

Building Relational Trust

While there are many different approaches to mentorship, what they all share in common is an emphasis on the importance of listening.

As the Chinese character for listening illustrates, listening is a complex skill. At its core, listening shows we care. It is a powerful tool for establishing and building the trust and rapport essential for any mentoring relationship.



Elements of Listening



Attending Fully

A real barrier to listening can be actually being present in the moment when someone is speaking. Many of us are guilty of “fake attentive listening” where we smile and nod at the speaker but in reality we’re thinking of the dozens of things still to do that day.

Attending fully involves physically unplugging from our personal electronic devices and also letting go of our “mental e-mail” in order to fully focus on the person who is speaking to us.



Pausing and Paraphrasing

Often we “listen to speak” when engaged in conversation. In other words, we begin to quickly construct answers or advice in our heads rather than truly listening. Both pausing and paraphrasing can be effective tools for acknowledging what the speaker is saying and allowing the person to clarify their thoughts.

An elegant paraphrase doesn’t parrot back everything the speaker has said, rather it’s a single sentence that expresses the gist of what you’ve heard and understood as a listener. We can choose to paraphrase the content of what we’ve heard or the feelings behind them or both. An example is below:

- Sounds like you’re very worried (*feeling*) about planning for the open house. (*content*)



Non-Verbal Encouragement

Albert Mehrabian's pioneering research in the 1960's examined three key elements of any face-to-face communication:

- Our words / Our tone of voice / Our body language

While his 7 / 38 / 55 rule (7% words / 38% tone / 55% body language) is subject to much interpretation and academic debate, the emphasis of how important non-verbal communication can be is worth considering. If our body language is congruent with the attributes of an effective listener we are sending a message of genuine interest in what the speaker has to say.



Reflecting Feelings

A learning focussed conversation is an intricate dance. As a skilled listener you may be adjusting your tone, facial expression or even body position based on the cues you are observing from the person speaking. This is not mimicking or mirroring the person, rather it's a sense of being in synch.

At its core, reflecting feelings is caring with your heart about what the person with whom you're conversing is saying. What's truly rewarding in working with both adults and students is that when people feel that sense of caring, how much more rich the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and ideas becomes.

So What / Now What: Ideas and Resources to Support Implementation

Maybe an idea for us over the next few weeks is to simply look for authentic opportunities to listen with our hearts.....to our family, our friends, our colleagues, and our students.



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



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- Do you have a topic that you'd like to see addressed in future *Mentoring Moments* or an idea or resource you'd like to share? Please email us at: Jim.Strachan@ontario.ca



Ideas for Making the Annual Learning Plan Authentic and Meaningful

School level examples:	So What / Now What
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principal engages staff in the collaborative development of the School Improvement Plan (SIP); teachers will be more likely to be motivated to connect their own learning goals to something they have invested in creating. • The principal makes explicit connections to the opportunities for ALP goals to connect to the SIP, when developing the SIP and discussing the ALP at the same time as respecting the ALP as a teacher-authored, teacher-directed learning plan. • The principal, with a team of teachers, collates ALP data into common themes and posts them in a prominent location in the principal’s office and/or the staff room. The principal keeps teachers’ ALP goals at the forefront when opportunities for professional learning and leadership arise. This signals to the teachers that the principal values their learning goals. The team also uses the common themes to build connections/networks amongst colleagues and to design differentiated staff learning based on the themes of learning goals. • The principal supports teachers and their ALP goals by accessing school, board or ministry resources (e.g., PD funds, professional reading materials, release time, TLLP). • Principals and teachers promote the ALP as a living document that is teacher- authored and teacher-directed. It should be a “messy plan” that may be modified throughout the year and impacted by ongoing learning and reflective dialogue. • The principal seeks opportunities to build professional learning networks with teachers with common learning goals. The principal fosters these collaborative networks during staff meetings, grade/division/department meetings and PA days. • Teachers use Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a forum for ALP development. • Teachers collaborate on the development of the ALP goals and strategies, and periodically discuss progress on their plan. • Principals use school-level release time to facilitate teachers in working together to develop and/or implement ALP goals and for principal/teacher meetings on the ALP. • Principals and teachers create opportunities throughout the year for staff to have conversations with each other about their learning goals and progress (e.g., learning-focused conversations in small groups at a staff meeting, team discussion at a department/division/grade meeting). The principal is involved in the collaborative and reflective discussions; principal discussions on the ALP do not always have to be one-to-one. • Teachers reflect on their ongoing learning /goals with their principal by either meeting again at the end of the year or by closing the loop on the previous year when the teacher and principal meets to discuss the revised ALP at the beginning of the subsequent year. 	

