

CONNECTIONS

Early Educator Support Office, Monthly Newsletter

In this issue:

- Message from Amanda
- Mentor Minute: Individualizing Mentor Support
- Collaborator Corner: Erin Newcomb
- Highlights from the Field
- Mark Your Calendar

As the holidays roll around, there couldn't be a better time of year to reflect upon the skill of empathy and perspective taking. Both are like muscles, each needing regular work-outs to stay strong and healthy. Take a moment to recall the video from our November team meeting (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=RyTQ5-SQYTo>). Simon Sinek noted two things essential to being a great leader, empathy and perspective. So, what does it take when you are a team of leaders? Empathic collaboration creates the conditions where teams can thrive

and flourish, as the collaborating individuals are engaged in the same. According to IDEO (2019) empathic collaboration requires; a) laying the groundwork for innovation by building a diverse team—one where people bring different perspectives to the group and unites them under a collectively held goal, b) investing time to build trust- making sure each person feels able to bring his/her fullest self to the table and enabling vulnerable moments, c) creating space for tension-keeping an open mind and making it a rule to assume the best of each other—that every person's intention is to contribute to the shared goal, and d) making others successful—by helping individuals develop their skills and tap into their strengths, you're increasing the chances

EMPATHIC COLLABORATION

“Effective collaboration is fueled by empathy – an awareness of others and an ability to detect their emotions and understand their perspective. To come up with truly innovative solutions requires new ideas. And to bring new ideas to light requires seeking a diversity of perspectives and creating a welcoming space for people to share their ideas without fear of judgment.” - IDEO

for empathic collaboration. If asked to rate our effectiveness, I would say we have the makings of the most empathic collaboration of my career, and likely of yours. We can hold our heads up high and be proud of the work we've put in to who we are as a team and how we collectively function. It's an extraordinarily impressive feat, to say the least. Continuing to challenge ourselves and our willingness to grow personally and professionally, with each other and for each other, has brought us a long way. No reason to stop now! Let's reflect and challenge ourselves a little more. If leaders can build trust by demonstrating vulnerability and empathy and encouraging honest communication, then let's ask ourselves about how well we create space for tension. Are you comfortable in space that holds tension? Does your fortitude waver in the presence of tension? Are you able to discern between tension that serves as a catalyst for growth and new ideas versus tension that is unnecessary and counterproductive? It is important that we all identify, understand, and respond effectively to times of strategic stress, ultimately necessary to keep us in that sweet spot (appropriate balance) between strategic boredom (complacency) and burn-out (excessive tension) (Penderson & Ritter, 2017). According to Penderson and Ritter (2017) a sufficient amount of tension ensures an organization moves forward efficiently, and keeps them alert and responsive to emerging developments. As we keep in mind our incredible level of interdependency, let's be confident and vulnerable enough to reflect on who we are in the presence of appropriate tension— tension that will bring us closer to our shared goals. I end with a challenge. Take time to create your own rule for what guides you in spaces of tension.

Amanda

MENTOR MINUTE

"We all carry the seeds of greatness within us, but we need an image as a point of focus in order that they may sprout." (Epictetus)

Individualizing mentor support for teachers

James Rowley (1999) states that meaningful learning takes place in the context of a significant relationship. Jablon, Dombro and Johnsen concur in their book, *Coaching with Powerful Interactions*, that individualized mentor support to teachers begins with finding the "just right fit;" being mindful of each teacher's needs, personalities, backgrounds and cultures, and interests. Effective mentor support begins first with building relationships with their teachers. Time spent by mentors in learning the interests, dreams and needs of their teachers demonstrates respect and is crucial in developing the mentor-mentee relationship. Individualizing support for teachers provides modeling opportunities that encourage teachers to individualize support for the children they teach (2016).

Building relationships

A supportive and responsive professional relationship is needed to begin the mentoring process (Chu, 2012). Trust is more likely to be built when mentors establish the relationship by listening and asking open-ended questions to learn about the teacher: common interests they may share and what the teacher wants to know and be able to do. An important component in developing relationships is to **"accept another person without making judgments"**; to see beginning teachers as a developing person and professional who needs meaningful support.

Getting to know our teachers

Miller and Rollnick (2002) state that teachers who feel frustrated or anxious about making changes become more comfortable when their concerns are first met with acceptance and empathy. Chu proposes that mentors who offer quick fixes before they begin to develop relationships, usually do not prompt long-term change in teacher behaviors. Mentors need first to listen to teachers, promoting teachers' strengths as the basis for building their work with teachers. Furthermore, Whitebrook and Bellm (2014), state that mentors support teachers in a "finely-tuned balance of support and challenge, focused on encouraging reflection, change and growth" in the teacher. Jablon, Dombro and Johnsen share, "I imagine myself to be a yellow highlighter in the teacher's classroom, highlighting what she is doing effectively so that she can do it over and over again."

