

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A STRONG MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Strategies for Setting Up an Effective Mentoring Partnership

Strategy #1: Share Your Personal Experiences

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Action Step #1: Model Active Listening

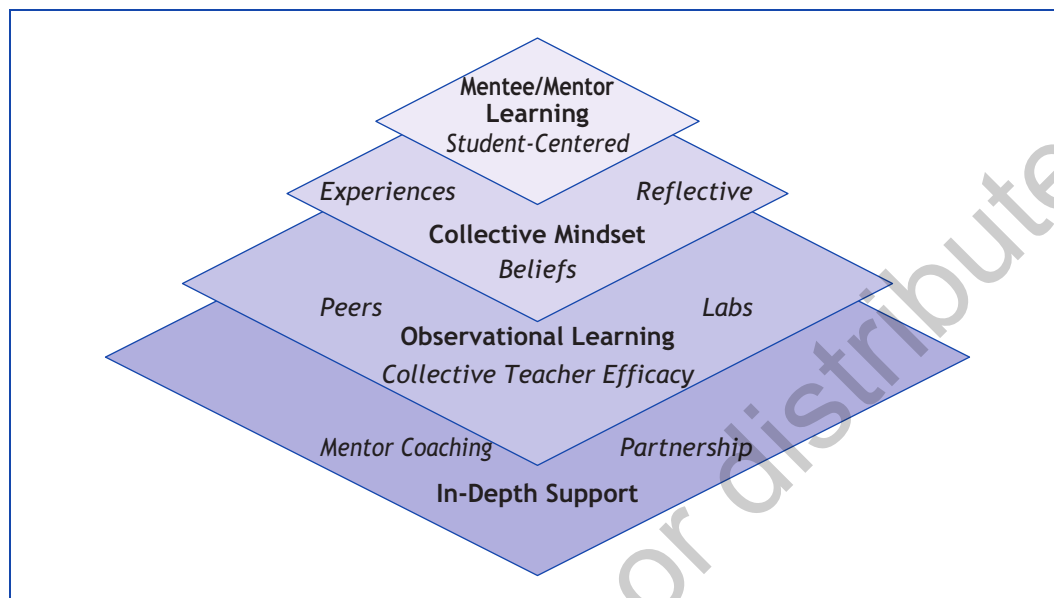
Action Step #2: Be Givers and Receivers of Feedback

Action Step #3: Use Strengths-Based Feedback

A mentoring partnership involves working together to fully guide new teachers through their beginning years. Laying a foundation from the start leads to supporting mentees instructionally, emotionally, physically, and conversationally. There will be times when the best laid plans may go awry and you may have to answer impromptu questions or give advice at any given moment. For instance, I walked into Lauren's room for our planning time on what I thought was a normal day after school and immediately knew something was off. From that moment, I could tell she was frustrated. I honestly didn't know if I should stay for our scheduled meeting or turn around and walk out. I knew Lauren was not upset at me, but she was at her breaking point. How many of us have been in a similar situation, where we walk into another teacher's classroom during a break or after school and instantly recognize that what we were planning to do or discuss or work on needed to be put on hold. Truthfully, it was clear that my next step was to help Lauren work through something difficult. She explained that her breaking point was earlier in the day when she had to make her first student office referral. Lauren was extremely upset and somewhat disheartened as well. I tried to reassure her that she was not a horrible teacher for needing to use that form of behavior management, gave her several suggestions for handling related experiences, and even shared a similar event from my first year teaching. Unfortunately, I don't think I responded in the way she needed, judging by the sad look on Lauren's face. I gave her too much information all at once, which ended up making her feel even more frustrated and overwhelmed. Do I wish I had had some professional learning on how to be more of a listener and ask questions in the moment? Of course!

As a mentor, you are an important piece of the puzzle in supporting, training, and retaining new teachers. But it is also vital for mentors to receive training and support as you guide novice teachers. Think back to the layers of Student-Centered Mentoring (Figure 2.1); the top layer includes mentor learning. Maintaining a cycle of appropriate and effective support is important for both mentees as well as mentors. Whether you are a fellow teacher, an instructional coach, or even an administrator, as a mentor you will benefit from some professional learning support so you can learn how to best approach student-centered conversations with mentees. This book will equip you to lead these conversations, which are crucial to improving student learning and developing new teachers' skills and confidence.

Figure 2.1 Layers of Student-Centered Mentoring With Key Ideas



WHAT IS THIS CHAPTER ABOUT?

In this chapter, you will learn strategies to

- ▶ Support positive emotions with new teachers
- ▶ Build strong mentoring relationships with a focus on students
- ▶ Provide effective feedback to your mentee and to students

A large part of a mentor's role in the mentoring partnership is listening to the needs of new teachers and their students and then forming relevant feedback. It starts by building a relationship with your mentee. It is also helpful to remind yourself of your own beginning experiences as you shift to a student-centered planning routine and boost your professional learning in these areas. In this chapter, we will uncover directional supports that promote a positive and supportive mentoring partnership and guide the differentiation that mentees need to be successful.

MENTOR INQUIRY PRE-REFLECTION

Use these guiding questions as you explore the ideas in this chapter:

1. What areas do you want to consider as you begin your mentoring work?
2. How can you promote positive thoughts with students, colleagues, and yourself?
3. How can you be supportive of your mentee and give feedback at the same time?

