# Good a mentoring program for educators critical thinking example

It is now recognized that new teachers need mentors to help them transition from the classroom and student teaching experiences to the professional role of teachers and their new responsibilities. Whereas during their training student teachers were supported and forgiven for lapses or errors while under the supervision of a senior teacher, now these new teachers are required to take both the praise and criticism of parents, principals and superintendents. In addition, there has been a recently developed movement in the U. S. of teaching based on standardized testing to insure that each grade learns the same material no matter where the school is located. While initially intended to ensure all students across the country receive the same quality education the movement came to mean that teachers must teach to the test, limiting their ability to create their own curriculum. Many times teachers are also being held responsible if their class does not meet the minimum cutoff for scores. These factors and other frustrations have resulted in over half of new teachers leaving the field of education before they have taught for five years (Fischer, 2014). The frustration experienced by new teachers, led to the establishment of a mentoring system to help them adjust to the stress of the daily classroom, cope with frustration and limitations in terms of their own autonomy, and handle behavior problems and other student problems that can interfere with teaching.

A study conducted at the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching at Newcastle University (Lofthouse, Leaf, & Towler, 2010), examined what methods of mentoring most effectively helped teachers in the variety of roles they play in the classroom. The resulting report was comprehensive and detailed presentation of the various findings of this two year study. The

authors conceptualize mentoring and the importance of mentoring as

" Teacher coaching in schools takes various forms, but is commonly

conceived as a means of providing personalized professional support to

teachers through discussion about their practice. Coaching takes time to

organize and facilitate within any organization, and as time is precious in all

schools it is important that coaching, where used, works to maximum effect.

If all stakeholders recognize the characteristics of coaching from one

another's perspectives it is more likely that coaching will succeed" (p. 6).

The models the authors reviewed while creating their program had certain

characteristics in common. They were one on one coaching models, with a

few that used triads. The idea of a successful coaching experience was

based on rapport and trust between the mentor and teacher. Finally, the

coach was positioned such that they had the power to effect change in the

system based on recognized needs of the teacher which would generalize to

other teacher as well.

This last characteristic, ensuring the coach has the power to effect change, is

crucial since if the teacher is having difficulties based on the system, yet

they are unable to count on any change due to the static nature of the

structure, mentors can only help teachers accept what they are unable to

change and adjust to their negative emotions. This is not the role of a

mentor or coach since the presumption is coaches help the teacher grow and

learn how to work towards affecting positive change through appropriate,

accepted means.

The model tested focused on coaching which was differentiated from

mentoring. Mentoring was conceptualized as continued support through a

teacher's career with increased attention paid to major transitions. Coaching as defined by these authors was stated to have the principle goal " to support teachers studying MTL in aligning professional practice development in the specific context of their schools with Masters-level study" (p. 7).

The program that was put in place focused on many elements of coaching. These included planning, practice, creating a coaching climate, using video for review, scaffolding for skills building, types of speech used in the coaching experience, appropriate coaching patterns, co-construction of the coaching experience, balancing the needs of the institution with the needs of the teacher, understanding the practical demands of coaching and using coaching that focuses both on learning and teaching.

Another focus of coaching in education is mentoring principals. Again, many of these efforts are aimed at new principals but others are aimed at principals who have been in their positions for varying amounts of time. Many feel that just because someone has been a teacher for a long period of time and, perhaps, even served in managerial or administrative positions these experiences do not necessarily translate into the skills needed to be a successful principal. While there many teachers in a single school so that a new teacher has the opportunity to learn from more senior teachers, there is generally only a single principal so there is no one on site for that person to learn from.

In one program which focuses on newly promoted principals, Dowling & Walkington, (2004), emphasized the importance of mentoring during career transitions from a teacher who reports to a principal to a principal to whom others report. There was also a focus on comparing plans for the mentoring

relationship, building the relationship between the two individuals involved, and using feedback from principals being mentored to better inform subsequent efforts.

One of the main components of coaching models for principals is the setting or context in which the principal must function. A reason for this is that there aren't any other individuals who can supplement formal mentoring efforts with more informal types of mentoring such as modeling certain types of behavior or communication with students, other teachers and administrations. It can be difficult for principals who go from being a senior teacher to managing those who had been peers prior to the promotion. Yet there is no one on whom to model the requirements for the new position or to pattern new ways of interacting with teachers who are no longer equals. Sometimes by the time a new principal in this situation discovers through trial and error the best way to interact with teachers who were once peers, it is impossible to establish interaction patterns that will provide the basis for the most constructive relationships.

