

Possible Guiding Questions: Conversations Between Principals and Teachers

ROLE: Autistic Support, Life Skills and MDS Teachers

This document utilizes the components within the Danielson Framework for Teaching to provide possible guiding questions for conversations that occur between a principal and teacher. Note that a few of the guiding questions also provide linkages to the Framework for Leadership in order to establish a level of connectedness among the two frameworks.

Please note: The questions identified here are provided to spur some thoughts as to the individual conversations that occur between a principal and teacher. The actual conversations that occur should be determined locally. It is not mandatory to use these questions, nor should they be viewed as a “checklist” to be followed. They are provided solely as a resource.

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

1a: Demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy

Possible Guiding Questions:

- What assessment tool do you use with your students to determine current levels of functional and academic performance (including communication skills, language skills, fine and gross motor skills, etc.)?
- Can you describe the process you use to choose IEP goals and objectives?
- How do you link students' goals and objectives to the common core?

1b: Demonstrating knowledge of students

Possible Guiding Questions:

- How do you determine what materials should be organized and developed for each individual student?
- How do you monitor individual student progress?
- What process do you use to determine when and where students are included within the general education setting?
- How do you determine what specific items have value for each student? How do you use those items throughout the day to motivate individual students?

1c: Setting instructional outcomes

Possible Guiding Questions:

- What is your process for teaching skills to generalization or transferring mastered skills to the natural school environment?
- Based on student data, what is your criteria and how do you determine when an individualized instructional change needs to be made?
- How often is data being collected for each student?
- What data collection system do you use to monitor student progress on a daily basis?
- Alongside an IEP for one of your students, can you explain how you develop goals and objectives?
- Did you utilize the common core to help develop IEP goals and objectives for your students? If so, how did you align and document individual student goals and IEP development with the common core?
- Is instructional content relevant to that provided in the regular education setting (e.g.

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

1d: Demonstrating knowledge of resources

possibly the use of similar themes or materials used at an appropriate instructional level for students on your caseload)?

- What assessment tool do you use with your students to determine current levels of functional and academic performance (including communication skills, language skills, fine and gross motor skills, etc.)?
- How did you determine what activities of daily living and/or self-advocacy skills were appropriate for each individual student to be taught?

Possible Guiding Questions:

- What process do you use when teaching a student a complex or multi-step life skill?
- If you have a student who uses sign language to communicate, what additional resources have you utilized to become more fluent with this mode of communication?
- If the current grade-level curricula are not appropriate for your student's needs, what have you done to supplement these curricula with evidence-based curricula that better meet his/her needs?
- Do you take advantage of peer-reviewed journals in your area of special education expertise to enhance your professional knowledge and pedagogy?
- Do you regularly reference websites such as the PA common core, SAS, and/or PDE portals to gain access to additional resources and curricula modifications?

1e: Designing coherent instruction

Possible Guiding Questions:

- Are there specific learning objectives for each student for each instructional time of the day?
- Have you aligned your students' individualized goals to the common core?
- Do you use intentionally use dynamic groupings based on student levels of performance?
- Do you use a variety of valuable reinforcers throughout the school day for each individual student?
- How do you determine what lesson to prepare, how to group students, and what skills should be taught on a daily basis?

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

If: Designing student assessment

- What type of systems do you have in place to account for maintenance of acquired skills, scaffolding on prior learning, and increasing skill mastery towards an achievable individualized goal?

Possible Guiding Questions:

- How do you determine what assessment to use to determine baseline instructional levels?
- How do students demonstrate their learning throughout each lesson (whether in a group or individual setting)?
- How do individualized assessments guide future lesson plan development and individual student programming?
- Explain some different ways your students can demonstrate their learning (based on individual needs and communication modalities)?
- Explain how you plan for ongoing formative assessments to make minute-by-minute decisions to your lessons?
- What data did you use to determine what lesson to prepare, how to group students, and what target skills should be taught for each individual student?

