# CHAPTER 3

# Ingredients of Effective Consultation

Given all that is now known about the benefits of effective classroom management, it is not surprising that there is great interest in supporting teachers in acquiring and maintaining these skills. Teachers get very little training in classroom management during their preservice education, and many report that they do not feel confident in their abilities to effectively manage classrooms (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Jones & Jones, 2004). Providing ongoing training and supervision to teachers during their inservice years becomes essential.

As we all know, helping teachers become more effective classroom managers is not as simple as telling them to do so. Giving them a book or day-long training is not enough either. Most teachers need ongoing consultation and supervision to develop and sustain their skills. The question becomes, what are the essential skills and qualities required for a consultant to be successful in supporting teacher skill development?

Before describing the structure and details of the CCU model (Chapters 5–7), it is important to consider the interpersonal skills and attitudes that set the foundation for any effective consultation relationship. Without this foundation, it won't matter how knowledgeable a consultant is or what model he or she is using. Instead, the consultant will be continually frustrated by his or her inability to get teachers to change their classroom practices.

In this chapter we describe the essential qualities of effective consultants. As you reflect on your own consultation experiences, it is likely that you will see yourself as possessing many or most of these qualities. If so, that's great! As you read, though, take time to consider which of these attributes come most naturally to you and which are areas you will need to spend more time developing. Often times, we find ourselves wanting to rush past these interpersonal qualities to get to the specific strategies of a given model. As research in clinical psychology, counseling, and education has repeatedly shown, models only work in the context of effective relationships.

## EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES ON CONSULTATION

Indirect service delivery methods came into vogue as part of community mental health and community psychology movements in the 1950s and 1960s. School psychology, in particular, embraced indirect service delivery models as a primary tool for facilitating effective functioning in school environments. It made perfect sense for school-based clinicians, given their large caseloads and limited resources, to work with key adults in children's lives (i.e., teachers and parents) to provide more effective environments, rather than to work with each child individually.

Despite longstanding interest in consultation models, the prevailing models (until recently) have largely relied on traditional psychotherapeutic and instructional methods for facilitating change. That is, most consultation models prior to the mid-1990s used didactic instruction to teach skills and support development despite the known limitations of these methods (Watson & Robinson, 1996). Even behavior consultation, a preferred model and activity among school psychologists, suffered from this overemphasis on didactic instruction.

**Targeting the classroom system is more efficient and efficacious because it is likely to reduce current student behavioral and academic difficulties as well as prevent future student problems.**

### *Direct Behavior Consultation*

Watson and Robinson introduced direct behavior consultation in the mid-1990s as a more explicit model of behavior consultation where emphasis was placed on direct instruction, modeling, practice, and rehearsal. Other models have since placed greater emphasis on similar methods known to promote skill development. Still, even these newer models have not always attended to the broader aspects of consultation relationships (including the huge literature on the power of collaborative relationships, alone, to promote change). Furthermore, they had narrow perspectives on the role of motivation and were focused on consultation around individual cases (students) rather than broader teacher skill development.

For instance, although direct behavior consultation was attentive to teacher motivation, the emphasis was on skill development, or what might be labeled self-efficacy, as the primary barrier to teacher motivation. Watson and Robinson (1996) wrote that while traditional models have blamed consultation failures on teachers for being resistant, "It is probably more accurate to say that the consultee did not have the skills to perform the tasks at the various stages of the consultation process" (p. 275). As we will see with MI, low skills or efficacy beliefs are indeed one aspect of motivation to change, but there are other facets that can be equally critical. Further, a major limitation of most behavior consultation models is their focus on individual students rather than on changing the classroom system (Sheridan, Welch, & Orme, 1996). This has been true despite recent calls to target and intervene in systems (e.g., classrooms, schools) rather than at the individual student level (Strein, Hoagwood, & Cohn, 2003). Targeting the classroom system by providing consultation to increase effective classroom management practices delivered to all students is more efficient and

efficacious because it is likely to reduce current student behavioral and academic difficulties as well as prevent future student problems.

## *Instructional Coaching*

Complementing the behavior consultation models, a parallel literature has emerged during the past decade about effective instructional coaching practices. This literature was sparked by state and federal investments in instructional coaches to support high-quality classroom instruction. These coaching models typically target teacher behavior and thus overcome the barrier of focusing on one student at a time. Dr. Jim Knight at the University of Kansas has been a leader in this movement and has created a partnership approach to instructional coaching. In his model, an instructional coach supports the teacher in identifying appropriate teaching for diverse learners, models practices in the classroom, observes the teacher, and engages in supportive, dialogical conversations with the teacher about what he or she observes. The advantage of these coaching strategies is that they have been developed in the field, often using highly skilled teachers as coaches, and thus have a high level of credibility with teachers. A limitation of these methods is that very little research has evaluated which strategies work best in which settings.