THE IMPORTANCE OF A POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Mentor programs and evaluation tools have one thing in common, and that is they begin by building relationships with students. Starting a mentoring partnership in a similar way is supportive of a mentee's overall well-being and success as a teacher. First and foremost, human connection is vital to the mentor relationship. Dr. Carrington (2019) shares in her book, *Kids These Days*, that with all relationships, it all comes down to "connection." Her thinking is in line with the philosophy behind Student-Centered Mentoring. Also imperative to our work when teaching gets tough is connections with others. Mentor relationships are important in dealing with stress, especially beginning teacher stress, which we will go further into during Chapter 3.

Angela Caves is a mentor at Prairie View Middle School in Brighton, Colorado, and attended a Student-Centered Mentoring session that focused on relationship work first. Her takeaway was that building relationships with colleagues the same way that she currently builds relationships with students can be extremely powerful in new teacher partnerships (personal communication, January 14, 2021). She shared as a follow-up to that work that staying present and working to understand both student and mentee needs is key. She adds that those steps support the relationship connection needed for progress to be made. The mentor relationships then underpin effectively collaborating with mentees.

With any partnership, we have to begin with getting to know the other person. But a true working relationship is built on trust and openness. How do we make that happen with our mentees? It starts with positivity. How do we then guide beginning teachers to be successful? Our attention then has to be directed toward students as the main topic, in order to make the most impact in a mentee's classroom of learners. All of this leads to a key component of a strong foundation—feedback.

As humans, we crave feedback. Whether we are open to the actual feedback itself depends on many characteristics for both the giving and receiving of the information. Considering the innovator mindset I have, I always enjoy learning something new from colleagues. I also like to hear what I am specifically doing well at, especially from those who I look up to. Therefore, I am open to hearing suggestions of what I can do to continue growing in my craft. I have not always been in that state though. As I reflect on how I made it to this point and couple that with what I learned from other new teachers and mentors, I have noticed that a positive relationship has to be built together first before giving feedback. Let's take Andrea and Katie's mentor partnership for example. Andrea, Katie's mentor, appreciates collaboration with her teammates and models reflective thinking with students regularly. During Katie's first several months, I also noticed that Andrea promoted time to eat lunch together with Katie daily and check in on her regularly.



MENTOR TIP

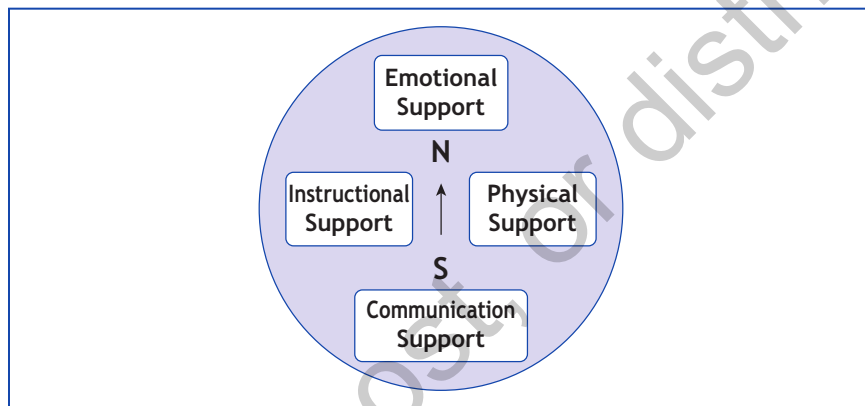
Set up a regular check-in meeting with mentees and be on the lookout for professional learning that helps you both in continuing to grow and strengthen your partnership.

LEADING YOUR MENTEE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

As you uncover your mentee's needs for support, you will want to categorize the types of support into four categories. It can best be explained in a directional nature, as we can all use the help of a compass when we are lost. Utilize the directional supports to

showcase emotional, physical, communication, and instructional support (Figure 2.2). A strong mentoring partnership attends to all four directions at some point. There are moments in a journey that we need to begin our track in a certain direction and then change directions as a path is adjusted. The same can be said for starting in a specific direction to assist mentees—based on their individual and student needs.

Figure 2.2 Directional Supports



Just as having the internal awareness of north helps us to find our way, especially when lost, having emotional support as north on a compass reiterates the importance of emotional well-being always being in the forefront of our minds. At times, you may need to change the direction of your path and give the support needed in one of the other categories. Communication is a key piece in supporting conversations with others, especially students. You cannot forget the physical needs that can include informational tips or even where to find places in the school. Last but not least is instructional support. This is where the rubber meets the road and supports the instructional methods taught to students. Have you noticed a trend as to what can initiate a strong mentoring partnership? Support! Support in a student-centered focus toward meeting the needs of your mentee is most evident.