Strategies for Individualizing Mentor Support



- Plan time with teachers in the classroom to see their classroom practice
- Schedule time with teachers at a time they can talk (nap-time/after school) to encourage reflective conversations
- Send targeted emails (with appropriate amount of information – not too much or too little)
- Use teachers' interests to guide how we support them
- Support teachers in identifying their strengths to share with others in a PLC
- Promote collaborative partnerships (site administrator, TA, etc.) to build on teachers' strengths
- Align mentor support to teacher's understanding and level of teaching practice
- Mentors own continued self-assessment and reflection of their knowledge and skills to best meet the needs of their teachers
- Use photos selectively to highlight teacher effectiveness and promote teacher reflection on next steps
- Acknowledge and celebrate teachers' progress with them
- Refer to Early Educator Support Office Mentor Continuum for guidance to individualize mentor support for teachers in different tasks (classroom support, PDP development, understanding and using Foundations, etc.)
- Identify and support teachers' learning styles
- Continue to weave educational language and content into conversations with teachers to build their knowledge base
- Intentionally connect on-going conversations with teachers to NC Foundations and rubric
- Review notes before next meeting/contact with teacher, touching base on progress as a result of prior conversation
- Embed PDP goals and progress into on-going conversations

Useful and Relevant Resources



Katzenmeyer, M. & Moller, G. (2009). *Awaking the sleeping giant: Helping Teacher to develop Leadership*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin (create link)

Early Educator Support Office– Mentor Continuum
(add link)

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- * What motivated you to become an Early Childhood Educator?
- * Tell me more about your interests/hobbies that you may have (questionnaire/conversation)
- * What can you tell me about the children in your class this year?
- * What you are most proud of this year? (Focus on teachers' strengths)
- * What have been some of your challenges this year? What strategies have you used to overcome the challenges?
- * Use "I noticed statements" to begin follow-up conversation
- * What are you noticing in your classroom and teaching practice since my last visit?
- * Why do you think so?
- * What outcomes are you seeing as a result of your PDP goals?
- * How might this connect back to NC Foundations?
- * What are some ways that you can promote and capture children's thoughts about their learning? Why do you think this is important?
- * What is the best way for me to follow up with you?



Photo 1:

What conversations might the mentor have with the teacher to enhance this area or make it more inviting and supportive to children's emotional social development?

Photo 2:

How could a mentor support the teacher in utilizing the blank space on the shelf? What are some possibilities for this space?



Photo 3:

Children were drawing pictures after the teacher read the book, *Ten Apples on Top*. How could the teacher capture what this child remembers about the book or is reflected in her picture? How might you provide more opportunities for children that are ready to engage in writing?



Photo 4:

Children were playing with dolls, a doctor kit and filling bags with food during center time. How could the teacher intentionally set up the dramatic play area to support children's play and expand their knowledge of healthy food and nutrition (lesson for the week)?



Special thanks to Starr Batts, this month's guest contributor!

REFERENCES

Chu, Marilyn. (2012). Observe, Reflect, and Apply: Ways to Successfully Mentor Early Childhood Educators. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*. 40 (3), 20-28. https://www.southernearlychildhood.org/upload/pdf/Dimensions_Vol40_3_Chua.pdf

Jablon, J, Dombro, A, and Johnsen, S. (2016). *Coaching with Powerful Interactions*. naeyc: Washington, DC.

Rowley, J. (1999). The Good Mentor. *Educational Leadership*, 56(8), 20-22. Retrieved October 22, 2019 from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may99/vol56/num08/The-Good-Mentor.aspx>

Whitebrook, M., Bellm, D., Mentors as Teachers, Learners and Leaders (2014). *Mentoring Programs Exchange*. 14-18, Retrieved 10/24/2019 from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2014/FINAL-218-Whitebook-Bellm1.pdf>



COLLABORATOR CORNER



Erin Newcomb is the Director of Center Services for the Sandhill's Children's Center. She has worked in the field of Early Childhood Education for 18 years and partnered with the Early Educator Support Office for the last 13 years. When asked what she likes best about her work with us, Erin shares, "The collaboration and support that the Early Educator Support Office provides is exceptional. There are experts in this of-

fice that bring early childhood back to life through the partnerships they build. They work hard to remind those in the field that they are making a difference each and every day. It is a positive partnership that ensures quality and guides early childhood educators to reach their fullest potential." Her favorite children's book is *Song and Dance Man* by Karen Ackerman because it is "a beautifully nostalgic picture book about a grandfather's younger days that shows you're only as old as you feel! My students enjoyed this book in the music area and read it throughout the year!" Erin has a 13-year old son and an 11-year old daughter – both now in middle school! She is originally from Florida and has a twin sister who lives in Texas. "I love to do yoga and go to Burn Boot camp in my spare time!"