## *Consultation Research*

Researchers have entered into the coaching/consultation discussion in recent years, motivated by the need to address a very practical goal: getting teachers and other school personnel to implement evidence-based practices with high fidelity. Ringeisen, Henderson, and Hoagwood (2003) pointed to the considerable progress made over the last decade in terms of the development of evidence-based preventive and treatment interventions for school-age children. At the same time, they noted the need for more research on the factors associated with the considerable variation found in the implementation of these interventions in schools settings (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000; McCormick, Steckler, & McLeroy, 1994).

Seeking to fill this gap, Han and Weiss (2005) offered a model of the factors influencing implementation of interventions in school settings, drawing on extant theory and empirical findings. They defined implementation fidelity and sustainability as (1) the quantity of the intervention delivered, (2) the quality of the implementation with respect to the standards set by the program developers, and (3) the use of the core principles of the intervention in dealing with behaviors not addressed in the training and consultation phase. Han and Weiss conceived of the implementation process as a "self-sustaining feedback loop," with the training/consultation protocol playing the central role. Effective training consultation protocols that are attentive to quantity, quality, and principles foster high teacher-perceived efficacy to implement interventions and to attribute improvements in student behavior to the intervention. This, in turn, increases teacher motivation to implement the intervention with high levels of fidelity, further improving student behavior as well as the teacher's "experience

of success" in implementing the intervention. In short, effective consultation occurs when consultants prepare and support teachers to implement practices that create meaningful and noticeable changes in their classrooms.

Han and Weiss's emphasis on the training/consultation protocol in establishing and sustaining implementation fidelity is consistent with extant theory and empirical findings. For instance, although most educators are familiar with classroom management practices, many struggle to implement effective practices in their own classroom. Although teachers may attend workshops on behavior management, these are often delivered in a didactic manner and use a one-shot, train-and-hope approach that is insufficient for changing actual classroom behaviors (see Fixen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005).

The renewed interest in consultation and implementation among researchers, educators, and clinicians prompted a synthesis of the literature on implementation of school-based interventions and the most comprehensive review of the coaching/consultation literature to date by Dr. Dean Fixen and colleagues (2005). They reached three primary conclusions: (1) professional development training on its own is not effective in supporting implementation of school-based interventions in classroom settings; (2) implementation is most effective when practitioners receive coordinated training, consultation, and frequent performance assessments; and (3) organizations need to provide the infrastructure necessary for timely training, skillful supervision and consultation, and regular process and outcome evaluations. The key limitations of the consultation movement identified in the report were that very few empirical studies have evaluated the relative contributions of training and consultation. They concluded that more research is needed to better understand the interaction between training, consultation, and the selection of interventions, and how these interactions impact implementation.

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD: EXPERT CONSULTANTS

> I find if I listen before I talk, I can learn a lot about a teacher's basic beliefs and values.
> —National classroom consultant in the field for over 20 years

We decided to supplement these growing theoretical and research descriptions of effective consultation with perspectives from expert consultants. We think that there is much to learn from professionals who are known for their skills in teacher consultation. We sampled a range of consultants, some having established reputations for decades as expert consultants and others relatively new to the field but already standing out as being very skilled in working with teachers. We also intentionally sampled consultants with different training backgrounds, ranging from general education to special education, school psychology, and counseling. We asked all of them to respond to two questions about consultation:

1. What do you think the most important skill/quality is to being an effective consultant when working with teachers (around behavior management)?
2. What is the greatest or most frequent challenge you have encountered in working as a consultant?

As can be seen in the summary comments in Table 3.1, the experts had many consistent comments about the elements of effective consultation. They all mentioned the importance of establishing effective and collaborative relationships. They also implied a hierarchy of consultation skills, with successful relationship partnering being a prerequisite for other skills such as direct instruction or giving advice.

> As I work with consultants across the country, and I ask them to reveal their greatest challenge, the overwhelming response is, "How do I get someone to change who seemingly doesn't want to?"
>
> —National consultant and trainer

We divided the primary barriers identified by these consultation experts into two domains: (1) lack of motivation and (2) lack of skill. They identified many factors that inter-

**TABLE 3.1. Summary of Expert Comments**

| Most important skill/quality | Greatest or most frequent challenge |
|---|---|
| Building a relationship<br>• Appropriate self-disclosure<br>• Empathy<br>• Active listening<br>• Being respectful<br>• Being genuine, caring, understanding, flexible, and consistent<br>• Instilling hope<br>• Being optimistic and positive<br>• Being enthusiastic<br>• Having patience and humility | Lack of interest/motivation<br>• Variations in commitment to improvement from day to day.<br>• Teachers not really wanting to make a change; more focused on getting a child out of their class.<br>• *Philosophical opposition* to many effective practices.<br>• *Unrealistic expectations:* Not having an understanding that change takes time and that although a lot of evidence-based practices aren't flashy and glamorous, they *do* work.<br>• *Variability of implementation:* Teachers convinced that they are already using a practice, when in fact, they are not.<br>• *People often take behavior so personally*, instead of viewing it simply as data.<br>• *Personal problems/stress:* In severe cases, teachers who are depressed or in need of therapy/mental health services; most frequently, teachers who feel overwhelmed and/or overly stressed.<br>• *Choice/historical bad practices:* Each person we work with is a professional; we must allow for choice.<br>• *Lack of administrator support* |
| Collaboration<br>• Creating a shared vision<br>• Meeting teachers where they are (e.g., skill level) and having realistic expectations in setting goals<br>• Being considerate of stress levels and other obligations | |
| Skills and knowledge<br>• Having creative and practical ideas<br>• Providing ongoing support<br>• Providing problem solving<br>• Being good classroom managers<br>• Communicating knowledge clearly<br>• Fostering vision<br>• Observing, collecting data, providing feedback | Lack of skills<br>• Lack necessary skills to effectively manage their classroom.<br>• Extremely harsh/negative/punitive. |
| Student-focused<br>• Able to balance needs of all players: win–win | |

