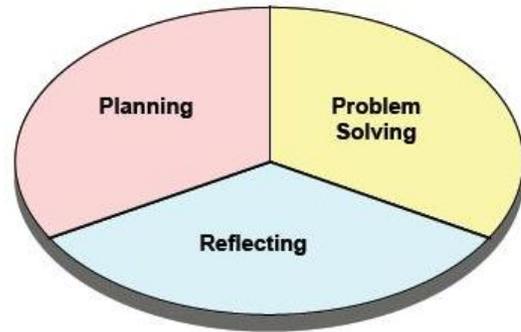


MENTORING MOMENTS: LEARNING FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

Mediating Thinking with Learning Focused Conversations

The months of May and June can mark the transition for many beginning teachers from thinking about the current school year to wondering about what next year holds in store. Many mentors may find themselves engaged with beginning teachers in the types of conversations described below:

- Anticipating a new teaching assignment or school (*Planning*)
- Looking back upon the highs and lows of the year (*Reflecting*)
- Addressing a specific challenge or concern that is top of mind (*Problem Solving*)



Flexibility of Stance and Role

Elements of Listening

Attending Fully



Non Verbal Encouragement



Pausing & Paraphrasing



Reflecting Feelings



Learning focused conversations represent authentic opportunities for mentors to [continue to listen](#) and by doing so foster the relational trust that is so important for successful mentoring relationships.

The conversation map below is intended to be a starting point for thinking. An attribute of skilled mentors is they demonstrate [flexibility of stance and role](#) based on the needs of the beginning teachers they are working with.

Example of a Conversation Map – Step by Step

1) Elegant Paraphrase

“So even though the rest of your class is coming along well you’re feeling frustrated because there’s one student you just don’t feel is connecting with anybody.”

As the beginning teacher begins the planning, reflecting or problem solving conversation, the mentor models the elements of listening illustrated above, thereby encouraging the person to continue speaking. When the person is “finished” explaining their issue in one sentence the mentor summarizes the “gist” of what they have heard.

An elegant paraphrase can reflect heart (*how the person is feeling*) or content (*the big issue or challenge*). In the illustrative example to the left, the mentor has summarized both feeling and content. Usually the speaker responds with an emphatic yeah and/or elaborates on the concern or issue in greater detail.



MENTORING MOMENTS: LEARNING FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

2) Explore Options

“Given all that you know about building inclusion in your classroom, what are some of the options you are considering as you try to bring your new student on board with the rest of the class?”

Instead of offering advice or autobiography, the mentor assists the beginning teacher in accessing their thinking about the choices they have. Key to this step is a “positive pre-supposition” that the speaker has already given the issue thought and has internal strategies and resources they can bring to bear.

Note that the question in the illustrative example is forward looking. At this point the speaker will often provide a synopsis of a number of things they are considering. The role of the mentor is to continue to listen without offering any counsel. Once a number of options have been surfaced, consider proceeding to step # 3.

3) Plan Next Steps

“Wow, you’ve obviously given this a lot of thought and you’ve shared many ideas. As you go back to your classroom, what will be the first step you take in your effort to help this student find an entry point into your classroom community?”

The mentor’s goal here is to have the beginning teacher consider all the options they have shared and articulate a specific next step or strategy that they will apply to the issue, problem or challenge.

Once the beginning teacher has articulated the practical idea(s) they are going to walk away with from this conversation and attempt to implement in their context, consider proceeding to step # 4.

4) Self Evaluation

“So you’re going to start by having the student work more in groups with others - how will you know if this strategy is working?”

When next steps have been established, the mentor assists the speaker in developing some “measures” that will let them know about whether the approach they’ve chosen is working.

The mentor encourages the beginning teacher to respond with specific indicators that they would like see. At this point the mentor may choose to affirm what she or he has heard and bring the conversation to a close.

Ideas and Resources to Support Implementation



Download

- NTIP Resource Handbooks for New Teachers, Mentors, Principals
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/resourcehandbooks.html>



Listen

- Online to the Learning Focused Conversations Slidecast
<http://conn-o.osapac.org/mentoringmomentsmay>



Connect

- With your colleagues on our new Mentoring Moments NING
<http://mentoringmoments.ning.com>