Ideas for Making the Annual Learning Plan Authentic and Meaningful

<p>School level examples (cont...)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principals respect the value of the teacher’s ALP by reflecting on the value of their own PPA and principal’s Annual Growth Plan (AGP) experiences, and how they can relay the same value to teachers through their own practice. • The principal captures the main components of the teacher’s ALP in the four non- evaluation years within the evaluation year Summative Report. This requires the principal to be familiar with what is in the teachers’ ALP and respects the value of the learning goals for teachers. 	
<p>System level examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boards, jointly with teachers and the federations, develop a list of overarching themes for the Annual Learning Plan from which the teacher selects as a general focus for the learning goal. This provides some support to the teacher to set the focus of their learning and may be used at the school or system level to analyse and collate ALP themes. • The staff development team, a joint federation and board committee, analyses and collates the ALP themes; this data is used to set the focus of system professional learning opportunities and/or a PA day. Learning sessions are designed and facilitated by teachers, and the sessions provide for teacher choice and self- direction. • The ALP is promoted as a living document that is teacher-authored and teacher- directed. It should be a “messy plan” that may be modified throughout the year and impacted by progress and reflective dialogue. • Boards align the process of teacher requests for funding to attend professional learning to the ALP and the teacher’s identified goals. • To build coherence between school/board/ministry priorities and the ALP, the board revises the ALP form to include check boxes on the ALP form for the teacher to identify whether their ALP goal is connected to their most recent TPA, the School Improvement Plan, the Board Improvement Plan, a Ministry initiative or to a personal professional goal. The form also provides an opportunity for the teacher to articulate how their goals connect to student learning. • Superintendents model the value of the annual learning plan through their meetings/discussions with the principal about his/her AGP. Superintendents model the value of a meaningful, collaborative and growth-oriented process with the principal. Boards can provide explicit opportunities for principals to reflect on the value of their own PPA and PALP experiences, and how that same value can be relayed to teachers through their own practice. 	<p>So What / Now What</p>

The strategies detailed in this document were garnered from board and federation representatives sharing of their ideas, practices and policies to promote effective practices relating to Annual Learning Plans and Teacher Performance Appraisal. These strategies offer examples of what boards and/or federations have found to be effective practices for ALP/TPA.

Annual Learning Plans and Teacher Performance Appraisal

The Question:

“How can I augment the learning culture of my school by effectively engaging teachers in their Annual Learning Plans (ALP) and Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA)?”

The Answer:

Here are five Tips for Success:

1. Embed learning-focused conversations in your daily interactions with teachers
2. Collaborate with teachers
3. Build coherence between ALP/TPA and other school, board and ministry initiatives and priorities
4. Align professional learning and resources with teachers' ALPs
5. Use the TPA as a growth-oriented opportunity

1. EMBED LEARNING-FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS IN YOUR DAILY INTERACTIONS WITH TEACHERS

Engaging teachers in conversations about teaching and learning is one of the most important roles of the principal that can have the greatest impact on student outcomes. Learning-focused conversations are not limited to an annual meeting about a teacher's ALP goal or the Pre- and Post-Observation Meetings during an appraisal year but, rather, they should occur regularly: a follow-up to a walk-through, a team or staff meeting, a PLC meeting or simply an informal conversation in the staff room.

“The more leaders focus their relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes.”

Viviane Robinson (2007)

By regularly engaging with teachers in discussions about teaching and learning, you build credibility and a trusting relationship that effectively prepares you and the teacher for the learning-focused conversations throughout the

ALP and TPA processes. You and the teacher are more likely to feel comfortable openly discussing his or her practice, goals and growth-oriented feedback if the ALP/TPA discussions are simply one of many professional conversations between you both.