fered with teacher interest and motivation in adopting new practices and skills. These included philosophical opposition to evidence-based practices, personal challenges faced by teachers (either because of excessive and competing demands for their time or because of personal problems and stress experienced outside the classroom), unrealistic expectations (about how easy or fast change will occur), taking student behavior problems personally, and lack of administrator support.

> People often take behavior so personally, instead of viewing it simply as data. I try to help teachers see how antecedent strategies can greatly impact behavior. When they finally "get" this, they are able to step away from taking behavior personally or feeling helpless (or angry).
>
> —CONSULTANT for over 20 years

On the other hand, even when teachers are motivated, these experts noted that some lacked core skills that needed to be established before the consultation relationship could be successful. For instance, one barrier was that teachers sometimes think they are doing the skill, despite evidence to the contrary.

## THE ROAD TO EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION

We attempted to integrate all of the perspectives described above into a framework for understanding the core skills and qualities of effective consultation. We conceptualize the consultation relationship as a journey along a road (see Figure 3.1). The prerequisite for a successful journey is a solid, collaborative partnership between consultant and teacher. At the beginning, the key consultant qualities all focus on relationship building. Without these qualities, your trip will be short. As you travel further in your relationship, these qualities are still essential because they allow you to expand your areas of focus and conversation. Further into your journey, you will have more opportunities to give constructive feedback and even direct advice. If you begin with (unrequested) advice without the other elements of consultation, it is highly unlikely that teachers will consistently follow through on your suggestions. The entire journey need not take long with all teachers; as you will see with the CCU, you can move through many of these elements in a few visits. Yet, with some teachers, you will find yourself at the beginning of a long and enduring collaborative relationship.

As a consultant you probably already have many of the skills and attributes described below. As you read the section, you might identify a few skills at which you are already good and that you want to solidify or extend. Alternately, you might identify one or two skills that you do less well as areas for growth. You may find it helpful to reread this chapter after reading the next one on MI, and see if you can use some of the MI-style self-reflection to help build your own motivation to improve these areas. This may serve as a useful exercise to gain further insight into the behavior change process we ask of teachers.

**You may find it helpful to reread this chapter after reading the next one on MI, and see if you can use some of the MI-style self-reflection to help build your own motivation to improve these areas. This may serve as a useful exercise to gain further insight into the behavior change process we ask of teachers.**


**FIGURE 3.1.** The consultation road map.

## *Beginning the Journey: Building a Relationship*

> Effective consultants must be understanding, flexible, genuine, caring, and consistent. They must understand the time constraints, stress, and challenges that teachers face in today's schools and be flexible in accommodating these challenges. They also have to be genuine. You can't just go through the motions. You need to really have a caring attitude and give 101% to the job and the relationship. You have to continuously check in with teachers and follow up on goals, offer feedback, and give support.
>
> —TEACHER CONSULTANT in a large urban district

• **Effective consultants use good social communication skills to build successful relationships.** Effective consultation is grounded in a solid collaborative relationship. Consultants create these relationships through social communication skills that engender trust. Effective consultants set the stage for such relationships to occur by first examining their own attitudes and biases, withholding judgments and conveying acceptance and understanding. No one wants to embark on an important journey with someone who is overly critical and evaluative.

Likewise, effective consultants are perceived by others as sincere. In other words, they truly care about what happens to the teachers and students with whom they work. They are empathic and communicate their concern and caring to the teachers with whom they consult. They validate the experiences of teachers with their empathy, but do so in a way that is empowering and not undermining.

Effective consultants are good listeners. They listen before they talk and before they recommend or advise. The style of their conversations is dialogical; that is, they seek to reach shared understandings and draw insights out of the teachers with whom they consult rather than communicating in a didactic manner. Furthermore, effective consultants are good at making social interactions fun, relaxed, and engaging. They are good at putting people at ease. They check in with teachers informally outside of more formal consultation times. They use well-timed and appropriate humor, engage in small talk, and offer to help and assist in small ways as needed.

Effective consultants are affirming in their consultation relationships. This means that they focus on strengths and resources as much as, if not more than, limitations and problems. They are humble and keep the focus on the teacher and classroom needs rather than on themselves. They use language to build self-efficacy by assigning successes to the teacher and not to themselves.

