

Steps to Success Facilitator Guide Unit 2 Module 2: Pre-Observation Conference (TVI)

Linda Warren: Welcome back. We've examined the second step in professional conferencing: observation. Now let's look at the first step: the pre-observation conference. We went to Denver, Colorado, to see how one mentor-coach conducts a pre-observation conference with her protégé.

Mercedes Vasquez: You're kidding.

Julie Ceja: No, but we got them focused.

Narrator: Julie Ceja a protégé at Denver's Rocky Mountain SER Head Start asked to meet with mentor-coach, Mercedes Vasquez.

Mercedes:...but we manage right? And you guys are pretty good. How can I help you?

Julie: You know, I had some questions about letter recognition. I'm not really quite sure how to to get my my friends, my kids to actually individualize their letters.

Mercedes: What strategies have you used?

Julie: A number of alphabet songs, a number of alphabet bingo like name recognition, beginning sounds. I don't want to drill them on their letters. I want to make some kind of fun activity. Have you done anything like that in the past?

Mercedes: Well, let's see, I have done a game, but tell me exactly what do you want me to do, what do you, what activity are you looking for? What kind of activity?

Julie: Something that could keep them focused and yeah, something fun.

Mercedes: I'm sure that at the beginning of the year you heard about the, you know, the Bear Went Over the Mountain, that activity that we did at one of the trainings.

Julie: Yes.

Mercedes: Yes, would you, how do you feel about trying that with your group?

Julie: Is that the one with the letters and you, you help the child go over the mountain with the letters?

Mercedes: Yes, yes, yes.

Julie: Yes, that sounds great.

Mercedes: And you could start if off with, you know, the children's first name like their first letter of the alphabet.

Julie: So they can recognize them.

Mercedes: And make sure that they each have you each have you know you have a letter for each child, of course, and I believe that you know that they have to go up and then they all say the letter. Okay? But make sure that you have the all the children's first name, the first letter of the name, yeah. Can you do that?

Julie: Okay, that sounds like a great idea.

Mercedes: Okay, well what time would you want me to come in to observe this activity?

Julie: We can try it at two o'clock.

Mercedes: At two o'clock? Okay, all right, so at two o'clock then I will come in to observe. And I do want you to know that I am not there to evaluate you.

Julie: Good.

Mercedes: No, I am just there to observe.

Julie: That would be great.

Mercedes: And then afterwards, what time is a good time for you to meet with me?

Julie: Probably around three-thirty or so.

Mercedes: Three-thirty? all right, exactly what do you want me to look for when I go in to do your observation?

Julie: I'm not really sure, this is the first time trying to do this so maybe I would need some help in exactly what steps I need to take to make it a better activity, and make it work.

Mercedes: Okay, all right then, I will look out for those things, and then I will see you at three-thirty.

Julie: Okay.

Mercedes: Okay?

Julie: Thank you so much I appreciate all your help and your advice and everything, thank you.

Mercedes: I already know that, that's what I'm here for, so feel free to call me or you know, just peek in my room whenever you need to.

Julie: Okay, thank you, thank you so much.

(slide)

Julie and children singing: Tia went over the mountain, Tia went over the mountain, Tia went over the mountain to see what she could see.

Julie: What letter?

Child: D.

Julie: Good.

Julie and children singing: She found the letter D, (let me hear you) she found the letter D, Tia went over the mountain and found the letter D.

(slide)

Mercedes: I gave her this this activity because she's a very bubbly and I know she likes music. So, I think, and the swaying of the hands, you know, I recommended that because, you know, being that she does have behavior problems, children, you know, children with behavior problems, that way maybe they won't touch anyone and that'll help her. But then at the same time, you know, my long-term goal for her would be, you know, for her to incorporate that into her centers.

You know, in the riding, in the manipulative, in the play dough, art, in all the areas. Although I realize, you know, that it has worked very well for me, but I totally understand, and I realize that it might not work for her. Because we are so different, you know. And, but I have to take into consideration that, you know, her teaching methods are different from mine.

Julie: The pre-observation conference I think helped out a lot. The information that Mercedes gave me like such as with the hand movements, I think that occupied my students so that way they wouldn't, you know, they would keep their bodies busy. And her not being there to evaluate me really helped out, you know, just knowing that she was there to give me tips and, you know, pointers to say this might work or this might work. And maybe she can give me some feedback of what to do with the students that weren't interested after their turn had had come and gone.

I think Mercedes knows exactly how I am with our personality matches. We've come to understand, she knows that I do more of the activities and the jumping up and down, and so this activity was perfect, perfect for me, perfect for my classroom. It wasn't something that, you know, that maybe would work for her classroom and not with mine. So it was a really good incorporation, what she did.

