

Planning For A Beliefs Conversation - *Example*

- 1. Identify a conversation that you'd like to have with a client related to the beliefs that he/she is holding—beliefs around students, discipline, instruction, curriculum, etc. Describe what you think this conversation needs to be about.**

I think I need to talk to Ian about the beliefs he holds about his English Learners—actually, all of his kids—when it comes to them being able to access the new CCSS aligned math curriculum. He doesn't think they can do it, hates the curriculum, and barely does it. Part of my job is to make sure he's using it.

- 2. What is the belief that he/she is holding? How would you describe the belief?**

I think he has low expectations for his students—because they are from a low-income neighborhood and because most of them are ELs. I'd call the belief "low expectations." And maybe I'm even insinuating or suspecting that there are more sinister beliefs that are leading to those "low expectations."

- 3. What data do you have that he/she is holding this belief? What have you seen or heard that reflects this belief?**

On multiple occasions he's said, "These kids can't do this (referencing the curriculum). There's too much language in here. They're used to doing simple math equations and they get frustrated really fast with all this reading. This is a math class, not reading." Also I think he's holding this belief because he barely uses the text in his class—he creates stuff himself (and then complains about how much work he has to do creating curriculum) or he downloads stuff from the web.

- 4. Why do you suspect he/she is holding this belief? Where do you think it came from?**

Part of this might be coming from the other teachers in the math department who have been here longer and are really loud opponents of this curriculum. They think kids should be sitting in rows and doing worksheets all day. I think it might also be because it's so different from the way he learned math as a kid—he's said that a couple times. I also think he might just not be sure how to teach ELs—he's never had much training specifically in working with them (aside from one or two credential classes) so that might be part of it.

- 5. Are you *sure* he/she is holding this belief? Would it be worth exploring this with him/her and seeking more understanding for yourself?**

Yes, I'm sure he's holding this belief—but maybe he wouldn't call it a "low expectations" belief. Maybe he sees his belief differently. I guess I could explore it more with him so that I can

understand how he sees this belief. I don't know if he thinks he's somehow helping kids by not giving them this curriculum—because he doesn't want them to get frustrated. I guess I could explore this...But I'm not sure if that's a good use of my time.

6. What do you see as the negative impact on students or the unintended consequences of the client holding this belief?

I think it has a negative impact on kids—because I think they can do this curriculum and so by not being given a chance they're being held back. They need to learn math this way now because it's how they'll be taught in high school and they'll have to take assessments that ask them to demonstrate their mathematical understanding in this way—so yes, there's a big negative impact on kids. Also, there's just no rigor in his classroom and so kids are bored and some act out and others just mentally check out. So yes, there's a negative impact on kids.

7. What data could you gather or share to help him see the negative impact?

I could gather data on student engagement during class, time on/off task for kids. I could capture student comments—because I've heard them say things like, "This is so easy, we did this in third grade." But he obviously doesn't hear that. I could show him what they'll have to do in high school and the questions on the exit exam so that he knows what they'll need to do. I'm not really sure, however, that data is going to help him do something differently—I don't know if it'll matter to him.

8. Are there any aspects of the system that your client is in which foster this belief or which don't interrupt it? Does he/she get fuel for the belief from somewhere in the system? Are there messages coming from someone that affirm—or deny—this belief?

I guess this could be part of the problem. The principal is wishy-washy on this curriculum himself. He missed the administrator's orientation to it and I suspect he has some reservations about it. (Sometimes, to be honest, I wonder about his expectations for our students). So I don't think teachers are getting a strong message from admin that yes, this is a great curriculum that our kids can do and that teachers need to use. I'm not sure if the principal really knows what to look for when he visits classes to see if it's being taught. The push for this new curriculum came from our Director of Teaching and Learning and she's new and a lot of people don't like her—so I don't know. And then the veteran teachers keep saying things like, "This too shall pass," and telling newer teachers that in a couple of years this will be gone and there's be some other new faddish thing that they'll be asked to do.

9. Do you suspect that the client has some gaps—and if so, in which gap areas? What might he/she need in order to close those gaps? Is there any chance that those gaps could be fueling this belief?

Yes, I think he has a lot of gaps. He doesn't know much about teaching ELs, he doesn't seem to have very many management techniques—which might be why he just wants his kids to sit quietly and do work sheets so that he doesn't have to figure out how to manage small groups doing cooperative learning tasks. I don't know if he even knows how to do the kind of math we're teaching kids now, to be honest. I guess he also has a lot of skill gaps—he doesn't know how to give his students access to the content through their language limitations, he doesn't know how to scaffold the learning or chunk it so that they can do it. I don't even know if he knows how to assess what they can and can't do. Because some of them can do it but he thinks they can't—so maybe that's another skill gap in the area of assessment. As I think about it, I think he has a ton of gaps which feels overwhelming because what he needs is a ton of PD. Yeah, maybe the gaps are fueling the belief. Maybe he even has beliefs about his own capacity—maybe he has low expectations of himself? Hum. I'll have to think about that.

10. What could you do to support your client to try something different? What could you say? What could you facilitate, demonstrate, share, show, offer or present?

- It might help for him to see these kids in their science class—where they are doing really complicated group work and experiments, using a lot of academic language, and reading complex text. Maybe it would help for him to both see that they can do it and to observe how the teacher scaffolds the learning.
- I think I could model a lesson where I specifically address the language issue and I preview the vocabulary, offer strategies for kids to understand the text, and differentiate instruction for those who don't need the scaffolding.
- It could also help for him to learn some strategies to use with kids when they get frustrated—some Social Emotional Learning strategies that he can use with his students to help them manage the difficulty of this curriculum.
- I might try getting him to reflect on how he's teaching in the way he was taught, which served him then and until now, but help him see that it won't serve us in the 21st century.
- I could help him focus on getting to know one student and learning about his or her needs and how to help him/her learn. This might help expand his empathy and understanding for his kids.

11. Activate your empathy for your client. What do you appreciate about him/her? What are his/her strengths?

Sometimes I think he is committed to working in our school—sometimes I get a glimpse of a commitment to our students. He can be very organized. He's always prepared. He is pretty respectful in PLCs and doesn't dominate the conversation—I guess he seems to listen a lot. He's taken on some extra stuff like coaching the Chess Club and helping with the Journalism Club. He doesn't yell at kids—he's not mean. Most of the time his relationship with kids is decent.

12. Reflect on these questions to activate your will, confidence and courage:

- Why does this conversation that you want to have matter?

- How could it positively affect children?
- Why does it need to happen?

This conversation about Ian's low expectations really matters to kids because math is a gate keeper for students from our schools and he has to increase the rigor. I feel pretty confident about why it needs to happen and how if I'm successful in this conversation then it would help kids. I know I need to do it.

13. What are your next steps in order to have this conversation? Is there anyone else with whom you might need to have a conversation, in addition to with your client?

I just need to email him to set up a time next week. I should probably write down how I'm going to open the conversation and some things I might say. I should also probably practice this conversation with another coach so that I feel confident and so that it goes as well as possible.

I think I also probably need to talk to our principal sometime soon about his ambivalence with this curriculum. I think he's giving mixed messages and that doesn't help. I also think he needs to be more proactive about looking for it being used and that he needs to do something about those who refuse to use it. I will have to prepare for this conversation separately, but I see how they're connected.