- **Effective consultants are respectful professionals.** A respectful professional maintains boundaries and recognizes the limits of his or her role, which is primarily to position others to create more effective environments for children. Thus, effective consultants honor individual autonomy and decision making. They trust that when provided with a nurturing, supportive, and reflective context, teachers will make the best decisions for themselves and naturally move toward positive changes in their classroom. Skilled consultants also respect and value individual differences. They are culturally competent and sensitive.

> Consultants communicate respect for the teacher's situation while helping him/her to see that they might be able to make the situation better.
>
> —National Consultant and Trainer

Respectful professionals are reliable. They do what they say they are going to do, when they say they are going to do it. They follow through on commitments. They show up to scheduled meetings on time and prepared. Effective consultants show their professionalism by ensuring the confidentiality of shared information except when the law mandates reporting.

## *Sustaining the Journey: Credibility, Facilitation, and Problem Solving*

> Consultant credibility rests on a foundation of personal and professional qualities. Consultants need the personal qualities that establish trust. They need professional expertise in order to demonstrate their value to teachers and principals.
>
> —Teacher Consultant and State Leader

- **Effective consultation is guided by good theory.** Of course, we want our consultation experiences to be more than a relationship. The purpose of consultation, after all, is to connect teachers with a knowledge and skill base to which they might not have access otherwise. Thus, the effective consultant must have expertise in this desired information or skill set and be perceived as a credible disseminator of it.

Effective consultants have a defined knowledge base—in this case, knowledge about effective behavior management practices and how to help teachers and other school personnel use these practices. Equally important, they are able to communicate this knowledge base in language that others can understand and won't dismiss. Being guided by good theory helps consultants clearly define the problem, conceptualize potential causes, and select appropriate options for interventions. As one of our expert consultants eloquently noted, "One of the most important things is that you have to know what the heck you are doing!"

It is imperative that a consultant have a solid understanding of how behavior is learned and how it can be changed. Thus, consultants working with teachers to support effective classroom management will need to have an understanding of the basic principles of behavior modification. Having knowledge of behavioral principles and the practical applications of these principals is a key component to effective consultation.

Table 3.2 and Figure 3.2 provide a brief review of these principals, and Chapter 8 provides practical applications. (If you have a strong understanding of behavior analysis, you might simply skim the table as a brief review. If you are new to behavioral theory, you may want to review the table as well as review some of the additional resources outlined in Chapter 8.)

- **Effective consultants are credible.** In addition to having a guiding theory, effective consultants demonstrate additional qualities that enable them to build credibility and trust and continue the collaborative journey with teachers. For instance, consultants who share past experiences in managing a classroom or examples of strategies used by teachers with whom they have worked in the past, communicate credibility as well as build a personal connection. Additionally, effective consultants share their knowledge of relevant research, when appropriate, to support and guide the development of intervention ideas. Some additional qualities that go hand in hand with building effective relationships and credibility include being a good problem solver, collecting and sharing objective data without passing judgment, being flexible, and conveying confidence.

> Rarely does anything in the world of educational consulting go as planned, because we are dealing with human beings. In order to continue fighting the good fight every day, consultants have to believe that even the smallest step is wholly worthwhile. Consultants must balance a sense of urgency with a sense of acceptance on a continuous basis.
>
> —National Consultant and Trainer

- **Effective consultants are confident.** Effective consultants believe that the consultation and problem-solving process works to produce positive change. Effective consultants convey their confidence to others through body language, tone of voice, and eye contact. They also know when to access additional resources and how to help others access relevant resources as needed. In other words, they are comfortable in their interactions and aware of the extent of their knowledge base and expertise. Setting appropriately high expectations and believing that others can meet their own goals when supported also conveys confidence.

- **Effective consultants are good problem solvers.** Effective problem solvers are solution-focused, and they engage in a sequential problem-solving process that involves clearly defining the target behaviors, specifying goals, monitoring progress toward those goals by

**TABLE 3.2. Basic Principles of Behavior Modification**

In order to support teachers in managing classroom behavior effectively, consultants need a solid understanding of how behavior is learned and how it is changed.

*Behavior is learned.* Learning occurs as a result of the consequences of our behavior. In other words, our behavior is influenced by the events and conditions we experience. When our behavior is followed by a pleasant consequence, that behavior tends to be repeated and learned. When our behavior is followed by an unpleasant consequence, that behavior tends not to be repeated and thus not learned.

A *reinforcer* is a consequence that increases the likelihood of a behavior in the future. For instance, *positive reinforcement* occurs when a behavior is followed by a consequence that increases the behavior's rate of occurrence. Many behaviors are learned as a result of positive reinforcement. For instance, teachers who praise their students for organizing their materials at their desk may teach the students to be neat and organized; a teacher who gives attention to a student who calls out an answer may be teaching the student to continue calling out.

*Negative reinforcement* occurs when a behavior increases following an aversive or unpleasant consequence. Individuals learn that certain behaviors terminate the unpleasant consequence and therefore are more likely to demonstrate the behavior in the future. For instance, if a student who is asked to stop a fun activity begins to cry and the teacher relents, allowing the student to continue with the activity, the teacher learns that by not making the student comply, the aversive consequence (student crying) ceases.