Figure 2.3 Summary of Directional Supports

Emotional	Communication	Physical	Instructional
<p><i>Your North!</i></p> <p>Emotional support encompasses the health and well-being of teachers and students.</p> <p>It includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing and understanding the trauma students face • Social-emotional needs of both students and teachers themselves • Absence of self-care of a teacher 	<p><i>Your South!</i></p> <p>Communication support pertains to the interactions from student-to-student, student-to-teacher, teacher-to-colleague, and teacher-to-parent.</p> <p>It includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student management concerns • Parent phone calls • Collaboration norms with teammates • Observations from administrators 	<p><i>Your East!</i></p> <p>Physical support involves tangible and procedural parts that are accustomed to the role of teaching.</p> <p>It includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information about locations • Figuring out copiers or other building resources • Building procedures and schedules • Classroom setup 	<p><i>Your West!</i></p> <p>Instructional support entails the use of teaching practices centered on methods and instructional strategies.</p> <p>It includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing appropriate methods and instructional strategies to meet student needs • Observing job-alike classrooms to deepen the instructional impact of students • Discussing impact on student learning and achievement

Adapted from Boogren (2015)



MENTOR TIP

Use Appendix G, the Digital Companion Resource: **Directional Supports for Beginning Teachers Handout** to have as an at-a-glance document. Also, share the resource with your mentee as it summarizes the four areas and can be a guide for conversations.

STRATEGIES FOR SETTING UP AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

Your role as a mentor will more than likely continue into your mentee's second and third year of teaching. Possibly even longer! As a mentor, you are not only integral within the layers of Student-Centered Mentoring for new teachers, but your relationship will be a safe haven for your mentee. Both of you will grow in your craft, and that results in the growth of even more students. In order for these benefits to occur, it takes some time to lay the groundwork for a mutual and trusting relationship. A supportive relationship will lead you to being able to give the feedback necessary for growth. Throughout this chapter, you will gain insight on strategies that will provide your mentoring partnership a start toward a positive relationship and add to your mentoring toolbox. Strategies 2 and 5 will give you multiple action steps to assist in the process.

STRATEGY #1: SHARE YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Think back to when you were a beginning teacher and the experiences that molded your early years. Most of us remember our first evaluation—the nerves and the intrinsic desire for it to go well. My first observation was scheduled during a reading lesson, and I thought it was a disaster. The administrator was running behind, so I waited to start. Of course, the students were a little bit antsy by the time she arrived, and I was right there with them. We finally got started, and I wasn't even a minute in when a student threw up on the carpet—luckily not on anyone else. I quickly got the students settled back in their seats, called the custodian, and continued to teach my lesson. The custodian was as fast as ever in responding to the call. I kept on teaching, even though students were trying not to gag at the smell. Afterward, I felt defeated as I shared my experience of turmoil with my mentor and teammates. Their responses were reassuring: “You kept teaching?” and “Your students will actually remember more than you think.” To my surprise, the students did remember some things. I also received good ratings on my evaluation because of my persistence in teaching the lesson! This experience was yet another early lesson for me that the way students respond is far more important than having a “perfect” lesson.

There are other moments you may recall more vividly than others. What memory seems to stick with you forever? Also, think about the experiences that are more general that could help you share a pearl of wisdom. Consider this list as you recall both positive and negative memories:

- ▶ First office referral
- ▶ Field trips
- ▶ Classroom interruptions
- ▶ Parent-teacher conferences
- ▶ Unexpected student responses

Any of these moments can be disheartening no matter how smoothly the process plays out. I will never forget dealing with harassment from a student and how it took a toll on me, as it would any teacher. I couldn't believe my ears heard it correctly when a student was making inappropriate comments to another student. Then, I found out they also had said things in reference to me as well. The piece that has risen to the surface as I go down memory lane is that all teachers can experience these impressionable moments, causing an emotional toll that shapes us into who we are as educators. As a mentor, it is important for us to think back to those experiences that molded us in our beginning years. When we share what was learned from those moments, it helps us relate to our mentees and builds a sense of trust and mutual respect.



MENTOR TIP

If your memory is a little fuzzy recalling other experiences, try asking yourself, What situations have made me nervous? When have I felt really disheartened? What has excited me? When did I see the light bulb moment for a student? You might even look at class pictures or yearbooks. Just remember to share some of those moments and what you learned from them with your mentee.

STRATEGY #2: SUPPORT POSITIVE EMOTIONS WITH NEW TEACHERS

We know from experience that being a new teacher can feel uncertain at times, which is why it is so important to guide mentees with positive support. Whether trying to find a sense of direction as a

mentee or even as a mentor, teaching can take an emotional toll. You will want to use these action steps to help you steer your mentee in a hopeful direction as well as to grow your mentoring relationship through optimism.

ACTION STEP #1: PROMOTE A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

For a new teacher, it is easy to feel like you are frantically running around in circles with no sense of direction making little progress with students. As mentors, to help remove those feelings of chaos, we must encourage a positive frame of mind. One easy way to do this is to start the day with positive affirmations that it is going to be a good day. More than likely, the positive thinking will promote an easier day or at least make the challenges that arise easier to deal with. As humans, we have to intentionally work to think on the bright side. We tend to let negative experiences play a toll on ourselves more than we allow positivity, which shapes our relationships. As VeryWellMind states from a compilation of research, “The negative bias is our tendency not only to register negative stimuli more readily but also to dwell on these events (Cherry, 2020). Overcoming this requires retraining our daily outlooks and promoting a positive outlook. I remember recommending this with my grandmother right after she had a severe heart attack and was in ICU. We started a notebook and I encouraged her to think of three things she was thankful for each day. It helped her. She progressed and gained enough strength to eventually go home.



MENTOR TIP

Advocate for positive thinking to help your mentee have a more optimistic outlook about each day. Reiterate that it will make the issues that arise easier to deal with as well.