Often, either the principal has been too lenient so teachers treat the person as a friend and do not take instruction seriously or the principal has tried too hard to establish a strong relationship establishing their new position and teachers resent the person. Either way, it can be extremely difficult for a new principal to try to balance the effects of changes in relationships once taken for granted with the demands of the new job.

In Australia, there has been a general lack of good candidates for principals due to mass retirements of senior teachers. Dowling and Walkington (2004), point out that the lack of established and experienced senior level teachers

who can transitions into the role of principal means that mentoring efforts need to start far earlier than after promotion. These authors suggest that the solution to this crisis is to first put in place mechanisms to encourage exceptional professional to go into the teaching field then to mentor them such that they remain in education throughout their careers. Then, it is argued, that close attention should be paid to the pool of teachers to discern which teachers begin to emerge as leaders so as to begin mentoring them in such a way as to ensure retention and encourage them to consider administration or managerial positions. Dowling and Walkington (2004), believe this is the best way to provide continued quality leadership in the educational system in Australia in light of the current lack of sufficiently skilled leaders to manage this generation of teachers and help mentor them. This study showed that there were several changes that occurred for principals being mentored. Many saw changes in the types of support needed. In the beginning, principals needed a lot of confirmation due to self-doubt related to being in a new role and the need to establish different relationships with teachers who had been friends first and peers second. This need changed over time, as the need to know that the mentor was available for immediate feedback or to function as a sounding board or someone who would listen while the principal just blew off steam decreased. This need was replaced with a more balanced relationship where the principal contacted the mentor when there was an actual issue and not just to use for the purposes of emotional regulation as the principals grew better at managing extreme emotions related to the job. Once principals felt confident in their new positions, roles and interactions with teachers, principals and mentors

often alternated in terms of contact such that the relationship became more of a time for checking in than as opposed to serving the function of crisis intervention.

Principals experience a major difference in their mentoring needs compared to the mentoring needs of teachers who have other teachers around them in their work setting. Feedback obtained from principals indicated that they needed multiple contacts, especially at the early stages of their new job, since mentors were generally off site and might not be available when the principals felt the need to speak with someone. In addition, after promotion, principals often reported a sense of no longer belonging or being a part of the group even when promoted within the same school they had been a teacher in. Having multiple contacts who were also administrators also served the function of providing principals with a peer group they felt was now lacking in their day to day work setting (Deresh, 2007).

One program that seems to follow the recommendations of Dowling and Walkington (2004) is the Professional Learning Continuum, which is part of the Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate in New South Wales. The Profession Learning Continuum is dedicated to providing support and mentoring to school personnel through the various stages of their careers. According to the Directorate,

This Professional Learning Continuum provides a framework for professional learning programs and strategies to guide the development of school staff and those who support their work. The continuum begins with graduate teachers and continues to teacher leaders, school executives, school leaders and senior officers. There is also a continuum to guide the development of

School Administrative and Support Staff.

This is the exact goal recommended by Dowling and Walkington. This program focuses on the needs of school personnel from the time they are student teachers throughout their careers, focusing on leadership skills for use with peers or after the have been promoted. Teachers are supported from pre-service professional experience placements through employment orientation for a professional experience, professional accreditation and helping teachers establish a record of accomplishment in their practice. This program focuses on early scheme teachers, new teachers, professional teacher standards and teacher's study leave. The program also focuses not only on the teacher's own classrooms but other classrooms they interact with, the rest of the school and other schools. This emphasis from a very early point in their career, establishes a focus that is aimed beyond the classroom reinforcing the idea of school wide and community wide dedication. These are the building blocks of later leadership. Career development is a constant focus for all school personnel even those who do not aspire to formal leadership positions. Career development strategies and goals are determined through ongoing research. Research is also conducted to help identify ways that each individual can be a leader in their own way, whether it be within their classroom, school or community. In this way, the goal of mentoring teachers from just after graduation through accreditation and job induction to helping each school staff member to reach their potential as a leader in whatever way the choose to serve in this capacity (Professional Learning Continuum, 2006).

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