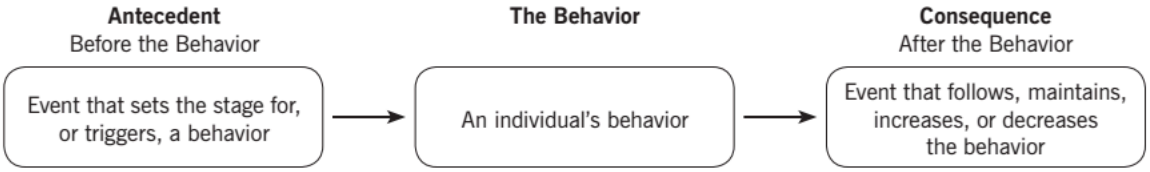
*Punishment* describes the relationship between a behavior that is followed by a consequence that decreases the likelihood of that behavior occurring in the future. A *punisher* is something that decreases behavior.

*Extinction* occurs when a previously reinforcing behavior is no longer reinforced and therefore decreases until it no longer occurs.

*Any behavior that occurs repeatedly is serving some function for the individual exhibiting the behavior.* In striving to support teachers to help students, it is essential to understand and communicate that *every* behavior serves a purpose. Students who consistently complete work assignments, come to class on time, and behave responsibly do so because they find good grades, positive parent and teacher attention, and a sense of pride and accomplishment reinforcing. Similarly, a student who repeatedly disrupts class and argues with teachers is getting some benefit from this behavior. Although the teacher provides reprimands and the student's parents are frequently called, the student likely finds the immediate consequence of attention from teachers and school staff to be reinforcing. Finding other ways for the student to appropriately gain attention from adults could help to meet this need and decrease the student's argumentative and disruptive behavior.

*Altering the classroom environment can change student behavior.* Behavior is affected by events that happen immediately before a behavior (antecedents) and events that happen following a behavior (consequences). By changing the variables affecting behavior, we can increase or decrease behaviors in the classroom. This means that we can change student (and adult) behavior by manipulating these variables.

Consider the following example. The classroom teacher passes out an independent work assignment (antecedent). Rather than working on this assignment, students talk to one another about topics unrelated to the assignment (behavior) or inappropriately walk around the classroom (behavior) as the teacher sits in the back of the room grading papers (consequence = the misbehavior is ignored). We can alter either the antecedent or the consequence to change student behavior. For instance, let's say that the teacher provides a precorrection (antecedent manipulation), telling students that during independent work time, they are expected to work alone at their desks and if they have a question, to raise their hand. Another option is to change the consequence. Rather than grading at his or her desk, the teacher walks about the classroom providing praise to students working on the assignment and answering questions for those who need clarification on the assignment. In this example, changing the antecedent and/or the consequence will likely result in increased student engagement in the task. Figure 3.2 demonstrates the variables that affect behavior and how we can manipulate these variables to increase or decrease a behavior.




Below is a list of interventions that target each of the variables that impact behavior. Chapter 8 contains examples and suggestions for supporting implementation of these strategies in a classroom setting.

| Antecedent Strategies | Teaching Behaviors | Consequence Strategies |
|---|---|---|
| Arrange physical layout of classroom to promote positive interactions and prevent disruptive behavior. | Actively teach students expected classroom behaviors. | Use behavior-specific praise. |
| Post positively stated classroom rules. | Teach classroom rules. | Use token economy systems to reward expected behavior. |
| Post daily schedule. | Teach behavioral routines. | Use group contingencies to reward expected behavior. |
| Use an attention signal. | Teach students to attend when a preset signal occurs. | Ignore inappropriate behavior. |
| Use active supervision. | | Use explicit reprimands for inappropriate behavior. |
| Use precorrection. | | Use differential reinforcement procedures to increase appropriate behavior. |
| Utilize effective instructional practices. | | Use response–cost procedures for inappropriate behavior. |
| Actively engage students by providing ample opportunities to respond. | | Use time out for inappropriate behavior. |
| Provide noncontingent attention to build positive teacher–student relationships. | | |

**FIGURE 3.2.** Variables that affect behavior.

collecting relevant data, and revising the plan, as needed, in response to the collected data. Rather than categorizing teachers as good or bad or as resistant or nonresistant, consultants look for the positives and the resources in each classroom. Other critical qualities of effective problem solvers are that they are patient, persistent, and believe that the set goals will be achieved. They proactively assess the plan and expect that it will need to be revised over time. They don't give up.

**Rather than categorizing teachers as good or bad or as resistant or nonresistant, consultants look for the positives and the resources in each classroom.**

- **Effective consultants collect objective data.** Collecting data is a critical ingredient to effective consultation. Data can be used to provide feedback to teachers on what is going

well in addition to what is in need of attention. Therefore, collecting data that teachers trust and feel are accurate is vital. One way to increase the likelihood that data are perceived by teachers as meaningful and useful is to make sure that they (i.e., the data) are objective. In other words, the data that you collect are observable, sensitive to change, and important. Additionally, the data will be most useful if they are shared with the teacher in a respectful manner that avoids implications of the teacher being at fault for student problem behavior. Just as we don't communicate that problem behavior is internal to children, teachers are not personally responsible for difficult classroom behaviors. Data simply provide information that can be used to improve the classroom environment. Lastly, although objective data are great, they may not always reflect the full picture. Checking in with the teacher about the data may provide additional insights. Simply asking the teacher, after conducting a classroom observation, about how typical the day has been or asking what he or she felt went well versus what did not go well during the observation is helpful toward collaborating on a plan for change.