Some of the teachers I work with regularly will also tell you that I encourage a similar thought process. We even sometimes text each other what we are thankful for when we know it is going to be a more challenging day. How does this all connect to the daily job of being a teacher? If we can remind ourselves of the joys of teaching, then a natural by-product is the hope of making a difference with our students. Being a model of positive thinking for our students creates the domino effect for our students’ to then learn.

Another aspect is how we feel others perceive our actions. “People often fear the consequences of the negative outcome more than they desire the potential positive gains, even when the two possibilities are equivalent” says Cherry (2020). As a teacher, we can feel judged for teaching a specific strategy over another or for how we talk with a student about their work, to name just a few. That is because of the possibility of it not working or being incorrect. You have the opportunity to help your mentee promote the positive possibilities instead. This will help diffuse some of the negative self-doubt and establish a happier relationship for you both.

ACTION STEP #2: GUIDE YOUR MENTEE NORTH WITH THE DIRECTIONAL SUPPORTS

Imagine walking around a forest with no sense of direction like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. She needed the encouragement and positive support to find her way to the Emerald City. Mentors and mentees think similarly as Dorothy. Many ask, “How do we know if we are on the right path?” “How do we know if our choices are effective?” One thing I believe deep down will help educators find the pathway out of this forest and make an impact on students’ learning is to support each other by keeping a focus on the north. What does that really mean though? To get out of a forest, whether with someone or alone, one of the first steps is to get your sense of direction. Focus on looking for the moss on trees. Moss only grows on the north side, so you can use that knowledge to help keep from circling back to where you started.

The start of getting out of the forest is positive thinking, which is an integral piece of the emotional direction. Think back to Katie earlier in this chapter. Katie is very reflective of her own practices and sometimes feels as though she could be doing more for her students. Knowing her passion, Andrea instilled the importance of certain routine practices that contributed to her emotional well-being. This allowed them to move in another direction when needed. Andrea encouraged emotional well-being support along with instructional support. How did Andrea know to do this? In part, she knew based on information that was provided to her during a mentor professional learning session that covered how to support beginning teachers. But the main reason is her intrinsic nature to lead Katie in the direction she needed most. Think of ways to encourage the positive emotional well-being of mentees so they can have a sense of direction with their students. Now that we have a sense of our north, we will explore the other supports in further sections of this chapter: communication, physical, and instructional.



MENTOR TIP

Start with the directional support of north to guide your mentee toward positive emotions and set the stage for next steps of support. You will also need to shift north from time to time, sometimes on a whim.

STRATEGY #3: ASK QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE APPROPRIATE SUPPORT

Having effective conversations with mentees includes questioning. By asking specific questions up front, you can save time and frustration, as well as learn about your mentee. Questioning can also clarify the types of support your mentee needs. You will want to reflect on how to be an effective communicator and then eventually it will become routine to ask questions. Embedding more questions into dialogue also allows mentees to share their thinking first. Your mentee could even solve their own problems! If we, as mentors, go right into replying when we are approached with a problem, beginning teachers are less likely to feel heard, as well as learn. Communication is vital in building an effective relationship with any individual. Trusting partnerships are not only based on honesty but open conversations as well. So when needed, turn the compass south and encourage talking it out.



IN THE CLASSROOM

Questioning promotes dialogue. This same questioning approach can be used to encourage dialogue with students. Help students understand the purpose of asking questions is to understand each other and encourage deeper questions in partnerships or small groups to increase learning. Invite your mentee to brainstorm together some open-ended questions to model the start of the process for students.

Let's revisit the directional supports and consider what questions to ask mentees in order to discover the possible support that is needed. Does your mentee need help with physical needs, like arranging their classroom to promote partnership and group work? What about

instructional needs, like how to teach a specific reading strategy to a higher-level group of students? Or is it emotional needs, like struggling with how to help a student who is experiencing trauma? If we really want to provide the appropriate support, then clarifying the state teachers are in will help the next steps of the partnership. The intentional questions asked can also tie to giving useful feedback when needed and guiding next steps. If you are uncertain of the specific directional questions to ask, consider a more general approach that embeds a student-centered focus. This will also help your mentee feel less judged for their actions and open to suggestions, as well as support positivity. Some guiding questions that mentors can ask of themselves are the following:

- ▶ What kind of questions are you asking your mentee in relation to the student outcomes?
- ▶ Are you asking surface-level questions or going more in depth?
- ▶ How are mentees themselves asking questions in relation to students?
- ▶ What do the majority of your mentee's students experience when outside of school that could affect their day-to-day well-being?



KEEPING IT STUDENT CENTERED

It tends to be more natural to ask mentees the physical questions of support, like whether they know how to use the copier. Try to adapt your questioning to be focused more around students. Ask yourself the guiding questions as you try to be more student centered. It can help when talking with your mentee and take the judgmental nature out of the conversation that some mentees may feel. Also, just like with students, mentees are then better able to solve their own problems.

STRATEGY #4: BALANCE PLANNING CONVERSATIONS TO INCLUDE STUDENTS AND CONTENT

Normally, the assumption is that new teachers need mostly content support, which is why many induction programs include a heavy emphasis on this area. This represents a teacher-centered viewpoint

where the focus is on creating the expert teacher. But information changes quickly in our world and factual knowledge is at the tip of our fingers. So having the focus so much on content decreases the importance of the students in front of us. “What do I teach my students?” is a common question and can still be a part of the planning. However, you can reframe this question to be, “How do I teach the learners?” instead. By doing this, we can help teachers keep their passion for learning about their craft alive and keep the heart of why we are in the profession up front—our students.



