



Unit 3: Reflective Practice

Reflective Writing Strategies

REFLECTIVE WRITING STRATEGIES

CONTEXT

Reflective writing provides another opportunity for protégés to examine their practice, think about what works and what doesn't, and come up with new ideas.

This module contains a wealth of information about a reflective writing strategy called dialogue journaling. It explains the responsibilities Mentor-Coaches and protégés have in making this strategy successful. The module also gives Mentor-Coaches the tools they need to use this approach in their work.

TIME: 1 hour 45 minutes

OVERVIEW

- Introduction to the Module (5 minutes)
- Facilitator-Led Discussion on Dialogue Journals (10 minutes)
- Facilitator-Led Discussion on Responsibilities of Mentor-Coaches and Protégés in Dialogue Journaling (10 minutes)
- Exercise 1: Sample Journal Entry (15 minutes)
- Exercise 2: Responding to Journal Entries (35 minutes)
- Exercise 3: Professional Development Plan (15 minutes)
- Wrap-Up (15 minutes)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By completing this module, Mentor-Coaches will learn:

- Key ingredients of effective dialogue journals
- How to support and encourage protégés to write about their work with children
- How to use reflective writing as a professional development strategy.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Prior to beginning this facilitated module, take these steps:

- Read through the entire module in the Facilitator Guide and the Mentor-Coach Manual.
- Thoroughly review **STEP-Doc 3.3a: Guidelines for Dialogue Journals** in the Mentor-Coach Manual.
- Prepare the presentation using the notes in the Facilitator Guide and the supplemental information in the STEP-Doc section.
- Review the material on reflective conferencing (Unit 3, Module 2) for the opening discussion.
- Review the two exercises in this module: **Sample Journal Entry** and **Responding to Journal Entries**. Develop exercises to meet the needs of your particular group: full-group discussions, small-group breakouts, pairs or triads, individual reflection.
- Review Module 4 of Unit 3 for the wrap-up segment at the end of this module.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MODULE

Welcome the group and make necessary introductions.

Using the Overview, introduce the topics and time frame for this module. Refer to the Mentor-Coach Manual and explain how it is used in this session.

Review the previous facilitated session on the elements of a reflective conference. Give participants an opportunity to ask any questions or make comments before moving to the topic of this module.

Tell participants that in today's session, they will be exploring reflection through journal writing. Using this approach is another way that Mentor-Coaches can support protégés.

Define **reflective writing** using these points:

- Reflective writing provides an opportunity for protégés to look at their teaching, think about what works and what doesn't, and come up with new ideas.
- Reflective writing and conferences share the same three phases:
 - Reflect on a classroom event
 - Learn from insights
 - Plan next steps.
- In reflective writing, protégés record their thinking about their work with children.

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON DIALOGUE JOURNALS

Use these points to introduce participants to **journal writing** and the role that it plays in reflective practice. Journal writing:

- Helps protégés think about and assess their practice and progress every day
- Requires protégés to “stretch their reflective practice muscles”
- Guides protégés to analyze their teaching and children’s learning, identify challenges, come up with new strategies, and assess the effectiveness of those strategies
- Strengthens protégés’ written communication skills
- Supports protégés who are naturally reserved or are more comfortable expressing themselves in writing.

Tell the group that you will be focusing on one type of journal writing in this module, a **dialogue journal**.

- A dialogue journal is a written, reflective conversation between two people.
- Mentor-Coaches can use a dialogue journal to build on and extend reflective conference conversations with protégés.
- Dialogue journals give Mentor-Coaches and protégés a chance to assess their progress and growth over time. This does not mean that a Mentor-Coach “rates” a protégé’s journal entry. It simply means reading through a journal and commenting on changes in thinking and practice.

Ask participants if they have used dialogue journal writing to support protégés. Use the questions in the Mentor-Coach Manual to begin the discussion.

Invite them to share some of the challenges and successes in using this type of journal writing with the group. Participants may wish to record points from the discussion in their manuals.

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTOR-COACHES AND PROTÉGÉS IN DIALOGUE JOURNALING

Explain the roles and responsibilities of protégés and Mentor-Coaches in making dialogue journals a successful, worthwhile strategy. Draw from the participants' contributions to the previous discussion. Review the list in the Mentor-Coach Manual of what Mentor-Coaches and protégés can do. Use the points below and information in **STEP-Doc 3.3a: Guidelines for Dialogue Journals** to supplement your presentation.

