



Great Public Schools for Every Student

Managing Difficult Conversations

Educator demonstrates the understanding and skills necessary to effectively handle difficult conversations with a student teacher candidate that will result in a positive outcome.

Key Method

The educator reflects on previous experiences and analyzes their own strengths in handling difficult conversations. The educator applies skills for effective communication, listening, and collaborative discussion to help move conversations toward positive outcomes.

Method Components

An educator who is aware of their own communication strengths and weaknesses will be able to have a better self-understanding of the skills needed to help facilitate constructive outcomes when challenging conversations arise.

Communicating

Difficult conversations can be approached from a variety of angles. In managing difficult conversations with a teacher candidate, a cooperating teacher should be attentive to the approach. Two such styles are “calling out” and “calling forth/calling in.” The calling out approach can be seen as adversarial and can often lead to tension and defensiveness. The calling forth/in approach is seen as collaborative and motivational. Understanding and approaching conversations using a calling in technique should be considered prior to engagement.

Being aware of the different strategies and techniques for providing feedback is useful during the student teaching experience. Educators will provide objective feedback instead of opinions and subjective feedback. Providing feedback built upon evidence from the classroom experience helps the student teacher candidate set goals for improvement. One strategy for providing feedback may include the SBI Model:

SBI Model

- Describe the **situation**,
- Describe the observable **behavior**, and
- Describe what you thought or felt in reaction (**impact**) to the behavior.

Listening

When difficult conversations arise, stay calm and take time to reflect on the situation. Look at both sides of the issue by using empathic understanding – seek to understand. Use listening skills and be cognizant of your verbal and nonverbal

communication. When having difficult conversations, one should pay particular attention to both verbal and nonverbal forms. Both can have an impact on the effectiveness of communication between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher candidate.

Collaborative Discussion

While the cooperating teacher is the facilitator of the conversation, both parties should have input in possible solutions for moving forward. This demonstrates a vote of confidence in the idea of the teacher candidate and honors the expertise of the cooperating teacher.

Components of Managing Difficult Conversations

Communicating

Name the situation – The situation identifies the full context. The full context includes the people involved, location, timing, the naming of the issue/matter/event of focus.

Example 1: “We should discuss the attire that you are wearing at school today.”

Example 2: “Let’s talk about the language you used yesterday during your lesson when talking about undocumented students.”

State the observable behavior – The observable behaviors include an objective account of what occurred. It addresses what happened with as much detail as possible. It should not presume possible reasons for the occurrences. The step should be approached with caution, as subjective and assumptive judgments can permeate what should be an objective report.

Example 1: “You are wearing a tank top with straps that appear to be less than one inch wide.”

Example 2: “During your lesson, you said that ‘those people’ do not belong in our country.”

Impact – The impact of the behavior should be discussed in context. It should answer the question or help the teacher candidate identify what the impact of the behavior is. During the explanation of impact, the “feedback sandwich” can be used.

Example 1: “Thank you for regularly being attentive to your attire. As per school rules, straps should be at least three inches in diameter. This shirt puts you in the position of being out of compliance with school rules. You have been clear about your respect for compliance. Thank you for that.”

OR

Example 1: “Thank you for being regularly being attentive to your attire. Are you aware of the school policy on tank tops?” If candidate responds yes, seek clarification to ensure correct understanding of the policy. If no, explain the policy.

Example 2: “I am glad that you are willing to tackle such issues through good discussion. However, the language that you are using and your stance on the topic should be attended to more carefully as it could put students, especially those who are undocumented or have parents who are undocumented, in a very awkward position. I could see the looks of sadness and dismay on the faces of some students as you spoke.”

AND/OR

“I am glad that you are willing to tackle such issues through good discussion. How do you think your message was perceived by students?”

Listening

Following the detailed outlining of the issue, the teacher candidate should be given a chance to be heard. The cooperating teacher should prepare to listen to the objective position of the teacher candidate. This should be done through the use of effective listening skills, which include periodically asking questions to seek clarity, building the other party’s self-esteem by conveying confidence in them and engaging cooperatively (in a non-disruptive/non-

argumentative way) in the conversation.

Good listening happens at various levels. The cooperating teacher should be attentive to the level of listening in which they are engaged (See What great listeners actually do).

Collaborative discussion

Finally, as part of the management of difficult conversations, solutions should be generated collaboratively.

Solution – Possible solutions to the situation should be discussed. This may be done through questions or through direct requests. The manner in which this is approached should be based on 1) the cooperating teacher's understanding of the teacher candidate's style of learning and 2) the speed at which rectification needs to occur. Sometimes, time for reflection is necessary in order to generate possible solutions to more complex issues. Time for this brainstorming should be made available with a proposed reconvening to discuss solutions. The solution should have 1) an action required, 2) a time frame outlined, and 3) referral for further assistance if possible/necessary.

Example 1: "Please adjust your attire before students arrive. The counselor may have additional sweaters for you to borrow for the day. Here is a copy of the policy in case you need one."

AND/OR

"How can we fix this situation? How can I help?"

Example 2: "There are great ways to make discussion a learning experience. Rather than giving your opinion, present the information to students and have them come to their own understanding while facilitating a discussion that demands that everyone in the classroom is respectful to everyone else."

AND/OR

"What can we do to ensure that students are not put in a position that makes them feel devalued?"

Supporting Research

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Zenger, J. & Folkman, J. (2016). What great listeners actually do. Harvard Business Review.
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Resources

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>

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https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_91.htm

Oelklaus, Nancy (2016). "The Eye of the Needle: A communication tool". Systems Thinker (blog).
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<https://wit.edu/sites/default/files/learning-innovation/resources/The%20Left%20Column%20Tool.pdf>

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<https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/3-feedback-steps-that-wont-crush-your-team/>

Treasure, Julian. "5 Ways to Listen Better." Online video clip. TEDTalk. July 2011. Web. June 2017.
https://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_5_ways_to_listen_better

White, Samantha. "Time to Think: Using Restorative Questions." IIRP. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 June 2017.

