Teacher learning on the job:
towards pedagogically productive talk

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Slides and more for this talk at: http://dialogicpedagogy.com/

Thanks to Dana Vedder-Weiss, Aliza Segal, and many more.

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Classroom event

- 5th grade Language Arts lesson, introduction to persuasive writing
- Two pupils perform for their "mother" texts about joining a soccer club

Text #1

Mom, on Sunday there is going to be a trial lesson in the village soccer club. You know, Mom, that soccer is an ancient game in which ten players run after a ball but it also develops esprit de corps, collaboration, motor coordination, quick thinking, the ability to plan, movement… My Mom, articles prove that youth spend hours in front of the computer and television and tend to become obese. And I? I want to go play outside…

Text #2

Mom, on Sunday there is going to be a trial lesson in the village soccer club. If kids come and stick with it, they'll create a team that will play in the league. Mom, I know you're opposed because I'm already registered in three clubs, but please!!! I have to go with my friends. You approve, right? Come on, Mom…. please.
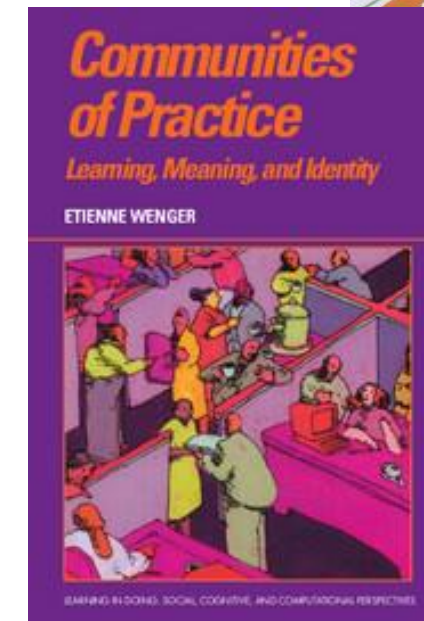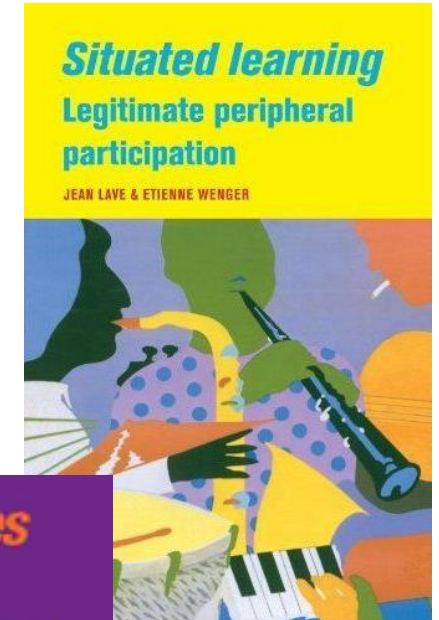
Some questions

