

Mentor Classroom Visit

How to Make Your Classroom Visits Work

In the document, "The Roots of Empathy Mentor", Mary Gordon states;

The Mentor has clear responsibilities to encourage and coach the best performance possible. Even though this role is related to the Instructor's certification, and therefore might feel like a power imbalance, it is our intent to jump hurdles with the instructor rather than disqualify them for any missteps... This is not about catching an Instructor off-guard or making them feel on-guard; it is about helping them feel unguarded and open to making mistakes that will be respectfully, gently and clearly addressed. A plan needs to be established with steps to deal with the issues that the Mentor and the Instructor identify. The plan needs to be respected and followed and progress noted and celebrated.

To prepare Instructors for your arrival, it's important that you have done everything you can to build a trusting relationship. Just the fact that you are also an Instructor will make a difference especially if you can recall how you felt the first time anyone came to see you in the classroom.

Here are the next steps to follow:

1. Choose a lesson.

Explain to the Instructors that it is ideal to arrange to see a Family Visit. This is a chance to use you as a resource to help build better strategies and to also find strengths the Instructor might not have realized.

2. Find a time.

Scheduling the visit will depend on a lot of factors including your commitment to visit other classrooms. Let Instructors know that they need to work out a time that suits everyone involved even if it means rescheduling the class. You will also have to build in one hour after the lesson for a discussion session during which time an Instructor Growth Plan will be completed by the Instructor and Mentor together.

3. Focus on the Instructor's goals.

Every Instructor will have certain areas they'd like to focus on. It could be anything from classroom management techniques to singing to engaging the teacher. Make sure to use these general goals as the starting point of your visit.

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4. Have them self-reflect.

Provide the Instructor Self-Reflection Questionnaire prior to your visit so they have an opportunity to reflect on their performance before you arrive. This tool can be used after any lesson and shouldn't take more than 20 minutes to fill out. Explain that although their questionnaire is a different format than your Mentor Classroom Visit Worksheet, it contains the same core items.

5. Prepare your Mentor Classroom Visit Worksheet.

Fill out the top portion of the first page of the worksheet including the aims of the lesson that the Instructor has chosen. Copy them as they are written in the Curriculum Manual. Familiarize yourself with the rest of the sheet as much as possible.

6. Arrive early

Remember that you are focusing on everything that encompasses a Roots of Empathy lesson including the classroom set-up, teacher involvement and the overall attitude of the students. Arrive early to have enough time to check in at the office, introduce yourself to the principal (if possible), chat with your Instructor and find a good vantage point in the classroom where you will be filling out the Classroom Visit worksheet.

7. Explain the Classroom Visit Worksheet Process

Explain that you will be sitting at the back watching everything that is going on including student and teacher reactions. Review the Instructor's goals first and see if there is anything the Instructor would like to add. Explain that you will be recording actions and dialogue as they occur to give both of you an overall picture of what happened. This record will be the basis for your discussion after the class.

8. Using the Worksheet

The worksheet is a tool. Only you will see it unless the Instructor asks to look at it. It is designed to help you make objective and unprejudiced notes for the discussion session. It is organized in three sections: Overall Lesson, Curriculum and Communication.

The checkmarks are a simple acknowledgement that the item as described was done. The more checkmarks in one space, the more likely the Instructor feels confident with that area. In the 'Examples' column, list action and dialogue as you see them. Try to write in a descriptive manner. For example, instead of saying, "Didn't answer everyone's questions about diapering", say, "Smelly diaper discussion - five children's hands still up when moved onto next activity". This will allow the instructor to get a better understanding of the incident and then recount why she acted as she did. Also avoid judgmental language. For example, instead of saying "Doesn't know how to use the baby roll", say, "Baby tries to push forward on baby roll and lands on head."

Save the Aims until the end. Then you can look back on the whole lesson and check off whether each aim was met.