Effective learning is actually facilitated by a positive attitude, whether it's the learner or the teacher, you know. From the mentor giving the teacher some advice or the teacher giving the students. I mean, it's a, it's a, it's a spiral effect, you know. It goes both ways, it can go up or it can go down, you know. And it's a beautiful thing, but if we work well together then it can be, effective learning can take place.

Linda: We saw that by discussing in advance what she was going to observe, Mercedes was able to lessen any tension Julie may have had about the observation. Their advance discussion supports building and maintaining a trusting relationship. Dee and Brenda, what specifically did Mercedes do that you found effective?

Dee Ard: I thought that she started with the most comfortable type observation. The teacher was so relieved when it was just an observation, it was not an evaluation. This was a time for them to share some tips and the teacher could take her, the mentor could take her long time, her long-term goals and then she could help that teacher stretch with those. So this was an excellent time to do that and she used this easy observation to incorporate those goals.

Brenda Eliand--Williford: I, I really like the way the mentor asked the questions of the teacher, to get her involved so she felt like this was truly a partnership. She had suggestions for her, she had the the song that she suggested, but she asked the teacher if she would like to do that particular song.

She asked the teacher well, what have you tried? And those are very good things to do in the mentor-coaching/teacher relationship to get the teacher involved so it's not all coming from the mentor but the teacher's involved. She's sharing what she's done, and she's talking about what her styles are and then to actually have that acted out in the classroom with the suggestion that the mentor-coach gave. I thought that was a very, very, a very good session with that mentor-coach and teacher.

Linda: Yeah, I think I agree. There were some very powerful strategies that allowed both to have equal ownership in the process. One thing that that I noticed that we talked about earlier was that we saw that Mercedes kept the focus on Julie and not the children, and that this gave the mentor-coach a focus, as well. Anything else that you want to add?

Dee: Well, I think this is also an opportunity for the mentor to share with the teacher, to work in the other goals that she might have for the classroom, not only just this literacy-type goal but she can work on her classroom management. She had mentioned that they had some behavior problems, so she incorporated that goal. And she can also the behavior management. So she had her classroom management, her behavior management, and her literacy management strategies built right in there. So this opened the door to refresh her on those strategies that they want to use.

Brenda: And you could tell the teacher really got a lot out of the session, the pre-conferences session, when she came back and she talked about how that worked for her. You could tell that that was what she needed in order to feel effective. And she also felt validated in the work that she was doing. And I think, again, that's so important in the relationship that the teacher, along with the mentor-coach, have that, that feeling of validation and of and being effective in the work that they do and that came through very well in that particular setting.

Linda: Brenda, share some of your experiences with the pre-observation conference.

Brenda: Well, within the pre-observation conference in in our program is the reflective supervision session. The master teacher/mentor-coach is talking with the teacher about what the focus should be. She's sharing with her the observation tools that may be used – the narrative forms that may be used - in the observation when she goes into the classroom. The teacher, in turn, is talking about some things she'd like to get from that observation. She's sharing areas that she feels she's strong in, and areas that she would like the mentor-coach to take a look at when she's in the classroom.

And it's also an opportunity for that mentor-coach to ask questions of the teacher to find out are there any specific strategies that she has used that have worked? And anything in particular that that mentor-coach/master teacher can provide that will really help her in working with the children and around literacy and language, or any areas within the classroom. It is an excellent time for them to partner.

And the mentor-coach/master teacher goes through trainings within our program to learn how to effectively ask questions, to learn how to effectively partner with the teacher so that it is a partnership. The teacher feels like her voice is heard along with the master teacher. It is an excellent opportunity to strengthen that relationship and then move forward with the observation and the teacher doesn't feel that this is a time that I'm going to be on stage or put on the spot. But that mentor-coach is there to really support me and do what I need for her to do. So it's a great opportunity for the two of them.

Linda: Thank you, Brenda. And Dee, thank you very much. We mentioned videotaping as one method for recording observations. This can be an excellent tool, but there are some things to consider before choosing this method. Mentor-coaches will need to follow your program policies and procedures for videotaping children. Also, some protégés might feel anxious about being videotaped.

If that is the case, you can use the pre-observation conference to help your protégé feel less anxious. You can remind your protégé that the videotaping is for documentation and not for evaluation. You can let your protégé know they can view the videotape privately before the post-observation conference. Another consideration is that your protégé has to give permission for you to share the videotape with anyone other than the protégé.

Now, you are going to take some time to think about pre-observation conferences. So stop the tape, and then resume playing when you are ready to continue.

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