1. Why attend to teacher professional conversations?

2. What do we talk about when we talk about our practice?

3. What forms of teacher talk might be pedagogically productive?

4. What are the challenges to cultivating pedagogically productive talk, and how are we addressing them?

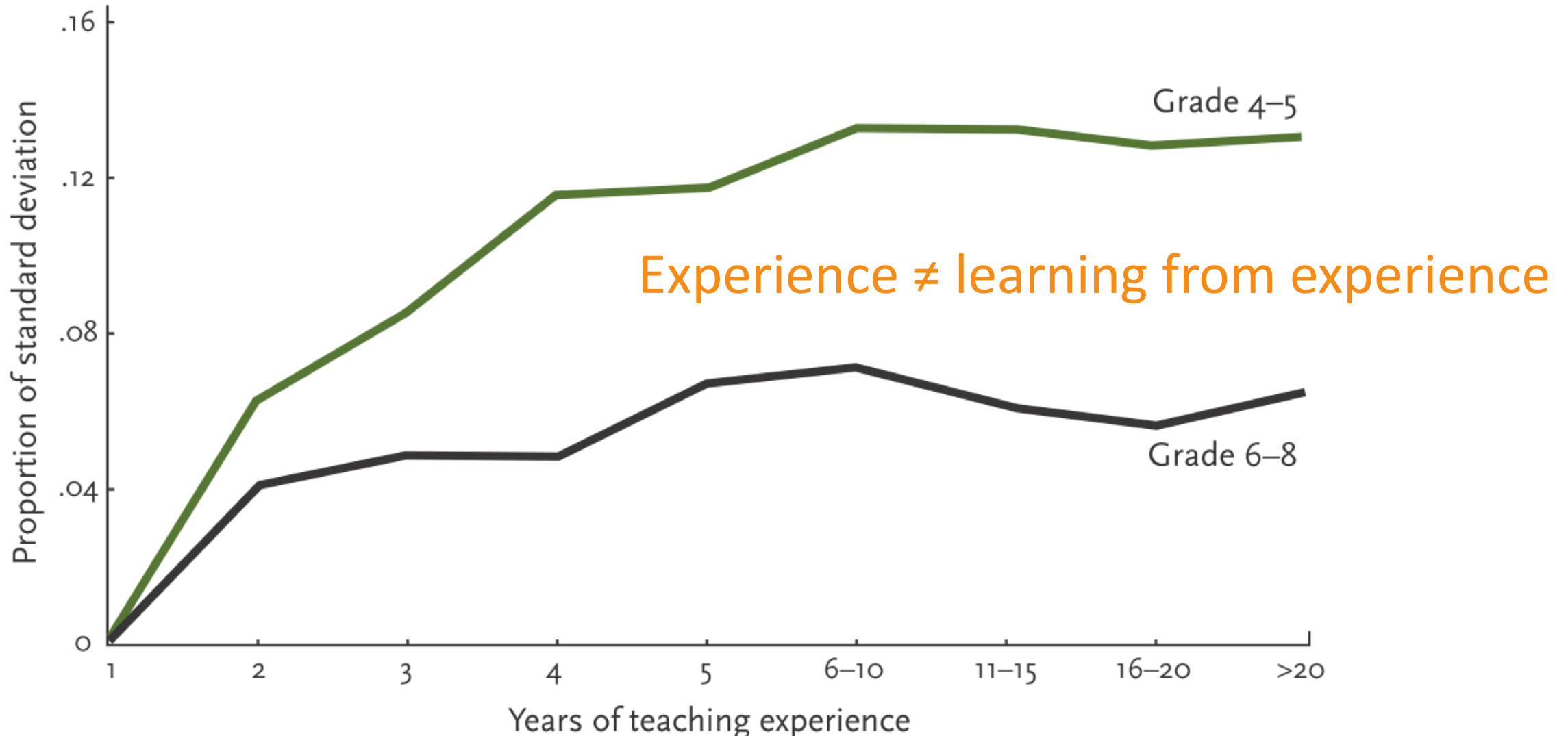5. How is it going? (Some productive problems of practice)