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

2a: Creating an environment of respect and rapport

Possible Guiding Questions (based on possible observations):

- During my observation, a student readily approached various adults to accept reinforcers. Has this student always readily approached you? If not, how did you teach this skill?
- In a 1-to-1 teaching situation, I saw staff vary the reinforcers used. Why does staff use a variety of things instead of just one favorite thing the student seems to prefer?
- During my observation, I saw a student engaging in problem behavior. How do you and your staff plan for maintaining dignity and respect of the student when he engages in problem behavior?
- I saw a student being escorted to the bathroom by school staff. Does this student require assistance in self-care routines? How do you maintain each student's privacy and dignity during activities of daily living where adult assistance is needed?
- I noticed different students were asked easy questions during your group time (such as "what color is it?" - yellow) and others were asked more difficult questions (such as "a bus is a type of what?" – vehicle). How do you determine what targets are appropriate to ask each individual student to ensure fairness and equity among classmates during a group lesson?
- I saw a student was not using his voice to respond, but was using sign language. How do you know how to communicate with a child who does not talk? As a teacher, what is your role in teaching students to convey their wants and needs?
- If a new student comes to your classroom and currently has no form of communication, what would you do?
- I noticed in your schedule a time allotted for social skills training and peer-to-peer interactions. Explain how these teaching times promote and encourage respect among peers?
- I noted that there were 2 TSS, a BSC, and a speech therapist in your room during my observation. How do you model respect and rapport building when you communicate with other adults and visitors in your classroom in front of students? Do you have any specific guidelines or rules (e.g. sign in/out sheet, rules for technology devices within the classroom, system for sharing concerns to be discussed at a later time, scheduling future visits, etc.) for visitors in the classroom during instructional times to ensure the top

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

2b: Establishing a culture for learning

priority is student engagement and learning?

- I observed a lack of direct communication among classroom staff concerning classroom logistics, transitions, and routines. As the teacher, how do you run a smooth classroom for your students without overtly directing the classrooms staff throughout the day (and avoid interrupting student learning opportunities)?

Possible Guiding Questions (based on possible observations):

- I observed a 14-year old boy listening to Barney songs on an iPod. Can you explain how and why this specific music was used to enhance and encourage his learning environment?
- I noticed a student grunting while pointing to an object across the room. Your procedure was to label the item for the student and have him repeat the name of the item before you gave it to him. Is this a typical procedure? How does it help students learn?
- I saw you get very excited when you praised a student for saying BALL instead of bah when he asked to play ball. Can you explain why you did this and how it impacts the culture of learning for that student?
- I noticed that a student made an error when a question was posed to him. I noticed you asked the question again and gave him the correct answer before asking the question a third time. Can you explain your procedure for correcting student errors and why you use that procedure?
- There seems to be a great deal of review of concepts during the lesson I just observed. Is this common practice? Why or why not?

2c: Managing classroom procedures

Possible Guiding Questions (based on possible observations):

- I see that your schedule has time slots which each have a student's name, and adult's name, an area of the room and an area of instruction to be completed. Why do you use this schedule to manage your classroom? What do you do if there is a student and/or staff member absent?
- I noticed students helping to prepare materials for their next set of activities. Why do you have students doing this and how does it enhance their learning?

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

2d: Managing student behavior

- I observed that staff is always assigned specific students even for short periods of time (daily living skills, group circle) or when the class transitions as a whole group (to lunch or recess). Can you explain the importance of these assignments for managing staff and students at all times?
- I noticed the structure of your teaching areas contain all the materials you need during that time slot including student data, instructional materials, student reinforcers and motivators. Can you explain your organizational system and what impact it has on managing classroom procedures, flow of instruction, and transitions from one activity from the next?

