



Notes, Ideas, Applications

Section 3

Maximizing Time and Attention

FOR ALL of us—mentors and protégés alike—time may be our scarcest resource. In most cases, the challenge of developing and maintaining a learning-focused relationship exists outside of the expected activities and responsibilities of professional life. This chapter offers suggestions and strategies for time efficient, productive interactions. It begins with the most important use of time for learning-focused mentors: attending fully.

Attending Fully

Human beings are highly attuned to the nonverbal signals of others. We communicate our intention and degree of attention to others by our posture, degree of muscle tension, and how we respond verbally and nonverbally. We fully join the conversation and the relationship by aligning our body with that of another. This is especially important when the other person is ill-at-ease or when we are having difficulty understanding what is being said.

Ten minutes of our complete and focused attention is worth much more, in terms of maintaining a relationship and supporting learning, than thirty minutes with distractions. We actually maximize our time together by focusing our full attention on our protégé.

While our capacity to attend fully is an innate part of being human, there are times when the potential for distraction or lack of attention is high. For example, when we are fatigued or stressed our mind might wander away from the present moment, and away from our colleague. When we have a great deal to do, with little time available, the same conditions apply. Given the pressures of life in schools, conscious attention to being with our protégé is a challenge that is particularly important to overcome.

Communicating Our Attention

We signal our full attention nonverbally. Imagine you are in a restaurant, observing two people across the room. You can tell if they are relating well, even if you can't hear what they are saying. You might observe them leaning in towards each other, nodding, smiling, and gesturing animatedly as they engage in conversation. When we are aligned congruently with another individual, we are said to be in rapport.

Alignment has three distinct categories: physical, which includes muscle tension, posture and gesture; vocal, which includes intonation, pace and word choices; and breathing, which includes depth, duration and rate. As described above, we are in rapport when several of these elements are matching. Often, rapport is naturally present. However, we can intentionally create it by matching our colleague's use of these elements.

Alignment Categories

- Physical
 - Muscle Tension
 - Posture
 - Gesture
- Vocal
 - Intonation
 - Pace
 - Word Choice
- Breathing
 - Depth
 - Duration
 - Rate

Being in rapport is a manifestation of our full attention to another. Generally, when we are fully focused on our protégé, rapport will be a natural part of the interaction. However, there are specific instances when we might pay particular attention to the use of rapport tools in our interactions (Costa & Garmston, 2002). These include times when we anticipate tension or anxiety or when tension or anxiety emerges within the conversation. For example, no matter how good the relationship between a mentor and protégé, there is likely to be some anxiety when we engage in a reflecting conversation about a classroom observation. Or preparing a protégé for a potentially stressful event like parent-teacher conferences or a first classroom observation by the principal is an important time to apply rapport elements.

Applying rapport tools is also useful when we are having difficulty understanding another person. Sometimes it feels like we're operating on different wavelengths. When miscommunication occurs, intentionally realigning and matching a colleague's nonverbals is often an effective strategy. A fourth occasion for intentional monitoring of alignment is when we are distracted or having difficulty paying attention. So often, the limited time we have to meet with a protégé is 'stolen' from time we would devote to other tasks. Sometimes it is difficult to keep these tasks, both personal and professional, from distracting us. In this case, intentional monitoring of alignment keeps our attention fully on our colleague.

Blocks to Understanding

In addition to fluent application of the elements of rapport, listening with total attention, and without judgment, is a fundamental skill for mentors. In this way, we signal our support and establish a safe environment for thinking together. Further, we increase our capacity to understand and better serve our colleague.

To maintain this quality of listening, our attention must be on our protégé. However, there are several common internal distractions. These blocks to understanding shift our listening focus inward, to our own opinion or interest or surety about a solution. This shift to 'I' distracts from understanding. For learning-focused mentors it is particularly important to maintain awareness and listening discipline.

'I' Listening

Listening from our own world view diminishes our capacity to understand a protégé's perceptions and concerns. There are three specific categories of 'I' listening: personal referencing, personal curiosity, and personal certainty.