Relocating teacher learning – from CPD to work

Professional learning happens all the time, for good and for bad, as consequence of engaging in work (and not as an event separate from work)
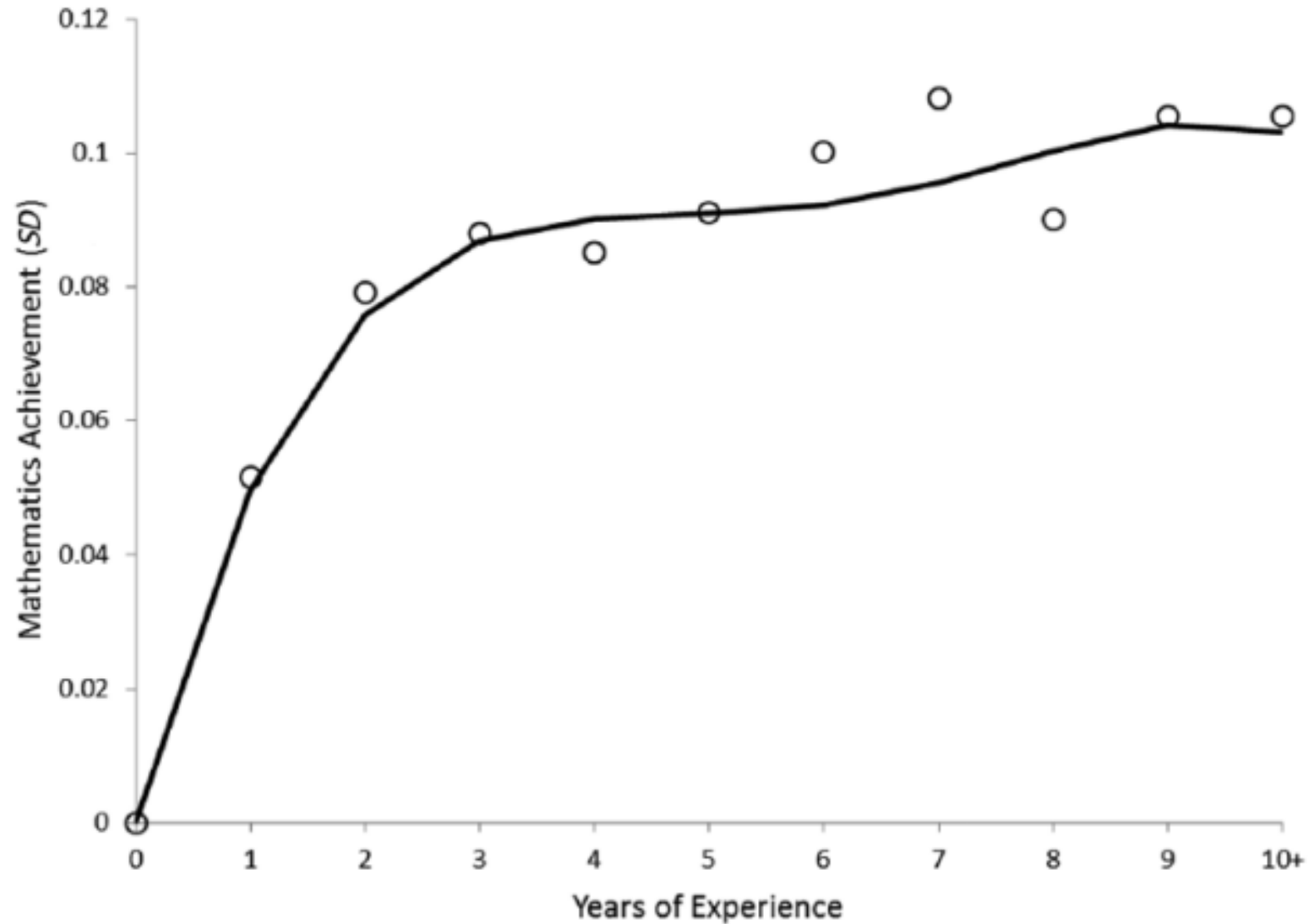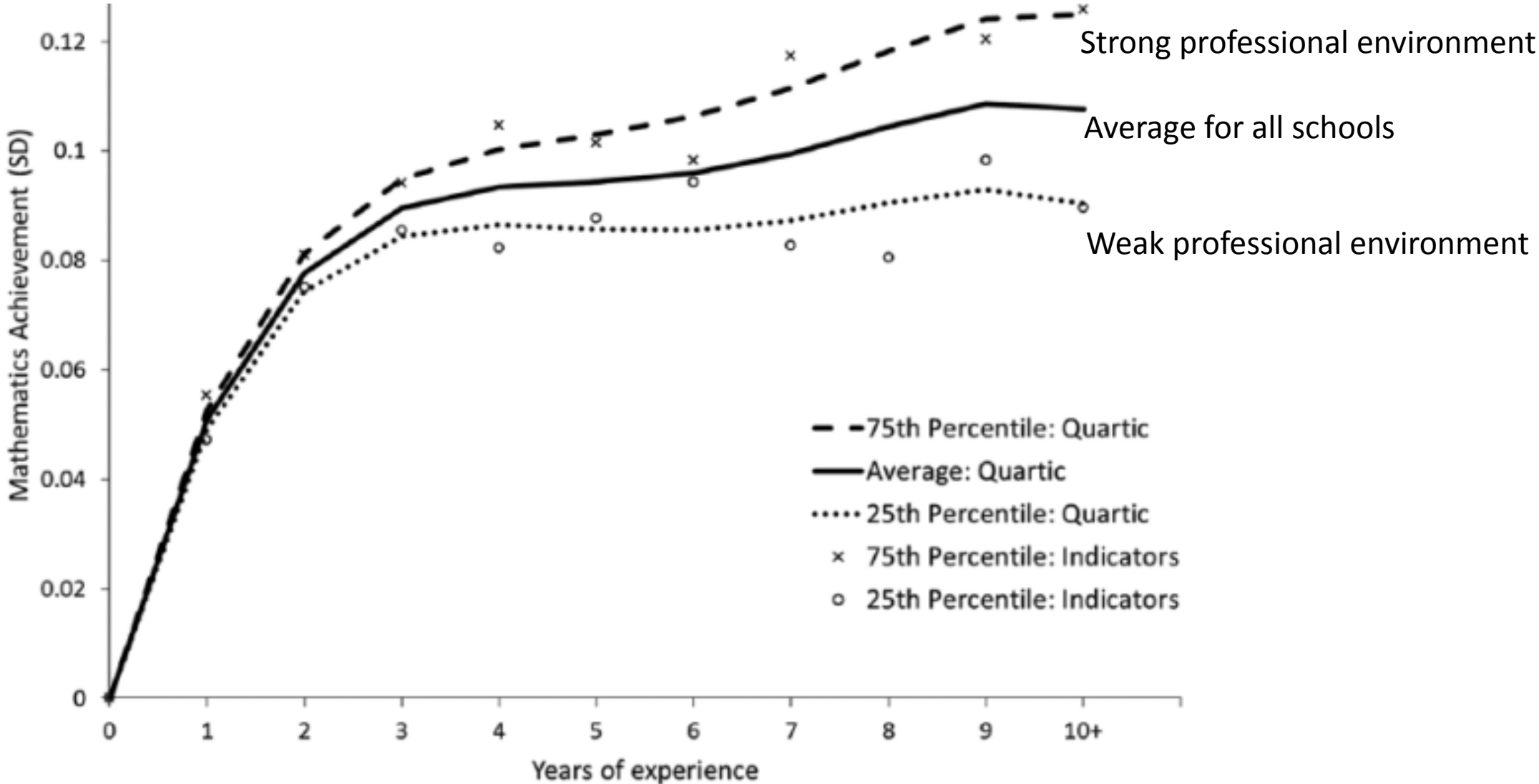
Are we "life-long learners"? (1)

