



Observation Protocols for Mentoring

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Office of Professional Development

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Establishing an Effective Mentoring Climate

The first step in the mentoring process, much like the first step in teaching, is to establish a productive working relationship between mentor and mentee. This is particularly important to do before beginning mentor, mentee, and peer observations.

Beyond getting to know one another, a mentoring relationship must be based on certain understandings or agreements, including the roles and responsibilities of both the mentor and mentee. It is helpful to clearly establish these up front.

Following are suggestions for agreements, most of which come from your mentoring colleagues in PWCS. You would not want to formally establish all of these, but determine which are significant for your situation.

- **For both mentor and mentee**
 - Set time agreements for meetings.
 - Establish a regular meeting day and time.
 - Set a purpose or agenda for each meeting prior to the start of the meeting.
 - Discuss confidentiality.
 - Respect professional experience.
 - Focus on attainable and measurable goals; on data.
 - Do not take anything personally.
 - Set quarterly professional goals and reflect on and analyze the accomplishment of these goals (Rutherford).
- **For mentors**
 - Be non-judgemental in providing feedback.
 - Establish a role as a collaborative partner and/or coach, who as needed provides consultative guidance.
 - Bring in other “experts” to support the new educator, respect the confidentiality of the relationship by gaining permission from the new educator.
 - Model professionalism and reflective practice.
 - Utilize metacognition.
 - Engage colleagues in welcoming, supporting, and collaborative with new staff members.
 - Provide a variety of perspectives rather than only your own perspective.

Look-Fors Specific to Prince William County Schools

Attributes of Successful Learning Environments

- Teaching to Virginia SOLs and PWCS curriculum
- Emphasizing prior learning
- Applying knowledge in a real life context
- Providing opportunity for dialogue and debate
- Providing ongoing opportunities (Using a variety of strategies) to assess student learning
- Promoting rigor in student work
- Asking higher order questions of students

Professional Educator Standards

KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS

Understands how students learn and develop and provides learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development.

KNOWLEDGE OF CONTENT

Understands the central concepts, structures, and processes of the discipline(s) he/she teaches and creates learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful to students.

PLANNING, DELIVERY, and ASSESSMENT OF INSTRUCTION

Plans, delivers, and assesses instruction effectively.

SAFE, EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Establishes and maintains a safe and disciplined environment conducive to learning.

• For mentees

- Come to meeting with questions.
- Open to accepting feedback, growing as a professional educator.

From *The 21st Century Mentor's Handbook*:

- Seek out help.
- Observe other teachers teaching, planning, and conferencing.
- Ask why things are done the way they are.
- Self-assess and self-adjust as data dictates.
- Demonstrate a willingness to watch, listen, and learn.
- Share own expertise gained from recent university and student experiences.
- Avoid negativity.

Observation	Purpose	Prerequisites
Mentee observe mentor *The mentee may wish to observe the mentor before any other observations take place. This will help the mentee to become more comfortable with the process prior to being observed.	To gain strategies and ideas regarding instruction or classroom/behavior management.	-Establish look-fors or a focus in an area the mentee is looking to improve or gain ideas. -Utilize discussion questions to process the observation (suggested questions shown below).
Observation	Purpose	Prerequisites
Mentee and mentor observe other educator(s) in the school	Provide a variety of mentee learning experiences by observing a variety of instructional styles and management systems; provide observation of a building "expert" in an area of the mentee's focus.	-Establish a focus or purpose for the observation. -Seek out educators who are viewed as experts by educational leaders. -Avoid observations of 'volunteers' unless endorsed by an educational leader.

Observation Tips for Mentees

- While in another's classroom, strive to be an objective observer. Resist the temptation to become a participant.
- When you are observing a classroom, it will help if you focus on only one aspect at a time.
- The opportunity to learn by watching others can extend beyond observing your "official" mentor.
- By all means, you should learn and study from successes in your field. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, and you shorten your learning curve by [observing] what others have done....But remember to take what you learn and **adapt** it to suit your particular abilities. (Keller, 2001, p.3).

