

Quick Tips

Best Practices in Supervising and Mentoring Teaching Teams: Self-Reflection Checklists and Guiding Questions

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The team teaching environment at DLIFLC is unique in many ways, not only with teachers' responsibilities and schedules, but also for supervising and mentoring. Supportive and knowledgeable leadership is crucial. It provides vision and builds efficient systems that encourage teachers to communicate openly, share in decision-making, and feel like part of the team. Successful leaders are trusted, foster a sense of safety, are authentic and willing to admit to mistakes, prioritize the well-being of the greater team, focus on a shared vision more than unnecessary hierarchies, and celebrate group successes (Sinek, 2014). They listen and understand how the opportunities and constraints of a workplace environment affect teachers' lives and sense of well-being, and they are knowledgeable about what teachers need in order to succeed.

In the 2023 1st issue of *Dialog on Language Instruction* (Vol. 33), we shared checklists and guiding questions that teachers can use to guide self-reflection and to create professional development plans. These tools were based on the results of a study we conducted in order to identify characteristics that make teaching teams consistently more successful (see Bikowski & Lim, 2022). In this current article, we share tools that supervisors in UGE (i.e., Deans, Department Chairpersons, Academic Specialists) can use to reflect on their skills in the areas of Curriculum and Teaching, Team Creation and Environment, and Communication and Decision-making.

Of course, supervisors face several potential distractions as they seek to lead and mentor teaching teams, but we hope that these Self-Reflection Checklists and Guiding Questions will provide a means for leadership to streamline the time that is available and focus on these areas, which have been shown to be important for teaching success (Bikowski & Lim, 2022).

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SELF-REFLECTION CHECKLISTS FOR SUPERVISORS

Supervisors can use the Self-Reflection Checklists in Figures 1-3 to reflect on their skills for leading teaching teams. Department Chairs can answer the questions at the department level as a unit of the team, while Deans can answer them at the school level. Use the three-point scoring system below when you read the checklist and write notes as needed. Remember, it is normal to find some things you can change for the better, and taking a few minutes every week to think about how you can do things differently with your team can save a lot of time in the long run.

3 = I excel in this area and can mentor or share practices/information with others.

2 = I feel competent in this area, though I have some questions or opportunities for improvement.

1 = I need more information or guidance in this area.

Figure 1

Leadership Self-Reflection Checklist: Curriculum and Teaching

Leadership: Curriculum and Teaching	My Score (1, 2, 3)	If you don't have 3 yet, what can you do to strengthen this element?
I know the curriculum thoroughly and provide curricular direction and support based on a shared vision and faculty input.		
I create a venue and online systems where teachers can share their activities and collectively look for solutions to common problems.		
I conduct class observations in a way that is supportive and collaborative.		
I engage in post-class observation discussions that are respectful and learning-driven.		
I provide professional development opportunities for teachers on topics they express interest in, and ones that I see the need for.		
I work to build teacher buy-in for new academic initiatives.		
I create an environment where teachers are willing and able to experiment with new and creative instructional ideas.		
I organize workshops as needed for students.		
I support teams in holding high standards for students in terms of discipline and academics.		

Figure 2

Leadership Self-Reflection Checklist: Team Creation and Team Environment

Leadership: Team Creation and Team Environment	My Score (1, 2, 3)	If you don't have 3 yet, what can you do to strengthen this element?
I consider various aspects of teachers (e.g., dialects, teaching styles, teaching experience, culture, communication skills, personality styles, etc.) to help create successful teams.		
I create venues or events to build team rapport.		
I create an environment in which teachers communicate, collaborate, and support each other.		
I create a venue where I acknowledge team successes (e.g., Team Leader award, Best Team of the Year, Team Leader Summit).		
I create a venue where I express my gratitude to teachers (e.g., Certificate of Appreciation, Certificate of Achievement).		
I help with conflict among teachers by using active listening skills, problem solving skills, and mentoring skills.		
I mentor teachers to work for the team goals and the institutional mission.		
I mentor and support rising leaders and model behaviors valued by the school and DLIFLC.		
I employ specific strategies to empower my teams to be their best.		

Figure 3

Leadership Self-Reflection Checklist: Team Communication and Decision-Making

Leadership: Team Communication and Decision-Making	My Score (1, 2, 3)	If you don't have 3 yet, what can you do to strengthen this element?
I design and develop weekly meetings that are effective and efficient.		
I communicate with C/MLIs, chain of command, and military units regarding student issues.		
After following up on student issues, I communicate with teachers as needed.		
I know how to bring out teachers' strengths.		
I know how to have crucial conversations with teachers regarding their performance and am willing to mentor teachers if necessary and appropriate.		
I listen carefully to teachers' wants and needs and include them and their inputs in the decision-making process.		
I include students' input in making major decisions in curriculum or scheduling, etc.		
I have a systematic process of reviewing all available data (e.g., classroom observations, I/ESQs, sensing sessions) to ensure that students are being included as part of the learning team.		
I develop action plans based on data analysis, implement them, and continuously reflect on their effectiveness to ensure improvement.		
When possible, I use bottom-up, instead of top-down, processes for decision-making.		
I practice asking probing questions that can promote critical thinking skills and help analyze the root causes of the problems in my teams, when needed.		