Improvements in Student Math Achievement Attributable to Additional Teacher Experience

Experience ≠ learning from experience

Are we "life-long learners"? (2)

Learning from experience depends on the environment

Strong professional environment

Average for all schools

Weak professional environment
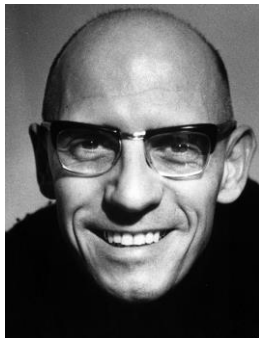
Why teacher professional conversations?

Sometimes a group is smarter than its individual members (i.e., the whole is greater than the sum of its smarts)

But sometimes the opposite is the case: the group is not as smart as each of its members, and indeed causes them to act stupidly

Why professional conversations? (2) Discourse shapes...

- **Gaze**: What we can see; What we notice as important – e.g. distinguishing figure from background.

- **Speech**: What we can say; Who can say what.

- **Thought**: What is thinkable; What is considered to be unquestionably true or foolish.

Michel Foucault

Charles Goodwin

Jan Blommaert

An example:
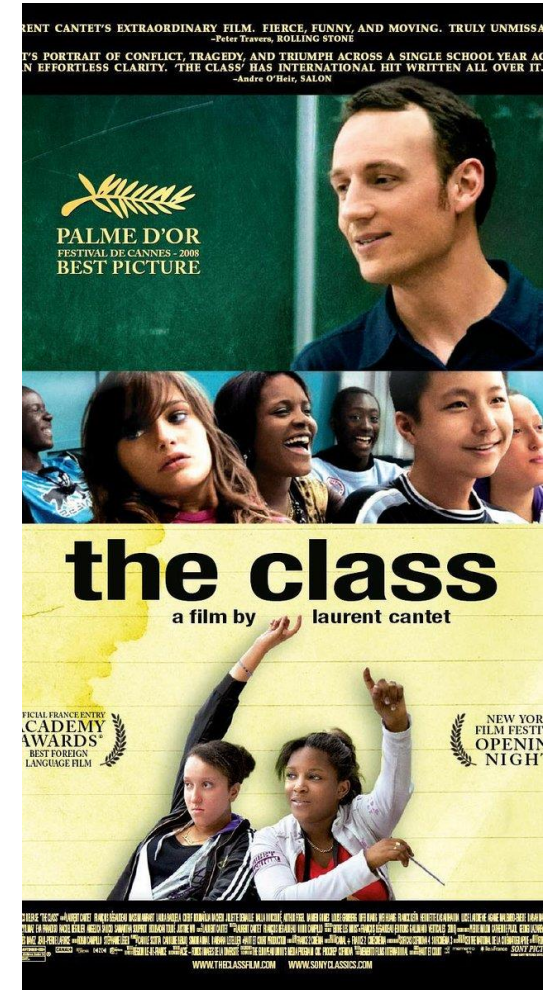What do you see?
What does a radiologist see?

