Mentoring Practice: CO-PLANNING WITH FEEDBACK

What is this practice?

Co-planning with feedback involves you and the teacher candidate working together to design or modify aspects of instruction, explicitly discussing 1) goals for student learning, 2) possible choices you could make and their pros/cons, and 3) ways of supporting specific learners in your classes. Co-planning may take different forms over the course of the year, with the TC playing a more peripheral role early on (e.g., modifying an activity, suggesting a reading for students). As TCs gain more experience, they can take the lead in designing increasingly larger chunks of instruction. Your role at that time becomes more advisory, probing their thinking and providing feedback on plans.

Why is it important?

Planning and modifying instruction is a pivotal part of the work of teaching. As an experienced teacher, you have planned and modified your instruction over many years, and much of your planning may nowadays play out "in your head." For the TC, on the other hand, it is imperative to experience how planning and modifying lessons is done as an explicit and regular practice, and the kinds of considerations that go into designing cohesive instruction.

Tips for doing this practice effectively

In recent research conducted at the University of Washington, where we tracked the co-planning opportunities for 66 preservice science teachers in their school placements, we identified three distinct approaches to co-planning. Each had strengths and challenges for TC learning—these were referred to as *tweaking*, *substantive co-planning*, and *taking the lead*. We discuss each here.

Approach 1: Tweaking

TCs often had opportunities to "tweak" lessons, meaning that they were invited to make minor adjustments to existing lessons. Examples here were re-arranging parts of a lesson without altering the intellectual work students were asked to do, or choosing representations to illustrate a concept. Tweaking provided an entry point and, at times, helped TCs explore the curriculum and see the impact of lesson changes on student learning or participation. However, TCs reported that tweaking quickly lost its value for learning how to plan and teach cohesively. For instance, sometimes the shifts TCs made were so minor that it was difficult to draw conclusions about how these impacted students' learning. At other times, TCs felt unclear about mentors' goals for lessons and how their tweaks coordinated with other aspects of the instruction. This feeling was exacerbated if tweaking was done in isolation from the mentor (e.g., a TC adding or changing a couple PowerPoint slides overnight, without much opportunity for feedback before they're used the next day). While TCs appreciated being

actively involved, tweaking lessons did not regularly allow them to experience instruction as an integrated whole or hear the reasoning of their mentors.

- Tip: When inviting changes or additions to lessons, consider giving TCs a "whole" part of a lesson. For example, you can ask TCs to add a sense-making discussion after an activity, but when they do this, they should be given permission to plan for the introduction and framing of the activity, adjust the activity itself, and shape the post-activity conversation with students. This is a modularized approach where the TC can design segments that fit together and have a learning impact.

Approach 2: Substantive Co-Planning

In the research cited above, TCs reported a positive influence on their professional learning when they had regular, collaborative planning opportunities with their mentors. During substantive co-planning episodes, the mentor and TC worked together to change fundamental aspects of lessons or units, often choosing different phenomena or events to anchor students' reasoning, introducing new activities and eliminating others, and reassessing the goals for student learning in the process. Mentor-TC partners also developed new lessons and learning goals from scratch or re-positioned lessons within a unit. In interviews, TCs indicated that they had a significant voice in these planning processes.

> *I feel like [my TC] was such a big resource, and she pushed me as a teacher because she's new and has all this education at her fingertips… that's a big benefit of being a mentor teacher, is I become a better teacher because of the conversations that we have.*
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> Mentor, 2018

- Tip: From the research data, it seems beneficial to start substantive co-planning as early as possible, preferably by mid-October. Substantive co-planning does not have to happen every week, but should be regular enough for the TC to feel that they are seeing how lessons get put together or changed and how they fit within a unit. Aim to work out a system early with your TC about when to sit down for face-to-face meetings about planning and when to do certain parts online.

Approach 3: Taking the Lead

Many mentors moved their TCs to taking the lead by mid-December for at least one section of one class, and TCs reported that this shift was impactful for their learning. In these instances, the TC took the principal role in designing the core activities of lessons (e.g., selecting disciplinary practices for students to engage in, choosing readings, scaffolding sense-making conversations or generating new forms of group work), identifying one or more learning objectives for the lessons, and linking ideas developed in that lesson to subsequent lessons. TCs did not necessarily make sweeping changes to the established curricula, but they had to have the authority to make principled adjustments they believed to be important for student learning and participation, in close consultation with their mentors.

- Tip: Even when TCs are "taking the lead," you can ask questions like, "What are your learning objectives? Why *this* activity? Who will need special support?" Occasionally the TC may plan something that you know will be a disaster unless you step in. Don't be reluctant to do this!

Providing Enough Time

Finally, since TCs are so new to the planning game, they need time to think about new activities, make adjustments, revisit lesson objectives, etc. Our research showed that mentors would sometimes ask a TC to modify a lesson and feel that this was a minor task that could be done overnight. But to the TC, this was more involved, as they often tried out multiple alternatives in their heads. Try to plan at least a couple days ahead of time with the TC—we know that being responsive to students' new ideas and confusions can mess with the curriculum schedule, which can't be helped, but having lead time is helpful for novice planners. Similarly, TCs got very stressed if they planned for a series of lessons, then had to plan for a different series of lessons if plans changed, as they put their heart and soul into their plans! On the other hand, with enough lead time, you can ask your TC to show you their final draft of plans a few days before they are to be taught, so you can provide feedback and help make necessary adjustments based on your experience.

Where to start?

Start by showing TCs lessons/curriculum materials, and perhaps share how these lessons played out the previous year. Maybe there were issues that could be resolved through planning differently. *Co-planning* is a good place to *make your thinking explicit* early in your relationship with your TC about how you define goals for a lesson or unit, and how you design lessons to connect and build students' ideas cumulatively over time.

Summing up

- Allow the TC to see and hear you creating/modifying lessons; be explicit about your thinking
- Identify whole parts of lessons that the TC might design or modify
- Start substantive co-planning by October
- By mid-December allow the TC to take the lead on planning for at least one class section
- Try not to ask TC to create or heavily modify lessons overnight