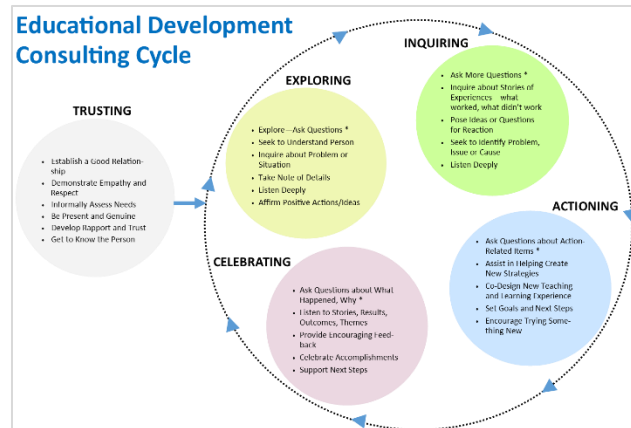# Educational Consultations:
Questioning and Listening

An educational developer's job is not to tell the faculty member ten ideas about how to improve his or her teaching. An educational developer's job is to be a good listener, to offer suggestions and to help the faculty member reflect upon their practice to guide them to decisions about changes and actions. Two core skills of being a good educational developer include asking good questions and deeply listening.

Educational Development Consulting Cycle

Asking Good Questions

Exploring: Questions

- What do the student-teacher interactions look like in your classes?
- What do the student-student interactions look like in your classes?
- What is working well? What is not?
- What is important to you about this?
- What would your ideal class look like?
- What kinds of activities would lead to the types of change you are interested in?
- Tell me about what is going on in your practice (or class or course). What happened?
- What do you think is going on?
- What's at stake here?
- What would you like to see happen?

Inquiring: Questions

- What is another perspective you could have about this?
- What do you want to happen?
- What is important to you about this?
- In what ways are you stuck? What would it take to get unstuck?
- What are the potential risks? Benefits?
- What other options can you think of?
- If you did X, what do you think might happen?
- What work do you need to do to get to that stage/place?
- What if this happened? How would you feel?

Celebrating: Questions

- Tell me about what happened?
- How did the students react or respond?
- How would you rate the outcome? Why do you think it went that way?
- What went well? Not so well?
- What did you learn?
- What will you do differently the next time? The same?

Actioning: Questions

- What questions about teaching and learning are you trying to answer?
- What are you wanting to do?
- When are you going to do it?
- Do you want to co-plan or work together on X?
- What obstacles might you meet along the way?
- What will be the hardest part in taking this action?
- What support do you need? How and when will you require this support?
- What first steps will you take?
- How will you know that you are making progress toward these goals?
- How will you measure success? How will you know you have been successful?
- How can I be of help to you? What other resources can I provide?

Credit for concepts and ideas: Little, D. & Palmer, M.S. (2011). A Coaching-Based Framework for Individual Consultations in Miller, J.E. & Groccia, J.E. (Eds). To Improve the Academy, Vol. 29.

Striving for Deep Listening

Educational consultations require a lot of good listening before and after you ask questions. To be a truly effective listener you need to strive to engage in 'deep listening'. Sometimes, educational developers can find themselves in self-focused listening or problem-focused listening – and while it is helpful to dip into these types of listening (e.g., when building rapport or wanting to connect to the faculty member), they really aren't that helpful for the faculty member. In the end, educational developers should strive for "deep listening" skills in their work.

Self-Focused Listening

The educational developer listens to the words being spoken, but focuses only on what those words mean to him or her. This results in distracted listening or pretending to listen while focused on other thoughts.

For example: You might be listening in a self-focused manner when you ask questions about the content of a course because it is like the content of your own course.

For example: We interrupt faculty members in their conversation to relate similar situations.

Problem-Focused Listening

Problem-focused listening happens when educational developers pay close attention to the words being spoken but has a weak awareness of the context the faculty member is speaking about. The educational developer is not paying attention to the non-verbal cues. This results in editorial and solution listening. A less effective consultation happens because the faculty member becomes distracted and there is a shift away from them in correcting or providing solutions.

For example: Editorial Listening - interrupting the faculty member to correct, revise or finish his or her sentences. When educational developers do this, it indicates that they are not paying attention to the non-verbal cues or how the faculty member is expressing his or her feelings.

For example: Solution Listening - Educational developers may provide answers or offer advice to faculty members to help them solve their problems. This happens when educational developers do not hear the full scope of the problem or allow the faculty member to address answers on his or her own.

Deep Listening

This is when the educational developer is very present and in the moment focusing intently on the instructor's verbal and non-verbal cues and listens without jumping to conclusions. This type of listening is not about judging whether the faculty member is 'right or wrong' but instead a concentrated focus on:

- *What topics the faculty member shows the most enthusiasm for*
- *Which points her or she avoids*
- *How gestures or facial expressions reveal unspoken values or beliefs about teaching and learning*
- *Being okay with silences and pauses for the faculty member to speak through*
- *Extending wait time (3-5 seconds+), modelling restraint to achieve a higher level of response*

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