1

Choosing the Best Strategies for Supporting New Teachers

"We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own."

Ben Sweetland

☑ STRATEGY 1: *Don't underestimate the rigors of the "induction" period for new teachers.*

What the Research Says

This study revealed that learning to become a mentor is a conscious process of induction into a different teaching context and does not "emerge" naturally from being a good teacher of children.

The study took place in Israel at a high school where the teacher-mentor worked as a teacher-leader within her English department. An English teacher in her 40s, with 15 years of teaching experience, was assigned a role as a mentor without any formal training. The research focused on one mentor and the process of learning to mentor to provide a more in-depth and substantial account of the subtleties and complexities of the process of learning to "read" mentoring situations.

"Reading a mentoring situation" in this context describes the forms and meanings that the mentor attributed to her first year of mentor induction. It is the case of how one experienced teacher in English learned to analyze one aspect of her learning in talking to mentor teachers of English about her formative stages of mentor induction experiences.

The metaphor for the mentored relationship is to compare the interactive process of reading, combining textual information with the information the reader brings to the text, as a dialog between the reader and the text. Thus we can interpret the mentor's evolving understanding of mentoring through the metaphor "learning to read the text interactively." The mentor as a "reader" is constantly interpreting and revising his or her own judgment of the meanings within the "mentoring text." This is done within the dynamic and unique nature of the dilemmas that the "mentees" face and manage. In the study's context, reading a mentoring situation could be interpreted as the evolving positioning of the mentor as she learned to reinterpret and reorganize her understandings of the dynamic nature of her practice. She learned to be more sensitive to the subtleties of the situation of her charge. This means knowing not just what any situation means but knowing what it means to the new teacher.

Application

What this research means to a beginning mentor is that learning to become a mentor is a conscious process of induction into a different teaching context and does not always emerge naturally from previous teaching experience with children. The study suggests that frustration, feelings of inadequacy, and uncertainties can be avoided by taking advantage of in-service opportunities or formal and informal "learning conversations" with fellow mentors mediated by more experienced mentors or mentors of mentors. The process of becoming a mentor reminds some of the development that new teachers' experience.

According to the research, the new mentor learns "to position him- or herself in relationship to his or her mentoring context by changing interpretive lenses as he or she encounters new situations." Further, "the various interpretive lenses the mentor wore, were characterized by transitions from initially being concerned with modeling her own teaching context in the new mentoring context, to concern for the way systemic factors (the technical and physical conditions of the workplace) affect the nature of the

collaboration between mentor and mentees." These concerns transitioned to a concern with imposing the mentor's views on the mentoring agenda and, toward the end of the year, how systemic and interpersonal factors operate to affect the type and mode of collaboration that develops in mentoring interactions.

Teachers may remember a shift in their induction experience from a focus on their own performance to becoming more sensitive to individual pupils in their classrooms. A similar shift was noted in novice mentors becoming aware that "not everything is for everybody," which signaled a focus shift from their performance as mentors to a focus on attention to the particularities and diversity of the mentoring context and helping their new teachers discover their own teaching style.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

The study cited noted a developmental phase in which the new mentors began to express anger and "blame the system" for the strenuous beginning stages of their mentoring induction. Not every experience mentors have is going to be successful in their capacity as a mentor. They never seem to have enough time. Realize that this is just part of the total experience that most new mentors experience.

Source

Orland, L. (2001). Reading a mentoring situation: One aspect of learning to mentor. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17,* 75–88.

STRATEGY 2: As a new mentor, be willing to exchange ideas with mentor colleagues as a means of professional development.

What the Research Says

Professional development often consists of short workshops and inservices for teachers based on needs perceived by admin-istrators and district office personnel. Professional develop-ment is something that is often done *for* or *to* teachers instead of *with* or *by* them. All too frequently this professional development may not enhance a teacher's classroom practice.

In a study exploring a group of teachers attending monthly meetings (McCotter, 2001), researchers found that it was possible to provide new and

meaningful ways to build support and collegiality enabling continuous professional growth and development.