MENTOR TIP

Start all of your planning conversations by looking at student evidence and asking about student observations. If you plan together weekly or even daily, try having the first 10 minutes always encompass student work.

As a mentor, how do you balance that planning to include students and learning strategies that will be most impactful? The idea is to increase talk about students and student evidence. It is extremely helpful to mentors who are not in the same content area as their mentee to plan strategic questions for use in planning conversations. This will allow you to have a student-centered focus and assist in planning quality instruction. Rodney, a mentor in an elementary school outside of St. Louis, shared that a big takeaway for him was incorporating how to discuss and celebrate the growth of students with his mentee. “When we have these conversations together, we can celebrate each other. It helps us to learn about each other’s strengths as teachers and share ways to help each other and our students.” Some planning questions that can guide planning conversations with a student-centered focus are the following:

- ▶ What student work can we look at to guide next steps?
- ▶ How are the students showing you their learning?
- ▶ What do the majority of your students already know?
- ▶ How can we keep students engaged?
- ▶ Why do we want the students to learn this information?
- ▶ What instructional strategies match the students’ needs at this time?

STRATEGY #5: PROVIDE EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK TO YOUR MENTEE

One of the top-rated strategies in the mentor ranking of professional learning is mentors giving feedback to their mentee. Giving effective feedback is more than just a comment in response to an action. It begins with active and supportive listening. The feedback process then includes understanding of both giving and receiving feedback. This high impact strategy is then best utilized by forming strengths-based feedback, where you center the feedback around strengths and skills. The feedback loop comes full circle as you continually go through the process and layer feedback that relates to recent feedback, helping your mentee make connections from one experience to the next. Use these action steps to reinforce a positive relationship with your mentee.

ACTION STEP #1: MODEL ACTIVE LISTENING

After asking clarifying questions, mentors need to truly listen to the responses before providing feedback. There is power in listening. Just like finding a sense of direction in the forest, listening to what's going on around you is important. In conversation, it is second nature to think in the moment about what we would do in a situation and reply immediately. Instead, we should be listening to understand.

In his book *We Got This*, Minor (2019) describes listening in three phases. First is the act of listening itself—more specifically, hearing. Second, we have some thinking to process what we heard and seek to understand. Finally, based on what is heard, we then ask questions. How do I make revisions to my teaching and my classroom community? How do I adjust to how everything around me operates? How do we listen to understand what students are communicating? So I think of these parts for listening in three easy steps: hear, think, and ask.

Beginning teachers need mentors and colleagues who will listen to their needs. As a mentor, we have to listen to mentees first in order to know what kind of support to give them. Whether it is more physical support, such as how to use the new LMS (learning management system), or further supporting emotional needs, we cannot make assumptions; we must listen. And in all reality, the same goes for any of our colleagues.

This small action of listening can be helpful, especially after teaching students to be assessment-capable learners. John Hattie's work around developing assessment-capable learners could be a great direction to help guide you on that right path of listening to students and their learning. It is powerful to use student evidence as you listen to students, as well as brainstorm ways to promote better listening with students. Try it yourself and then share the experience with your mentee so they can listen to students as well! Here are two sets of questions to use as you collaborate with your mentee about the act of listening:

What evidence can we use to be more intuitive with students?

- ▶ Student survey data
- ▶ Student achievement data
- ▶ Student observations
- ▶ Interviews or conversations

How do we promote being better listeners with students?

- ▶ Class meeting discussions
- ▶ Book clubs
- ▶ Group work
- ▶ Partner reading
- ▶ Providing examples of listening characteristics
- ▶ Modeling being a listener during presentations



IN THE CLASSROOM

The same listening process—hear, think, ask—can be used with students as well (Minor, 2019). Just like with mentees, the assumption cannot be made as to what students' needs may be unless we listen. As a mentor, start off with listening to your students and their needs. This could be listening to what and how they say things. It also includes listening to their learning and understanding what they may be struggling with.

Additionally, I invite you to take the challenge of listening to your own listening. Since technology is readily available, you can easily do that by watching a recording from an activity with your class. You could

also ask colleagues to record one of your planning sessions. If you're unable to record any of those opportunities, just thinking and being mindful of how you listen is a powerful follow-up reflection. Consider times of interruptions, pauses, and even your body language when you are trying to be two steps ahead in the conversation. Lastly, don't be afraid to ask more questions!



MENTOR TIP

Be a model of listening to understand with teammates, staff, and students. Promote the challenge of listening to your own listening. My favorite is videoing a small group or conference with a student!

ACTION STEP #2: BE GIVERS AND RECEIVERS OF FEEDBACK

Now we are ready for what many think of as the most important strategy of a mentor's role: delivering feedback. Before delving into how to give feedback to mentees, it is important to explore several aspects—mentor concerns and the characteristics of being a receiver as well as giver of feedback. This is where a relationship with mentees can go awry. It is also the aspect of mentoring that many mentors feel unsure about. One mentor shared that it sometimes intimidates her to give feedback, but learning how to keep the feedback based on strengths and using a process makes it feel less intimidating and something she feels more comfortable doing the more she does it (Sherry, personal communication, January 11, 2021). So let's dive into the other parts of that process for you to be prepared as well!