Be Intentional When/If:

- You anticipate tension or anxiety
- Tension or anxiety emerges
- You are having difficulty understanding another person
- You are distracted

'I' Listening

Be aware of:

- Personal Referencing
- Personal Curiosity
- Personal Certainty

strength
NO I
attention to
colleagues
create
empathy

stoked
- personal
curiosity
ask questions

• PERSONAL REFERENCING

Personal referencing is 'me too' or 'I would never' listening. It occurs when our minds shift from listening to understand another, to considering what is being said with reference to our own experiences and then judging its worth. This type of listening can be important in the consultant stance; but only after we're sure we understand our protégé's concerns, issues, and needs. Personal referencing often leads to judgmental responses.

• PERSONAL CURIOSITY

Personal curiosity drives our listening when we are interested in what the protégé is saying, not to understand his or her needs, but because we want more information for ourselves. For example, a bright, young novice is talking about accessing the internet for a thematic unit on ecology. We find ourselves intrigued and want to know what websites are available, what type of hardware or software is necessary—and our questions are driven by our personal curiosity. While this type of listening can build relationship and is sometimes useful during the collaborative stance, it takes our attention away from our protégé.

• PERSONAL CERTAINTY

This listening block occurs when we are sure we know the solution to the problem, sometimes before we've listened enough to be sure that we understand the problem. Even before a problem is fully framed and mutually understood, this type of listening leads to offers of advice, or questions like "have you tried . . . ?" or "have you thought about . . . ?"

Giving our full attention to a colleague contributes to relationship and to clear communication. These are the foundations for mutual learning and future exploration. As consciousness about full attention develops into automaticity in our ways of listening, we can further maximize our opportunities for learning by using shared and specific structures for guiding our interactions.

Structured Conversations

Applying a shared and agreed upon structure to our conversations maximizes time, and also serves to focus attention by providing a scaffold for supporting and challenging thinking within a specified context. For example, when a mentor and protégé schedule an opportunity to plan a lesson, a structure for guiding the interaction offers topical focus and permission to keep the conversation moving. Further, a structure designed for planning increases rigor by highlighting the cognitive outcomes that support effective planning, such as predicting, envisioning and forecasting. This same notion applies to structure for reflecting and for problem-solving.

The conversation templates on the following pages are samples of efficient guides for purposeful interactions. They are based on fundamental and current theories of learning (see, for example, Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999; Marzano, 2000) that suggest the importance of specific intentions within a learning-focused interaction. The general template on the next page is based on the three phases in the Pathways Learning Model (Lipton & Wellman, 2000).

Each phase on the template serves a specific purpose. The Activating and Engaging phase establishes context and frames of reference. It activates prior knowledge and experience, surfacing the orientation and perception of the protégé regarding the topic at hand. It engages relationship, as well as mental and emotional awareness, and sets the scene for a thoughtful, learning-focused conversation. The Exploring and Discovering phase, whether in planning or reflecting, provides an opportunity for examining the details of specific events, making inferences and analyzing experiences; while the Organizing and Integrating phase supports generalizing from these explorations and bringing forward new learnings.

This general template can be tailored for specific purposes. The Planning Template that follows supports effective planning and problem-solving. Its counterpart, the Reflecting Template, is designed to elicit thoughtful reflection and produce transfer from one experience to many. Notice that these templates are designed to direct attention and focus on particular cognitive outcomes. For example, when planning, the mentor's paraphrasing and inquiry should cause the planner to predict, envision, and describe. While reflecting, the skillful mentor guides analysis, cause-effect and synthesis. Each of these structures guides thinking and produces inferences, hypotheses and new connections.

Versatility in stance is an integral part of applying the conversation templates on the pages that follow. While the questions are framed from a coaching stance, learning-focused mentors flex among the stances to support their protégés in producing the information and thinking processes within each phase of the template. For example, from a consultative stance within a planning conversation, the approach might include offering a menu of possible goals from which the novice can choose, modify or adapt. As a consultant, the mentor might also offer some possible success indicators for those goals. In a reflecting conversation, the mentor might encourage a collaborative stance and join the protégé in brainstorming a list of possible cause-effect connections between what occurred and the approaches and actions upon which the protégé is reflecting.

Specialized Applications for Conversation Templates

We propose the conversation templates as frameworks and not as recipes to be followed in a step-by-step fashion. The questions, within each phase, beneath each focus arena are intended as models and possibilities;

not as the only options. Different conversations will take on different flavors. Although these templates are relatively generic, thoughtful attention to their use for specialized functions produces powerful results.

What follows are some general tips and guidelines for applying the templates to different types of conversations.

