

Steps to Success: Self-Reflection and Overcoming Biases

(link for viewing at end of transcript)

Linda Warren: Another way to build a strong relationship between mentor-coaches and protégés is through meaningful communication that allows the mentor-coach to learn more about the protégé. One way to accomplish this is through a process called "reflective inquiry." Reflective inquiry is an effective communication skill that involves listening. It also involves asking questions periodically -- during reflective conferences -- to encourage your protégé to reflect on her practices.

Some of the questions that you could use are: can you talk more about that; why do you think that happened; why did or didn't that work; what other approaches could you use; what additional support or resources do you need. These questions come from the Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum: A Handbook for Mentors. It is important to remember that mentor-coaches are not expected to direct protégés activities, but to guide and help protégés make, implement and evaluate their own decisions.

Reflective inquiry takes a lot of practice, but it is an effective and worthwhile skill to adopt and refine. We found a wonderful example of cultural sensitivity and reflective inquiry in Pendleton, Oregon where we saw a protégé and mentor-coach discussing plans about bringing live baby salmon into the tribal classroom. Let's watch.

[Video Starts] [Tribal music] Narrator: At the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla in Pendleton, Oregon children are included in traditional tribal activities from an early age: going hunting and salmon fishing with their families. At Head Start, culture is integrated into every aspect of the program. Here, mentor-coach Susan Fordice meets with teacher Linda Sampson to discuss ways that Linda is using salmon in her teaching.

Susan Fordice: I love those fish tanks in the classroom. And all of the little tiny fish and the eels and all of that kind of natural stuff.

Linda Sampson: It's the time of the year. Right now we have salmon running. Little people are fishing with their moms and dads and they're out. They just got done with salmon feast. We just finished with root feast and this time of the year -- because of the extensiveness with our fisheries program -- is the opportunity for the kids to actually feed salmon, see where the salmon are, and hopefully encourage those future little fish biologist so... When it comes down to it Susan, we wanted to have live everything in class.

Susan Fordice: Do you have enough resources, you think, to carry this out for the rest of the week? Is there something else more that you're going to need or that would enhance it in some way do you think?

Linda Sampson: No, the key this week is the water temperature so and that ties to, actually, what is hot and cold and freezing it, why does water freeze -- things like that so we're just going to keep expanding on that and then vocabulary of the different types of fish, things that we use to fish with.

If you come to class you'll see the words dip net, gill net, tules -- things that live in the environment, rosebush, and things like that, that we're going to add to the word wall. We put... we labeled 'em, but we want to move them to the word wall so the children will be able to do it.

Susan Fordice: So you're tying literacy in? Linda Sampson: Yes Susan Fordice: You're tying that in there.

Linda Sampson: And we're going to actually... we'll do all of the fish. Now we just have springer chinook -- that's what they call spring chinook right now -- so we're going to use the word chinook and we'll move it to the word wall and we'll constantly stay with that and reemphasize those all week so that we'll be able to understand that there's a difference between sockeye, coho and then we've got...

Susan Fordice: How are you...? Can I ask you a question? How are you gonna show the children... because chinook starts with C and we've been teaching them that C is [makes hard C sound] so how are you going to approach that?

Linda Sampson: [Sigh] That was a good question. I think we're just going to emphasize the sound that the [makes soft C sound] not too much on the actual grouping of the c-h together. I think we'll just stay with the sound of chinook.

Susan Fordice: So your goals are vocabulary expansion, a little bit of problem-solving maybe? Linda Sampson: Mhmm.

Susan Fordice: And of course, the cultural piece: understanding the importance of the salmon to the people. You talked about doing this for your large...for your small group which are the kids that are really, really ready to actually do the charting and things. How about some of the other kids? What are your goals for them?

Linda Sampson: For some of the smaller children were just to get them to use the words, the vocabulary words and then the other ones were to draw pictures of them. Their journals are right below the tanks so I was hoping that they would draw pictures of the fish. We have some cutting skills for them to do. We put in magnifying glasses so that they could actually look larger and maybe use rulers to see if they could see the size of the fish.

Susan Fordice: So how do you think...? Is there something that you would do differently next year if we did the same project?

Linda Sampson: I want a large, large salmon. I don't think I'll have a tank big enough, Susan. [Laughter] Can we get a bigger tank for next year? Because the goal was to see similar to a life cycle of the salmon -- we had egg clusters in one, the subyearlings in another and the dream would be to have a large full size adult chinook sitting in the class so that would be...

Susan Fordice: A live one? Linda Sampson: Yeah. Can you...? Can we do that? Susan Fordice: Kind of a crazy week, but if you need to meet again just, you know, let me know. You know how to give me the signal or just pop into the office and...

Linda Sampson: What do you think about weighing 'em? Do you think of that... Do you think that would be something that we should do? Susan Fordice: How much do they weigh? [Laughter]

Linda Sampson: On a scale... I mean they're not very large, but some of 'em...I don't know. Do you think that's something that we should look at? 'Cause right now we're just gauging the temperature of the tank with charting and graphing on that. I was wondering... Do you think they would actually figure out how to weigh the salmon?

Susan Fordice: Do you wanna do it? Linda Sampson: I would like to. I would need to a scale. Susan Fordice: All right. We'll figure out a way to do it. [End of Video]

Linda Warner: That video shows a strong protégé and mentor-coach relationship. They are able to discuss the culturally sensitive meaning of the salmon in the lives of the children and families at Cay-Uma-Wa Head Start. Linda's mentor-coach, Susan, seems to enjoy listening and asking Linda questions about her plans purposes and needs.

Susan Fordice: What are the indicators of cultural sensitivity that you noticed in this clip, Linda and Patty?

Linda Campanaro-Glover: Well, I thought it was a wonderful example of reflective inquiry and I think it had a lot of really strong points that this protégé was very knowledgeable of her culture and in the background you could actually see the print awareness was in the children's Native culture and the fact that there was drumming and dancing and all the pieces that you saw was just rich in culture.

I saw a lot of purposeful planning between the mentor and the protégé. Humor and just sharing of her knowledge was a celebration of how that can be implemented into quality classrooms.

Patty Hnatiuk: We really were fortunate to get that example of culturally sensitive practices and reflective inquiry. I recall that the parents actually brought the baby salmon in -- so the parents were involved from the start. And they took a field trip out to the river -- the Umatilla River which is a tributary of the Columbia River out there -- where the children saw where the salmon live not just in the fish tank so they extended the curriculum and the mentor-coach supported the protégé in extending the curriculum.

And I thought she engaged in reflective inquiry in a very supportive manner seeing that her protégé had clear ideas and enthusiasm about the theme of the curriculum and together finding ways to extend it and make it deeply meaningful to the children and to the families.

Linda Campanaro-Glover: And the dialogue that they had and in finding and asking appropriate questions like, "Do you think we could weigh them?" And having the fun of thinking about bringing a whole salmon and how it's such a hands-on opportunity for the children to learn.

Linda Warren: This was such a rich experience. We had the opportunity to visit this classroom. And I have to tell you that I was visiting my niece on Sunday and she is studying these customs, the Native American customs along the Missouri...I mean the Columbia River. It was absolutely fabulous to have the experience. Thank you. Thank you for the points.

Linda Warren: Now we want you to take some time to think with your facilitator about cultural sensitivity and reflective inquiry. Stop the tape now and resume playing at the conclusion of your discussion.

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