We suggest that you periodically review your responses by reflecting on your responses in Figures 1-3, ideally on a weekly basis. You may want to set your goals quarterly to measure your progress in your focus areas. Let your supervisees know that you are seeking their feedback. For example, you can offer an open door policy and encourage faculty to share any input, or place a “Suggestions, Successes, and Support” box where faculty can leave comments anonymously or with their names. Finally, you can discuss ways to develop your skills and knowledge by talking to your colleagues, supervisors, or mentors and by researching your field of interest. You can also use the questions below for self-reflection.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS A SUPERVISOR

Every week, try choosing one or two of the following questions that relate to your position to guide your self-reflection. Or write your own reflection questions. There is no need to push yourself too hard—small changes can accumulate over time and lead to improved outcomes.

Leadership in Curriculum and Instruction

1. Do I create events for teachers to share best practices at the department level or school level?
 - a. How do I collaborate with other department chairs and/or the academic support group in the school to bring new ideas based on teachers’ needs?
 - b. How do I minimize obstacles so that teachers are willing to participate in these events?
 - c. How do I show that I respect diversity among teachers?
 - d. How do I support teachers taking risks and using creative ideas in class?
2. What actions do I take to create a community environment where teachers collectively examine situations and explore solutions to issues and challenges in teaching and learning in my department?
3. If I feel like I need more information on a teaching topic, do I know people I can contact to get more resources and guidance?
4. What communication strategies do I use to generate interest and buy-in for new academic initiatives?
5. Do I conduct class observations that help teachers be their best and spread best practices? If not, do I have resources to ask for guidance?
 - a. Do I conduct effective post-class observation discussions with teachers that focus on self-reflection and professional growth with feedback that is specific, actionable, and timely?

Leadership in Team Creation and Team Environment

1. Do I consider a variety of factors when I create teaching teams (e.g., dialects, teaching styles, teaching experience, team dynamics, culture, etc.), as possible given the circumstances?

- a. What efforts am I making to minimize teacher rotations or disruptions during the course?
 - b. Am I proactive in communicating through my chain regarding my department's needs (e.g., staff changes, retirements/resignations, new classes, etc.)?
2. Do I show my gratitude to my teachers?
 - a. When expressing gratitude, do I praise specific things in a timely manner? Do I recognize the individuals in the department meetings?
 - b. Am I willing to make timely recommendations for various awards available for my teachers (time-off award, certificate of appreciation, certificate of achievement, teacher of the quarter, etc.)?
 - c. Do I create a venue to build team rapport through appropriate social gatherings? Do I know the regulations to comply with when creating such social activities?
3. Do I know how to address conflict among teachers and am I willing to do so?
 - a. Am I an active listener?
 - b. Do I know how to support individuals as they work conflicts to ultimately reach solutions?
 - c. Do I use my critical thinking skills to solve problems?
4. Do I have venues where I acknowledge team successes in various ways (e.g., Team Leader award, Best Team of the Year, Team Leader Summit, time-off-award, recognition by the CMDT)?
 - a. How do I express my gratitude to teachers (e.g., Certificate of Appreciation, Certificate of Achievement)?
5. How do I empower my teams and enlist their motivation for professional growth?

Leadership in Team Communication and Decision-Making

1. Do I make a conscious effort to ensure that my meetings with my teams are streamlined and productive?
 - a. Do I circle back to my teams when necessary?
 - b. Do I intervene in a timely manner?
2. Do I proactively communicate with C/MLIs, chain of command, and military units regarding student issues and update teachers regarding my findings?
3. Do I make efforts to bring out teachers' strengths and find ways that their strengths can best come out and contribute to the mission?
4. Do I have regular conversations with teams about their performance and when needed, do I know how to have crucial conversations regarding their performance?
 - a. If needed, do I know which office I should contact to receive further guidance (e.g., CPAC – LMER, SJA, EEO, Chain of Command).
5. Do I know how to listen actively to teachers' wants and needs?
 - a. Do I give my full attention when listening?

- b. Am I trying my best to engage conversations with appropriate body language, provide feedback when necessary, and respond professionally and appropriately?
- 6. Do I have a systematic process for reviewing all available data (e.g., classroom observations, I/ESQs, sensing sessions) to ensure that students are being included as part of learning team and making decisions in curriculum?
 - a. Am I willing to provide teachers with professional development opportunities based on their needs and interests, suggest that they add the relevant items to their IDPs and follow up with them on the process?
 - b. Do I have information on what professional development opportunities are available for my supervisees?
- 7. Do I encourage bottom-up processes for decision-making?
- 8. Do I know how to ask probing questions that can promote critical thinking skills and analyze the root cause of the problems in my teams?
- 9. Do I communicate my vision for the school/department? Do I communicate the institutional mission and near-term strategic goals to my teams?

CONCLUSION

We hope that these tools can be useful for supervisors across DLIFLC as they support teaching teams. Self-reflection can be a fundamental yet powerful tool for all individuals at the institution. Using the guiding questions presented in this paper, supervisors and managers can regularly look back on their knowledge, skills, and abilities to improve their leadership competence while mentoring their teams for success. Ultimately, when leaders put these into practice, a culture of giving and receiving feedback can naturally be rooted into the institutional culture of collaboration and development of the workforce. As we all work to further develop ourselves professionally, we can strengthen our collaborations within our respective teams and build student success across DLIFLC.

REFERENCES

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