- **Effective consultants are flexible.** Although their theory guides them in choosing which aspects to emphasize in each consultation case, consultants don't come with a formal plan for how to address problems. They recognize that effective plans are created in collaboration with the teachers who will be most directly involved in implementing the plan. In other words, their theory provides the parameters for the interaction and problem-solving discussion, but ultimately the plan is developed through conversation, brainstorming, and discussion with the key players.

- **Effective consultants provide structure to meetings.** Being flexible within a structure can be a challenging balancing act. However, establishing parameters to how time will be used during a meeting is critical to a consultant's success. Effective consultants make the purpose of meetings clear by reviewing the objectives and expected outcomes up front. Having an agenda does not mean that the consultant arrives with every idea detailed in full or a formal plan for intervening; rather, the agenda identifies steps that can be taken toward collaborative planning with the end result being an action plan. Additionally, consultants try to minimize surprises by communicating openly about the purpose of meetings, how data will be collected and when, and how progress toward the collaborative goals will be measured.

## *Detour Ahead: Collaborative Planning and Overcoming Roadblocks*

> If we fully employ collaboration, we have to allow for choice. If the allowance of choice is not balanced by the pressure to change from someone who holds that person accountable, then good luck. Because even the most dedicated professional has very valid reasons to resist change in education today. We've approached change so poorly for years, we will be making up for it for many years to come.
>
> —National Consultant and Trainer

When teachers come to perceive consultants as trustworthy and credible, they are then more willing to engage in collaborative planning. The skill set here focuses on how to facili-

tate skill development and overcome barriers to change. These include giving constructive feedback and navigating difficult conversations.

- **Effective consultants provide constructive feedback about skill development.** Consultants provide high rates of positive feedback along with comments and suggestions about what might be improved. They ask permission from teachers to provide feedback about targeted behavior change. For feedback to be constructive, it needs to be specific, solution-focused, and directed toward an agreed-upon behavior that can be changed. Telling a teacher, "There are too many students in your classroom," is not constructive because that is probably not an aspect of the classroom that a teacher directly controls. Saying, "You need to work on your relationships with students," is problematic because it is vague and does not give the teacher enough information to move toward a more positive behavior. Instead, consider the following feedback: "I counted ten times when you provided students with behavior-specific praise and five occasions when you checked in with students about their day. Teachers find that by increasing those types of interactions, they nearly always see a decline in disruptive behaviors." This type of statement is very concrete and gives the teacher a road map to improving his or her skills.

**Constructive feedback is specific, solution-focused, and directed toward an agreed-upon behavior that can be changed.**

- **Effective consultants are able and willing to model target skills.** Consultants not only need to be knowledgeable about effective classroom management practices, they also need to be competent in showing teachers how to perform these practices. Modeling is a critical tool with which consultants help teachers learn new skills. Rather than simply telling a teacher to increase his or her rate of behavior-specific praise, a competent consultant needs to be able to demonstrate examples of behavior-specific praise and to model this skill in a classroom setting. Having teachers observe you as you model, collecting data on *your* use of praise and other key variables, is particularly useful because they stay engaged and focused on the skills being modeled.

- **Effective consultants have immediacy skills.** Inevitably, challenges or roadblocks will arise on the journey. Skilled consultants manage these challenges while still moving forward. To have immediacy skills means that one is able to monitor the immediate, present interactions and comment on these processes as needed. Understanding that change can be uncomfortable and that ambivalence about changing is normal supports this process. Effective consultants are aware of resistance or discomfort when it arises. Rather than urging people to change or countering resistant statements with reasons for why change is needed, they get out of the way; as discussed in the next chapter, they roll with resistance. They reposition themselves so that they let others tell them why they believe change is important.

- **Effective consultants are willing to have difficult conversations when needed.** Consultants need to be willing to talk about the "elephant in the room." On occasion, there are circumstances that are difficult to broach, for one reason or another. However, if the issue is ignored, little progress will occur. Being able to address challenging issues by dis-

cussing them in a respectful manner has been labeled *collegial confrontation*. Discussions of this type may include sentence stems such as "I'm confused" or "This is hard to talk about, but." Additionally, presenting data can be helpful when bringing up a difficult topic. As an example, suppose you are working with a teacher who reported having a very well-behaved classroom, but upon actual observation of the classroom, you note that the teacher uses harsh and punitive means and little or no positive practices to manage student behavior. While it may be difficult to discuss this issue with the teacher, it is absolutely necessary. You might use the CCU feedback form, placing the use of praise and reprimands in the red (i.e., need for attention), and then have a discussion with the teacher about the data, perhaps asking him or her to think about why it would be important to increase the use of positive reinforcement in the classroom and how that might benefit students. Of course, on occasion you may have to bring in research and past experiences to support the discussion, but moving forward as if the issue does not exist is unhelpful, if not detrimental, to the teacher's growth.

