

Mentor Communication



- **Competency Statement:**

- Establish, develop and maintain an authentic, trusting, collegial relationship with teacher candidates that is professional and mature.

- **Objectives**

Supervising Practitioners will:

- Gain knowledge and skills around establishing and maintaining positive professional communication to build and keep a strong working partnership.
- Gain an awareness of characteristics of the adult learner and novice teacher.
- Explore communication techniques and strategies in general and more specifically, related to proactive interactions between the SP and Teacher Candidate.
- Identify conflict resolution strategies.
- Gain knowledge on effective feedback strategies for guiding Teacher Candidates.
- Be able to model and support Teacher Candidate with self-assessment and self-reflection strategies.

Key Concepts

- First impression conversation
- Purposeful introductions
- Initial Conversations
- Peer/Team communication
- Campus culture and protocol
- Communication plan and Intentionality Constructive Feedback Questioning Skills
 - Communicating Expectations and Being Proactive
 - Check for Understanding
 - Avoid Assumptions
 - Active Listening
 - Communication Boundaries
 - Misunderstandings or Difficult Conversations
 - Constructive Feedback
 - Confidentiality and Topics for Conversations
 - Personal vs. Professional Conversations
- Non-verbal Communication
- Sensitivity to Verbal and Nonverbal

Establishing Rapport

- “Mentoring takes place within a working relationship, and the development of a working relationship requires active participation of both its parties.” Portner, 2002
- It is up to you, as the Supervising Practitioner, to establish rapport and start building trust. Perhaps one way to get started is to set aside time for a focused conversation to get to know the Teacher Candidate. These initial conversations can set up the environment for what is to come.
- View the video clip on mentors building trust. Self-reflect upon your own skills, personality or style in relationship to the content of the video clip.



Reflection Activity: Getting Acquainted

- Reflection Activity: Getting Acquainted Reflection Activity: Getting Acquainted item options
- “They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.” Carl W. Buechner
- Take 5 minutes and brainstorm as many questions as you can to assist you in getting acquainted with one another’s interests, background and prior experiences.
- Take 5 minutes and brainstorm as many concrete ways that you can help the teacher candidate feel welcomed and included in your setting.
- Compare your questions and concrete ideas to the sample ideas found [here](#).

Think About It

“Failing to plan is planning to fail” Unknown

A conscientious teacher candidate was preparing in advance for spring semester student teaching. S/he initiated contact in December with two different teachers; one in special education and one in regular education of whom s/he had been assigned. After a couple of weeks with no reply in email communication, the teacher candidate contacted his/her university supervisor with a version of the following: “I don’t understand why I have not heard back yet from either one of them. Perhaps they don’t want me! What do you suggest I do? Shall I try to call them on the phone? Should I send another email?”

- A. This teacher candidate is emotionally unstable! S/he is overly sensitive and over-reacting. Perhaps s/he is not a good fit for teaching.
- B. This teacher candidate is unaware of all the demands on a teacher. S/he is unaware that higher priorities are the focus for the Supervising Practitioner at this time, and in due time, the SP will reply.
- C. This teacher candidate is being responsible with initiating contact. If the Supervising Practitioners(s) replied with a simple reply that the message had been received and some time frame of when to expect more from the SP as it gets closer to the initial day of student teaching, it could prevent the teacher candidate from imagining the worst and contacting the supervisor.
- D. I think B and C

Adult Learner

There are great similarities between working with the adult learner and working with our youth; yet there are distinct differences that you will want to be intentional about when interacting and mentoring your teacher candidate. The amount of past experiences with children or teens, the confidence level and initiative level of your teacher candidate will differ. Try to diagnose what phase or stage of adult learning speaks most to your teacher candidate at this point in time. As you diagnose the stage your teacher candidate is in, you can better align your mentoring practices. Either you will be very much a guide on the side or you will be very concrete, very structured and direct, or somewhere in between. The important element is trust and for the teacher candidate to know you “have their back” and best interests in mind for achieving competency with the standards set before them to apply.

One of the greatest fears of teacher candidates is that when they make mistakes, “the whole grade level” or “the whole school” will know. Just as FERPA protects our young learners, so too, does this federal law apply to those of us who are working with teacher candidates. Information is always confidential unless a building principal or university official is inquiring information from you on the candidate. The candidate must have your utmost trust and confidence as they begin to implement and grow in their professional pedagogy (if necessary, seek out more information on Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act or FERPA, 1973).

