in well-implemented dialogic text discussions can enhance students' reading comprehension, thinking and reasoning skills. Repeated participation in coach-guided reflection around artifacts of practice is key to developing teachers' adaptive expertise for facilitating dialogic classroom discussions (Lefstein et al., 2020). But skilled facilitation of productive professional conversations is a challenging endeavor.

Recent studies have revealed the huge potential of pedagogical tools (e.g., rubrics and observational protocols) to support productive professional learning conversations (See Figure 1). This study explores how coach-teacher dyads use tools to support productive professional conversations that develop teachers' dialogic teaching skills through encouraging specificity in teacher reasoning, establishing a dialogic stance, and making connections to general instructional principles (generalization).

Figure 1. Tools & Productive Professional Learning Conversations



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

That all human action is mediated action is a central idea in Vygotsky's sociocultural theories of development. The relationship of people toward mediated tools can be characterized in terms of appropriation. Appropriation refers to the process through which a person adopts the pedagogical tools available for use in particular social environments and through this process internalizes ways of thinking endemic to specific cultural practices. (Bakhtin,1981; Grossman et al., 1999; Wertsch, 1998; Vygotsky, 1987). Drawing on this framework, this study explores how tools were appropriated in coach-teacher professional learning conversations. Specifically, we examine the following research questions:

1. Where and how frequently are tools used in the coaching routine?
2. How does the use of tools influence the quality of the professional learning conversation with respect to evidence-based specificity, dialogic stance, and connection of specific interactions to general principles?

## STUDY CONTEXT

### Literacy Coach Professional Development

The study is embedded in a year-long literacy coach professional development program (See Figure 2) designed to teach coaches how to implement **Online Content-Focused Coaching** (CFC). To examine how coach-teacher dyads use tools in professional learning conversations, this study particularly focuses on the phase of their professional training where they were coached by a master coach around their conferring with teachers.

Figure 2. Literacy Coach Professional Development

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## Online Content-Focused-Coaching (See Figure 3)

➤ Coaching Goal: To enhance teachers' dialogic teaching skills through building a nuanced understanding of how their discussion moves shape students' thinking opportunities through ongoing cycles of reflective dialogues around their videoed classroom discussions
➤ Coaching Content: Questioning the Author & Accountable Talk
➤ Tools for supporting professional learning conversations - **Framework for Effective Text Discussion (FETD) & Accountable Talk Moves and Functions (ATMF)**

Figure 3. Tool-supported Post-conference Routine



## METHODS

### Participants & Data Sources

➤ Coaches (N=4) & Case study teachers (N=4; 1 fourth grade, 2 fifth grade, 1 seventh grade)
➤ Post-conference transcripts (N=14); Reflection Questions & Teacher Responses (n=39)

### Data analysis

**Phase 1**: Data reduction (RQ 1)
➤ Segmented transcripts by post-conference subroutines
➤ Identified subroutines that contain the use of the FETD and ATMF tools
**Phase 2**: Comparing differences in discussion quality when tools were and were not used (RQ 2)
➤ Developed rubrics to assess quality of conversations within each subroutine (See Table 1)
➤ Assigned three scores to each subroutine (one per dimension), and then conducted descriptive statistical analysis

Table 1. Rubrics for Measuring Professional Learning Conversations (Subroutine1 & 2)



## FINDINGS

RQ 1: Where and how frequently are the FETD and ATMF tools used in the coaching routine? (see Table 2)

Table 2. Frequency of Tool Use in Post-conference Routine

| | No tool use in post-conference routine | Tool used in asynchronous reflection | Tool used in synchronous reflection |
|---|---|---|---|
| Subroutine 1 | 68% | 23% | 9% |
| Subroutine 2 | 46% | 32% | 22% |

RQ 2: How does the use of tools influence the quality of the professional learning conversation?
**Subroutine 1: Reasoning the Influence of Pedagogical Choices on Student Thinking** (see Table 3)
➤ Enhancement in specificity and dialogism levels
➤ No enhancement in generalization

Table 3. Quality of Professional Learning Conversations in Subroutine 1

| Dimension | Subroutines contain the tool use | | | | Subroutine does not contain the tool use | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Complete realization n (%) | Partial realization n (%) | Lack of realization n (%) | Mean | Complete realization n (%) | Partial realization n (%) | Lack of realization n (%) |
| Specificity | 3 | 10 (100%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2.71 | 15 (71%) | 6 (29%) | 0 (0%) |
| Dialogism | 2.7 | 7 (70%) | 3 (30%) | 0 (0%) | 2.57 | 13 (62%) | 6 (29%) | 2 (9%) |
| Generalization | 1.6 | 3 (30%) | / | 7 (70%) | 1.19 | 2 (10%) | / | 19 (90%) |

**Soutine 2:Considering Alternatives** (see Table 4)
➤ Enhancement in specificity and dialogism levels
➤ No enhancement in generalization

Table 4. Quality of Professional Learning Conversations in Subroutine 2

| Dimension | Subroutines contain the tool use | | | | Subroutine does not contain the tool use | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Complete realization n (%) | Partial realization n (%) | Lack of realization n (%) | Mean | Complete realization n (%) | Partial realization n (%) | Lack of realization n (%) |
| Specificity | 2.93 | 14 (93%) | 1 (7%) | 0 (0%) | 2.23 | 3 (23%) | 10 (77%) | 0 (0%) |
| Dialogism | 2.93 | 14 (93%) | 1 (7%) | 0 (0%) | 2.69 | 10 (76%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (24%) |
| Generalization | 1.4 | 3 (20%) | / | 12 (80%) | 1.31 | 2 (15%) | / | 11 (85%) |

## CODING EXAMPLES



**Subroutine 2 that contains tool use**

Teacher: Me repeating back everything they say, I could have the kids repeat back. My para suggested, "Well, you could have them repeat back what they were talking about." Right?

Coach: Yes. **I'm just looking at ATMF. There's an example here for keeping the channels open, where you as the teacher might say, "Paul, can you please say back what so and so said."** So now they're not just listening for their opportunity to talk, but they're really listening to what each other is saying. And then when you think about that, **how do you see this impacting the text discussion overall?**

Teacher: I feel it would make for a real conversation and they would really own the reading and have that **accountability of really listening to each other.**

Coach: **That is actually a goal of QTA, right? It's one of our goals when we actually engage students in QTA, that's the habit of practice** (listening to and building on each other) that students will actually pick up.

**Subroutine 2 that does not contain tool use**

Coach: From some of the kids, they were still problem solving through this. how could you have helped the students solidify that big idea of child labor?

Teacher: I guess as a quick check in maybe giving examples and seeing a thumbs up or a thumbs down and see how kids react to different types of work

Coach: That could be one way of doing it, **but that might take you away from where you want it to be.**

Teacher: Right.

Coach: Something you could do like, "Okay boys and girls, we've got this discussion going on between chores and whether or not chores is child labor. We've got this opinion that the author doesn't think necessarily that chores are child labor. What's our evidence?" I think really opening it up, again, bringing it back to the whole group, what's our evidence? What that idea then solidified with that?

Labels: Specificity, Dialogic stance, Generalization; No Dialogic stance, Specificity, No Generalization