

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

“Ayers Institute Lunch & Learn” Podcast

Episode 18 – August 2018

Title: *What the Best Mentor Teachers Do*

SPEAKERS

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INTRODUCTION:

EM: So, we wanted to be a mutually beneficial relationship, where they're working together being able to collaborate.

JH: We want our candidates to experience as many of the facets of teaching as possible: parent teacher conferences, the idea of professional development, and realizing that a teacher's responsibility is going to be a lifelong learner.

EM: I just know from my own personal experience– working with my mentor teachers– we still have a relationship today. And I think that's so important to know that you're building relationships that can turn into lifelong friendships, that can turn into lifelong mentoring.

JO: Welcome to the "Ayers Lunch and Learn" podcast presented by the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation at Lipscomb University, where we're all about education. These podcast episodes are sponsored by Edsouth, which promotes interest and awareness of higher education opportunities to students, families, and schools. Each Ayers Lunch and Learn podcast episode provides bite-sized portions of professional learning.

Today's topic is "What Do the Best Mentor Teachers Do?" We'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic as well using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchAndLearn and #MentorTeachers. My name is Julia Osteen and I'm the Technology Integration Specialist for the Ayers Institute. Participating in our conversation today is Dr. Junior High and Dr. Emily Medlock of the College of Education at Lipscomb University.

Welcome!

EPISODE BODY:

JH: Thank you.

EM: Thank you, Julia.

JH: It's good to be here.

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One of the things that gives me cause to pause in thinking about this topic, is going back to my experiences as a student teacher many years ago. Had I not had a really strong mentor, I think it would have changed the course of my career; and that career led to 31 years in the Nashville Public School System. And now, I've been at Lipscomb for 17 years, so you can add the numbers. I've been around for a good while.

EM: And, I've had the opportunity to work as a supervising teacher in the classroom with 13 years of experience in Metro Nashville Public Schools. And then most recently, working with our teacher candidates here at Lipscomb University over the last six years, through our clinical practices and our student teaching experiences.

JH: So, I think when you put all that together, having had both personal experience as a mentor teacher and being on the receiving end of helping our candidates to have that opportunity to be mentored by quality and engaging a mentor teacher, has been- it comes together and does a lot for the purpose of giving our students fabulous experiences during that capstone experience.

EM: And I agree. And I think that we've learned a lot over the last few years, as we've been working with mentor teachers about what are some of those best strategies, best practices that our mentor teachers need to know as they're welcoming new teacher candidates into their classroom.

JH: One of the things, I think that we want our mentor teachers to do is number one: to desire to host one of our candidates. Having that desire to be a mentor, knowing that one can impact the future of the profession, by having a really great experience in helping the students get their feet on the ground as they begin their career.

EM: Oh, I agree. And I think that it's important for a mentor teachers to understand their roles and responsibilities before they bring a student teacher into their classroom. So, understanding what the university expectations are, what the student expectations are, and then also being able to share what are the responsibilities, where do the expectations from the school and the school district for that teacher candidate.

JH: Plus, it's also very important for the university to provide a clear understanding and direction as to what we as a university expect from a mentor position in the classroom.

EM: And going along with that, I think probably the most important aspect of our mentor teachers is working to build positive working relationships with their teacher candidate as they're coming into the classroom.

JH: And the other thing, we like to use the term collaborative. To be able to take the candidate who is there and they're still in the learning mode, they're still not that professional teacher that we hope that they're becoming. But to put them into a classroom where they have a collaborative relationship with a teacher who has had experience, and who does bring to the table a lot of really great practical applications for organization and planning that will make the candidate successful in the classroom.

EM: Absolutely, and I think that there are so many benefits that our mentor teachers have by working with our teacher candidates as they're coming into the classroom. So, we want it to be a mutually beneficial relationship, where they're working together being able to collaborate as you said.

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JH: And I do think that, you know, I go back to Covey. Because Covey always refers to having a win-win relationship and having a quality relationship that exists between the mentor and candidate, obviously is producing a win-win relationship.

So, when it comes to mentoring, one of the things that our candidates must have is direction and some sense of organization. That helps them to know their role, and to feel like that they are adding quality or they're adding value to the classroom experience.

EM: I agree and I think that some of that is as simple as the mentor teacher being prepared for their teacher candidate, when they come the first day. There are some simple things that they can do as they're preparing for their teacher candidate. Things such as providing class roles, providing maybe an outline of what will be covered over the next few weeks as they're working with their teacher candidates.

JH: We all are very prone to respond more favorably to a learning environment or to a working environment in which we are known and appreciated. And I think helping them to know the lay of the of the building and to be introduced to those individuals who will become a huge part of that whole school experience, become familiar with guidelines and handbooks and maybe specific dress code, any of those kinds of things that a candidate needs to know in order to be an effective member of their faculty.

EM: And the expertise that our mentor teachers bring is so valuable to the learning experiences for a teacher candidate. And so, the modeling that our teacher candidates observe in the classroom, whether it's your lesson planning, working with students in large group settings, or working with students one on one. Our candidates learn so much from what their mentor teachers do in front of their students, day in and day out.