**Consultants need to be willing to talk about the "elephant in the room." Being able to address challenging issues by discussing them in a respectful manner has been labeled *collegial confrontation*.**

- **Effective consultants offer solicited advice.** After establishing a trusting and collaborative relationship and credibility, effective consultants give advice when requested to do so. Advice from a credible authority can actually encourage people to make important changes in their lives. Keep in mind, however, that for advice to be impactful, all the other elements of effective consultation need to be in place. It is also generally a good idea to ask permission before giving advice. For instance, you might say, "I have some ideas about what might work to make a difference in your classroom. Would you like me to tell you about some of these?"

## MASTER CONSULTANTS

**Effective consultants know where to focus their attention.**

Beyond the core skills and qualities depicted in the road map, we believe that there are two fundamental abilities that the best consultants master over time to ensure the success of the collaborative planning stage: (1) knowing where to intervene and (2) anticipating problems. We describe these below.

### *Knowing Where to Intervene*

> A clear vision of what needs to be accomplished is paramount. I've seen many endeavors fail because of lack of vision. In other words, the teacher, the administrator, the consultant may clearly see that change is needed in regards to classroom management, but they have not fully defined how that change will look. In education, I've seen too many people, including consultants, focus on the behaviors of an ineffective teacher that need to stop, but not fully define what replacement behaviors would look like.
>
> —National Consultant and Trainer

Effective consultants know where to focus their attention. As a consultant, it is helpful to be aware of the multiple domains involved in the consultation process (see Figure 3.3). The first domain to consider involves classroom practices and where to focus attention with regard to the changes needed. Direction comes from the use of objective data to inform you regarding the needs of the classroom, in conjunction with a good theory that can align the data with effective strategies. Once the relevant targets for intervention are identified (e.g., define and teach expectations, increase use of behavior-specific praise), the second and third domains emerge as a focus of your attention: the teacher's capacity and willingness to implement the practices that can improve his or her classroom management. Those domains are important because they can impact whether the strategies actually get implemented. In our model, we conceptualize two primary domains as integral to effective implementation of classroom practices: teacher knowledge and skills and teacher motivation.

Even the best-laid plans will fail if consultants are not tuned into the "music" behind the conversation. Thus, effective consultants are perceptive and reflective. They listen for cues from teachers that signal what might go wrong with the best-intentioned plans. During conversations with the teacher, effective consultants listen with a third ear to determine: "Is this plan really going to work?"; "Will this teacher actually implement it?"; "Am I missing something important?" They ask questions to gain additional information from the teacher: "Is this something that is important to you?"; "How confident are you that you will be able to do this in your classroom?"; "What might get in the way of this happening?"

**Even the best-laid plans will fail if consultants are not tuned into the "music" behind the conversation.**

## *Teacher Knowledge and Skill*

A potential area for interference with intervention implementation is a teacher's lack of necessary skills or knowledge required to use a new strategy. In this case, you may want to play a more active role in implementation by engaging in active practice with the teacher through

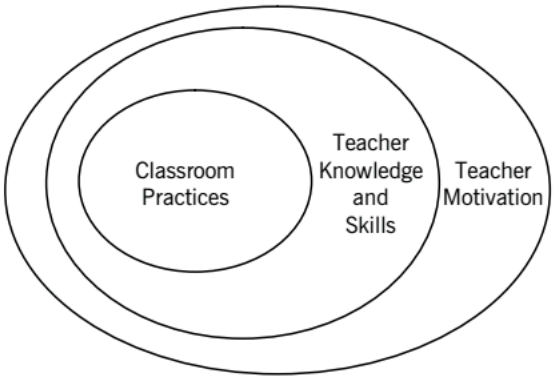



**FIGURE 3.3.** Domains of consideration in classwide consultation.


**FIGURE 3.4.** The relationships among motivation, knowledge, and self-efficacy.

role playing, modeling the new strategy in the classroom while the teacher observes, or having the teacher observe another teacher in the school who successfully uses the targeted strategy. Other effective strategies to support teachers in developing a new skill include providing them with a step-by-step guide, identifying useful resources, helping prepare materials, being close by and available when the teacher implements a new strategy for the first time, giving positive and constructive feedback following teacher implementation, and brainstorming ideas to adjust the strategy if necessary. Additional strategies include collecting data and providing ongoing performance feedback to support the teacher in honing his or her new skill.

Matching a teacher's skill level with the intervention is key to successful implementation. We have worked with very enthusiastic and motivated teachers who have wanted to implement eight new practices all simultaneously. While some teachers may be very capable of implementing multiple intervention practices at one time, this may not be reasonable or feasible for others. Knowing when to capitalize on enthusiasm while supporting the development of realistic goals is an important skill set for the consultant. Identifying one new strategy and supporting teachers toward success with this one strategy builds confidence and self-efficacy. Teachers who feel more efficacious will be more motivated to try new skills in the future (see Figure 3.4).

