

Competency #9 Reflection

There is absolutely no substitute for having a great mentor. The concept of having someone to ask for guidance, advice, and to bounce ideas off is a necessity for anyone wanting to better their own understandings. We learn this lesson early on in life from parents, teachers, and even from our peers. One simply cannot place a value on learning from another's experience.

Conversely, what then are the ramifications for having a sub-par or poor mentor? One can learn to adopt the practices of their mentor, continuing a cycle of negative results, or to learn from their mentor's mistakes, abolish them, and create experiences that will enable them to overcome the lack of sufficient modeling.

Fortunately for myself, I have been privy to having many admirable mentors, of whom I have, and continue to look towards for support and encouragement. We could look at my parents, teachers, coaches, and friends to see that I have learned priceless lessons on character, values, and doing things that will make others, and me, proud. I would also like to think that I have returned the favor to others throughout my life and career.

I have been a classroom teacher for nine years now. I have also had the pleasure of coaching high school athletics, namely basketball, during this time as well. I remember my high school basketball coach used to speak about the importance of surrounding oneself with quality people. I can safely say that during my career, I have had the fortune of being surrounded by exceptional colleagues and friends. In fact, it was one of my colleagues, whom I have the greatest respect for, who actually felt that I

should go back to school and get a degree in physical education. This person is our current physical education teacher, Jerry Smith.

I met Jerry five years ago, when I took a job teaching third grade in Cherry Creek. I knew right away that this man was a terrific teacher. He has always carried himself with dignity and class, and his students have benefited from this because he expects the same from them. Despite the fact that he has been teaching physical education for thirty two years, Jerry's energy and devotion to his students and craft have made him a cutting edge teacher, and a school favorite.

It was not long after I had come to this school that Jerry and I began to talk. Oddly, he had taught at a school for several years that fed into the high school where I was coaching. Jerry remembered students he had when they were in his elementary physical education class and asked about them often to see how they were doing in high school. Conversely, when I asked some of my players about Mr. Smith, they revealed at how wonderful a teacher he was and how greatly he impacted their lives. It was not long thereafter, that I knew I could learn a great deal from Jerry. However, like in most schools, everyone gets into doing their own things with their classes and time becomes less abundant.

It really was not until about two years ago when I was picking my students up from Jerry's class that he told me I should consider teaching physical education. At the time, I was finishing up another Master's, was busy teaching, coaching, being a husband and a father, to even consider such a thing. Yet, the next time I brought my students to the gym for class, Jerry again mentioned that I should consider teaching physical education. So, I asked him to elaborate on this notion. He basically told me that he

thought I was a wonderful teacher, and that physical education needed more teachers like me. He went on to tell me that I have high expectations for all of my students, do a great job of promoting healthy living, and have a way of relating to the kids that I come in contact with. He also said that like me, he too began his career in the classroom as a fourth grade teacher. However, he always had a passion for physical education and he saw similarities between us. I was pleased to hear such high praise coming from a teacher that I held in such high esteem. I went home that night and thought about what Jerry had said, and decided that I do love physical education, motivating students to do their best, and that I had the necessary skills to do a great job.

Therefore, I began looking for programs that would allow me to get a physical education endorsement. I also began making more of an effort to talk to Jerry. I figured if I am going to teach physical education, I should probably make sure I do it right. I started asking more questions, attending a few of the classes he was teaching, and trying to bring more physical education into my classroom. Jerry has been wonderful at helping me to understand more about the job. Unfortunately, I did not record our conversations until recently. I wanted to gain even more perspective and felt that by interviewing Jerry, I would be able to fulfill the requirements of the mentoring competency. This artifact is the recorded interview that I had with Jerry Smith, our physical education teacher and my mentor.

Originally, I wanted to sit down and talk specifically about curriculum. Because he has worked for thirty two years as a physical education teacher, Jerry has the timing and organization down to a science. I think that all of the greats make things look easy, but I did not realize all of the experience and knowledge that Jerry possessed when it

came to teaching physical education. He really understands what kids need to do in order to continue an active life beyond school. Yet, when we spoke, we ended up talking about much more than curriculum. He talked about assessment, collaboration, finding extra time, safety, and how it all comes together.