JH: Plus, I think our mentor teachers may be somewhat surprised that they're going to be learning a lot from our candidates. With today's increase in technology and the fast pace of change, our candidates are often equipped with new technologies and new ideas and new expressions or whatever that give them an opportunity to bring some newness to the classroom. So, it's hopefully a learning experience that they benefit from each other.

EM: Right it goes back to what you said about Covey. Having that win-win relationship is so important. Thinking about also the role that our mentor teachers take now in the form of being their coach, I think that's important too. That it's a coaching relationship that they're working alongside each other that they're working to build capacity in the classroom.

JH: And I think that's another issue is we want our candidates to receive constructive feedback. If we thought they were totally equipped to go into a classroom and just take over, then they wouldn't even need the student teaching experience. But we feel like this three, four months that they're going to spend in two different teachers' classrooms is just going to be a huge time in which they get to model, be modeled, and to experience what that experience is going to be like.

EM: And I agree, I think that feedback is so important for the growth of our candidates. That they're able to receive that feedback, to work alongside their mentor teacher as they're working with their students and impact what is happening in the classroom.

JH: One of the things that we promote in today's world is the idea of co-teaching, and that is- that's so different than when I had the experience of student teaching. I was afforded two weeks to be active as a teacher during my student teaching experience.

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But the co-teaching model seems to be so much stronger in the sense that I might be a small group instructor as part of the whole classroom. And there may be times when I'm taking the bulk of instruction. But that's where the mentor teacher and the student candidate work together to provide what I would think is fabulous to have two adults in a classroom. The pupil-teacher ratio is much greater with that experience.

EM: Oh, I agree Junior. I think when you think about the demands that are placed on our classroom teachers now that when they have an extra teacher in the classroom, it benefits both teachers and students in the classroom. So, when you're thinking about those co-teaching ideas, we're really talking about sharing responsibilities. And that, you know, when we're talking about sharing responsibilities that means that our teacher candidates are involved in the classroom from day one.

That doesn't mean necessarily that they're taking over the classroom, but they're working with their mentor teacher. So, it looks like working with planning. So, in that planning process— when we're planning lessons, planning units of study. It's so important that there's collaboration happening so that the best instruction is happening for our students. And then also when we're thinking about that instruction, the sharing of strategies. So again, you talked about the importance of being able to collaborate with each other. But there are strategies that our mentor teachers have used that are great learning experience for teacher candidates.

EM: But on the flip side of that, our teacher candidates have some strategies that they may want to introduce to their students.

JH: For sure, and I think the big part of it too is the fact that if the two things work together to think how much more benefit it is to the students in the classroom. We never want a classroom teacher or a mentor teacher to feel like that he or she is having to relinquish their classroom. It is the mentor teacher's classroom. It will always be their classroom. But we want them to feel comfortable sharing it and in a positive way with our candidates.

EM: Right and then we also talk about the importance of feedback for our teacher candidates. But feedback for our students in the classroom are so important, as well. So, when we think about those co-teaching responsibilities that assessment plays a major role in that.

JH: And I think the other piece is that we want our candidates to experience as many of the facets of teaching as possible. Parent teacher conferences, the idea of professional development, any time that the teachers involved, we would love for our candidates to have that experience of learning and realizing that a teacher's responsibility is going to be a lifetime, lifelong learner.

EM: I just know from my own personal experience working with my mentor teachers- the mentor teacher that I worked with when I was doing my student teaching- we still have a relationship today, and I think that's so important to know that this is- you're building relationships that can turn into lifelong friendships, that can turn into lifelong mentoring well past student teaching.

JH: And I would hope that the end result is that mentor teachers see themselves having an impact on the future of the teaching profession. Our candidates are excited about the profession; and yet, that transition from student to actually being a professional in the classroom, makes a huge. it's a huge important step and we would love to think that mentor teachers feel a great responsibility for helping make that transition a real valuable one.

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CONCLUSION:

JO: In our conversation today, Dr. High and Dr. Medlock discussed preparing to be a mentor teacher, what mentoring entails, and sharing classroom responsibilities in order to build capacity and student teaching candidates. They have given us a lot to think about and discuss with colleagues. A probing question for you and your colleagues to explore is: “What steps are you taking toward being an effective mentor teacher?”

As we close today's episode, we would like to encourage you to continue the conversation on what the best mentor teachers do with your colleagues. There is a graphic organizer file available for download as you continue thinking about this topic. The graphic organizer, along with links to articles cited, are found on eduTOOLBOX – at eduTOOLBOX.org.

Don't forget. We'd love to hear your thoughts on hiring high-quality educators using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchAndLearn and #MentorTeachers. Also, follow and like the Ayers Institute and Lipscomb's College of Education on Twitter and Facebook @AyersInstitute and @LipscombCofEd.

We hope your appetite for bite sized portions of professional learning was satisfied with this podcast presentation sponsored by Edsouth. Look for other episodes of this podcast and other Ayers Institute Professional Learning Podcasts at <http://podcast.ayersinstitute.org/>.