GOAL-SETTING CONVERSATIONS

During the Activating and Engaging phase in a goal-setting conversation, it is important to take some time to clarify the roles, responsibilities and options available for both mentor and protégé. Defining the mentor's role initiates a partnership which can be shaped and negotiated to serve the learning needs of both members. Discussing the expectations of each partner reduces the possibility of disappointment or miscommunication down the road. Sharing information about the three stances makes it possible for a protégé to request a certain type of interaction, depending on needs. Use the template to keep notes and revisit the goal-setting conversation several times during the year.

Use the Exploring and Discovering phase to establish clear goals for the mentor-protégé relationship. Further, when a novice clearly articulates his or her own learning goals, the mentor can focus energy and resource on supporting the protégé in achieving them. Both types of clear, concrete and specific goal setting are important to the learning-focused relationship. The Planning Template is an effective structure for guiding these initial goal-setting conversations.

During the Organizing and Integrating phase, complete the goal-setting conversation by having your protégé summarize his or her understandings and name the next steps.

PLANNING CONVERSATIONS

Planning conversations offer fundamental learning opportunities for modeling and extending the intellectual habits of goal-driven thinking. Effective teachers set clear goals for their instruction, and identify specific systems for monitoring their achievement. They also generate contingencies should their initial planning prove unsuccessful during implementation. Attention to planning, and experience understanding the ways in which experts think about their plans, are important to the development of novice teachers. Applying the template for planning helps internalize important planning questions teachers must consider in order to produce high achievement learning for their students. Doing so with the support of a mentor increases a beginner's confidence and capacity for effective, independent instructional planning.

In the Activating and Engaging phase, establishing the context for the lesson or event allows the mentor and protégé to 'get in the room together', both the immediate space of moment-to-moment rapport and the conceptual space of the protégé's classroom. Experienced mentors preserve time for more elaborative thinking in the Exploring and Discovering phase by moving through this first phase as efficiently as possible.

The second phase, Exploring and Discovering, is where the bulk of the time is spent in a typical planning conversation. The four focus arenas are arranged in order of priority. This is especially important to emphasize to novice teachers, who tend to spend more of their time designing activities and approaches, and less of their time clarifying goals and success indicators. Reducing activity-driven planning is an important goal for learning-focused mentors.

The third phase, Organizing and Integrating, emerges from the general flow of the conversation. The focus arenas in this phase of the template offer options for extending awareness and producing higher order instructional thinking. Over time, skillful mentors note potential stretch arenas for their protégés and select focusing questions and/or suggestions within these arenas accordingly.

The Planning Template is also a useful scaffold for supporting problem-solving. Hallmarks of an expert problem-solver include the ability to envision the desired state and specify the outcomes of a viable solution. Skillful problem-solvers can also articulate criteria for and indicators of success. The Planning Template is designed to pursue these topics as they relate to the protégé's specific concerns. Again, learning-focused mentors can apply one or several stances to the problem-solving conversation, balancing support with challenge as they do so.

Problem-solving conversations can be scheduled or may arise spontaneously in hallway or staff lounge 'Gotta-minute?' moments. The Activating and Engaging phase takes on new light and new meaning in these conversations. Skilled mentors listen very carefully to the presenting issues and concerns of the protégé as well as to the perspectives and perceptions about the issues being described. Some problem-solving conversations accomplish the bulk of the work in this phase. By paraphrasing, inquiring, reframing issues and offering alternative frameworks, we model the habits of expert problem-solvers who spend more time clarifying and defining the problem than do novices. Novice problem-solvers often jump to solution thinking prematurely and spend time generating possible actions for ill-defined issues or concerns.

Once problems have been framed, the Exploring and Discovering phase proceeds very much like the planning conversation. Goals and success indicators are especially important to clarify. This process provides a reality check for the depth of the problem and for the qualities of possible best outcomes. Novices may need consultation help across this phase for especially tricky or complex problems. They may not have sufficient repertoire to generate effective strategies and/or know enough about situations like the one they are exploring to envision the array of options and choice points within the solution frame.

PROBLEM-SOLVING
CONVERSATIONS

During the Organizing and Integrating phase, the personal learning arena is often quite productive during problem-solving conversations. Again, experienced mentors note and mentally catalog the patterns of novice thinking in order to select the most productive focus arenas within this phase.