Possible Guiding Questions (based on possible observations):

- Is there a functional behavior assessment (FBA) on file for all students who present with significant problem behavior (any behavior that impedes their learning or the learning of others)?
- Using one student as an example, can you show me the FBA and corresponding behavior plan and explain:
 - The behavior defined in measurable and observable terms
 - A functional class identified for the behavior(s) of concern
 - Interventions that are derived from and match the function(s)
 - The clear plan for staff when the target behavior occurs
 - The clear plan for teaching a replacement behavior that matches the function
 - A log of systematic staff training prior to implementing the plan.
 - Treatment integrity (to verify consistency of cross-staff implementation)
 - Daily data collection system and corresponding graph
- How do you ensure all staff is consistent in their interactions during similar “episodes” with this particular student?
- Choose one of your students and describe a typical daily schedule of reinforcement as well as the concept of “catching them being good.” How has this schedule been determined and what are the educational benefits of using reinforcement in the classroom?

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

- During group instruction, do you expect all students to be actively engaged? How do the students know what behaviors to engage in to demonstrate their learning and active engagement with the lesson? How has this been systematically taught and reinforced throughout the year?
- I observed a student engaging in problem behavior. How were you able to maintain the dignity and respect of the student during problem behavior?
- If a student engages in problem behavior during a group lesson, what procedures do you have in place to ensure that the learning environment is not interrupted for the other students in the class?
- If you have a student who demonstrates dangerous, self-injurious, or unsafe behaviors what type of crisis plan has been put in place? Is this plan part of his or her IEP? What related training has you and your classroom staff had in crisis prevention and management?

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

2e: Organizing physical space

Possible Guiding Questions (based on possible observations):

- Explain your classroom layout and set up and how it meets the needs of your students. Why does it look different than a general education classroom?
- Explain how valuable it is to maintain a neat and organized classroom to allow students to move easily between activities and allow staff to monitor the behavior of all students at all times throughout the school day?
- Can you explain how storage areas for instructional materials, the labeling of materials, materials being readily accessible, and organizational systems based on instruction aide your teaching of students?
- I noticed that you have a list of items that have value to a specific student posted on your classroom wall. What is the purpose of this and how does it enhance student learning?
- I see that your classroom schedule is mainly for staff reference and is large enough to be seen in any area of the room. Can you explain how this enhances student learning and staff productivity?
- I see staff reminders and procedures cues posted on your walls. What is the purpose of this and how does it impact student learning?
- I noticed that reinforcing items for each student are stored just out of their reach. Can you explain the rationale of this strategy?
- What is the importance of chair and table size in relation to your student population?
- Compared to the general education classroom across the hall which has one smart board and one computer, I noticed you have 3 iPads and 6 portable DVD players in your classroom. Can you explain the rationale for this extra technology? Does it help or hinder organization of your physical environment? Explain how these supplies directly relate to student learning outcomes.

Domain 3: Instruction

3a: Communicating with students

Possible Guiding Questions (based on possible observations):

- I noticed that you used a natural tone of voice throughout you interactions with students. How does this increase student achievement?
- During my observation, you reinforced the student every few responses that he gave. What is your rationale behind this procedure?
- During my observation, you reinforced the student and had him “give himself a token” after every few responses. How did you determine this reinforcement schedule and how does it increase student achievement?
- You didn’t appear to give the student “wait time” or “thinking time” when talking with the student. Can you explain the rationale for teaching students to respond quickly?
- I observed you using multi-step directions such as “go to your cubby, get your lunch box, line up” for one student and for another student you gave directions one at a time and waited for the student to respond. Why and how do you change how you give student directions based on students’ individual needs?
- I noticed that you did not overtly address a hand flapping behavior that a student was engaging in and instead kept saying “ready hands.” How does this communicate the expectation to the student without directly drawing attention to the problem behavior?
- During teaching, you always said the name of the toy or snack before you gave it to the child. Why do you do this and how does it impact student communication and language learning?

3b: Using questioning and discussion techniques

Possible Guiding Questions (based on possible observations):

- I noticed that when you taught a reading lesson (individual or group) you used hand signals so the student knew when to respond. Is this a specific part of the program? Do all staff members use the same signals? What is the rationale for this strategy?
- I noticed that some questions the student answered very quickly and others took longer for a response. You reacted differently for each of these scenarios. Can you explain this to me?