Members met monthly to provide support and feedback to one another. Support was expressed in several ways: having the opportunity to ask questions and pursue feedback, the sharing of similar experiences, suggesting solutions or strategies, or just showing support either verbally or nonverbally. The most important characteristics of these monthly meetings consisted of a "What is said in here, stays in here" pledge, group and individual reflection and critique, seeking feedback, and all-important collaboration. Group members felt this type of professional development helped them to reflect on their practice and experiences and more importantly had relevance and purpose for their classroom practice.

Application

Clearly a focus in education today is providing meaningful professional development for all stakeholders in schools. Because beginning mentors have needs and concerns that experienced veteran/mentor teachers may not have, it is important for them to feel supported and have their problems taken seriously. Many teacher-mentor induction programs are now providing professional development specifically designed for helping their beginning teachers. These programs are based on needs assessments given to new teachers and on surveying teachers with a few years' experience under their belts to determine what kind of professional development would have been helpful in the first year or so of teaching. Based on this feedback, districts are tailoring programs to meet specific needs.

Many new teachers feel totally intimidated around their experienced colleagues and might be cautious, if not downright reluctant, to discuss problems or concerns for fear of being perceived as weak or not in control. When new teachers can get together in a group and share problems and concerns with their peers, they realize they are not the only ones experiencing these questions or problems. The support can be as simple as giving practical suggestions for solving situations in the classroom or encouraging new teachers to step outside their comfort zone and try a new teaching strategy. The collegial communities that emerge from this ongoing support and collaboration can be lifesavers to a struggling mentor.

The use of reflective conversations with fellow teacher-mentors, as well as a mentor trained in the art of reflective conversation, can also be of great benefit. This reflection should be more than just thinking back on a problem or lesson; it should operate with the purpose of changing one's practice and enhancing students' learning. By engaging in these conversations in a nonthreatening environment, the beginning mentor has the opportunity to perceive himself or herself through a new teacher's eyes.

The importance of collaboration with colleagues cannot be overlooked. It is one of the most important components of good professional development for beginning teachers and mentors alike. If mentors new to

the profession can share meaningful discussions involving a sharing of knowledge and focused on communities of practice, then as they progress from novice to experienced, confident veteran, the collaboration may well continue throughout their professional careers. The benefits, both personal and professional, to new mentors cannot be ignored.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

New mentors should be aware that professional development is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. So much advice (some good, some bad) may be thrown at new teachers during their first few years that they need to take care not to become jaded or overwhelmed. They would also do well to distance themselves from the veteran complainers who may see all professional development opportunities as a waste of time. These are the teachers who have taught the same way for the past 25 years, haven't had a new idea or instructional strategy in that time, and can't understand why kids and new teachers today aren't "getting it." Coming out of years of classroom teaching, new mentors might think they are equipped with all the tools and knowledge they will ever need to mentor new teachers. Often they will find themselves sadly disappointed.

When new teachers hit the "wall of reality" in their first classroom, an experienced and informed mentor needs to be there. Effective and successful mentors quickly discover the benefits of seeking out professional development opportunities, formally and informally, to continually evaluate and strive to improve their practice.
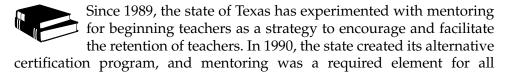
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STRATEGY 3: Look at the mentoring process as more than a one-on-one relationship between mentor and beginning teacher.

What the Research Says

Since 1989, the state of Texas has experimented with mentoring for beginning teachers as a strategy to encourage and facilitate the retention of teachers. In 1990, the state created its alternative certification program, and mentoring was a required element for all

alternatively certified teachers. In 1991, it was mandated for all teachers. In order to gain an understanding of the most current status of teacher mentoring activities in Texas school districts, researchers conducted a statewide survey that was sent to district superintendents during the spring of 2000. The data allowed the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory researchers to assess the scope, range of mentoring programs, mentoring activities, use of resources, and results. Data compiled represented 51% of all students in the state and 49% of all teachers. Responding districts reported student ethnic characteristics of 41% white, 41% Hispanic, 15% African American, and 3% other. Responding districts reported teacher ethnic characteristics of 72% white, 17% Hispanic, 10% African American and 1% other.