*Thank you to Gail Hicks for supporting a long-time relationship with Erin and for providing us the info!

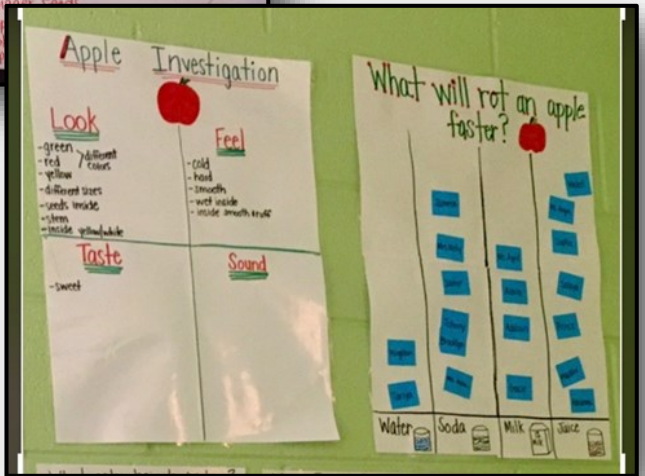
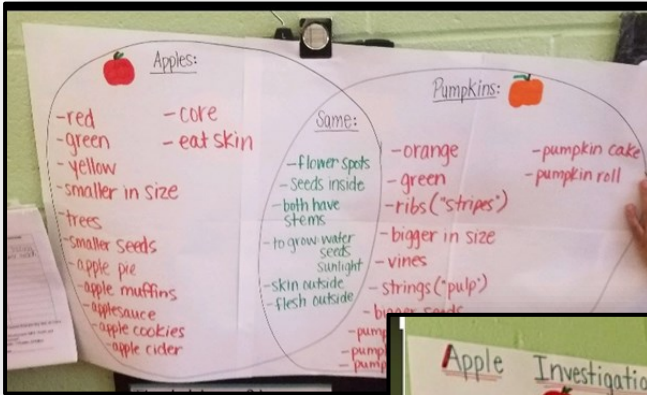


Highlights from the Field

Jess Burris shares highlights from one of the teachers she serves who does a wonderful job of documenting what children are learning and displays documentation throughout the classroom. "When you walk into her classroom you do not need to ask what they have been studying; it is right there for anyone to see who enters her room!" Children love looking at pictures of themselves, and share all about what they've learned. The teacher comments, "I use documentation to help support children's learning. When I post documentation around the room, it helps children remember what we have learned and sparks conversations not only with the teachers but with other children." The teacher further notes, "I use documentation to support and back up why I taught a particular activity; to help parents understand the purpose and developmental domains that activity intends to teach."

Highlights from the field continued-

The teacher supports children's interests by inviting children to help guide the theme of the lessons and activities planned. "I have learned that if the children are not interested then it will cause them to shut down and not learn." The teacher continues, "I am passionate about teaching because I know each child that enters my classroom comes from different walks of life and I want them to know that they matter. I teach every child that enters my classroom a quote, 'I am somebody and I will do great things.' I want them to know that I am here for them and love them. My favorite thing about teaching is those little "light bulb" moments; when a child is struggling with a task and finally gets it and is so excited. Those are the moments that make all the long, tiring days and nights of being a teacher worth it."



- ◆ Graphic organizers help children organize and connect information they are studying.



- ◆ Photos of a class activity provide opportunities for children to revisit and share the experience with each other and their families.

Mark Your Calendar

- **December 2 (Staff Only)***
 - 2:00-6:00pm– Practice Session (Teacher Profile Sample)
- **December 3-6 (Staff and Partners)**
 - 12-3 Region 2 Team Meeting
 - 12-4 Region 3 Team Meeting
 - 12-5 Region 1 Team Meeting
 - 12-6 Region 4 Team Meeting
- **December 9-13 (Staff Only)***
 - Interrater Reliability Week 1
- **December 16-20 (Staff Only)***
 - Interrater Reliability Week 2
- **December 20 (Staff and Partners)***
 - Observation 1 completed (Continuing- SPII)
 - Observation 2 completed (Initial-SPI / LE / Residency licensed)

December 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2 *	3 *	4 *	5 *	6 *	7
8	9 *	10 *	11 *	12 *	13 *	14
15	16 *	17 *	18 *	19 *	20 *	21
22	23	24 *	25 *	26*	27*	28
29	30*	31*				

Happy
Holidays