*The Induction team at BTR is in the process of launching and convening the Early Career Teacher Network, a **networked improvement community[1]** of teacher educators, learning science specialists, improvement researchers, designers, and teachers, coming together to tackle the obstacles that inhibit continuous growth and development in a teacher's early years and beyond. In our early stages, we've developed and begun testing a change idea – the Excavating Teaching Protocol – and this tool is still very much a work in progress. We are seeking interested partners to join us in iterative testing of this tool, in order to learn what it takes to improve it for diverse contexts and conditions. If interested in learning more or connecting, please reach out to Brianna Wilson at bwilson@bpe.org.*

Change idea: the "Excavating Teaching" Protocol

What is it?

Excavating teaching is a *process* designed for use by teacher educators to help make teachers' implicit, personal practical knowledge more explicit, generalizable, and useable for peer to peer learning or coaching novice teachers. This sequence of **strategic coaching questions,** when lead by an experienced facilitator or teacher educator, can help a coach, mentor, or collaborating teacher analyze, abstract, and generalize the knowledge, key ingredients, underlying principles, and beliefs at work in a given aspect of their teaching practice. In order to be an effective mentor to an early career teacher, we believe a teacher or coach must develop **strong, theory-based reasoning about teaching** *and* be skillful at sharing these practical theories, not simply the practices themselves.

Purpose

With this tool, we aim to improve coaches' or collaborating/mentor teachers' ability to **clearly explain their practical knowledge about teaching** (what they do, why, and how it works for student learning) in a way that others (especially novice or pre-service teachers) can learn from it.

Our working theory

This tool is a work in progress – we are learning how to improve it through iterative testing and refining, **guided by some hunches about how it works** to support peer-to-peer learning. As teachers and coaches grow more expert-like in knowledge and practice, we become less explicitly aware of the knowledge, beliefs, and skills that underlie our decision-making and actions every day. As our performance improves over time, what once required effort and deliberate attention becomes more seamless, integrated, fluid, and automatic. This is the nature of expertise – it becomes much more challenging to remember our prior states of knowledge and skill, *and* it becomes difficult to explain what it is that we know, or how we know it. These **strategically designed questions** are our attempt to solve this problem.
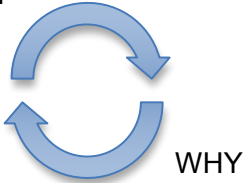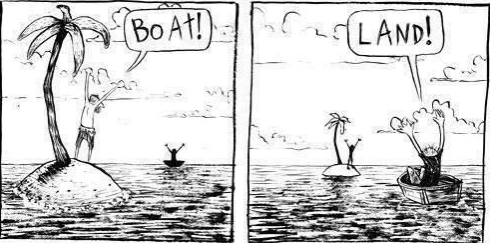
How to use it in practice

Before initiating an Excavating conversation, define the context and purpose for which you will use these questions (for example, perhaps you are supporting a mentor teacher to improve her coaching of a resident.) Next, **define the focus for Excavating** (what practice or aspect of the mentor's teaching will you excavate, and why?). Before you open the conversation, review the questions, the sequence, and **run the plan through in your head**. You might plan some specific questions. Others, you might paraphrase or adapt in response to what you're hearing in the teacher's thinking. During the conversation, *listen carefully* for the **elements of the teacher's theory based reasoning**: what knowledge, principles, and beliefs underlie this teacher's practice? Your job is to reflect these back to the teacher, to help make them visible.

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[1] https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/our-ideas/

Opening the conversation	
TARGET (What you're going after)	SOUNDS LIKE
Explain the purpose of Excavating **Define the focus**	● These questions are designed to help uncover or "excavate" what it is that you do, why you do it that way, what you've learned in your teaching, and how you know what you know. ● We will spend about 35 to 45 minutes. ● Our goal will be to learn how _____works and why *(*facilitator defines the focus of the conversation based on knowledge of the teacher's practice, the goals and purpose of using this tool.)*
Normalize culture of theory sharing vs. recipe sharing	● We know that teaching is complex - there is no "one way" or "best practice" ● Over time, you've developed a lot of practical knowledge through your experience, and you have some effective ways of solving problems or responding to challenges. ● We want these things you know implicitly and do instinctively to be made more transparent to you, to help your own growth and to make you a better coach for others. ● When you can share not just *what* you do, but also why and how it works for student learning, other teachers will learn more deeply from your experience.
Build mutual trust, psychological safety, & adaptive mindset	● We are both here today to learn… ● Our purpose is to make your decisions, knowledge, and beliefs more transparent, not to judge or evaluate them in any way. ● Getting clearer about what you know and do will help your own teaching, not just your coaching or mentoring of others. ● It's *hard* to uncover what you know deeply. The more experience you gain, the more seamless, integrated, and invisible much of your knowledge becomes. This will take effort and practice, and you'll get better at it over time.
Explain the structure of the Excavating conversation	● Micro-analysis (what and why) ● Theory generating (abstract and synthesize) ● Perspective taking (generalize beyond own specific experience)

Excavating teacher's practice	
TARGET (What you're going after)	SOUNDS LIKE (Prompts for teacher thinking)
Micro-analysis of teaching WHAT WHY CYCLE THROUGH OR SHIFT BETWEEN "WHAT" AND "WHY" TO DIG DEEPER	● What are you doing when you…? (*define the focus*) ● What do you look or listen for when you… ? ● What do you ask yourself when… ? ● What are you thinking about when you…? What's going on in your head? *Scaffold:* if stuck, have the teacher *run through,* then name the micro-processes and decision making steps in what they did.
	● Why do you do that? ● How else have you done this in the past? How (or why) did you come to do it this way? ● Why is this different (or more effective) than other ways you've tried? ● Why does it matter?
Theory generating ABSTRACT AND SYNTHESIZE	● Why do you think that works? ● How does (this process/ practice) work for students' learning? ● What are the key ingredients that make this effective? ● How do those elements impact your teaching and students' learning? ● How do you know when it's working for student learning? ● So given all this, how would you name your "working theory" for _____? (*If… then… may be a helpful frame here).* *Scaffold:* You may need to synthesize what you've heard the teacher say in the microanalysis, pull out or summarize the key elements, and say it back to the teacher.
Generalizing and perspective taking BOAT! LAND! THINK FLEXIBLY BEYOND OWN EXPERIENCE	● Okay, pretend for a minute that I am _____ (*choose a novice teacher that the person has some familiarity with.)* ● What would you ask me to find out how I think about this work? ● What about this [strategy, practice, etc.] would be helpful for my practice? In what context/ conditions would I want to use it? ● What would I need to know or think about (their students, content, etc.) in order to do this effectively? ● What challenges do you anticipate I might face in trying this with my students? What might go differently for me, and why?