2. COLLABORATE WITH TEACHERS

Collaborating with teachers is a vital element to both the learning culture of your school and to ALP/TPA as effective growth-oriented opportunities. Viviane Robinson states the role of the principal must be more than “just supporting or sponsoring staff in their learning.” In promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, “[t]he leader participates in the learning as leader, learner or both.”

Friedkin & Slater (1994) believe that “[t]he principal is also more likely to be seen by staff as a source of instructional advice, which suggests that they are both more accessible and more knowledgeable about instructional matters...”

Viviane Robinson (2007)

Here are a few easy ways to build collaboration in the ALP with your staff:

- Engage staff in the collaborative development of the School Improvement Plan (SIP); they will be more likely to be motivated to connect their own learning goals to something they have invested in creating;
- Build professional learning networks among teachers with common learning goals – foster these networks and connections during staff meetings, grade/division/department meetings and PA days; and
- Create opportunities throughout the year for teachers to discuss their learning goals and progress with each other (e.g., mingle at a staff meeting or a team discussion at a department/division/grade meeting). Get involved in the collaborative and reflective discussions; these discussions on the ALP do not always have to be one-to-one.

Nurturing a collaborative culture, when it comes to teacher growth and appraisal, involves reaching and



empowering all staff members according to their individual needs and strengths. Through collaboration, you can recognize successes, access expertise, and acknowledge and support growth and learning needs.

Look for: ALP/TPA Effective Practices Strategy Harvest (collated from regional networking sessions with boards and federations) at:

<http://mentoringmoments.ning.com/group/alp-tpa-networked-learning>

3. BUILD COHERENCE BETWEEN ALP/TPA AND OTHER SCHOOL, BOARD AND MINISTRY INITIATIVES AND PRIORITIES

Coherence can be found in one overarching goal: to improve student achievement. There are many competing priorities in your school and district; a focus on teaching is essential to reach all of these priorities. It is, therefore, important that you align your work as it relates to these priorities with the annual learning plans and teacher performance appraisal.

Here are a few simple ways to build coherence between ALP/TPA and school, board and ministry initiatives:

- Ask questions to guide the discussion in the Pre-Observation Meeting that make explicit connections between the teacher's practice and the SIP and other school, board and ministry priorities;
- Throughout staff learning sessions, model the use of success criteria to highlight what that practice would look like in a classroom and connect to what you would be looking for during formal and informal classroom visits;
- During staff learning sessions or meetings, use reflective questions to engage teachers in discussions about teaching and learning. Use the same questions throughout the ALP and TPA processes to generate discussion on the teacher's practice and goals.

4. ALIGN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND RESOURCES WITH TEACHERS' ANNUAL LEARNING PLANS

The teacher's ALP gives you another opportunity to create and model a collaborative working culture. The value you place on the ALP by meeting with the teacher to discuss goals and strategies, suggest resources and offer support will heighten the value the teacher gives the ALP.

The value a principal demonstrates towards the ALP process is very significant; it is a reflection of his or her respect for teaching professionalism through recognition and support for a teacher's professional development.

Teacher Focus Group on ALP/ TPA

You can further build value into the ALP by aligning professional learning and resources with your staff's goals. For instance, you can:

- Analyze and collate the learning goals outlined in the ALPs into common themes;
- Use the themes to connect, formally or informally, teachers with common learning goals;
- Design differentiated staff learning based on the themes of learning goals; and
- Support learning goals by accessing school, board or ministry resources.

5. USE TPA AS A GROWTH-ORIENTED OPPORTUNITY

The TPA process is designed to engage in collaborative growth-oriented discussions about teaching and learning. Embedded in the broader learning culture of the school, TPA can profoundly motivate and stimulate teacher growth and instructional improvement. It is both an opportunity to formally acknowledge what the teacher is doing well and to provide forward-looking feedback for support and growth.

The broadest function of the appraisal meetings is to "improve or enhance job performance by engaging a reflective conversation on the complexities of teaching and learning."

