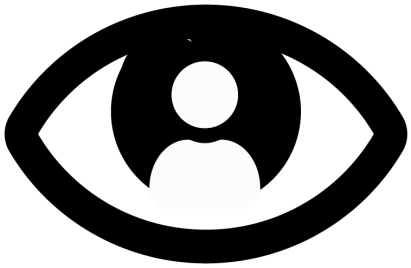
Mentoring Practice: MODELING THE WORK OF TEACHING

What is this practice?

Modeling the work of teaching refers to demonstrating some part of the work of teaching under authentic circumstances for a specific purpose. We usually think of mentors modeling instruction by standing in front of the class while the teacher candidate observes. But "the work of teaching" involves a lot more. You can also model how to interact with other teachers, interact with parents (face-to-face, on the phone, via e-mail), interact with students outside of instructional time, deal with management issues, and inquire into your own practice.

Why is it important?

Modeling parts of teaching provides TCs with opportunities to experience and better envision how instructional strategies and interactions play out in practice, without simultaneously being responsible for figuring out how to respond to what happens. These are prime opportunities for TCs to notice, wonder, and draw connections between student learning/participation and instruction.



Tips for doing this practice effectively

Almost any professional practice or situation you can think of can be modeled. Some opportunities occur in brief moments (how to de-escalate a disruptive student's outburst in class), and some extend over days (a series of e-mail responses to a parent who is concerned about their child's grade). Some may occur in response to a question or request from the TC ["I am not sure how to connect the lab we're doing to the big question we're trying to answer. Can I see how you introduce the lab to the class?"]. And as you model and debrief the work of teaching, you can also model what it looks like to inquire into instruction and refine instruction in relation to what students do.

Opportunities for modeling may be spontaneous or preplanned. For example, imagine that in a department meeting, a colleague questions an idea you put forth, and you respond with openness while using facts to address the colleague's query. After, you may choose to frame this as one model of how to interact with a colleague who is thinking differently than you and debrief the interaction with the TC.

In other cases, you can plan out the modeling episode. For these instances, a pre-briefing with the TC may help them be more prepared to observe what it is you are emphasizing. This could sound like: "I'm going to try _____ today. You may want to pay attention to how the students _____ , whether they _____ , or who _____ . My theory of action here is that ____ will help _____ in this situation." While you are modeling the part of teaching you identified, the TC can then attend to how the episode plays out and how students respond to identified aspects of instruction. You may even invite the TC to take data about student participation or

understanding and share the data as part of a debriefing with you. Start the debriefing by focusing on the students: "What did you see students doing? Saying? Who seemed to be struggling with the assignment, and how do you know?" Together, you can then have a conversation that traces those observations to aspects of instruction ["I wonder if Susanne didn't write an explanation because she didn't have a chance to talk through her ideas first"] and potential adjustments ["Maybe I'll start the next class with a turn-and-talk and let students know that they will have an opportunity to continue to write and revise their explanations after"].

Finally, strategic contrasts can help TCs learn about how particular teaching moves work and for whom. You may want to intentionally try different variations of the same practice in two different classes, or model the same move across different classes, and invite the TC to pay attention to what differences they notice in students' responses.

Where to start?

Consider modeling parts of teaching that you want the TC to try out in the near future. Let the TC know in a pre-briefing: "Next week, I would love for you to [introduce and discuss the entry task in at least two classes]. Watch me do that today, and see [what ideas come up from students and whether those ideas come back up or help us later in class]."

Summing up

- Determine what part of the work of teaching should be demonstrated, and for what purpose
- Let the TC know in a pre-briefing what you are modeling, what they should pay attention to, and what your theory of action is
- Invite the TC to make observations or take data about the enactment if appropriate
- Debrief by first focusing on the students, then tracing what you saw or heard back to instructional choices that were made