Two conditions that can contribute to first-year difficulties are the physical and social isolation that many new teachers experience (Lortie, 1975). This isolation varies but seems to be experienced more by new teachers in less effective schools. The Angelle study found that new teachers in less effective schools were more often forced to search for informal mentors for information and guidance involving all aspects of their professional responsibilities. In these situations they also labored to find their own resources, as few or none were voluntarily offered to them. In these less effective schools the main goals of the formal mentor were to "check" on the new teacher or observe and critique for assessment. There was little teaching, exchange, or sharing of relevant information or personal help given.

Application

It is critical for new teachers to surround themselves with exemplary experienced colleagues. In most schools, almost without exception, teachers work in settings where the sociocultural context, if not the actual physical structure, encourages little interaction among adults and can contribute to feelings of isolation and frustration. This can limit a new teacher's maturation and stifle professional growth.

A teacher's style is a very personal thing. Usually it is hard to find two alike on the same campus. Teachers are not made with a cookie cutter. As mentors develop an appropriate relationship with their new teachers, it is important to keep in mind that "style" is something that most people discover about themselves and is not something that is given to them. The mentors' job is not to create clones of their own instructional style; it is to help new teachers discover their own. The range of new teachers that are likely to be mentored may range from a 22 year old with no classroom experience to a reentry middle-aged change of career person who comes with very different life experiences. To mentor both at the same time, a mentor would not be able to treat them the same, as their needs vary.

In addition, what if the mentor's teaching philosophy differs from the new teacher's? What if the mentor starts to realize that the colleague next

door seems to match the new teacher's instructional style better? Mentors have to be strong and confident enough to understand that new teachers need a variety of role models and professional contacts from which to draw ideas and inspiration.

New teachers benefit from the support of other teachers, administrators, and higher education partners. Induction mentoring is best developed within a professional culture that favors a collegial exchange of ideas. Egos can get in the way of this. Mentoring a new teacher can be a source of tremendous satisfaction that some may not want to share. Be ready to accept the idea that a colleague might upstage some ideas. However, it is up to the mentor to *help create and encourage* this type of collegial teaching and learning including facilitating a rich and varied supportive professional environment.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Sometimes the hardest thing for mentors to do is to not offer their opinions or to accept the idea that their solutions are not the only solutions. Sometimes it is better to offer the new teacher a range of options and solutions offering choice. This is a very different concept than telling them what the mentor would do.

Sources

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STRATEGY 4: Encourage beginning teachers to look at conflict and tension as opportunities for personal growth and change.

What the Research Says

New teachers vary in their ability to perceive, grapple with, and resolve the normal conflicts and tensions that exist in the teaching and classroom environments. As identified in the research (Beach & Pearson, 1998), some new teachers avoid or minimize conflicts

and tensions by conforming to the system or authority figures in the workplace. Others are so overwhelmed that they find conflict and tension unmanageable, leading to a sense of loss of control, resignation, and futility or wanting escape from the system. A review of 16 studies (Beach & Pearson, 1998) on the effectiveness of programs fostering beginning teachers' reflections found that preservice and student teachers' reflections were primarily technical or practical, with little evidence of substantial reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995). During early student teaching experiences, focus is usually concentrated on conflicts and tensions to developing basic teaching techniques. Later in student teaching and into their first year of teaching, teachers shift out of their more egocentric modes of teaching, learning, and relationships to focus more on their students and their students' reactions to their teaching. In this study (Beach & Pearson, 1998), 28 students enrolled in a 15-month postbaccalaureate teaching program were required to reflect on their clinical experiences in journals and small-group interactions.

Application

Four basic types of conflicts and tensions were categorized in Beach and Pearson's research that are useful to consider. These categories can be used in helping mentors more clearly define areas of concern and consideration in helping new teachers. They are:

1. Curriculum and instruction: conflicts and tensions between planned instruction and actual events or between teachers' perceptions and students' perceptions of relevancy, or beliefs about their own teaching and curricular choices and school- or department-mandated curriculum and pedagogy.

2. Interpersonal relationships: conflicts and tensions with and among students, other teaching colleagues, and administrators. This category could also relate to a sense of personal isolation.

3. Self-concept or role: personal conflicts and tensions regarding the need to be accepted and well liked, the role ambiguity of transition from student to teacher, and the further definition of self.

4. Contextual and institutional: conflicts and tensions related to the expectations of the institutions in which teachers work, teach, and learn. This generally involves acclimation and socialization to the culture of school and teaching.