Suggested Search Terms: Effective listening, empathy, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, feedback.

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a “passing” score in Parts 1 and 3, and a “proficient” score for each component in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions

450 word min - 500 word max

Describe a situation where you had a difficult conversation with another person that did not result in a positive outcome. Provide an analysis of the communication that took place, and address the following in your analysis.

- ☐ Give a brief overview of the issue.
- ☐ Which parts of the conversation went well? What did not go well?
- ☐ What were you feeling inside while the conversation was taking place? Why?
- ☐ What were some of the nonverbal communication components you noticed from yourself and from the other person?
- ☐ What was the end result of the conversation?
- ☐ How did you feel after the conversation was finished? Why?
- ☐ What could you have done differently?
- ☐ Tell about ways you could have managed the conversation differently.

- **Passing:** Responses address each question. Writing is organized, easy to understand, and includes details that are directly connected to the overview of the issue described. In the final questions, the educator specifically focuses on their personal responsibility in managing and/or mismanaging the conversation.

Part 2. Work Examples / Artifacts

To earn this micro-credential, submit the following

1. A list of possible conversations that might be the most difficult for you and a rationale for each one as to why you believe that aspect will be the most difficult for you.
2. Three different recordings (audio or video) or transcriptions of a mock difficult conversation:
 - a. Ask a colleague to play the role of a teacher candidate as you conduct a conversation that might occur based on the list that you created.
 - b. Note: Inform colleagues that they may choose their temperament, emotional state, and any other personal characteristic they prefer.
 - c. Each conversation should last less than 5 minutes.
 - d. Refer to the above components of managing difficult conversations and use the rubric below as a guide.
3. A self-evaluation of your conversation. In your evaluation be sure to address the following:
 - Did I fully identify the situation? If yes, provide evidence and rationale. If no, discuss why and/or how not.
 - Was my description of the issue/event objective? If yes, provide evidence and rationale. If no, discuss why and/or how not
 - Was I clear about the impact of the issue/event? If yes, provide evidence and rationale. If no, discuss why and/or how not.
 - Did I ensure that the mock teacher candidate was heard and felt supported? If yes, provide evidence and rationale. If no, discuss why and/or how not.
 - Did I ensure that the solutions were collaboratively generated? If yes, provide evidence and rationale. If no, discuss why and/or how not.

null	Proficient	Basic	Developing
Communication	<p>The educator demonstrates effective communication techniques in all three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>The educator identifies the communication techniques used and provides a rationale for the use of the techniques for each role-play scenario.</p>	<p>The educator demonstrates effective communication techniques in each of the three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>BUT</p> <p>The educator does not identify the communication techniques used for each of the role-play scenarios.</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>The educator does not provide a rationale for the use of the techniques for each role-play scenario.</p>	<p>The educator does not demonstrate effective communication techniques in any of the three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>The educator does not identify the communication techniques used for any of the role-play scenarios.</p> <p>The educator does not provide a rationale for the use of the techniques for any of the role-play scenarios.</p>
Listening	<p>The educator demonstrates listening techniques in all three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>The educator identifies the listening techniques used and provides a rationale for the use of the techniques for each role-play scenario</p>	<p>The educator demonstrates listening techniques in each of the three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>BUT</p> <p>The educator does not identify all the listening techniques used for the role-play scenarios.</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>The educator does not provide a rationale for the use of the techniques for all of the role-play scenarios.</p>	<p>The educator does not demonstrate listening techniques in any of the three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>The educator does not identify the listening techniques used for any of the role-play scenarios.</p> <p>The educator does not provide a rationale for the use of the techniques for any of the role-play scenarios.</p>
Collaborative Discussion	<p>The educator demonstrates collaborative discussion techniques in all three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>The educator identifies the collaborative discussion techniques used and provides a rationale for their use for each role-play scenario.</p>	<p>The educator demonstrates collaborative discussion techniques in each of the three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>BUT</p> <p>The educator does not identify all the collaborative discussion techniques used for the role-play scenarios.</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>The educator does not provide a rationale for all of the techniques used for each role-play scenario.</p>	<p>The educator does not demonstrate collaborative discussion techniques in any of the three role-play scenarios.</p> <p>The educator does not identify the collaborative discussion techniques used for any of the role played scenarios.</p> <p>The educator does not provide a rationale for the use of the techniques for any of</p>

Reflection

250-word limit per conversation

Write a response to the following questions for each difficult conversation:

Briefly note how this conversation might be different with a teacher candidate.

- What was the easiest part of the conversation for you?
- What was the most difficult part of the conversation for you?
- If you had to have the same conversation again, what would you do differently?

- **Passing:** Responses are thorough and thoughtfully address the impact of the educator's current communication skills, and the educator provides other concepts that will aid in the communication process. Writing is organized and easy to understand.

300 word min - 400 word max total

Write a response to the following four questions/prompts:

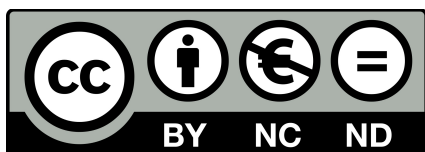
Why is it important to have difficult conversations?

What is important to consider before engaging in difficult conversations?

Describe the strategies you would use when having to engage in difficult conversations.

What conditions have to be in place for a difficult conversation to have a positive outcome?

- **Passing:** Responses are thorough and thoughtfully address the impact of the educator's current communication skills, and the educator provides other concepts that will aid in the communication process. Writing is organized and easy to understand.



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