Moving Past Resistance:  
Attuning to (Re-) Build Trust and Galvanize Action

Scenario:

Students have concluded a case-based science unit on epigenetics. Cooperative teams have been tasked with sharing “... at least one additional example of a phenotype affected by epigenetic methylation.” One group has researched Post- Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) and posited epigenetic origins for PTSS. Their presentation to the whole class includes part of a video, ripped from YouTube.

Initially, following the group’s presentation, students raise their hands, are recognized and ask (mostly clarifying) questions about the content of the video. Ultimately, a student expresses insult at the content of the video and challenges the presenting group’s motivations (“... that was some racist sh–t...”). A second student aggressively defends the presenters (“shut up, that’s not what they said...!”) ... At once, the class digresses into heated and very personal comments! Students’ begin to shout and challenge each other and ultimately the teacher demands, “everyone just sit down and be quiet! “.

The hour that follows is the teacher’s preparation period and the scheduled de-brief for the lesson. Applying the Key Ideas and Confusing Concepts resource, critique the Mentor referencing the following excerpted observations from that meeting:

**Mentor:** (pulls a chair to the left shoulder of his PT in an overture of solidarity)  
“Ok, what went wrong there?”

- sitting beside (rather than afront) the teacher sacrifices **significant** opportunity for **Attunement**
- **the Mentor has offered an evaluative Statement (here veiled as a question).** Not everything in this lesson was a failure; in fact this video could be the foundation for deeply-relevant teaching and learning. **The Mentor’s opener might have been “That was one of the most exciting and educational hours I’ve ever spent in a classroom and I’m grateful to you! Can we discuss student engagement (targeting the Instructional Core) as we replay the lesson’s chronology?**

**PT:** (choking back tears) “everything, that was the worst 50 minutes of my life...”

- **this moment begs recognition of the teachers deep upsetment and then reappraisal targeting what went right ( e.g. the lesson landed extended strategic thinking and creative constructs <DOK-4 at Application>; the lesson was standards-based timely and deeply authentic; the lesson offered rich formative assessment of both pedagogical next-steps and classroom management revisions,..).** Defaulting to the emotion of the moment narrows the teachers focus; reduces cognitive resources needed
for creative thought process and reduces the odds of agreement and action regarding next-steps.

Mentor: (grappling to assert solutions are forthcoming) “Look, don’t worry, I see exactly what happened and I know exactly what I’d do next!... I can see you’re bummed-out; tell me what you’re feeling...?”

- yet another Mentor statement where a question would have activated reappraisal and reversed the teacher’s default to Loss-Bias (example: “What were the amazing and significant aspects of the lesson that landed exactly as planned?”). Additionally, might this be an opportunity for Motivational Interviewing?

PT: (an extended recalling of lesson and how each moment of the lesson provoked an associated negative feeling)
- this action, on the part of the Mentor, evidences a further lack of focus on Perspective Taking and risks the Mentor being cast in the role of weekly recipient of catharsis, but little constructive action...

Mentor: “Ok, the lesson went badly, but one cannot make an omelette without breaking some eggs!”
- the Mentor has both reiterated a Statement that provokes a narrowing of the teacher’s focus (limiting the brain’s capacity to be creative while deconstructing the lesson)...) and reduces the monumental opportunity for growth that this experience has provided. At some point (perhaps at the next week’s Induction appointment), the Mentor may structure a Question that supports a Data Driven Dialog about the lessons successes and failures (how about: “OK, let’s look at grade distributions from the unit exam; review again the Key-Indicators from your 7C survey and glance at the video of the student discussion that evolved following Group #1’s presentation. What does the data suggest, worked in that lesson and in the unit? Where is the data pointing toward a need for focus / intervention?)

PT: “Ah, I don’t know. It feels like I’m slipping instead of getting better at this; I don’t really know why... I don’t know what to do next and I don’t know if this class will be controllable if these issues come up again tomorrow.”
- The Participating Teacher announces a loss of his sense of Certainty (“I don’t know what to do next...”). The Mentor might commend the teacher, reminding that “slipping” is both evidence of innovation and a near inevitability. The cost of avoiding “slipping” is a halt to one’s professional growth. The mentor may also address what classroom management issues could arise in the next day’s class and role play how to address these should they occur.
Mentor: “Well, I still think you’re a STAR and I know that if we keep pushing to finish this inquiry-cycle you’ll feel pretty damned great to have that clear credential!”

- Another Statement on the part of the Mentor and this time loaded with a tacit Conditional Incentive

PT: “I feel strongly that I should get back onto the departments pacing guide and common curriculum; get back to the proven stuff. What do you think?”

- The Teacher is proposing a renewed sense of Certainty, but traded for a regression toward the mean of the department...

Mentor: “Well, ‘Birds of a feather flock together’ and I want you to be your own bird!”

- ...?

PT: “Maybe the strategies I’m trying are the wrong ones? I don’t see anyone else in my department is using them. This is why I think maybe I should get back to the proven stuff...”

- An opportunity to reassert Certainty: The mentor may query, “What are the strategies you chose to use in this lesson/unit? What is the Effect Size for these?”

Mentor: “Well, here’s a great chance for you to work on CSTP 6.1 by engaging your department colleagues. Why not explain what happened in this lesson and then ask what they’d do next if it were their class?”

- The Mentor has retreated into a personal Loss Bias affected default. Passing the neophyte to colleagues for advice can work in a high performing department, populated by veteran teachers, who are prepared to engage in a Data Driven Dialog with the new teacher that culminates in High Effect instructional interventions that are appropriate to the need. Too often, well meaning colleagues offer advice, from their personal experience which (even if the advice given is really good), norms the neophyte away from 21st Century “Habit of Mind”

PT: “Whew, ... maybe.”

- but, more than likely, not...