RML fissure

Pleural effusion

"The radiograph demonstrates a relatively flat opacified line at the right hemidiaphragm characteristic of an effusion. In addition, the upper surface of the right middle lobe fissure is more sharply visible which tends to occur when there is fluid in that fissure. The lateral radiograph shows loss of the costophrenic angle posteriorly on the right." (http://www.yale.edu/imaging)

Teacher informal learning – an example

- Fraic, a history and geography teacher, arrives in a new school

- Edited excerpt from "Entre Les Murs" (The Class), directed by Laurent Cantet

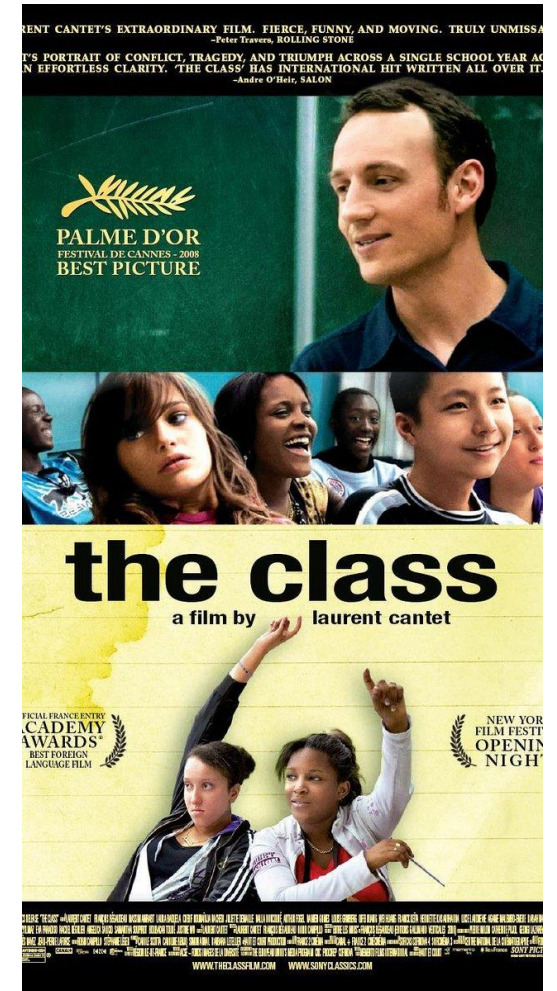- What does he learn in his first hour at work?
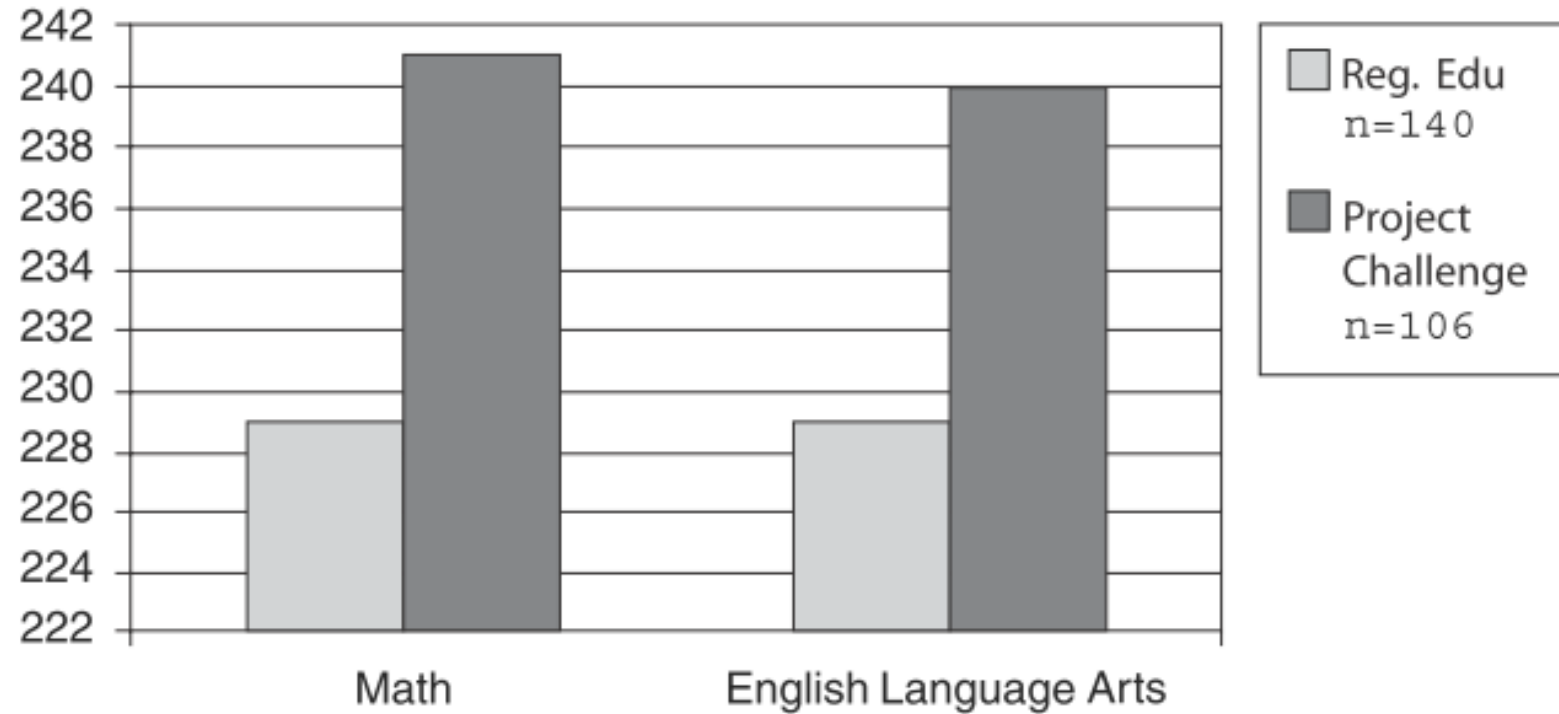
0:45