-Taken from Being Mentored: A Guide for Proteges by Hal Portner

Mentee and mentor observe educator(s) in other schools

Particular useful in cases when the mentee is the only or one of a few teachers in a program/subject area or when from a small school.

-Utilize discussion questions to process the observation (suggested questions shown below).

Possible Areas of Focus/Look-Fors

- Evidence of routines/procedures
- Student engagement and/or time on task
- Specific student behaviors
- Modeling of a common lesson or strategy
- Identifying the Attributes of Successful Learning Environments
- Effective use of instructional time
- Management of transitions
- Facilitation of student groups
- Questioning strategies
- Room arrangement

Post-Observation Discussion

You may wish to select questions from multiple strands to meet the desired outcomes for your discussion.

Discussion Strand A

1. What did you notice as you observed the students in those classes?
 2. Is there anything else you would like to talk about related to what you observed?
 3. Among those things you observed, what really stood out?
 4. What sequence of events may have led to what you observed?
 5. What did you see that may influence how you approach teaching in general and planning in particular?
- (The above were taken from *The Active Mentor* by Ron Nash)
6. What components of the lesson did you think were particularly well planned or executed? What made you think so?
 7. How did you know students were learning in this classroom? Is there specific evidence of this?



Making Time for Observations

- Ten minute observations conducted numerous times can often paint a clearer picture of professional practice than one or two longer observations and does not equal sacrifice of an entire block of planning time.
- Visit other classrooms at various points of a lesson.
- Talk with your educational leader about providing class coverage if needed to allow time for observations.
- When necessary, the Office of Professional Development can provide reimbursement up to ½ day per year for mentor and mentee observations.

Discussion Strand B

1. How does the educator establish and maintain a positive social and emotional atmosphere in the learning environment? For example, the educator demonstrates patience and acceptance of students through positive verbal and non-verbal exchanges.
2. How does the educator create a climate that encourages all students to achieve? For example, the educator exhibits expectations for success by communicating expectations to assigning tasks, rewarding student effort, and providing help and encouragement.
3. To the extent that it is under her or his control, how does the educator establish a physical environment that is safe and conducive to learning? For example, the educator has arranged chairs, desks, and tables in such a way as to allow for group interaction while at the same time providing for rapid and safe movement in and out of the physical space formed by that arrangement.
4. How does the educator communicate and reinforce appropriate standards of behavior for the students? For example, the educator has established, administered, and maintained rules for student behavior.
5. How does the educator vary instructional strategies in response to varying student needs? For example, the educator provides scaffolding and extension, addresses varied learning styles, and avoids sarcasm, disparaging remarks, and sexist and racist comments and promotes the same from students.
6. How does the educator initiate the lesson? For example, the educator frames for students what is to be learned, why it is to be learned, how it is to be learned, and how it relates to real life experiences and past or future learning.

Adapted from *Being Mentored: A Guide for Proteges* by Hal Portner.

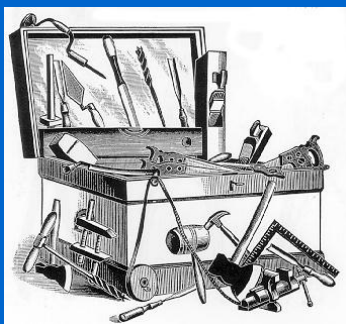
Another option to process a mentee observation of a mentor, expert or peer observation is to utilize the PWCS *Attributes of Successful Learning Environments* Observation Tool.

Observation Tips and Tools for Mentors

The Role of the Mentor

What the new teacher doesn't need is a mentor who will just offer to fix the problem. Sometimes experienced teachers are more eager to offer solutions, often based on their own personal experience, rather than asking questions which help guide the problem solving process. This technique does little to help new teachers build confidence in their own problem-solving strategies. Having a mentor who really listens and is accessible is immensely important.

