

## ***Written Feedback on Observed Teaching Session.***

**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2004.

**Location:** Learning Resources Centre, Chester University College.

**Tutor:** Linda Rush.

**Observer:** Andrew Sackville.

**Title of the session:** Mentor Training.

### **Purpose of the Session:**

This was a one-off session that was delivered at the request of the Head of Learning Resources to a group of her staff, as part of their staff development sessions. There were nine members of staff present.

### **Broad Description of the Session as observed.**

The session was held in a small seminar room, arranged conventionally with a 'front' screen and an OHP facing this. Participants either sat at a table formation around the screen, or on a row of chairs against the back wall. The session commenced at 11.10am.

Linda started by checking that everyone had a cover sheet with the Learning Objectives of the session printed on them. She then went through the Learning Objectives explaining what the session would cover, indicating that the prime aim was to raise awareness about mentoring. She established her 'credibility' by explaining her interest in, and use of mentoring on the Postgraduate Certificate she teaches. At this stage she didn't introduce herself - I guess this must be because she knows all the participants.

She then moved on to explaining how she would conduct the session – commenting on the shortage of time, she explained that she would not have time to complete all the activities she had planned, but participants could do some themselves later following the comprehensive handout she had distributed. She also promised to e-mail participants the full details of the references she had in the handout in the next couple of days. Giving them the handout – she asked them not to read it yet (always a potentially tricky instruction!!).

Linda then asked how many of the group had been mentors or mentees. Two admitted to being mentors, and only one to being a mentee. However I guess that some of the group were only focusing on 'formal' mentoring schemes, and not recognising 'informal' mentoring. (Point to think about in the future?)

At 11.16am Linda introduced herself. Then switched on the OHP. The first OHT contained the four key questions she would be covering in the session. At this point I noted the well-constructed OHT – not too much print; good type

size; nice 'clean' slide – no fussy colours. I also noted Linda's nice pace of talking; excellent tone to the voice (conveying interest and friendliness); and good, but not distracting hand gestures. A really good balance of formal and informal delivery style.

Linda now asked the participants to think about the first question individually. She informed them that she would give them 60 seconds/ two minutes to jot down thoughts --"then if you wish, share them". (Point to think about – clarity of instructions/ less ambiguity of what is wanted?)

In practice, Linda gave them 60 seconds on their own, and 45 seconds to share! She asked for, and got feedback from four of the participants. I was impressed by the way she drew more ideas out from the respondents. She reinforced the activity by referring to page 2 of the handout; and then used her second OHT with Robert's definition of mentoring. This actually duplicated what she had just asked them to read in the handout. (Point to think about – we don't always need two mediums to make the students read something twice). Again Linda got two excellent examples of insight from the group at this point.

11.23. Linda refers to the short space of time again.

She moves on to activity 1 on page 3 of the handout. This is quite a complex activity with 3 questions, five statements and 3 more questions. (Point to think about – could this be simplified and just three questions used?). The participants actually addressed the second set of 3 questions, and joined in small group discussion enthusiastically. There was a good buzz of conversation. This activity lasted 5 minutes, with Linda giving them a 'one-minute to go' warning at 11.27, then stopping them at the five minute point. (Point to think about – do you always sit outside the small groups, or do you circulate and pick up ideas?)

This time Linda varied her tactics by giving the participants her own ideas before she asked for any feedback – a nice change. She then gained feedback from the small groups. Really good points came from this exercise and the feedback, and Linda drew these together very well. (Point to think about – for this exercise Linda didn't use a flip-chart to note the main feedback points down – although she did this for later exercises. Using a summary chart helps the students to keep their attention focused on the main points).

11.35. Linda refers to the need to move on. (Time is pressing)

One student wants to raise another point in feedback on the exercise. Linda does listen and takes this on board.

11.37. Moves on to the next activity. Think of why we have a mentor? Another 60 second exercise. Now using the flip-chart for feedback. Again good feedback, which Linda reinforces very effectively, summarising using a mind-map she constructs on the flip-chart. An excellent teaching aid.

Linda now uses her 3<sup>rd</sup> OHT – 'Rationale for Mentoring'. Asks for comments – two things picked up. Refers to handout page 4. At this point for the first time, I felt that the delivery was coming too fast. I think Linda was becoming more aware of the time, because she now says – "we must swiftly move on".

11.44. Linda turns to the question – How do we select a mentor? At this point I wrote in my notes – are we being too ambitious in this session? Linda again gave the groups 60 seconds – but this time I noted that whilst some of the small groups were still concentrating hard on the task, one group had resorted to humour – were they feeling too pressurised? (Point to think about – should an introductory session end around here?)

However the feedback from the participants was again very good. Linda again used the flip-chart to summarise.

“We haven’t got time today to discuss this fully”

11.50 Next question – Why do people want to be a mentor? Not convinced that this is necessary in this introductory session. More time could have been spent on earlier questions. But again some feedback points; and then Linda backed this up by using her 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> OHTs. Good material – easily understood by participants – but challenging nevertheless.

11.55. Now coming to an end. Tempo speeded up. Read page 8 of the handout; try activity 4 on your own; whizzes through pages 11 and 12. Linda encourages participants to think further – using the handout. She finishes by using OHT 6 and 7 (These are in the handout). This five minutes felt rushed.

12.00 “we’ve finished” – “any questions?” Some really good questions came from the participants. They were keen to hear of examples of successful mentorship schemes; and good practice. They wanted to know what to do next? Linda offered her services to support them, or run another session, after they had had time to reflect on the ideas, and talk among themselves. I thought this was an excellent way of offering further support.

The session finally ended at 12.07pm.

### **Summary of Good Teaching Points:**

- Clear learning objectives. All were covered in the session.
- A really good delivery style. Combines formal and informal presentation styles. Good tone of voice; encouraging tone; clear articulation.
- Excellent use of short activities. The majority of these were short and focused.
- Really good engagement with students. Even when one student had misinterpreted the question, Linda was able to demonstrate that she valued her reply, and was able to turn the response round in to a positive teaching point.
- Excellent use of OHTs, and of flip-chart.
- Comprehensive handout given to participants; and more importantly – used effectively in the session.
- Further support and advice offered to the participants.

**Points to think about in future:**

- In an 'introductory' session, cut the content you expect to cover by a third. This allows more time for their questions – which may indeed cover more content. You can always have extra OHTs ready, to use if a specific point is raised by students.
- Try to avoid raising anxieties by continually referring to the lack of time, or the need to move on. Yes – you are feeling that, but you only need to share the shortage of time with participants once – at the start of the session.
- Try to slow down the pace of the last five minutes. Don't rush through lots more material. Just recognise that it is there in their handout – if they want to continue reflecting on the topic.
- Ensure all your activities are fairly simple, and that clear instructions are given, and you check the students understand your expectations of the activity.

**Conclusion:**

Thank you for letting me observe your session. I found it really interesting. The content was stimulating; and the mode of delivery really supportive.

Andrew Sackville.