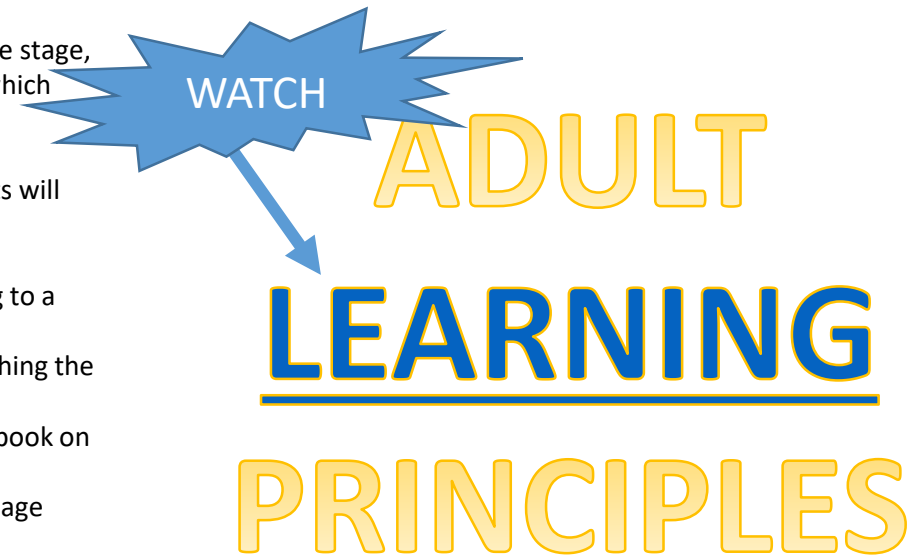
Notable pioneers, researchers and authors on adult learning theory, such as Malcolm Knowles (1973), Judith Erin Krupp (1981, 1982), and complementary studies following their work suggest adult learners have attributes and needs in common. Zemke and Zemke (1995) wrote a classic article that appeared in Training Magazine (pages 31-40) titled “Thirty Things We Know for Sure.” Three categories are revealed which include motivation to learn, curriculum design, and classroom instructional designs. (source: The Adult Learner, 2004, written by Robin J. Fogarty and Brian M. Pete. Fogarty and Associates.)

Keep in mind, also, David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory which suggests that generally, adult learners prefer one stage, instead of hitting all 4 stages, in how they process new information. Let’s take learning to ride a bike for example, which may parallel learning to teach.

To effectively learn to ride a bike, adults should hit all 4 stages of the cycle (seen below, and in that order), but adults will only learn new information in 1-2 stages:

- Concrete Experience – This is personal involvement in everyday situations, known as the FEELING stage (speaking to a cyclist on riding technique and tips).
- Reflective Observation – This is observing/relating the experience to them, known as the WATCHING stage (watching the cyclist ride a bike, and how it relates to conversations).
- Abstract Conceptualization – This is using logic and systematic analysis, known as the THINKING stage (reading a book on riding a bike, and connecting it to the cyclist and themselves).
- Active Experimentation – This is practically applying the experience to their environment, known as the DOING stage (jumping on the bike themselves).

“Cooperation is spelled with two letters.....WE!” V. Estrem



Communication

By now, you have had many opportunities to interact and get an idea of where your teacher candidate is in relationship to past experiences, initiative, confidence, motivation, and his/her own vision of being a student teacher. Another set of deliberate interactions, with your teacher candidate, need to clearly communicate high expectations and specific criteria to set up a successful team partnership. The earlier on in your relationship, the better! You are still in “neutral territory” and taking on the leadership role in order to set the teacher candidate up for his/her success.

Avoid Assumptions! Consider this relationship parallel to setting up house with a new roommate. The more detailed and specific your agreements are up front, the less room for misunderstandings. This is referred to as proactive communication. The more topics that are agreed upon, up front, will result in less assumptions, taking things for granted or having misunderstandings develop that could have been prevented.

Get in the habit of requesting the teacher candidate to summarize their understanding of a conversation prior to going off and following the directions or completing a task. Often, a novice who is nervous (or has not yet established trust with a mentor), will not be able to fully listen or accurately comprehend a conversation. Thus, checking for understanding and providing written feedback can be extremely proactive and helpful.