REFLECTING CONVERSATIONS

specific
cognitive
processes

Reflecting conversations consolidate and extend professional thinking and habits of mind. They can occur after specific events such as lessons or meetings, or at scheduled intervals to reflect upon patterns of teaching practice and student learning. This process is especially useful at transition points in the curriculum, when unit topics switch; or at significant points in the school year, such as the close of marking periods.

Here again, the Activating and Engaging phase matters greatly. The protégé's issues and concerns and/or perspectives and perceptions are important to surface. Depending upon what emerges, the skilled mentor will select a stance to explore the protégé's current awareness. For example, if the novice notes some issues of concern and not others that the mentor deems equally important, the mentor-as-consultant may add these to the list of topics to explore during the Exploring and Discovering phase.

During the Exploring and Discovering phase, asking the protégé to weigh priorities is not only a respectful approach; but also provides a contextually sound assessment of the ways in which this novice is developing as a professional. Experts notice more than novices. By noting what the protégé is noticing and about what the protégé is concerned, the aware mentor can select an appropriate stance and help frame the content for reflection.



During the Organizing and Integrating phase, experienced mentors widen the conversation from immediate issues to the bigger picture. The connection making, generalizations, applications and personal learnings that emerge at this phase increase the likelihood of transfer of new awareness and insight. This is the true test of learning-focused conversations. Building habits of reflection and supporting transfer of and applications of learning is a critical responsibility for mentors.

Creating reflective practitioners is an important aspect of the mentor-protégé relationship. Formal, structured opportunities to do so make a powerful contribution to developing this disposition. Note that the Reflecting Template is designed to elicit personal discoveries, as well as new learning about teaching practice.

Learning-Focused Conversations

A Template for **PLANNING** and **PROBLEM-SOLVING**



ACTIVATING AND ENGAGING

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- When thinking about this (lesson, presentation, issue, event), what are some of the dynamics that are influencing you?

INFORMATION ABOUT THE EVENT

- What are some of your questions and interests regarding this (lesson, presentation, issue, event)?

PRESENTING ISSUES/CONCERNS

- What are some of your concerns about this (lesson, presentation, issue, event)?

PERSPECTIVES AND PERCEPTIONS

- As we start to think about _____, what are some of the perspectives that will help us to see a fuller view?

ORGANIZING AND INTEGRATING

CONNECTIONS

- What are some ways that this experience fits within the larger picture for this year?

GENERALIZATIONS

- If you were going to give this (plan, issue, problem) a title, what might it be?

APPLICATIONS

- What do you want to be most aware of as you begin this (lesson, presentation, issue, event)?

PERSONAL LEARNING

- What are some learning goals for you that you might keep in mind during this experience?

EXPLORING AND DISCOVERING

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- As you think about your (lesson, presentation, issue, event) what are some of the goals you have in mind?

INDICATORS AND EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- What are some things you anticipate you will see or hear as your goals are being achieved?

APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

- Given this opportunity to think through your plan, what are some actions you might take to ensure success?

POTENTIAL CHOICE POINTS AND CONCERNS

- What are some variables that might influence your actions and outcomes?

Learning-Focused Conversations

A Template for **REFLECTING**



ACTIVATING AND ENGAGING

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- As you reflect on this event, what are some things that come to mind?

INFORMATION ABOUT THE EVENT

- What are some of the factors that influenced what happened?

PRESENTING ISSUES/CONCERNS

- Given your recollections, what are some of the things that capture your attention?

PERSPECTIVES AND PERCEPTIONS

- What are some of the things you are noticing about your own reactions to this event?

ORGANIZING AND INTEGRATING

CONNECTIONS

- What are some ways that this experience fits within the larger picture for this year?

GENERALIZATIONS

- Based on this experience, what advice would you give to someone about to do something similar?

APPLICATIONS

- What are some of the things that you are taking away from this experience that will influence your practice in the future?

PERSONAL LEARNING

- What are some of the things you are learning about (yourself, your students, this curriculum, this unit, this aspect of your teaching)?

EXPLORING AND DISCOVERING

WEIGH PRIORITIES

- Given your impressions, what might we focus on that will be most useful to you?

SEARCH FOR PATTERNS

- As you reflect on this event, what are some patterns of which you are aware?

COMPARE/CONTRAST

- How might you describe any differences between what you anticipated and what occurred?

ANALYZE CAUSE-EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS

- Choose one significant element in this event. What might have been some of the things that caused that?