It is important to consider the characteristics of feedback and expectations within the mentoring partnership. This is especially true for the attributes of both giving and receiving effective feedback (see Figure 2.4). Even though most of the characteristics are applicable to both the giver and receiver, you will notice the majority lie with the receiver. This is where we have to consider not only learning how to give feedback but also how to receive it. In *Thanks for the Feedback*, Stone and Heen (2014) describe how giving feedback skillfully only goes so far if the receiver is unwilling or unable to absorb the information. Helping mentees be engaged receivers of feedback is the key to unlock learning. So instead of pushing, we instill pulling.

Creating pull is about mastering the skills required to drive our own learning; it's about how to recognize and manage our resistance, how to engage in feedback conversations with confidence and curiosity, and even when the feedback goes wrong, how to find insight that might help us grow. It's also about how to stand up for who we are and how we see the world and ask for what we need. (Stone & Heen, 2014, p. 6)

Figure 2.4 Characteristics of Giving and Receiving Feedback

Characteristic	Giver	Receiver
Coach	✓	
Role model	✓	
Open to ideas		✓
Reflective		✓
Seeks relevance		✓
Choices		✓
Listener	✓	✓
Collaborator	✓	✓
Seeks growth	✓	✓
Positive	✓	✓
Innovator	✓	✓
Problem solver	✓	✓

The top of the list for both givers and receivers includes listening, covered earlier in the chapter. Listening is not only valuable in a relationship but also when incorporated into the feedback loop. Another characteristic to point out is from the receiver side of seeking relevance. As a receiver, truly feeling as though tips and suggestions are relevant feels personal. Several other characteristics for the receiver—growth, innovator, open to ideas, reflective, and problem solver—fall under having a learning mindset, which we will cover more in depth in Chapter 3. An important area to also keep in mind for a receiver is having a choice of next steps. As humans, we tend to work well when given a few options. It is noticeable in a strong mentoring partnership how mentees respond well to being given choice.



MENTOR TIP

Helping mentees to become receivers of feedback is the key to unlock learning. Show the chart to your mentee and analyze characteristics of giving and receiving feedback together to help support the feedback process.

As mentors, it is also important to consider the categories of feedback in the mentoring partnership (see Figure 2.5). As you examine the categories, you will also notice qualities of giving effective feedback are embedded throughout. The first two categories—promote and praise—are where the effective feedback characteristics are most evident. Promote tops the list because that is where the mentoring partnership will be the most student centered as well as make the most impact. It is where you will collaborate and generate ideas about student learning. Praise is meant to be celebratory of results and increase motivation. To persuade is to be more teacher centered in the feedback approach, where you will inform your mentee about specific details around concepts and moments. There may be rare occasions the directness may be needed, so keep in mind how to shift to using the other feedback categories. The same can be said for the perceive category. This can be more related to the evaluation of mentees but solely recommended for the administrator to do.

Figure 2.5 Categories of Feedback in a Mentoring Partnership

	Characterized by	Purpose
Promote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening, questioning, paraphrasing, probing, withholding judgment • Mutual brainstorming, clarifying, deciding, assessing impact on students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach and collaborator • Student-centered decision making (what students currently understand and can do) and promote ongoing reflection in order to expand/sharpen knowledge, skills, and capability • Generate ideas to solve instructional problems, apply and test shared ideas, and learn together through co-planning
Praise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition, encouragement, gratitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase motivation • Acknowledge results, hard work, and effort in order to motivate and thank

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Characterized by	Purpose
Persuade	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Directness• Giving advice or suggestions• Modeling and demonstrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inform about details regarding policies, procedures, content, techniques, and events
Perceive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observing actions• Judging• Commenting• Measuring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate progress and results for significance• Performance-based in the moment

ACTION STEP #3: USE STRENGTHS-BASED FEEDBACK

Finally, we get to the “*how*” of providing feedback. The strengths-based feedback approach falls in the promote and praise category of feedback. I first heard of giving strengths-based feedback when I began my role as a coach. I learned to use a three-step process with Sweeney (Sweeney & Harris, 2017). This is one approach you could take with your mentee. The three steps are as follows:

- 1. Clarify:** Ask clarifying questions and probe to learn more about details, successes, and difficulties
- 2. Value:** Celebrate what is working and showcase strengths and actions
- 3. Uncover possibilities:** Devise a goal and define next step(s)

Let’s compare that to the sandwich approach. Most know this method as an area of need shared between two positive comments, not necessarily about the same focus. Well, I may still use that at times, like with my husband, but there is another option to keep in mind. I have since formed a technique using some of the strengths-based feedback parts but in a two-step process (Figure 2.6). I simplified the process because I found that most mentors and mentees know each other on a more in-depth level. Plus, more than likely questions have already been asked in some way prior to giving feedback. With that in mind, a mentor rarely needs the clarification step before recognizing and brainstorming ideas. More often than not, clarification is blended into the brainstorm phase.