As instructor of record and classroom teacher, it is important to convey to the teacher candidate that ultimately, you are the one responsible for student safety, student achievement, etc. Prevention and proactive conversations will serve the partnership best. Prepare him/her to dialogue and develop agreements with you in order to promote the ultimate strength in the partnership. Having him/her know up front what is expected as well as what is not expected is of value to both partners.

Reflection Activity: Expectations & Proactive Agreements

Review [Checklist of Topics for Expectations/Proactive Agreements](#) to add, delete or revise according to your own vision, work ethic, team or grade level agreements, etc.

Think About It

It is spring semester in a middle school classroom. It is a 16 week assignment for the teacher candidate. Fourteen weeks into the placement, a Teacher Candidate unloads on the Supervising Practitioner one morning before school. Things are said such as “I do not trust you. I do not think you respect me. I don’t want to come here in the mornings. You tell me one thing and then you change your mind after I have already started down the path with what you asked of me to begin with. Others in the department tell me that you are like this with them also! I am not feeling well and need to go home.”

99% of your communication can be deliberately aimed at PREVENTION yet 1% or more of the communication may need to be spent in resolution of differences. These differences may be in professional philosophy or beliefs, personal style or preference, or they can be misunderstandings that can be resolved and strengthen the working partnership. One of the most important skills you can help a novice teacher develop is his/her ability to confront and move through conflict.

The topic of conflict resolution is essential to be discussed at the very beginning of the mentoring experience or the team relationship. Conflict happens when two or more people disagree about something. Conflict is a natural part of life. It happens within and outside of our professional lives.

Conflict can be positive and beneficial. It can strengthen growth. When it is dealt with in a constructive way, a mutual resolution can generally be found. Conflict also can be negative. It can sometimes result in hurt feelings or broken relationships.

Reflection Activity: Conflict Resolution Skills

Read the following article. As you read it, reflect upon any recent or past professional conflicts that you have experienced. Review what skills you used or avoided using in the attempt(s) to bring resolution to the conflict at hand:

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships/conflict-resolution-skills.htm>

The article presented an analogy to describe the three most common ways people respond when they're overwhelmed:

- **Foot on the gas.** An angry or agitated stress response. You're heated, keyed up, overly emotional, and unable to sit still.
- **Foot on the brake.** A withdrawn or depressed stress response. You shut down, space out, and show very little energy or emotion.
- **Foot on both gas and brake.** A tense and frozen stress response. You "freeze" under pressure and can't do anything. You look paralyzed, but under the surface you're extremely agitated.

Another similar perspective to examine and explore- three main approaches to conflict:

- **Fight** is used when there are no other resolution strategies to use. It is purely an emotional reaction to the conflict or frustration. One uses authority, rights or force to attempt to get compliance from another.
- **Flight** is hoping that the conflict will go away or resolve itself if the parties avoid or ignore it.
- **Unite** is when two professionals talk with one another to develop mutually satisfying results. A result(s) that both parties can support or implement.

Any or all of these approaches may be indeed appropriate, given the situation. The skill is to know when and how to use these strategies deliberately.

Feedback

Somewhat related to the topic of conflict resolution is a communication skill that strong and effective mentors need to be able to use. This is the use of authentic, honest and constructive feedback. Often times, Supervising Practitioners are sensitive to the emotions of a teacher candidate and try not to “hurt their feelings” when upgrading feedback needs to be given. Depending upon the trust, the strength and transparency of the relationship, and the delivery of the information from a mentor to a novice, attempts to give constructive feedback can result in:

- passive or indirect conversations in which the teacher candidate walks away with confusion or mixed messages or inaccurate information
- emotional meltdowns on the part of a teacher candidate
- defensiveness or displacement of ownership on the part of a teacher candidate
- acceptance and gratitude for being authentic with them.

As you move forward in this module, the need for constructive feedback and authentic coaching will be embedded into the recommended coaching protocol for Supervising Practitioners to use in order to be effective when supporting, nurturing, and encouraging a Teacher Candidate to professionally grow.

Think About It: Part 1

It is about the 5th week of a 16 week placement. The Supervising Practitioner and Teacher Candidate have just come in from dismissal routines on the school campus. The sixth grade Supervising Practitioner invites the Teacher Candidate to sit down. They both grab their water bottles. The Supervising Practitioner proceeds with the following interaction. As you read this interaction; put yourself in the place of the teacher candidate. Ask yourself:

- What are the strengths of giving constructive feedback that this SP is modeling for you?
- What do you think the SP is being very deliberate about in his/her word choices?
- How might this case study guide your future interactions when you have some difficult news to share with your teacher candidate?