Navigating Within and Across the Conversation Templates

We offer a metaphor of ‘map’ for the Conversation Templates. A map defines boundaries, clarifying what belongs inside and what is external to the territory. So, too, do these structures provide clarity about the parameters of the conversation. In this way, when used skillfully, they are especially time efficient, allowing either colleague to return to the agreed upon purpose(s) of the meeting. A map also can be shared, so both parties know what territory can be explored and what routes are possible—whether we take the same path each time, or vary it. Further, while each area on a map is clearly defined, we may choose to apportion our time visiting several neighborhoods, or spend most of it concentrated in one or two. In fact, once the mentor and protégé have had some experience with the Conversation Templates, they are rarely applied linearly. That is, moving from one arena (establishing goals and outcomes) to another (potential choice points) and then to a third (indicators of success) and then back to the first (for more goals and outcomes) is quite common. It also makes sense, frequently, to navigate across the templates—drawing from past experiences, or reflecting, while developing a plan. Or finishing a reflecting conversation with questions for applying new learning to a future plan.

Balancing Support with Challenge

As described above, the Planning and Reflecting Templates offer a structure to mentor-protégé conversations. These guides enhance the efficiency of meeting time by providing a shared focus. They also serve as learning scaffolds, allowing novices to internalize the thinking protocols that guide experts when they plan and reflect about their own practice. The questions and ways of thinking that are explored during structured conversations become an internal voice for novices when they are working independently.

As a result, after several applications of the Conversation Templates, the protégé comes to a planning or reflecting meeting prepared to respond to the challenging questions of the mentor. This readiness and confidence sets the stage for increasingly rigorous conversations about teaching practice and increasingly effective solutions to the inevitable challenges of classroom life.

Using Quick Forms

When the time, attention, or opportunity for a formal planning, reflecting, or problem-solving conversation is not available, there are other ways to facilitate a novice’s thoughtful participation in learning-focused interactions. Practical and simply-structured protocols will save time and effectively balance support with challenge. Using these Quick Forms signals our expectations that, while we are very willing to provide support, we are not expecting to do all the thinking or problem-solving

for our protégé. We consider these strategies to be scaffolds. That is, just as the construction metaphor suggests, they are structures to support a learner in reaching higher than they could without it. It also suggests that these scaffolds are temporary and adjustable, being moved where and when they are needed, and ultimately removed altogether. The three examples below require brief preparation prior to a scheduled meeting and can be applied in a variety of ways.

3 - 2 - 1

3 - 2 - 1 offers a structured approach for protégés to organize thinking and focus communication. The information can be written on an index card, or note pad. Or, if a protégé is keeping a log or journal, the 3-2-1 structure offers an effective format for entries. Because it is so versatile, we use 3-2-1 for planning, reflecting and problem-solving. For example, prior to planning, ask a protégé to jot down three possible goals for the lesson (or unit), two specific success indicators and one strategy that might be used. Or, at the end of class, after teaching a new strategy, ask for three things that were noticed about the students’ learning, two surprises and one new understanding. As a problem-solving support, ask for three ways to think about the problem (or three perspectives on it), two potential contributing or causal factors, and one possible solution.

Asking a busy novice for six pieces of information makes the task doable while appropriately placing the responsibility for defining the problem or gathering the necessary information on the protégé.

STEM COMPLETIONS

Fill-ins, or stem completions, build confidence in responding to open-ended questions while honing a novice’s thinking skills. Use the same stem completion regularly and consistently, for example, every Friday a protégé might fill-in the following:

“The most interesting thing that happened this week was . . .” or, “One thing I’d never do the same way again is . . .” or, “This week, I was pleasantly surprised by . . .” or, “I discovered that . . .”

Or vary the stem to exercise and focus specific cognitive outcomes, such as comparison. For example, “Some things that are the same about teaching reading and teaching math are . . .” Stem completions also serve to facilitate professional vision. Generate stems that require articulation of values. For example, “The most important thing a teacher can do for struggling students is . . .” or “A priority for me as a learning-focused teacher is . . .”

Stem completions support and challenge thinking and provide a quick start for purposeful mentor-protégé interactions. They also develop the important habits of reflective, value-driven professional practice.

P+ M- I*

The P+ M- I*, or Plus, Minus, Interesting Frame, developed by Edward DeBono, supports reflection, self-assessment, and evaluative thinking. A three column sheet is used to record the Pluses, or positive aspects, of an event, plan or situation; the Minuses, or negative aspects; and the