Hi, I'm Herv

What does Fraic learn in his first hour at work?

What might the staff learn from such conversations?
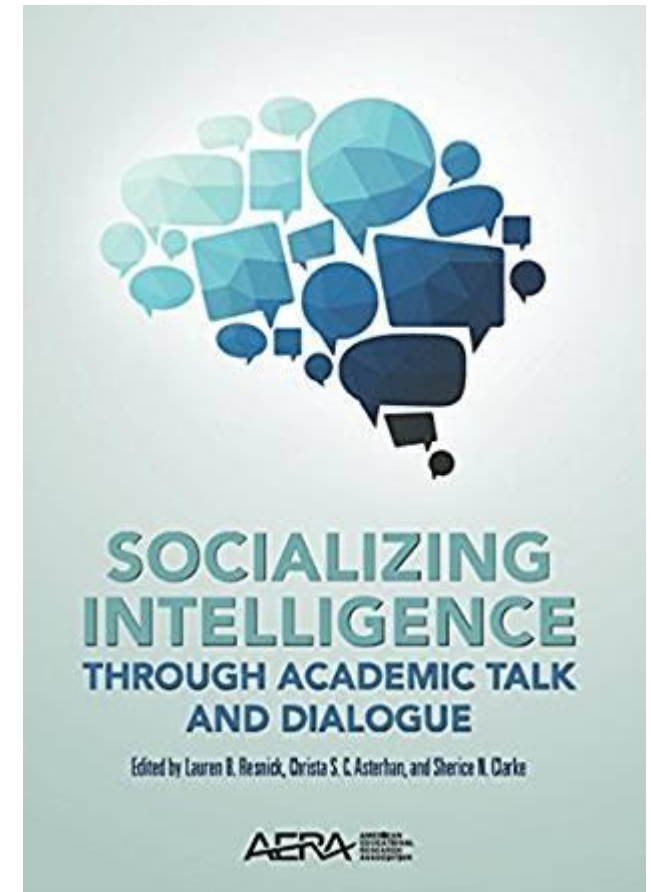
- **Terms for identifying students**: "tough but good kids", "nice", "not nice", "not nice at all"

- **Academic expectations**: "teaching multiplication tables, and sometimes mathematics"

- **Being a teacher in the school**: solidarity, survival, veteran status

Discourse and reasoning (among pupils)

Figure 7.6 Project Challenge students compared with post-hoc matched control.

Some questions

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5. How is it going? (Some productive problems of practice)

Norms of privacy → avoidance of problems

"Schoolteaching has endured largely as an assemblage of entrepreneurial individuals whose autonomy is grounded in norms of privacy and noninterference and is sustained by the very organization of teaching work." (Little, "The Persistence of Privacy", 1990)

When problems do emerge….

Judith Warren Little

- "Ventilation", blowing off steam

- Consolation ("normalizing" problems)

- Quick solutions, "tips and tricks"