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9. Growth Plan Discussion

Once the lesson is over, find a quiet spot for you and the Instructor to talk. Let them know how much you enjoyed seeing them in action and thank them for sharing this time with you. Give the blank Growth Plan sheet to the Instructor, read it over, fill in the top section and ask that she keep notes on anything from the discussion that will help her learn from this experience. This Growth Plan sheet needs to be completed right away, and is a joint effort between the Mentor and the Instructor. Explain that you will take a copy of their Growth Plan as reference for further mentoring and that you will also be sending a copy to Roots of Empathy International Office.

Let the Instructor lead the conversation, with you guiding her through different parts of the lesson. Start the discussion by asking her how she felt the lesson went: "How did it go?", "What did it feel like for you?" Be sure to always work with the positives first. Talk about the parts of the lesson that worked really well and why. Use your specific examples from your Classroom Visit worksheet. Comment on the areas that were checked off frequently.

When a problem area is raised, try to get the Instructor to work it through first: "What do you think happened?" "Why wasn't it working for you?" Again, use your specific examples. This is the time to do some strategizing. Sometimes the Instructors don't have all the right answers. Try asking, "What might you do differently if the same thing happened again?", "What's worked for you in the past?" If the Instructor is having a hard time finding a solution, that's the time to jump in with your ideas and brainstorm: "Did you think about...?", "Something that has worked for me is...", "Would it have been helpful if...?"

Review the Instructor Growth Plan to see if there is anything else to be added, and ensure you have both signed at the bottom. As a Mentor, you can suggest that the Instructor records things you have discussed which haven't been written down yet: "I think you might want to put in", "I think you might want to make a note of". End the discussion on a positive note and help the Instructor record her future goals. Make two copies. Send one into the Mentor Report, with a copy to your Senior Mentor and be sure to review the goals for future growth in your next conversation with the Instructor.

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Mentor Classroom Visit Worksheet - Family Visit, p. 1

Instructor:	
Date:	
Lesson:	
Instructor Goals:	

Aims of lesson:	✓
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

Comments:

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Overall Lesson	✓✓✓✓	Examples
Preparation Material preparation and readiness of students		
Presentation of Content Lesson flow, use of toys, songs and rhymes, baby exercises, weighing and measuring		
Classroom Management Inclusive, non-threatening strategies, observant of whole class		
Teacher Involvement Teacher engagement, picture-taking, planning and debriefing		
Best practice: 3 Threes (3 seconds, 3 songs, 3 temperament traits) Baby has T-shirt on		

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Mentor Classroom Visit Worksheet - Family Visit, p. 2

Curriculum	✓✓✓✓✓	Examples
Emotional literacy		
Engaging the parent		
Engaging the student		
Attachment/attunement		
Neuroscience		
Temperament		
Infant development		
Empathy		
Following baby's lead		
Reading baby's cues		

Communication	✓✓✓✓✓	Examples
Tone Non-judgmental, authentic, respectful		
Questioning Open-ended, inviting and responsive questioning techniques		
Responding Acknowledging but not praising, building on content of responses		

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Mentor Classroom Visit Worksheet – Pre/Post Visit, p. 1

Instructor:	
Date:	
Lesson:	
Instructor Goals:	

Aims of lesson:	✓
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

Comments:

Overview	✓✓✓✓✓	Examples
Preparation Material preparation and readiness of students		
Content Presentation Lesson flow, literature and art activities, grouping strategies, problem-solving opportunities, sticking to curriculum		
Classroom Management Inclusive, non-threatening strategies, observant of whole class		
Teacher Involvement Teacher engagement, planning and debriefing, bulletin board		

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Mentor Classroom Visit Worksheet – Pre/Post Visit, p. 2

Communication	✓✓✓✓✓	Examples
Tone Non-judgmental, authentic, respectful comments and responses		
Questioning Open-ended, inviting and responsive questioning techniques		
Responding Acknowledging but not praising, building on content of responses		

Core Values	✓✓✓✓✓	Examples
Empathy Perspective-taking, care for and about others		
Emotional Literacy Acknowledgement, identification and discussion of feelings		
Inclusion Celebrating diversity, respectful of individual differences including temperament, culture, learning styles		
Attunement Response to emotions, circumstances and moods of students, use of student names, personalized conversations		