Taken from *What Successful Teachers Do* by Neal A. Glasgow and Cathy D. Hicks



Observation	Purpose	Prerequisites
Mentor observes mentee	To provide another set of eyes; to provide data to inform mentor discussions and/or provide growth-producing feedback to the mentee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Positive mentor relationship. -Established date and time for the observation. -Mentee determines area of focus for the observation. -Consider use of a data collection tool. -Utilize discussion questions to process the observation.
Pre-Observation Discussion		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can I be of help to you? 2. What specifically do you want me to look for? 3. What specifically do you wish me to know? 4. Is there a particular student you would like me to watch? 5. What are your objectives and expectations for the lesson? 6. How long would you like me to observe? 7. When can we get together after the lesson? <p><i>From "Peer Coaching," National Staff Development Council (now named "Learning Forward")</i></p>		

Observational Strategies

Observers should utilize the strategy that provides the best data for the focus of the lesson.

- Throughout the lesson, note significant times
 - Events, transitions, major lesson components
 - Actions, behaviors, teacher responses
 - Teacher or student comments, questions and statements
- Utilize a seating chart to track student behaviors, teacher questioning patterns, etc.
- Describe classroom events, using facts only.
- Use anecdotal notes to describe:
 - Small-group work
 - Student engagement (what are students doing?)
 - Note use of required or research-based strategies

Adapted from "Mentoring as Collaboration" by Mary Ann Blank and Cheryl A. Kershaw

Additional Observation Tools

The *21st Century Mentor's Handbook* outlines multiple observation possibilities and provides supporting templates and tools. See pages 183-186.

Post-Observation Discussion

You may wish to select questions from multiple strands to meet the desired outcomes for your discussion.

Discussion Strand A

1. How did you decide what to teach today?
2. How does what you and your students worked on today fit in the context of the unit on which you are working?
3. How did you go about finding out if your students had the background knowledge and skills required to be successful on this lesson?
4. How did you decide what instructional strategies to use today?
5. What are the variables, beyond completion of assignments, that you consider in determining whether or not the students have learned what you wanted them to learn?
6. What do you think worked and did not work in this lesson? Why do you say that?
7. When you teach this lesson again, what will you do differently?

Discussion Strand B

1. As you look back on this lesson, how do you think it went? What happened to make you think this way?
2. What do you remember about your actions during the lesson? How did what you actually did match what you had planned? Why do you think that is the case?
3. What do you remember about student work and behavior during the lesson?
4. How did the students' actions and work match what you hoped/expected would happen?
5. How successful were the students in moving toward competency with the standard? What is your data?
6. What do you think caused some students to not "get it?"
7. What did you notice that caused you to...?
8. What did you learn from this conversation that may influence your future thinking and planning?

Rules for Peer Coaching

-**Describe first, discuss details later.** First describe what happened, using your data. The teacher can take or leave that. Only then discuss what the results were, and only if the teachers initiates the discussion.

-Talk **specifically and concretely.** (You called on Will three times," rather than "You tend to call on boys a lot.")

-Talk about things which can be changed and which are **worth changing.** (e.g. Ignore personal mannerisms, unless they are interfering with student learning.

-Remember to comment on **strengths.** Important learning comes from building on our own strengths as well as from addressing areas of weakness.

-**Check to insure clear communication.** Paraphrase a lot: "Are you saying that...?" "Let me see if I understand you..."

-**Interact.** The basic human interaction skills of attending, listening, responding, and acknowledging are important for both the coach and the teacher.

From *Peer Coaching*,
National Staff Development
Council (now named
"Learning Forward")

Discussion Strand C

1. From your perspective, was the learning objective clear and significant? What evidence can you provide?
2. What percentage of the students mastered the objective? What evidence can you provide?
3. What work did the students do to achieve the objective, and did that work add up to a quality learning experience? How do you measure that?
4. To what extent were the students actively involved in the construction of meaning? What evidence can you provide?
5. To what would you attribute students' success or lack of success? Which of these attributions are within your realm of control?
6. How will your practice change as a result of our reflection together?

Adapted from *Leading the Learning* by Paula Rutherford.

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