Responsibilities of Mentor-Coaches

- Introduce protégés to the purpose and benefits of dialogue journals.
- Provide clear guidelines to help protégés understand when and how to write in their journals.
- Reassure protégés that the content of their journals is only shared with the Mentor-Coach.
- Let protégés take the lead in the reflective written conversation.
- If protégés seemed blocked, provide an assignment to get them started. Without guidance, some adult learners are uncomfortable writing in a journal. They don't know what to write and can become discouraged.
- Write back. Be encouraging and supportive in your responses to journal entries.
- Facilitate protégés' reflection by asking questions and writing comments that stimulate further thinking and dialogue.
- Resist the urge to correct journal writers' spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Mentor-Coaches can help writers' thinking and writing flow freely if they keep journals an "evaluation-free zone."
- Encourage protégés to make their journals their own. Suggest they include quotes or pictures that inspire them. They can also jot down new ideas and thoughts about readings.
- Help protégés see their growth over time. Look for and point out: honesty, self-assessment, reflection, self-awareness, signs that they are questioning their current practice, and signs that they are thinking deeply about their work with children.

Responsibilities of Protégés

- Write about challenges and triumphs in their work.
- Reflect on their experiences, ask questions, and come up with new ideas.

EXERCISE 1: SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRY

This exercise introduces the participants to a sample journal entry by a protégé and provides an opportunity to give or share feedback on the Mentor-Coach's response.

Ask participants to read **Rose and Namiko's First Journal Entry** in the Mentor-Coach Manual. Point out how this protégé (Rose) was confused and uncomfortable with the process.

After everyone has read the entry, facilitate a discussion using the questions on the next page. Refer participants to their manuals for taking notes.

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions to stimulate a discussion. Supplement the discussion with the responses listed under the questions.

1. What did the Mentor-Coach (Namiko) write that was helpful?

Possible Responses:

- Reassurances that Rose was on the right track: “You are not a failure at all. This is a good start.”
- Her own experiences with beginning journal writing: “...I struggled with not knowing what to say, too.”
- Specific examples of the strengths of Rose’s entry: “You write about a real struggle for you. Your entry is super honest. It is also very thoughtful.”

2. How did the Mentor-Coach stimulate the protégé’s thinking?

Possible Responses:

- Gave her a specific topic to write about: “Next time, please write about one moment during a day when you talked with a child...”
- Included statements to encourage reflection: “Tell me how you feel the conversation went. Tell me if there is anything you would do differently next time.”

3. Can you think of other things the Mentor-Coach could have written to support the protégé and encourage her to write in her journal?

EXERCISE 2: RESPONDING TO JOURNAL ENTRIES

This exercise gives the Mentor-Coaches practice responding to a journal entry. They will also receive feedback on their response from another Mentor-Coach in the group.

Ask the group to divide into pairs.

Ask one member of each pair to read and write back to the writer of the **Dialogue Journal Entry: Amy** in the Mentor-Coach Manual.

Ask the other member of each pair to read and write back to the writer of the **Dialogue Journal Entry: Carlos** in the Mentor-Coach Manual.

After they have finished writing, ask participants to:

- Read each other's responses to the journal entries.
- Underneath each other's responses, jot down a few notes, ideas, and questions that would make the response even more helpful to the protégé.
- Share their ideas with each other.

Give participants a signal when it is almost time to rejoin the large group.

Use the discussion questions in the Mentor-Coach Manual to process the activity with the full group.

Discussion Questions

Invite participants to share their questions and thoughts about the dialogue journal exercise. Use the following questions:

1. What are some of the thoughts that went through your head as you responded to the sample entry?
2. Was it hard to write feedback? How did it feel?
3. Does anyone feel comfortable sharing the feedback they provided to Carlos or Amy?
4. Did anyone's partner give them fresh ideas that they think would have strengthened their response?
5. Do these entries and the feedback raise any questions for you about your work with protégés—or their work with children?

EXERCISE 3: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Give participants time to reflect on what they learned from this module.

- Learning about the key ingredients of effective dialogue journals
- Supporting and encouraging protégés to write about their work with children
- Using reflective writing as a professional development strategy.

Refer them to the questions in the Mentor-Coach Manual to guide their reflection.

Ask them to review their Professional Development Plan to check on their progress, make any necessary changes, and decide on next steps.

WRAP-UP

Conclude the session by making the following points:

- Remind participants that reflective writing may be a new concept for many protégés. If they decide to include this strategy in their Mentor-Coach work, keep in mind the role that they play in making the effort worthwhile. The Mentor-Coach's support, guidance, and active participation are key elements to success.
- Point out **STEP-Doc 3.3a: Guidelines for Dialogue Journals** in the Mentor-Coach Manual. Suggest that Mentor-Coaches refer to this as they try this strategy with their protégés.
- Review Module 4 of Unit 3 with the group.
- Schedule a time to meet for the next facilitated session (Unit 4, Module 2). Remind participants to complete Unit 4 Module 1 prior to the next session.

