

Beyond Congeniality

A brief critique protocol for teacher educator communities that want dialogue to produce learning, not just agreement.

The problem

Professional communities can become supportive without becoming educative. When everyone is careful, agreeable, or quick to affirm, important assumptions remain untouched. This protocol provides four simple critique moves that preserve relationship while deepening thinking.

Move	Purpose	Possible language
PROBE	Ask for the reasoning underneath the claim.	What makes you think that? What evidence or experience is shaping that interpretation?
SURFACE	Name an assumption, value, or taken-for-granted idea.	What assumption seems to be underneath this? What are we treating as obvious?
COMPLICATE	Introduce another perspective, context, consequence, or tension.	What might we be missing? Who might experience this differently? What happens in a different context?
REFRAME	Offer a different way to define or interpret the issue.	How else might this be understood? What changes if we frame the problem differently?

A simple round

1. One person shares a claim, interpretation, plan, or dilemma.
2. Each listener chooses one critique move: Probe, Surface, Complicate, or Reframe.
3. The presenter listens and takes notes before responding.
4. The presenter names what shifted, what remains unresolved, and what deserves further inquiry.

Ground rules

- Critique the idea, interpretation, or practice – not the person's worth.
- Do not disguise advice as a question.
- Do not require immediate agreement.
- Make room for silence and revision.

- Ask whose perspective or consequence is missing.
- End by identifying what the conversation made newly visible.

Quick reflection

Which move do I use naturally? Which do I avoid? What would make our group's dialogue more rigorous without making it less trusting?

The goal

Move from a community that is merely congenial to one that is both relationally supportive and intellectually demanding.

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