When we spoke about curriculum, Jerry was very candid. He talked about how he breaks up the year and how he is able to teach different concepts. Jerry did say that he found it easier when he was teaching at schools that were on the traditional calendar because he had more access to classes. However, on the year round schedule, Jerry teaches one class for an entire week, and then will not see that class for another four weeks after that (barring that they track off during that time, and then it could be even longer).

Jerry then presented me with the Cherry Creek K-6 Physical Education Guide. He told me that he has used this to help plan and implement various disciplines throughout his career and that it is a helpful resource in pacing his lessons throughout the year. The guide has various activities and lessons and Jerry explained that it was originally developed for physical education teachers by physical education teachers. He reflected that the district, at one time, really understood the importance of collaboration and he told me that he was often able to meet with other physical education teachers to discuss best practices and the development of their programs. However, he has said that recently it has become much more site-based and less collaborative, thus, less productive. He expressed that he would love to continue discussing these things with others in the field.

This led into a discussion about assessment. Jerry told me that he has seen a wide range of things come and go, but he has always tried to assess his students based on their abilities. He gave the Presidential Test as an example and said that everyone was doing it and then they did away with it. Jerry likes to evaluate his students based on how well they can complete their skills, how well they know their skills, and how well they work, as a part of the community, to enhance both their skills and the skills of those around them. Then he shared a handout he had recently received that showed how students in physical education, kindergarten through fifth, would be graded based on the same standards (he could not believe that it was written the exact same way for all six grade levels, showing no progression, and no variety in terms of benchmarks). He reiterated the importance of physical education teachers being able to unite so that their voices could be heard when it comes to passing these various policies. He also noted that he would continue to assess each of his students individually and based on what he deemed best, because what the district had outlined seemed too ambiguous.

Jerry and I revisited his thoughts about time being an issue. I have witnessed Jerry providing before school intramurals that would be the envy of most other schools. He has promoted and successfully implemented a jogging club, where students jog a certain number of miles and are rewarded with little mementos of their accomplishments. Jerry has also successfully implemented a Holiday Hockey tournament for the past several years. Students compete against other teams before school and are able to gain points based on the outcomes of their games. While these two programs have been wildly successful, they pale in comparison to Jerry's Jump-Arounds.

Every spring third, fourth, and fifth grade students put on a breathtaking show that involves a plethora of tricks and skills. He let me in on how he was able to start this program. Apparently, when Jerry first became a physical education teacher, a group from Boulder came to his school to perform. They were able to get Jerry on stage, and he had no idea what to do, but he was so fascinated by the program, that he decided that he would learn the skills and tricks, and that every year, his students would put on the show. I can say that thirty two years later, the show is amazing, and recently our students have been performing it at the Southland's Mall.

Jerry told me that his intramural program is vital to his job and cause as a physical education teacher. Without it, he may not see his students for weeks on end, and they may not be able to participate in anything that pushes them physically. He felt that his program allowed him to do more, much more, with less.

The interview ended with Jerry discussing the importance of safety. He told me that before he does anything in the gym, he asks himself if it is safe. Having the experience that he has had, he has seen students suffer some injuries in his classes. However, he knows that kids will do more, and will try more, if they are in a safe environment. I have noticed this on the numerous occasions that I have observed Jerry, and understand that this has to be a cornerstone in any physical education program. With that said, I realize that I cannot eliminate **all** dangers, but if I am vigilant, I will be able to procure a safe environment so that my students are able to master the skills that they are being taught.

While I understand that the idea behind competency nine is for me to share my newfound knowledge with other teachers, notably physical education teachers, I felt it

was equally important to have a mentor as well. Together, with my knowledge of the various things I have learned throughout my master's program with what I have gained from my mentor, Jerry Smith, I know that I am better prepared to be a Master Physical Education Teacher. I realize that it is my responsibility to impart these things on those around me to help further their horizons, as mine have been. It is important to continually learn from your own experiences and from those of others. I plan on continuing this cycle in a positive manner, so that others will continue to grow.