Figure 2.6 Two-Step Process for Strengths-Based Feedback With Mentees

Using Strengths-Based Feedback With Mentees		
	Description	Language Stems
1. Recognize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on the strengths and skills of the mentee with a focus on students • Encourages and recognizes hard work and effort in order to motivate and thank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you plan to . . . ? • The students really responded to . . . • Did you notice how the students engaged in . . . ? • The . . . practice was really effective when . . . • What strategies will you use? • What will success look like? • You really thought about . . . • How will you monitor students' . . . ? • I see how you've been working diligently on . . . • So you're feeling . . . thinking . . .
2. Brainstorm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-constructs ideas to increase mentees' knowledge, skills, and capability focused around understanding and helping students • Promotes ongoing reflection that includes choices and open-ended questions for mentees to consider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What student evidence leads you to these decisions? • How would you revise . . . ? • How is this compared to how you thought it would be . . . ? • What are some ideas that you have? • What are the causes for . . . ?

The first step is recognizing. This step is about a specific skill or action that is relevant in the moment. The recognition step is one of the most important because it sets the stage for the mentee to think positively. Plus, mentees need to know what they are doing well so that they can continue that practice. More than anything, it helps them keep an open mind to new suggestions or ideas. It is also important to use language that is focused around students. The language stems in Figure 2.6 provide lots of examples to model this. The second step is brainstorming. It includes collaborating around ideas based on the recognition. As a mentor, you are essentially coaching your mentee in a student-centered manner by modeling how to reflect on ideas and

process decision making that will benefit students the most. This is when many mentors will use clarifying questions as the co-construction of ideas and next steps propels the collaboration forward.



KEEPING IT STUDENT CENTERED

Giving feedback to mentees and colleagues can be intimidating, especially if you have received a negative response in the past. If you recall giving feedback before, analyze your approach. Then, consider practicing the use of strengths-based feedback language with a focus on the students to make the student-centered wording more of a habit.

Giving feedback using this process with a student-centered focus supports a beginning teacher in making amazing growth with students. Rather than just giving advice or saying, “Good job,” you will have more of an effect when being specific and relevant to the skills and instructional practices. Kimberly Warne (personal communication, January 14, 2021), a mentor at Prairie View Middle School in Brighton, Colorado, shared how this approach gives her the opportunity to give feedback to her mentee that is less intimidating and more focused. “It allows me to be able to express the feedback in terms of the student needs and reactions so that the teacher does not feel attacked and can get behind doing whatever is needed for our students!” When you couple strengths-based feedback with guiding mentees toward becoming open receivers of feedback, it makes the feedback loop come full circle. When it comes to achieving the feedback loop, build off past feedback by slowly adding onto suggestions or ideas based on the strengths of your mentee.



IN THE CLASSROOM

This feedback process can be used with students in the classroom as well. Teaching kids to give and receive strengths-based feedback can be embedded into a beginning teacher’s daily routine, which promotes a culture of community and learning. This process can be followed when responding to students verbally and in written comments as well. To do this, take some of the stems above and try adapting them to use with students. For example, “I see how you have been working diligently on your use of algebraic expressions. What are some ideas for showing your thinking as you find the answers?”



FROM THE LENS OF A NEW TEACHER

How Lindsay Found Value in Mentoring as a Reentry Teacher

Although she taught for six years, Lindsay was brand new to her district and knew she was in for a learning curve. Lindsay took a first grade position after having previously taught fifth grade, and even though she looked forward to her new position, she had some slight apprehension. She truly did not realize it would be like she was starting over from scratch until after the fact. Luckily, Teena was her buddy mentor and the pair was a perfect match. Here is Lindsay's account of their experience:

The most beneficial part of my work with Teena was the ongoing support and collaboration. We were constantly talking about what worked, what went well with the students, and making plans to adjust where needed. I had to be honest with myself to admit that even though I had been a teacher for six years prior to coming to Heritage, I had VERY little experience with primary grades, and I needed support with reading strategies to help my kids. I am so grateful that I was able to have Teena as a mentor because she was so understanding and supportive.

Specifically, that was a big year for us to learn about how to make a small group reading method we called massive practice (introducing several books, some created together, across a 3-5 day succession with a group). It was successful, and so I think because of having that time to collaborate together and make adjustments to the method is something I'll always remember. Teena helped by listening and giving me encouragement along the way, which made me feel much more confident in the primary level of teaching reading! She was previously a reading interventionist, so her level of knowledge in reading was extremely helpful as I learned the best strategies to teach my first graders.

Being able to try something together makes it a little less scary, and you have someone to talk to along the way. Teena and I even went through a mentor coaching cycle together as well. Because I had her as a supportive mentor, I made quick gains with some of my most struggling readers. Teena also pushed me to be a

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risk-taker and really held me accountable for making a plan. It helped me to be intentional with what I was going to do to help my students. If I hadn't gone through that process, I don't think I would have made the increase in effectiveness that I did.

Lindsay highlighted the importance of having Teena's support through her first year in a new grade level and new school. Their mentoring partnership showcased the value of a mentor's listening and guidance in the appropriate direction. Lindsay also mentioned their work in a mentor cycle, which you can read more about in Chapter 6. Teena's participation also made an immense impact on Lindsay's beliefs in herself. The two of them continue to work at the same grade level and refine their teaching practices together to better their students.



