

With much teaching now occurring online, mentoring is also moving online, and setting expectations and building trust should be built into that process.



MAKING MENTORING WORK ONLINE

BY TOM MANNING, KATHLEEN SHEEHY, AND LESLIE CEBALLOS

Effective mentors set clear expectations for their work with the teachers they support. This is a critical step in the process of building trust between mentor and mentee, and it is never more important than when mentors conduct observations of teachers as they engage in classroom instruction. With much teaching now occurring online, mentoring is also moving online, and setting expectations and building trust should be built into that process.

Recall times when you, as a new teacher, were observed while teaching. What did the observer do in your classroom? How effective were those practices? How did they make you feel? Now think about being observed in an unfamiliar learning environment, such as leading an online lesson or designing a virtual learning experience for students to complete at their own pace.

With so many teachers redefining

their expectations for instruction to accommodate social distancing due to COVID-19, it is critical that mentor teachers recognize the unique challenges their mentees are facing; take steps to ensure that their observation of instruction considers new, unfamiliar learning designs; and provide the learning-focused feedback teachers need to improve their practice in designing and engaging in virtual learning.

When conducting a virtual classroom observation, coming to consensus on the details of observation goes a long way toward establishing trust between mentor and mentee. Particularly when there is unfamiliarity with both facilitating and observing virtual student learning, both parties may be nervous about conducting an observation. Guidelines can alleviate that anxiety.

The following tool can facilitate conversation, set expectations for

observing a virtual lesson, and help both parties feel prepared for what's to come.

It is important during this observation planning process to be clear that the goal of classroom observation, particularly in a virtual environment, is to help the teacher improve his or her practice in particular areas of focus.

As teachers continue to grow in their familiarity with designing and engaging in virtual learning with their students, a strong mentor whose areas of support are clear and established collaboratively with mentees will facilitate that continued teacher growth.

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MENTORING REMOTELY: PLAN A VIRTUAL LESSON OBSERVATION

GETTING STARTED

First, agree to what will be observed. Is it a live, synchronous online lesson, or a lesson that the mentee has designed in advance within a learning management system like Google Classroom or Edgenuity? If it is a live lesson, confirm the day and time of the observation, as well as how the mentor will log into whatever technology platform is being used. Also establish what role the mentor will play in the classroom — interacting with the teacher and students or silently observing?

Once you determine the logistics of the observation, the mentor will want the mentee to share the lesson and the lesson’s instructional goal. One of the mentor’s primary jobs is to support mentees in teaching their curriculum well, so they need to know what lesson from the curriculum they are teaching and what the goal of the lesson is.

Mentor and mentee also need to confirm the focus

of the observation, including the specific skills or instructional practices that will serve as the focus of the mentor’s observation notes. During the lesson, what work will students be doing? Will students be providing oral responses during the lesson? Different lessons and focuses will lend themselves to different kinds of data to collect. Mentors will use this data during one-on-one debrief conversations.

It can help build trust with mentees to discuss questions of confidentiality. What needs to be kept confidential between the mentor and mentee to enable authentic growth?

Finally, come to consensus on conducting a one-on-one debrief following the observation. This should take place no more than 48 to 72 hours after the observation. The more time that passes between the observation and the debrief, the less impact the observation data have.

This tool was adapted from a mentor teacher program that Learning Forward designed and facilitated in support of 1,500 mentor teachers in Louisiana through a 2017-20 partnership with the Louisiana Department of Education.

Instructions: The mentor and mentee should set a time to discuss each of the key components in this tool. The mentor and mentee should come to an agreement about each item and each have copies of the completed form to ensure that it serves as a mutual agreement between them.

Key components to discuss	Guiding question(s)	Notes
Observation format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being observed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A live virtual lesson? • An asynchronous, recorded lesson? (Make sure you refer to your district’s student privacy rules before recording a lesson.) • What virtual tools are needed to conduct this observation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live session link? • Access to mentee’s virtual classroom? • If the observation is of an asynchronous recorded lesson, will mentee be present for review of the lesson? 	

TOOLS

MENTORING REMOTELY: PLAN A VIRTUAL LESSON OBSERVATION CONTINUED

Key components to discuss	Guiding question(s)	Notes
Observation day and time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where and when will the observation take place? 	
Observation/virtual classroom logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long will the observation last? What is the best way for the mentor to observe? (e.g. camera on or off) If the lesson is a live virtual lesson, what kinds of interaction between mentor and students are acceptable? If the lesson is a live virtual lesson, what kinds of interaction between mentor and mentee are acceptable? Is there anything the mentor needs to know about the classroom, the technology, or students? 	
Instructional goal of lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the instructional goal of the lesson? What standard(s) does it align to? Why does the mentee want students to meet this goal? 	
Focus of observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the focus of the observation? (e.g. student management in a virtual environment, questioning, student discourse) What does the mentee hope to gain as a result of this lesson being observed? 	
Student work and data to collect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What will students be working on during the lesson? How will students turn in work in this remote learning situation? What work can be collected and discussed during the debrief? What, if any, data will be generated in the lesson? 	
Confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What needs to be kept confidential between the mentor and mentee to enable authentic growth? 	
Debrief conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will the debrief be conducted? (e.g. on the phone, via a video call) 	