The same research also identified three levels of strategies for coping with conflicts and tensions:

1. Avoidance/denial: In the beginning, new teachers frequently describe their dealings with conflicts and tensions in highly positive terms. Some assumed problems would diminish with time so they avoided coping.

2. Immediate solutions: New teachers frequently generate short-term, quick-fix solutions. They defer tensions and conflicts between the cooperating teachers or students to the back burner. They only deal with issues when they are forced to.

3. Incorporation: New teachers accept their conflicts and tensions as a necessary part of growth and incorporate positive changes and alteration of class and management structures to better avoid conflicts or create clear, workable mitigation plans for students. Informal professional support structures are created and integrated into interpersonal relationships with colleagues and administrators.

Most veteran teachers have developed their teaching and student interaction strategies to a point where most points of tension and conflicts are avoided. A veteran mentor can look at almost any situation and identify potential problems and help their new teachers read and anticipate situations and responses in advance. It's nice to prepare a new teacher with *answers* before there are *questions.* Mentors should use their intuition to benefit their new teachers.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Good teaching is a continuous and exciting journey. If teachers think they will finally have it all down pat one day, they are mistaken. Unfortunately, it is still true that new teachers are often placed in a position of trial by fire. They are given assignments that more experienced teachers would never accept. It is common to have to teach in more than one room or teach a variety of classes, forcing the new teacher to prepare for multiple settings, disciplines, and ability levels. It is difficult to give advice for situations like this. In induction programs such as the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program in California, there is support for new teachers to limit the number of preparations, classroom changes, and involvement on multiple committees and coaching assignments through the first two years. It is ironic that the most inexperienced teachers are often given the most challenging assignments. Good planning and communication with all stakeholders help.
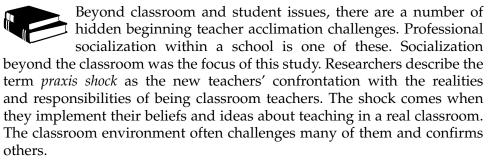
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> ☑ *STRATEGY 5: Use site politics as an induction topic and a consideration in mentored relationships.*

What the Research Says

Beyond classroom and student issues, there are a number of hidden beginning teacher acclimation challenges. Professional socialization within a school is one of these. Socialization beyond the classroom was the focus of this study. Researchers describe the term *praxis shock* as the new teachers' confrontation with the realities and responsibilities of being classroom teachers. The shock comes when they implement their beliefs and ideas about teaching in a real classroom. The classroom environment often challenges many of them and confirms others.

In this study, information was collected from 14 beginning teachers in Flemish primary schools with a minimum of 3 years experience and a maximum of 5 years experience. The data collected attempted to answer questions on how beginning teachers experience their professional socialization during their induction phase. Further, researchers looked into how beginning teachers confronted the micropolitical realities of schools during their professional socialization/induction.

Researchers described socialization as the beginning teachers' self-interest in

- Looking for self-affirmation or self-confidence
- Coping with vulnerability
- Coping with visibility

Essentially, the study found that teachers needed to feel successful both inside and outside the classroom for successful development of self-confidence and a positive socially recognized identity. If their social recognition is threatened by hitting their own professional limits, they feel threatened and vulnerable. This vulnerability is further increased by their high degree of visibility as new teachers within the school social structure. Visibility is particularly high, with frequent visits by other teachers, contact with parents, and contact with older students. Almost every teacher in the study strongly emphasized the importance of good relationships with other members of the school.

Application

The research clarified and put words to the self-evident presence of the micropolitical dimension of teacher induction. For the mentor, it points to the task of helping new teachers become more micropolitically aware, active, and helping them develop some micropolitical literacy within their new teachers. Mentors can help new teachers move from a reactive to proactive mode. Reactive strategies should be aimed at maintaining a safe learning environment or protecting the teacher from certain conditions. Proactive strategies are directed toward changing the situation or influencing the conditions, helping the new teacher anticipate problems, and developing solutions before they are needed.