FROM THE LENS OF A MENTOR

How Kala Embodied Listening as a Mentor

Kala was a mentor during her sixth year of teaching. She began her teaching career in the same district she is still in today. She also had a wonderful role model to look up to, as her mother was an elementary teacher as well. Kala's mentee, Hannah, had graduated the December before, and that spring semester, she was a building substitute prior to being hired on Kala's team. Kala and Hannah taught on a grade level with three other teachers as well. Kala shared her account of her mentoring partnership with Hannah:

Thinking back to Hannah's interview, I remember that she had hardly left the room when our team announced simultaneously that she was the one we recommended. Hannah was, we could tell, a hard worker and just so eager to get into the classroom. Her enthusiasm was contagious and she worked (and continues to work) so hard. I think that my mentee and I had a very strong relationship because we shared these similar characteristics. We had an immediate connection from the interview and quickly felt lost if we were not talking on a daily basis. We became friends first and colleagues second. Therefore, all our conversations were ones where we assumed the best in each other.

Her first year she had a VERY difficult group of kids, but she never gave up. I have so many memories of Hannah coming to my room, laying across the front carpet, and sprawling out over student desktops to talk. We just knew we could laugh together, sometimes even cry, about whatever issue had come up.

She built a classroom community where everyone felt included and valued. I will never forget the many conversations before, during, and after the school day, even some nights and weekends!

I think the biggest thing is just being there to listen. Being a first-year teacher is HARD! You need to have someone that you know will support you, have your back, give ideas when they are looking for them, and know that they are not being judged in the process. We all go through starting off as a first year teacher and come out on the other side knowing so much more about ourselves. But, we need someone there for us to make sure we don't fall. When my mentee would doubt herself, I would ask why she did it the way she did. Her response usually was because this student or that student needed a basic need met, whether learning or emotional. I then told her that she did it for the kid, to give them what they need. That is what a teacher does and no one would find fault in that. The look of relaxation would hit her and I knew it was the right move at that time.

Now, we are excited to have even moved up to a new grade level, together. Another teacher who had been on the original team that hired Hannah also joined us. It felt like a wonderful reunion that we were all together again! Hannah is a great teacher and coworker, but an even better friend. She attends birthday parties for my boys and I was at her wedding this past fall. She is an amazing person and I am so thankful that I took a "risk" on mentoring a teacher new to the profession.

Kala's takeaway about listening helped her to understand her mentee's needs, along with being someone to confide in. The simple replies centered around meeting the necessities of students helped give her mentee confidence in those moments and encouraged room for more professional learning together. The two of them moved into the other layers of Student-Centered Mentoring, specifically "labs and observations," that is the focus of Chapter 5. The partner learning lab experience was helpful for Kala to add on to her mentoring work and fully help her mentee realize she was not a poor teacher. Now, the duo is continuing to positively impact students together.

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MENTOR TIP

Use Kala's story as a reminder to help understand your mentee's needs and be there as a resource for your mentee to confide in you when needed.

RECAP AND REFLECT

As mentors, it is our job to set the foundation for a strong mentor and mentee partnership. It begins with being the point person for your mentee and recalling the experiences of being a new teacher yourself. As you consider shifting to a student-centered planning routine, also consider the directional supports that can guide the differentiation needs of your mentees. Figure 2.7 summarizes possibilities for each area based on this chapter's information. Use those ideas and add onto the possibilities as you reflect further on your mentor learning. Last but not least, tap into the use of strengths-based feedback in order to propel the partnership further. Together, this will empower beginning teachers to take actionable steps that motivate their students to learn and grow.

Figure 2.7 Summary Table of Directional Support Ideas

Emotional	Communication	Physical	Instructional
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-care routines• Student trauma• Social-emotional needs pertinent to age levels• Start a journal of moments• Family stressors and challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student recognition• Student behavior• Collaborating with colleagues• Family Involvement• Parent-teacher conferences• Administrator evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Copier• Building drills• Room location• Staff meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Methods• Engagement of students• Strategies and skills for students

MENTOR INQUIRY REFLECTION

Think back to the guiding questions at the beginning of the chapter. Take some time to reflect on the questions that follow as well as use the Rubric for Student-Centered Mentoring, Section #2 to help set goals and make a plan (Figure 2.8).

1. What areas do you want to consider as you begin the work of mentoring?
2. How can you promote positive thoughts with students, colleagues, and yourself?
3. How can you be supportive and give feedback at the same time?
4. Which Student-Centered Mentoring success criteria would you choose to support your mentoring partnership?
5. What are some initial action steps you can take to achieve a more positive and supportive relationship?

Figure 2.8 Rubric for Student-Centered Mentoring

#2: Build Positive and Supportive Relationships With Mentees		
Beginner	Emerging	Innovative
The mentor is interested in helping beginning teachers and either has not fully developed facilitation skills for any type of support and/or is in the beginning stages of forming a relationship.	The mentor is working toward being a positive resource who is attempting to use supportive conversational skills and expanding the use of feedback strategies.	The mentor is a partner with the beginning teacher, consistently showing effective communication skills that result in a successful working relationship.
Success Criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can be a point person for my mentee and provide my mentee direction whenever needed. • I can identify the type of support my mentee may need depending on the moment. • I can support positive communication with colleagues by being a model for my mentee. • I can be a listener and seek to ask questions rather than always jumping to reply in conversations. • I can use feedback that is building on the strengths of my mentee. 		

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