Ilana Horn

Radical contextualism

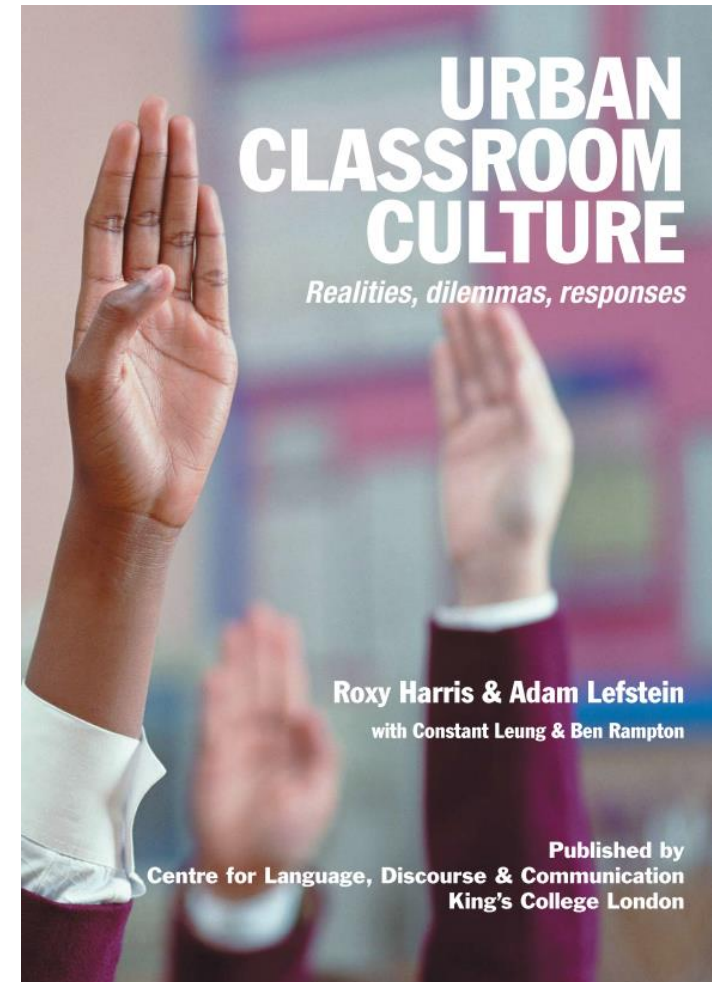# Gap between practice and talk about practice

"In open discussion, the first response of the teachers in the groups we assembled was to criticize the teachers in the recordings... But this soon gave way to the admission that episodes like these were familiar, and although traditional order could still be found, classroom relations in urban comprehensive secondary school contexts in London had changed."

URBAN CLASSROOM CULTURE
Realities, dilemmas, responses

Roxy Harris & Adam Lefstein
with Constant Leung & Ben Rampton

Published by
Centre for Language, Discourse & Communication
King's College London

Conversations about classroom video-recordings

Harshly judgmental, often dismissive

Intuitive, impressionistic

Focusing on what's missing: "I would have liked to have seen…"

Attributing everything to the teacher

- Are these phenomena familiar?

  - norms of privacy

  - ventilation, normalization and quick solutions

  - radical contextualism

  - gap between practice and talk

  - harshly judgmental

  - focus on what's missing

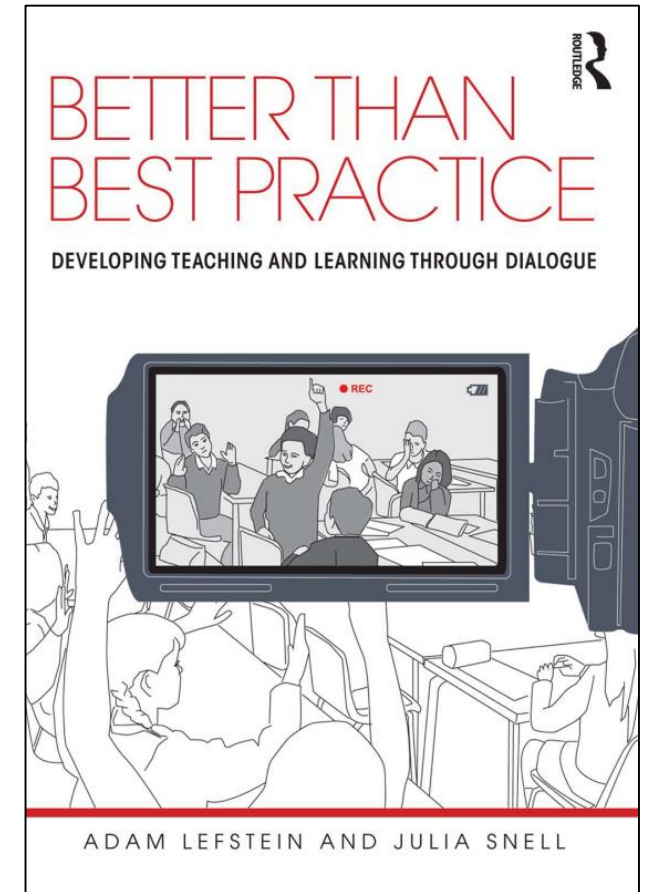- What do we learn from them?