Micropolitical action can take many very different forms in the reality of the social context. The analysis stresses that the goal of understanding micropolitics is learning to read situations and conditions through a professional eye. This involves understanding them in terms of stakeholders and interests and being able to deal, cope, or avoid them as necessary. Ultimately a new teacher will be able to develop micropolitical strategies and tactics in order to establish, safeguard, or restore their own work environment. Micropolitical reality for new teachers often triggers intense emotional discomfort, uncertainty, powerlessness, and sometimes anger. A mentor can turn struggle and conflict into collaboration and coalition building, replacing insecurities with meaningful interactions between a new teacher and the professional context.

Veteran teachers and mentor teachers usually know those in the school setting who have the formal and informal power to affect a teacher's working conditions. They also know how to get things done and avoid pitfalls and time wasting. They know the community, the administration, and how to develop and maintain political standing and currency. Some of this micropolitical literacy can only be learned by experience and some can be taught. A savvy mentor will know whether experience (with reflection) or direct early mentoring is the best strategy for learning professional socialization skills.

What is clear is that micropolitical literacy is an important issue in the induction phase of teaching. It is difficult for many teachers to understand the complexities of the workplace outside of the classroom and can significantly influence the next career stages.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

The cost of not alerting new teachers to the most effective ways to get things done outside the classroom can be huge. Parents, students, and others within the school environment can ambush

new teachers with problems they are not prepared for. The school bureau-cracy can drain confidence and foster insecurity. This is especially true with class management and discipline issues. All teachers want the sup-port of assistant principals regarding discipline problems. Teachers want protection from aggressive parents and misbehaving students. Most new teachers fear calling attention to their discipline problems for fear it will reflect on their teaching. They need to learn when to call for help and how to utilize the support avenues available to them. There are times in class management when problems need to be transferred to others once the teacher's system fails to obtain the desired changes. Mentors need to support their teachers in identifying these points and optional supporting pathways. Should the problem be a counseling or assistant principal issue? When should the teacher alert the administration to a possible parent call or complaint? How can a new teacher be professional, proac-tive, and effective in these situations? Mentors should have these answers thought out ahead of time in anticipation of needing options for their new teachers.

Sources

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STRATEGY 6: Mentally prepare for special challenges such as late hires to the school or new teachers taking over classes mid-year.

What the Research Says

In order to gain an understanding of the most current status of teacher mentoring activities in Texas school districts, researchers conducted a statewide survey that was sent to dis-trict superintendents during the spring of 2000. These data allowed the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory researchers to assess the scope and range of mentoring programs, mentoring activities, use of resources, and results. In the final chapter of their research, the authors made specific recommendations and identified a number of challenges from mentors. The following application addresses one of the major challenges faced by mentors as identified in their research: new teachers coming into schools and classrooms out of sequence with a September starting time.

Application

Coming to an assignment late or in the middle of a term presents mentors with special problems. The new teacher is likely to be especially needy. Ideally, new teachers have enough time to develop their own "best" guess for appropriate curriculum and instructional development within their level of expertise and ability. Coming to a school late or taking over a class midterm cuts out this important mental and collaborative acclimation time. A mentor can be especially helpful here in "scaffolding" support based on the needs of the new teacher and that teacher's assignment. The research identified these three scenarios as creating the most concern:

- Teachers asked to use unique or innovative instructional approaches in which the new teacher has no background
- The assignment of a new teacher to a subject or a grade level in which he or she has no experience or field preparation
- The presence of many new teachers, all of whom need some degree of mentoring

Ideally, in situations such as these and a few others, the mentor will want to move the teacher from day-to-day survival mode to more long-term planning as quickly as possible. The most common expression of novice teachers who are facing their own classes for the first time is "feeling overwhelmed" by their students, by lesson planning, by new responsibilities, by paperwork, and more. What can be done?

Lesson planning is the most obvious way to reduce stress. If the mentor or another colleague is teaching the same class, have the new teacher "piggy back" curriculum, lessons, and activities. This would not necessarily deprive a new teacher of the opportunity to develop planning skills; however, in an emergency it may be required. If the piggy backing can't be done, there might be some interim steps to take to help minimize the curriculum and instructional void. Most departments have some tried and true strategies that have been shared by teachers in the department. The more familiar the material and the situation, the more comfortable the students and the parents will be.