Domain 3: Instruction

- Most of the time, you were posing questions with a single discrete answer. Why is this teaching strategy used with this student compared to asking open-ended questions?
- I noticed that you corrected a student when it seemed as though they self-corrected and eventually ended on the right answer. Can you explain the rationale for this?
- You didn't appear to give the student "wait time" or "thinking time" after asking a question. Can you explain the rationale for teaching students to respond quickly?
- During a 1-on-1 teaching session, you asked questions about many different concepts and themes and appeared to be teaching across-subject areas. Is this common? Why is this teaching strategy used?
- I noticed that you prompted the correct answer immediately when you were teaching new skills and then repeated the same question without the answer. Is this how you typically teach new concepts? Why or why not?
- I did not observe any student-formulated discussion topics, or open-ended higher level questioning used during my observation. Can you explain why this was not present and what pre-requisite skills you are teaching students towards this end?
- How do you plan for peer-to-peer interactions?

3c: Engaging students in learning

Possible Guiding Questions:

- I observed a 14-year old student listening to current pop music following a lesson where he earned tokens throughout. How were you able to keep him engaged throughout the entirety of the lesson?
- After you delivered something reinforcing to the child, you often played with the item with the child and sometimes even held the item and didn't let the child even hold it. What was your rationale for remaining an active and involved part of the session even when he was interacting with an "earned" reinforcer?
- I observed a subtle beginning, middle, and end of an individual 1-on-1 teaching session that began with you interacting with the student, fading in work demands, and ending the session with another positive interaction with the student. Does each session look similar? Why are these strategies used and how do they increase student learning?
- How do you made decisions on when to group students and when to work with them

Domain 3: Instruction

individually?

- How do you determine what motivating items to use during your teaching to reinforce desired behaviors and responses for each individual student?
- Based on the data that I collected during your group time, you were able to actively engage all students (turned toward instructional materials and the teacher and actively responding) for over 80% of intervals. How did you prepare for this lesson to ensure that all students would be actively engaged at their instructional level for the duration?
- Based on the data that I collected during your group time, you were able to actively engage students 26% of the intervals that I collected data on (5 students in 10second intervals – 13 intervals were positive for student engagement). How can you better prepare for active engagement for all students during future group lessons regardless on individual present levels?
- I noted in my observation that you were using whiteboard and dry erase markers for student responding just as the 4th grade teacher across the hall uses. Do you think it is important for your students to use similar materials to those used with students in the general education setting (perhaps modified)?
- I noticed on your schedule that Johnny goes to 6th grade science. What pre-requisite skills are being in this classroom that encourages Johnny’s self-advocacy and engagement when he is in that environment with typical peers?
- You have a few students who do not spend any time with their same-aged peers without disabilities. What is your plan for establishing opportunities for students not in the general education settings to access typical peers and school activities whenever appropriate?

3d: Using assessment in instruction

Possible Guiding Questions:

- How often do you reflect on your teaching alongside student data and responses in order to make future changes to instruction?
- Can you show me a recent example of a change you made to instruction for a student whose data showed he/she was not making adequate progress?
- How do your students demonstrate their understanding during the course of a teaching

Domain 3: Instruction

3e: Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness

session?

- How do you provide specific feedback to your students and correct student errors when they occur?
- What efforts do you take to ensure students receive timely, individualized, constructive, and substantive feedback on their performance?
- Explain how you use formative assessments during instruction to make minute-by-minute decisions and modifications to your lessons?

Possible Guiding Questions:

- I noticed you changed your prompt type as a student repeatedly errored on a target skill. Why did you make this change and how did it enhance this student's learning?
- How often do you evaluate the appropriateness of groupings in your classroom? What data systems do you use to guide this decision making process?
- I noticed that you use a specific teaching procedures outside of a specified teaching session. Can you explain to me the importance of seizing teachable moments with your students?
- During my observation, I noticed that a student who usually enjoys playing the keyboard, did not want they keyboard today. Can you explain how individual student preferences plays a role in your responsive teaching?