Stronge and Tucker, 2003

Annual learning plans and teacher performance appraisal provide a strategy for teachers and school leaders to focus on instructional practice and ongoing professional learning. They provide opportunities to engage in professional dialogue about these priorities and the teacher's practice, to motivate further growth and direct or access support. It is important, however, that ALP and TPA are situated within the learning culture of the school, not in isolation.

You can learn much more by reading the original source listed in the reference that follows. We welcome you to add your own thoughts by joining the Ontario Education Leaders network:

<http://ontarioeducationleaders.ning.com>

REFERENCE

Robinson, Viviane (2007). *The impact of leadership on student outcomes: Making sense of the evidence*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research

Stronge, J. and P. Tucker (2003). *Handbook on Teacher Evaluation: Assessing and Improving Performance*. Eye on Education Publications

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>



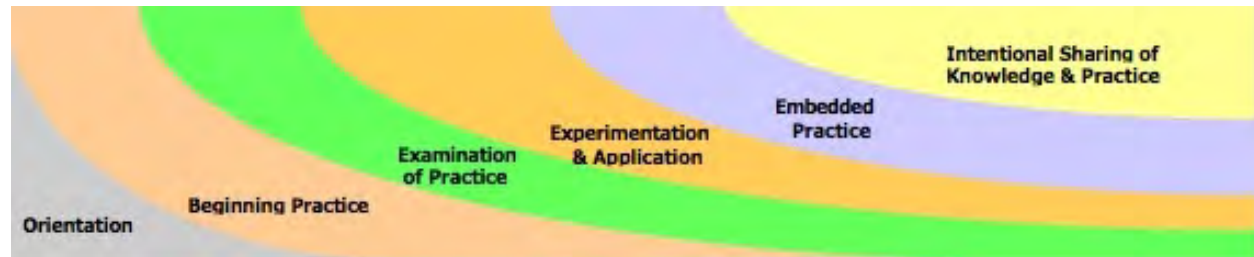
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MENTORING MOMENTS: PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR MENTORS

Utilizing Scaling Questions in Debriefing Conversations



Opportunities for Beginning Teachers to reflect on practice and debrief with mentors can be powerful learning for both parties. One approach to debriefing conversations is “scaling questions” adapted from the solution – focussed conversation work of [Nancy McConkey](#).

What is powerful about this tool is not only that variety of mentoring contexts within which it can be applied but also the underlying assumptions described below.

Attributes Based Approach

A purposeful seeking out of strengths is at the heart of this idea. Often, the person you are mentoring has given their challenges considerable thought prior to speaking with you.

Islands of Competence

By asking about the positive things you ensure the conversation begins with a success. Even a “1” is better than a “0!”

Ownership resides with the Beginning Teacher

Your impression is set aside as ultimately the Beginning Teacher will be the one implementing the ideas in their classroom.

Flexibility of Stance & Role

As a skilled mentor you may choose to continue in the coaching stance or shift to consultant or collaborator, based on the needs of the person you are debriefing with.

Scaling Questions Conversation Map

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the worst morning you’ve had and 10 being the best, how was this morning for you?
- Oh a <e.g. 6> - What made it a 6?
- How might you bump it up a notch to a 7? (specific ideas)
- Continue with Coaching stance or shift to Consultant or Collaborator based on needs

Don’t like Numbers?

For some, applying a quantitative number to an experience may not feel comfortable. If that’s the case, the initial scaling question can be simply adapted as in the example below:

- *Thinking about both the worst morning you’ve ever had and the best one; how was this morning for you?*
- *Oh..the morning was “fine” – Fine sounds better than so so...what made it fine?*
- *How might you bump it up to “very fine” (specific ideas)*
- *Continue with Coaching stance or shift to Consultant or Collaborator based on needs*

At first, scaling questions may feel a bit like following a script but over time this tool can simply be embedded into a mentor’s repertoire of learning – focussed conversation strategies.



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Human Resources Certificate Program Session #2

Jim Strachan, Education Officer
Ministry of Education Teaching Policy and Standards Branch

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Our Children, Their Future, Christ's Way....Nurturing Souls and Building Minds