0:45

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"Productive" to what end?
Pedagogical reasoning and adaptive expertise

- **Sensitivity** to notice what's happening;

- **Interpretation** to accurately make sense of what's going on;

- **Repertoire** of strategies to act and respond flexibly;

- **Judgement** to choose the best course of action.

http://dialogicpedagogy.com

Pedagogically productive talk

a) focused on problems of practice;

b) anchored in rich representations of practice;

c) multi voiced: different perspectives are shared and attended to;

d) involves pedagogical reasoning: the use of evidence, explanations, and reasons to interpret classroom events and weigh and justify courses of action;

e) generative orientations toward students, learning, content and teaching; and

f) balances support and critique: fostering trust and collegiality, on the one hand, and critical inquiry on the other.

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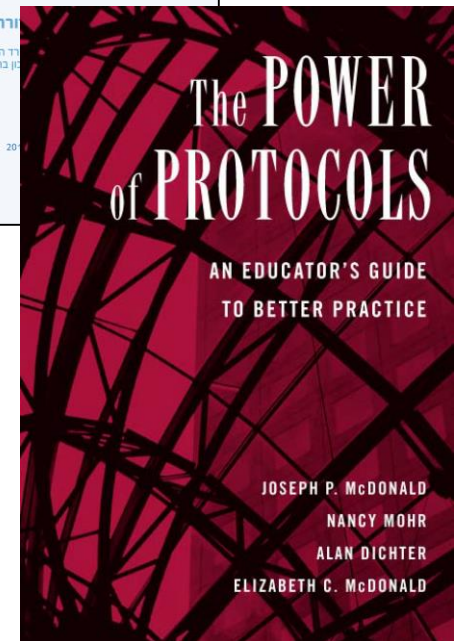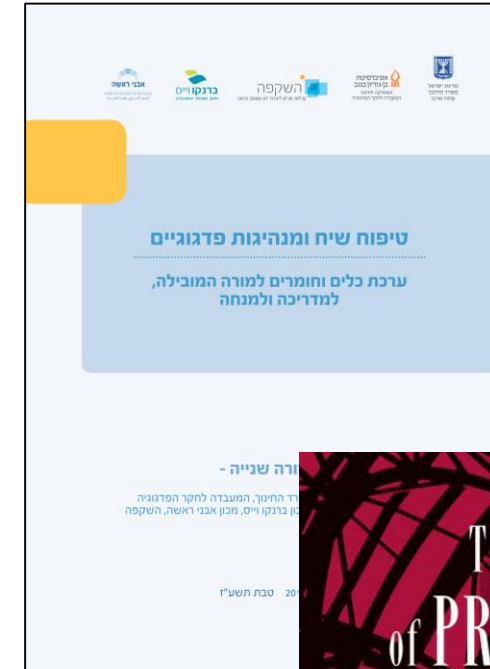# Challenges to advancing teacher learning through professional conversations

1. **Organization**: creating teams with a shared object, carving out time for regular meetings;

2. **Culture**: cultivating productive discourse norms, through protocols, modeling, and reflection;

Protocol norms → adaptive expertise

- Description
- Analysis
- Means of coping
- Advantages and disadvantages

⇨

- Sensitivity
- Interpretation
- Repertoire
- Judgement

Challenges to advancing teacher learning through professional conversations

1. **Organization**: creating teams with a shared object, carving out time for regular meetings;

2. **Culture**: cultivating productive discourse norms, through protocols, modeling, and reflection;

3. **Representation**: making practice available for inquiry, e.g. through video recordings, or documenting student work;

4. **Leadership**: facilitating teacher discourse requires a unique set of skills and dispositions.

5. **Systemic approach**: career trajectories, incentive structures, support systems.

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Back to Sarit

- First discussion of the video with her teacher team: overly focused on the protocol, stilted, unhelpful

- Discussed her experience with the community of leading teachers

- Second, restructured discussion: much better but a little too late

- Development of a well-structured video case disseminated throughout the network

Some of our problems of practice

1. **Agency and appropriation**: exerting ownership, and embedding the tools in local culture, entails changing them

2. **Face-work**: ever-present in work with video – an impediment to but also potential catalyst of learning

3. **Framing teaching events as problems of practice**

4. **Principals' involvement**: a double-edged sword

5. **Pace of research vs. pace of intervention**.

6. **System stability**: too much or too little funding, personnel turnover, pace.

7. **Cultural change**: "work" or "workshop"?

Thank you!

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