Second, veteran students at any school can make life very hard for new teachers, long-term subs, or replacement teachers. If the mentor is a respected veteran teacher and a mentor, he or she can help the new teacher by his or her association with the new teacher in front of the students. If the students see new teachers as part of the school team, they are less likely to view them as outsiders.

Class management is hard enough for veterans. By visiting new teachers' rooms during class, participating in team teaching, or offering some other types of visible support, mentors can help integrate new teachers into the school and department fabric. Remember, most new teachers are good with content, but class management and discipline

always offer the greatest challenge. They may have a plan, but veteran teachers know that as soon as the plan is articulated, the students will test it. New teachers feel the dilemma between being liked and maintaining discipline. Mentors know the school, the kids, and the general school behavior standards. They can help tremendously here by providing detailed help when student behavior and discipline become ambiguous for the new teacher. The simple act of looking over a class roster for potential "red flag" students can be a proactive rather than a reactive step in class management.

Also, every school has a discipline pattern between the classroom teacher and the administration. Familiarizing the new teacher with the management and discipline culture of the school can help acclimate the new teacher.

The bottom line is that mentoring is not always as clean as would be hoped. Mentors may be asked to respond to a less than ideal mentoring situation. By thinking about these issues ahead of time they can avoid some of the pitfalls of late planning. Ultimately, the students will benefit and everyone will feel more in control and empowered.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Mentors shouldn't assume things are all right because they don't hear from the new teachers. Time is a key here. Mentor–new teacher relationships are built during time together. Mentors may have a situation where new teachers don't ask for help for a number of reasons. Mentors should be careful not to let their opportunity to succeed slip away because new teachers don't ask for help. Mentors may have to be the leaders here and create space for time together whether new teachers ask for help or not.

Source

Mutchler, S., Pan, D., Glover, R., & Shapley, K. (2000). *Mentoring beginning teachers: Lessons from the experience in Texas.* Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Policy Research Report. http://www.sedl.org/pubs/policy23.

STRATEGY 7: Be aware that beginning teachers in less effective schools are at greater risk for leaving the field than those teaching at more effective schools.

What the Research Says

This study was designed to answer the question, does the socialization experience of beginning teachers placed in effective schools vary from those placed in less effective schools? To add to this, what are the processes effective in schools that account for these differences? And finally, what role does mentoring assistance play in the beginning socialization experience? The study took place in Louisiana and focused on middle schools. The terms and "profiles" of effective and noneffective schools were determined using a school effectiveness index covering many variables typical of school operation. Test scores, attendance, drop out rates, and other factors were included in the determination. In this study, *beginning teacher* refers to one who had less than three years of total experience.

It was found that less effective schools breed less effectiveness and more effective schools breed greater effectiveness, with inertia maintaining the status quo. Principals, mentors, and naïve beginning teachers did not set out to lead poorly, mentor poorly, or teach poorly, but the researchers found that the "health" or "illness" of the school culture transferred that health or illness to the community members who worked and taught there. It was found that the healthy atmosphere or the sick building syndrome had a direct impact on the socialization experiences of these beginning teachers and transferred to their intention to remain in the field of teaching.

Application

The results of the study speak volumes on the socialization experience from good mentoring (in more effective schools) and bad mentoring (in less effective schools) perspectives. Here are the characteristics typically found in both placements as described in this research.

Mentoring Characteristics in Less Effective Schools

- In less effective schools, new teachers were forced to seek out guidance and informal mentoring for procedures regarding day-to-day activities, knowledge of planning, paperwork, curriculum, and classroom management.
- Teachers were offered few resources and had to find their own.
- The activity of the mentor was largely limited to checking, editing, or rechecking the lesson plans or making critiques and observations.

Mentoring Characteristics in More Effective Schools

- Schools promoted mentoring from the whole person perspective.
- Mentors in more effective schools were proactive.
- The mentor took the lead in providing information ahead of time and worked with the new teachers much like an aide helping with paperwork.
- Mentors role-played as parents with the new teacher prior to conferences.
- Mentors role-played student management and discipline scenarios.
- Mentors met frequently with new teachers and sought them out rather than waiting for them.
- The principal's expectations for the mentors were that their role was a vital one.
- Mentors focused on the assimilation of their new teachers into the total school culture.