**Knowing when to capitalize on enthusiasm while supporting the development of realistic goals is an important skill set for the consultant.**

> By the time teachers ask for assistance, they are so frustrated with a particular student that they really don't want help, they just want the student out of their room. In fact, if this is a strongly held position, the teachers may have no incentive to implement an intervention, because if it is successful, it disproves how severe the student/situation is.
>
> —National Trainer and Teacher Consultant for over 40 years

## *Teacher Motivation*

Effective consultants need to be in tune with motivation issues. Motivation is a key contributor to the effective implementation of a new practice, and unless a teacher is ready

and willing to attempt the intervention, it won't matter what skills he or she has; the intervention will be ineffective. On the other hand, if a teacher is ready and willing to try an intervention, then the focus can shift toward helping him or her do it. In fact, if a teacher is motivated to get started, you may actually undermine that motivation by spending too much time talking about it. However, if a teacher doesn't think that it is important to introduce new practices into his or her classroom, the consultant needs to spend time building motivation and determining what that teacher believes is important enough to try.

The CCU model employs a number of strategies to support teachers in their efforts to make important changes in their classroom, including providing them with personalized feedback and developing a menu of options (see Chapter 7). For instance, the use of feedback specific to a classroom that includes both student and teacher information is presented to allow for a discussion about any discrepancy between what the teacher would like for his or her classroom and what is actually happening. For example, a teacher may feel that having a positive and supportive classroom is important, but the data collected might point out that much more attention is given to misbehavior and that the teacher is using more punitive strategies than proactive ones to manage student behavior. When presented with this feedback, the teacher may be more willing to try new proactive strategies in an effort to better align his or her classroom vision with actual practice. Another effective strategy for increasing motivation to implement new management practices is to develop a menu of strategy options that can be used by the teacher in the classroom. Providing options increases buy-in because the teacher is the one making the choice rather than you, as the consultant, telling him or her what to do. Additionally, MI strategies can be useful when consulting with a teacher who is less ready or willing to introduce new classroom management strategies. The key point is that, as a consultant, you need to recognize when to give attention to motivational factors and when to move forward. Spending time on building a plan that the teacher finds important and is willing to try is essential for effecting change.

**Providing options increases buy-in because the teacher is the one making the choice rather than you, as the consultant, telling him or her what to do.**

## WHEN PERSONAL ISSUES INTERFERE WITH PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

It has become increasingly common to encounter teachers for whom stress, depression, or other personal issues interfere with their classroom performance. Personal issues or on-the-job stress may inhibit a teacher's readiness to implement new practices. The teacher may feel overburdened by the current classroom situation and be at a point where he or she is simply trying to get through the day. Some attention will need to be given to this topic if it is an issue that may interfere with a teacher's willingness to implement new strategies in his or her classroom. First, simply validating the feeling of the teacher is a good start (e.g., "Teaching is becoming more stressful, and you have fewer resources to do everything you are asked to do"). Further, providing emotional support by listening, validating concerns, and highlighting the teacher's successes can be useful. Empathizing with the teacher while communicating that change can happen when he or she is ready to make it happen may

encourage dialogue about even the smallest of steps toward increasing effective management practices.

Being aware of the multiple domains requiring attention during the consultation process will allow you to support the teacher in changing not only current but also future classroom practices. As teachers become more knowledgeable about and successfully implement effective classroom practices, they become motivated to continue the practices as well as to attempt new practices. In turn, each year students enter the classroom of a teacher who values, understands, and utilizes effective classroom management practices.

### *Anticipating Problems*

How many times have you looked back on a situation and thought, "How did I not think about that?" Over time, as you gain experience consulting with teachers, you learn to anticipate potential problems by maintaining a mental list of all the barriers and mishaps that interfere with effective implementation of an intervention in the classroom. Your ability to effectively anticipate these barriers depends not only on your understanding of behavioral theory, but also on what is actually feasible in classrooms with limited resources, across teachers with varying levels of skill. As you move forward with a plan, make it a priority to consistently ask yourself (and the teacher), "What can go wrong or get in the way of this being successful?" Assessing these issues prior to having a teacher implement new strategies in the classroom can help avoid potential roadblocks to success.

**Over time, you learn to anticipate potential problems by maintaining a mental list of all the barriers and mishaps that interfere with effective implementation of an intervention in the classroom.**

## SUMMARY

In this chapter we describe the important qualities of effective consultants, derived from existing research on the topic and from conversations with expert consultants. We conceptualize effective consultation as a journey, with collaborative relationship-building skills serving as the prerequisite for embarking. Only further along the journey, after establishing a collaborative relationship, are the more nuanced skills of effective consultants (immediacy skills, modeling, advice giving) even relevant. Attending to this road map also serves as the starting point for learning to do motivational interviewing and to use the CCU. As the next chapter clarifies, most of the skills needed to do effective motivational interviewing align with the attributes of effective consultants.