



EIGHT STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS THAT SUPPORT NOVICE LEARNING

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The following strategies can help mentors talk to their novice about planning ahead, making choices, and responding to challenges. These strategies are especially useful when paired with the 3 types of mentoring conversations. A guide to these conversations can be found in the "How-to Resources" on the NASCENT website (mentorteachers.org).

1. Offer a Menu

If one idea is useful, several are even more effective. Suggesting multiple options when planning or problem-solving (we suggest at least three) provides information and support while leaving the choice-making, and the responsibility for making that choice, with your colleague. *"Given your concerns about developing meaningful homework assignments, here are three options to consider...."*

2. Think Aloud

Just as in instructional problem solving or modeling strategic reading strategies for students, sharing the thought process along with a solution or idea enhances the learning and maximizes the likelihood of transfer to future applications. *"When I encounter student confusions like this I first search for the underlying knowledge gaps and thinking patterns that might be contributing to those confusions. Then I try to figure out the instructional building blocks that will help develop essential understandings. So, in this case, you might look at ways to scaffold your students' understandings of these objectives."*

3. Share the What, Why and How

When sharing expertise, an effective verbal pattern is describing the "what, why and how" of an idea or suggestion. This might sound like: *"Here is a strategy for addressing that issue (what); which is likely to be effective because (why); and this is how you might apply it (how)."*

4. State A Principle of Practice

Connecting a specific strategy or solution to the broader principles of effective practice provides the novice with an opportunity to learn and apply the principle, as well as the individual idea, in other situations. This might sound like: *"An important principle of practice related to (topic) is _____; so a strategy like (suggestion) should be effective in this situation."*

5. Generate Categories

Stating ideas or solutions as categories provide a wider range of choice and a richer opportunity for learning than discrete strategies or applications. For example, a category such as "grouping students" is broader than "putting students in pairs" or suggesting a specific partnering strategy. This approach is especially effective when categories are offered as a menu. This might sound like: *"Several broad categories of successful classroom management include attention moves, establishing routines, maintaining momentum and developing effective transitions between activities."*

6. Name Causal Factors

Rather than suggesting potential solutions, it can be productive to offer several factors that might be producing the problem. This option is particularly effective when working with experienced teachers. This might sound like: *"There are several things that typically would produce that behavior (or result); for example _____, _____ or _____."* Followed by a shift to a coaching stance to add: *"Given what you know about your situation, what's your hunch about which of these, if any, might be an influence?"*

7. Consider an Alternative Point of View

Effective problem solving can be stimulated by an exploration of multiple perspectives. When idea generation bogs down, you can surface additional points of view that will re-energize the conversation. For example, offering thoughts on how parents might consider the issue, or administrators, or the students, and so on. *"It is possible that your students are not perceiving the purposes of the new grading incentive system in the ways that you had intended. It might be effective to consider their beliefs about motivational rewards."*

8. Reframe the Problem or Issue

Expert problem solvers spend more time defining a problem than they do strategizing solutions. Novel approaches to the problem definition not only generate new energy and ideas, but often lead to a more effective solution. Reframing is suggesting a new context or representation of a problem, including positive or useful aspects of the issue and alternative descriptions of the goal or approach to the problem. *"There are several ways to think about classroom climate and culture. Typically, teachers search for simple rules and fair consequences to apply equally. Another approach might be to work from the inside out and support students in developing the self-management skills to be productive classroom citizens and contributing group members."*