Individual mentoring perspectives depend on how mentors see their school. Regardless of how the school is classified, the key to effective assistance is in the extent of the support provided. Even in under-performing schools there are generally pockets of good teachers to draw mentors from. Mentors who find themselves in a less effective school may want to develop their mentoring skills to compensate for weaknesses in other parts of the school's environment. The sooner new teachers feel in control of their environment, the happier they will be. Merely providing support in order to fill the state mandated assessment was the norm in less effective schools.

Highlighting another important point, it was found that mentors at less effective schools were more likely to relate concerns about conflicts with their mentoring and be less than optimistic about teaching in general. Mentoring tended to fall low on their priority list behind their other duties. Full-time teaching loads were cited more often as a problem in providing mentoring. Administrative expectations for the mentors in less effective schools were cited as being limited to recommending or not recommending certification as the ultimate goal.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

In districts or schools that have no mentor training or formal expectations it is up to individual mentors to decide what they are willing to do. Mentors shouldn't rely on their own personal student teaching or new teacher induction experiences to serve as a mentor model (unless it was a really good experience). There are many proven models and guidelines out there. Mentors should seek them out and learn what they can add to their own vision and what already works for them.

Sources

Angelle, P. (2002). Mentoring the beginning teacher: Providing assistance in differentially effective middle schools. *High School Journal, V86, iL,* 15–28.

Orland, L. (2001). Reading a mentoring situation: One aspect of learning to mentor. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17,* 75–88.

STRATEGY 8: Integrate the principal into the induction loop as a key source of support and guidance for the beginning teacher.

What the Research Says

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of principals and beginning teachers regarding problems, role expectations, and assistance in the first year of teaching. The researchers wanted to discover what differences existed from each unique perspective about assistance first-year teachers wanted and what principals were willing to provide. Seventy-five elementary and high school teachers were surveyed at the beginning of their second teaching year. Forty-nine returned the survey. During the second stage, 75 principals were surveyed, with 46 returning surveys on their expectations for beginning teachers and the problems teachers encountered during their first year. This survey also included a look at what principals thought the components and methods of the first-year induction program should be.

Application

The expectations of the new teachers in this study clearly illustrate that principals are seen as central to the successful socialization and first-year induction of beginning teachers. Although much of the literature and research deals with mentor or teacher-to-teacher relationships, it is clear that principals are key figures in the eyes of the first-year teacher. Ultimately, it is usually the principal who holds the new teacher's fate in his or her hands. The principal decides if the new teacher is worth fighting to retain. Ultimately the principal also recommends upgrading a teacher from temporary to probationary or probationary to tenure. If the new teacher moves on, it is the principal who will write the letter of recommendation or make an important telephone call.

Within the research, the principals reported that their first-year teachers should be able to demonstrate the following proficiencies:

- A professional attitude
- Adequate knowledge of the subject area
- Good classroom management skills
- Excellent communication skills
- A belief that every child can learn
- A desire to help students succeed

The beginning teachers listed a variety of expectations that they had for the principals.

- They wanted principals to clearly communicate the prevailing criteria for good teaching and lesson plans.
- They wanted principals to explain what to expect and what the principal's role was.
- They wanted to be introduced to the entire staff, not just other teachers.
- They wanted classroom visits, feedback, and affirmation.
- They wanted to meet and discuss the culture, traditions, and history of the school.

The first principal in a teacher's career usually holds a special place in the minds of new teachers. The teacher may move on, or the principal might change, but the first one is the one who new teachers negotiate with first for professional working status. In many cases it's the first principal who influences a new teacher's career the most. They have a big say in what comes next for the new teacher. In the social structure of schools, the principal holds the keys to the resources and the teaching assignments and the power to make things happen. In contrast to new teachers, the power structure is just not the same for veteran teachers. Research on the subject is difficult to find, but principals seem to relate to those they hire differently (usually more favorably) than to those they inherit from their schools.