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

4a: Reflecting on teacher and student learning

Possible Guiding Questions:

- Based on a reflection of the observed lesson, what would you do differently and why?
- How often do you reflect on your teaching alongside student data in order to make future changes to instruction?
- Can you show me a recent example of a change you made to instruction for a student whose data showed he/she was not making adequate progress?
- Has there been data collected on other classroom staff to assess fidelity of procedures, behavior plans, protocols, etc.?

4b: System for managing students' data

Possible Guiding Questions:

- Can you explain your system for recording, scheduling, and archiving important student-level information (e.g. preference assessments, IEPs, re-evaluation reports, frequency and summary of communication with parents/guardians, team member contact information, current diagnoses and medications, student tardy/absence logs, etc.)?
- Can you explain your organizational system to monitor your communication with families regarding student school needs (e.g. needs more lunch money, permission slip for field trip needs returned, student is out of toiletries used at school, library book needs returned)?
- Can you show me an example of ongoing data collection towards an IEP goal or objective (e.g. progress monitoring data, cold probe data, weekly skills tracking sheets, individualized student program book, academic data, participation data, etc.)?

4c: Communicating with families

Possible Guiding Questions:

- Can you show me an example of the communication you have with families regarding student school needs (e.g. needs more lunch money, permission slip for field trip needs returned, student is out of toiletries used at school, library book needs returned)?
- Can you show me how you communicate with families to provide updates on progress monitoring in a timely and parent-friendly manner?
- How do you incorporate the family's opinions on student strengths and needs within the

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

4d: Participating in a professional community

annual IEP document?

- What steps do you take to educate families about their child's daily instructional program and their child's progress?
- How do you include families and support systems in daily learning decisions and encourage consistency within the integrated environments of home and community?
- Do you provide specific or scheduled times to be available for parents to ask questions or provide input? Is this schedule flexible for all parents' schedules?
- For students of transition-age, is there a system of regular and ongoing communication and collaboration with parents concerning post-secondary interests, goals, and training opportunities?

Possible Guiding Questions:

- Do you hold regular classroom team meetings (and log content and attendees) to promote collaboration and consistency to maximize success for individual students?
- Do you have documentation of regular and scheduled times for co-planning and team meetings with general education staff (this may include, but is not limited to principals, support staff, teachers, school nurse, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, transition coordinators) that may include professional development related to collaboration, scheduled opportunities for parent collaboration, collaboration in development and delivery of SAS, pre-planning for inclusionary opportunities, PA Common Core, transition planning, etc.?
- Is there regular collaboration with grade-level general education teachers to individually plan for student opportunities and success with same-aged peers?
- How do you participate as part of a professional community that enhances the teaching of your specific population (targeted college coursework, reading peer-reviewed journal articles, attending conferences related to your students' needs, etc.)?
- Can you provide an example of serving as an advocate for your students by encouraging inclusionary interactions or making modifications to school-based initiatives or activities to ensure all students are provided equal opportunity to participate?
- What steps have you taken as a professional to educate (with respect to privacy laws and

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

student dignity) building staff who may not be as familiar with students with special needs?

4e: Growing and developing professionally

Possible Guiding Questions:

- Are you a member of any professional organizations correlated to your specific student population?
- Do you subscribe to any peer-reviewed educational research journals?
- Are you fully aware and engaged with new instructional initiatives in local, state, and federal contexts?
- Growing as a professional often involves collaboration with others in the field of special education. Can you talk about some of your collaboration experiences this year?

4f: Showing professionalism

Possible Guiding Questions:

- Are you able to prioritize student needs and current research to guide your teaching despite the difficulty of situations that may arise? What if the current evidence-base directly contradicts traditional practices or beliefs in this area?
- Are you an effective classroom manager with all members of your classroom staff and guests in your classroom (PCA, medical assistants, TSS, BSC, related service providers, guidance counselors, family members, peers, visitors, etc.)?
- Do you consistently work to improve the competency of classroom staff by directly evaluating and assessing fidelity of implementation of procedures and protocols that lead to better outcomes for students?