

By [IU PIIC Mentors Alicia Hull and Andy Gavalis](#)

Since this is the season of giving, we will explore two important aspects of mentoring/coaching that give educators the opportunity to build on their practice. These two aspects of mentoring or coaching are listening and reflecting. Both are rare, valuable gifts. Independently, each of these will improve practice and result in improved student learning. However, both together will improve practice exponentially. So, how do listening and reflection help coaches and teachers?

Listening

Effective listening is a gift not often given by others. While most consider themselves to be effective listeners, many are not perceived that way by others. Mentors are very intentional in being listeners during our time with coaches. We want our coaches to have a voice, which is often lost in the day-to-day grind in the school. We understand that the best coach/mentor conversations will have the coach doing a majority of the talking. When we truly listen to our coaches, not just hear them, we are better able to understand their needs. This requires patience on our part, but will help build relationships based on awareness and trust. We model this behavior with the expectation that coaches then become effective listeners during their time with teachers.

Reflection

Facilitating reflection as a mentor or coach is a thoughtful gift. Reflection is also the gift that keeps giving because it builds capacity of the individual, which benefits students in the long-term. Reflection also tends to generate as many questions for the mentor or coach as it does answers. This enables a mentor/coach to explore new areas of practice that have not been considered previously. Exploring new areas of practice allow one to continue to reflect further. What better gift is there than reflection? It is the gift that keeps on giving.

In summary, 'tis the season of giving. Both listening and reflection are rare gifts, which are cherished by those who receive them. For mentors, this season is not limited to the end of December, rather it extends throughout the year. Each year, we enter knowing we have the perfect gifts to give to our coaches: listening and reflecting.