The principal plays a major role for new teachers in the first 3 to 5 years. If mentors believe in their new teachers, it is their job to facilitate a relationship between the new teacher and the principal. This is especially true if there is no more formalized contact between the principal and the new teacher in the school's induction process.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

Some mentors have egos that demand the full attention of their new teachers. They want to be the sole expert in their new teachers' lives. They are reluctant to involve others in the induction loop for

fear of "competition" with others that may conflict with the mentor's relationship with the new teacher. Diverse opinion is a good thing. Mentors should refer new teachers to others if they offer something special or something they are really good at doing. Mentors should observe the work of teachers respected on staff. Mentors should introduce new teachers to the school's best special education teacher and counselor so when they need advice they know who to go to. New teachers need to know who can meet their needs in the office and within the nonteaching staff.

Source

Brock, B., & Grady, M. (1998). Beginning teacher induction programs: The role of the principal. *Clearing House*, *71*(3), 179–184.

STRATEGY 9: Use job sharing arrangements to produce personal and supportive "co- or peer mentoring" relationships within the learning environment.

What the Research Says

This article provides a narrative describing the fifth year (first year of teaching) induction experience of two middle school science teachers as partners in a job sharing arrangement. The writers tell the story of their shared experiences as first-year teachers in the Southeastern United States. In their state, student teachers are allowed to accept paid teaching positions if they are enrolled in and remain enrolled in a fifth-year teaching program at a college or university. The two new teachers shared a middle school science assignment (one taught two integrated science classes and the other taught three). At their site, they were officially "mentored" by an assistant principal and "supported" by the department's lead teacher. In reality, mutual mentoring or peer mentoring by each other replaced a more typical mentoring arrangement, and the assistant principal served as an assessment mentor assuming responsibility for their formal first-year evaluations. The department lead teacher helped them with questions and issues they couldn't solve themselves, most importantly those to improve their classroom discipline.

Both women supported a philosophy of a hands-on and inquiry-based instruction strategy that was in line with the "student-centered" approach favored by the school administration (but not by all teachers at the school). The two teachers were compatible with each other for nonevaluative support through regular dialog with each other and as

familiar, respected, and trusted colleagues. Their shared philosophy helped them develop a productive "co- or peer mentoring" environment to buffer the sink or swim situation that existed for others at the school. The study showed how job sharing and peer mentoring, in the absence of a true induction program, could facilitate the induction of new teachers or student teachers.

The researcher (Eick, 2002) pointed out that while peer mentoring was productive in this case, these teachers could have benefited by more time with an experienced mentor or pairing with a second- or third-year teacher.

Application

While not directly a mentor strategy, creative educators dealing with induction could discover a model for new teacher success within this research. There are a variety and range of induction programs, student teaching, and preservice teaching arrangements throughout the nation's schools. Some are very formal and structured and others are very fluid and informal. Every district and school conducts the business of teacher induction differently. Eick's research model will not be for everyone, but it could be the answer for successful induction in some settings. The model could also be modified to fit the individual needs of a specific school or district.

Imagine pairing new teachers with a part-time veteran to fill a full time vacancy. This could benefit the new teacher and the person responsible for the master schedule. Pairing two student teachers would relieve the tension of a single assignment and offer them an instant collaborator usually long before the first day of school. For a master teacher or teacher-mentor, pairing two student teachers could help buffer the isolation and emotional needs of both teachers and free the mentor to focus on specific issues both teachers share.

While the cited model isn't for everyone, it does foster "out of the box" thinking regarding mentor–student teacher–new teacher arrangements. While teaching partnerships are generally rare, in this case it did foster collegiality and sharing of the student teacher experience. The classrooms of beginning teachers are fast paced and filled with surprises. Working with a partner slows the pace and helps level the ups and downs of that first assignment. Daily observation, dialogue, and reflection on practice increased the depth of their involvement. Their job sharing arrangement provided many supports that are not available to struggling beginning teachers going it alone. Finally, these types of relationships do facilitate and model the sort of collegiality that helps even the most veteran teachers in their careers from time to time.

Precautions and Possible Pitfalls

As with any "group work" in the classroom, educational mismatches in many areas can pop up. Student teaching and first-year teaching are filled with drama about right career choices, knowledge and experience, commitment, and life changes in general. It is easy to see thata mismatch could create as many problems as solutions, and careful screening of potential partners is important. A quick call to a college or university contact or other reference could help avoid these pitfalls.

Source

Eick, C. J. (2002). Job sharing their first year: A narrative of two partnered teachers' induction into middle school science teaching. *Teacher and Teacher Education, 18,* 887–904.