“John, I want us to take time this afternoon to discuss your current classroom management skills. I want to review one area of strength and two areas of concern with you and work something out that we are both comfortable with, for the benefit of our students.

We have the next 15 minutes together in which I plan to review these points with you:

- A. Every minute counts for instruction
- B. Time is our responsibility to manage and keep track of
- C. There are strategies that we can deliberately use so that our learners will use time well and be productively engaged. It is a teacher responsibility rather than assuming that our students can do it on their own.

Might there be anything you would like to add to this quick agenda?

Part 2

Over time and especially today, I have noted for you that bell to bell instruction is important. As an example: our learners come from across the grade level to us for Social Studies instruction and we have only 45 minutes in which to conduct the teaching and learning. Other colleagues depend upon us to dismiss them on time so that schedules will stay on track for the rest of the day. Also – we want to be consistent as a grade level with how time is used in our settings.

One skill that you have really picked up on and are using well is that you tell them up front how much time they have for a task. This helps our kids know right away what is expected of them to be productive and on task.

The concern I have is that you currently are not watching the time or sticking to what you have stated. You say that the kids have 5 minutes but sometimes you let them go way over 5 minutes. Let's look at examples from today that I have recorded for you so you can see not only the frequency but also the total amount of time that students were allowed to go beyond the time frame you gave them up front....(show tallies, script, or other documentation of evidence)

The more often you allow the kids to do this, they get two indirect messages:

- One message is that you say one thing but you do not mean it.
- A second message is that sharing the responsibility for time management is not something that the kids need to be concerned with. WE want the opposite to be true.

This practice is also ineffective because it gets us more and more behind with our schedule and our instructional plans.

If we say that we are giving them 3 minutes, then at the end of 3 minutes, I believe we need to check in and see how many of them are finished or at a good stopping point. Do you have any ideas for how you might do that?.....

Part 3

Perhaps one idea that we could expose you to is the strategy of a wrap up cue. This means that at least 1 minute prior to the time you gave them up front, you signal or tell them aloud how much time they have left of the 3 minutes. What ideas come to mind now?

Another idea that I would like to encourage you to begin using is when you are lesson planning, take the time to project how long you think each activity or segment of the lesson should take you. Be mindful of this from the get go. If you know we have 45 minutes for the instruction, then also the transitions need to be exceptionally smooth and efficient. This is my second area of concern. Too much time is being wasted at the beginning or ending of the periods.

When the kids come in, what ideas do you have for how to get them started as quickly as possible for instruction? If we allow them 3-5 minutes at the beginning just because we are not prepared, we don't have our teaching materials ready and accessible, or we don't have a ritual for how to get them in, seated and ready to learn; then we are missing valuable minutes of instructional time. The time for each period of each day that we allow this really begins to add up.

Share with me what you are thinking or how this relates back to what I am witnessing..... Have you been aware of this and just not known what to do or am I bringing this to your attention in way today that you will be intentional about strategies to use so that the learners know what is expected of them to share the responsibility for how our time is used???

Let's review again where we began. You are skillful in telling them up front the time frame for a task, yet you need to be consistent with following through or adjusting the time frame as you monitor students working on the task. It is also critical that you have strategies for how to get the kids in, seated and engaged as quickly as possible to avoid wasting time up front or at the end of a period.

Share with me some of the ideas that you think fit your style or personality in order to upgrade the time management.....

Thanks for being so open and willing to receive my feedback. Time management is a challenge for all of us at one time or another. The more I can help you now, will give you a head start!"

Reflection Activity:

Conferencing with your Teacher Candidate

1. What is the basic cause or reason for this conference?
2. What facts or concrete evidence did the Supervising Practitioner have for the teacher candidate?
3. What were the desired results for this conversation?
4. What are the positive aspects of this situation for the SP? For the teacher candidate?
5. How did an action plan develop?
6. What did I notice about word choices that the SP was intentional about using? (Notice the use of WE, OUR, etc.)
7. How did the communication get checked for understanding?
8. What check points for implementation might be considered or added to this conversation?
9. How did this interaction help the teacher candidate to confront an area of concern and bring needed information to the surface for the team and the benefit of the students?
10. What specifically did this case study model or demonstrate for me that I will be mindful of doing when communicating a concern to my teacher candidate?