Unit 3: Effective Mentoring

Unit Learning Objectives:
- Learners will gain knowledge and skills related to observation and feedback.
- Learners will be prepared to support Student Teachers/Interns in learning new professional knowledge and skills during the Student Teaching/Internship experience.
- Learners will learn about ways to manage challenging situations and to positively influence teacher retention.

-- -- -- -- -- -- --

Lesson A – Strategies to provide feedback to Student Teachers/Interns

Specific Learning Target: Learners will explore different approaches to providing feedback to Student Teachers/Interns.

Estimated Time: 30-40 minutes

Materials:

> None

Key Points/Background Information:

Most teachers have a great deal of experience receiving feedback both positive and negative. Sometimes the experience of receiving feedback in constructive and destructive ways does not translate into skills for providing feedback to others. In other words, just because a teacher has experienced receiving feedback in a variety of ways doesn't mean that he/she has successfully used those experiences to inform his/her feedback to others. Bringing awareness of different strategies for providing feedback to others can help teachers think about their own experiences and use that information to improve.

Having a "tool kit" of different ways to provide feedback is very useful during the student teaching/internship experience. The wider field of human performance management includes extensive information about what is and is not successful in producing improved performance. Strategies explored in this lesson include examples from education and other venues.

Lesson Content and Activities:

1) Explain to participants that this lesson focuses on different ways to provide feedback to Student Teachers/Interns during the student teaching/internship experience. (1-2 min)

2) Ask the group to think about a time they received feedback that was useful for professional growth. Ask for volunteers to share short descriptions of why the feedback was helpful. Repeat this sharing, but with times that participants received feedback and was of little or no use. Again, ask volunteers to share short descriptions of why the feedback was not helpful. (3-5 min)

3) Present the following key points about feedback strategies: (10-15 min)
Depending on the readiness or past experience of the cohort, consider using the Unit 3.A resource handout and invite candidates to work in small groups to recount examples of each of the strategies below. Assign one strategy per small group of cooperating teachers, then have them report out to the group:
- Feedback must be provided to the Student Teacher/Intern consistently and frequently
    - Techniques for giving constructive feedback
        - Be sure it's the "right time" and "right place" for providing feedback. A setting in which others are present or a time of stress or strong emotions is not likely to be conducive to a positive conversation about performance improvement.
        - "Feedback sandwich" approach – provide a "negative" piece of feedback between two positives within the same general area. For example, a Student Teacher/Intern may have developed a thought-provoking question, but given little time for students to think and respond. Feedback about this could focus first on the strong question design, then on ideas for providing more time for students to think and respond, and finally on strengths of the question asked.
        - "I noticed…" approach – make a statement of something noticed during the teaching/learning episode and allow the Student Teacher/Intern to respond. This can be slanted in a positive, negative, or neutral way depending upon what the Cooperating/Mentor Teacher wants the Student Teacher/Intern to reflect upon from the teaching and learning episode.
        - Specific information/data – this relates to content about evidence vs. opinion. Give specific information in feedback such as "Only three students out of twenty-two had written down any ideas before you asked students to start sharing."
        - Avoid making "but" statements. When giving positive feedback, try not to detract from it by including negative information.
        - Avoid "piling on." If there is a consistent issue to discuss, focus on actions to take to improve performance rather than a list of instances the issue has occurred.
        - Employ strong listening skills after delivering feedback. (Connect to content in Positive Professional Relationships about listening skills and non-verbal communication.)

- Connect with the educator preparation program to see if there are feedback techniques or models that are suggested or preferred in order to meet particular programmatic goals and objectives. If there are required formats for observations, there may be feedback techniques that work particularly well with the observation format.

- Scaffolding learning, guiding Student Teachers/Interns to improvement
  - Use open-ended questions before and after a teaching and learning episode to help reveal ideas and beliefs that influenced instructional decisions. For example, "How did you choose…?" or "What did you envision happening in the classroom during…?"
  - Be aware of the Student Teacher's/Intern's own school learning experiences and how it might impact instructional choices. (Connect to content in Managing Differences.)
  - Provide applicable information about instructional strategies, material, or technology that could be used with the planned learning experience.
  - Share examples of the Cooperating/Mentor Teacher's improvement efforts including the resources used (colleague observations, books/articles/online content, etc.). Make it clear that as professionals, continued learning and growth is a constant focus.

- Allow Student Teachers/Interns to start the conversation
  - Ask Student Teachers/Interns to talk first when discussing a teaching and learning episode
  - Use prompting questions that put the responsibility on the Student Teacher/Intern: "What went well?" "What did not go well?" "What would you like to do differently next time?"
  - Employ strong listening skills when the Student Teacher/Intern is responding to questions. (Connect to content in Positive Professional Relationships about listening skills and non-verbal communication.)

4) Ask participants to choose one strategy presented here or that they've used previously and write one piece of feedback related to the following scenario.
Scenario: The Student Teacher/Intern designed an effective lesson that incorporated an interactive activity using some of the technology available in the classroom. Students were highly engaged in the lesson. About one-third of the student were confused by the verbal instructions given before the activity began. All students were able to successfully find at least one solution/conclusion to the activity by the end of the lesson. One group of four students finished early and distracted other groups. (3-5 min)

5) Ask volunteers to share their feedback examples. (3-5 min)

Additional Resources:
- Resources from the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) related employee feedback and performance management
- Connect to Charlotte Danielson or Robert Marzano information about teacher growth.
- Handout/worksheet for group brainstorming of effective feedback strategy examples.