



3 TYPES OF MENTORING CONVERSATIONS

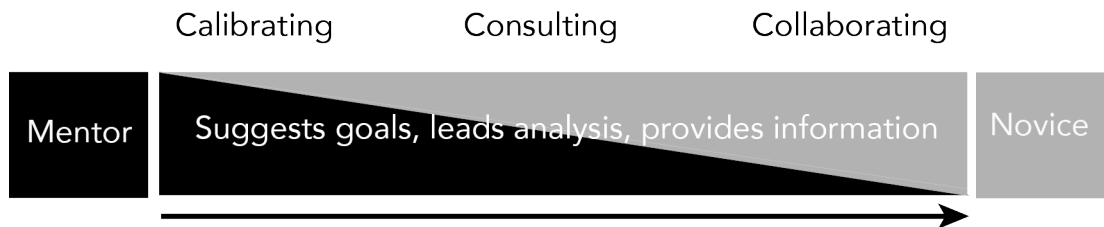
Adapted from L. Lipton and B. Wellman: *Learning-Focused Consultation: Promoting Growth for Beginning and Experienced Teachers*; ASCD Annual Conference 2010

How to select the right kind of conversation to have about teaching and learning

In broad strokes, there are three types of mentoring conversations, each used for different purposes—*calibrating*, *consulting*, and *collaborating*. Each is defined by who identifies problems of practice, leads the analysis of teaching outcomes, and suggests next steps. Moving from calibrating to consulting to collaborating, responsibility for giving direction to the conversation is increasingly transferred to the novice teacher, and over time the mentor shifts from a directive role to one of facilitator and sounding board (see figure below). Because of this, we also refer to these 3 C’s as “stances” that the mentor takes in each conversation.

These conversations usually happen before and after observing a teacher candidate. Having clear goals for the talk is essential. During the observation, the mentor generates or collects data from students that can be used for the post-teaching discussion. These can be literal notes about what was said, student work products, exit slips, or other forms of documentation.

To capitalize on these opportunities, trust and rapport must be maintained between the mentor and novice. As the novice develops better decision-making, professional problem-solving, and thinking skills, each of the conversation types described below may be useful at different times and in various situations. It is possible that the mentor moves, in a single conversation, among all three stances, depending on the problem being discussed and how the TC is responding.



Role of Mentor Teacher:

Calibrating	Consulting	Collaborating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define problems of practice • Use data to identify gaps between goals for students and their responses to novice’s instruction in class • Describe steps for improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide problem analysis • Use data to discuss gaps between goals for students and their responses to instruction • Generate discussion about possible improvement paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-frame problems of practice with novice • Co-generate ideas for teaching solutions • Co-analyze data & observations from students, co-determine next steps with novice

When and how should each of these conversations be implemented?

1. Calibrating

This stance is especially useful at the beginning of the partnership, in order to set clear expectations, establish timelines for teacher candidate development, and develop their knowledge of practice and of young learners. Guiding questions are: What are the gaps/growth areas for the novice based on present performance levels and standards?

Use this stance when:

...inexperience requires a more directive approach, especially in areas/for scenarios that are new to the novice teacher

...it is necessary to provide evaluative feedback to a novice teacher immediately

...a novice teacher is ineffective in a critical area such as safety, classroom management, performance, planning, etc.

...pre-briefing and de-briefing an observation of the *mentor* completed by the novice teacher

For the mentor to do this well:

- Make your thinking explicit to the novice teacher so they can learn and understand your reasoning for prescriptive actions (Share the What, Why, and How; Think Aloud)
- Reference specific instances of teacher performance and the consequences for student engagement, understanding
- Use a credible voice with neutral language ("These data..." "This example..." etc.)

2. Consulting

This stance allows the novice teacher to practice their decision-making and planning skills while still drawing on the mentor teacher's experience and larger wheelhouse of ideas. It is likely to be particularly valuable in the early stages of co-planning with mentor feedback, with increasingly more decision-making responsibility transferred to the novice teacher.

Use this stance when:

...the novice teacher needs help clarifying problems of practice and/or solutions

...a teaching goal has been identified by the novice, but they are uncertain how to proceed or can generate only limited possible solutions

For the mentor to do this well:

- Offer a menu of choices for goals, solutions; Name potential causal factors; State a principal of practice
- Continue to make thinking explicit as you provide ideas and feedback throughout the decision-making process.
- Use a credible voice with neutral language or personal pronouns ("I think that..." "Here is one way to think about that..." etc.)

3. Collaborating

This stance is marked by shared responsibility and a more balanced partnership. It is likely to be particularly valuable as more decision-making responsibility is transferred to the novice teacher, but should be balanced with the consulting stance as the novice tries increasingly challenging forms of pedagogy and gaps in skills or knowledge are discovered.

Use this stance when:

- ...the novice can co-plan and teach semi-independently
- ...the novice has developed the skills to analyze student work or your observations
- ...the novice teacher can contribute productively to co-teaching, especially using a practice that has previously been pre-briefed, modeled by the mentor, and de-briefed

For the mentor to do this well:

- Use purposeful pausing and paraphrasing while brainstorming problems of practice, to promote collaboration and to help develop reflection and personal learning in the novice teacher
- Continue to make thinking explicit and help the teacher candidate sort through ideas as they are produced (Co-generate categories for student responses or teaching choices; Re-frame the problem or issue)
- Use an approachable voice and collective pronouns ("Let's think about..." "How might we..." etc.)

For some specific strategies that can help novices learn in any of these conversations, check out the "8 Strategies for Effective Conversations," which can be found in the "How-to Resources" on the NASCENT website (mentorteachers.org).