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## *Mentoring: Aim and Assess*

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Today was just like any other day for Cinderella at the swimming hole. Just like all the other days, she would continue to swim the murky waters alone, perfecting her strokes in hopes of reaching the distant shore. Unlike a host of other swimmers, she had to swim the deepest parts of the lake for Cinderella was new, and the more experienced swimmers knew the hardships of the deep water currents. They took up the shallow areas near the shore. She would learn just like everyone else—to sink or swim by handling the roughest waters. Thus it is for too many of America's beginning teachers. Just like our imaginary Cinderella learning to swim alone in the roughest waters, too many of our beginning teachers are learning to teach in isolation of placed in climates not conducive to developing effective teaching skills.

Though a number of states and local school systems have developed induction programs of one sort or another, there are still too many of our best and brightest beginning teachers leaving the profession. Too many are still learning to swim on their own; too many are still being evaluated and offered remedial help with little concern for the expressed needs of the situation or the individual's unique attributes. Too many programs are simply an orientation program to indoctrinate or simply another layer of evaluation, a deficit model which sees the beginning teacher as one who lacks specific skills and its role is thus to correct any specific problem areas.

Today, it is more important than ever to promote comprehensive, developmental induction programs which concentrate not only on orientation and development of strengths but on the situational, personal and professional concerns of our beginning teachers. Our beginning teachers need more than a dose of standardized pedagogy and evaluation of their mastery of the "golden rule". Our programs need to develop personal strengths and ideas to change education for the better, not stifling the creativity and idealism of first year teachers by legislating dependency on accepted methods and materials. It is time to take aim at programs that dignify, humanize and develop professional personnel who strive to master the art of teaching.

So what can be done to make the waters calmer for our Cinderellas? What restructuring of the swimming hole is possible that will allow Cinderella to perfect her strokes and swim the waters of today's classroom? Perhaps the single most important answer rests with fellow swimmers designated as mentors. One who plays a number of roles over time, roles such as a trusted guide, advisor, model, supporter, protector, challenger, opener of doors, confidant, and/or simple colleague. One who can facilitate growth in another by being positive, trustworthy, accepting, non-threatening, and caring. One who can communicate unambiguously and allow another

his/her own separateness. Perhaps it is the mentor who truly holds the key to the beginner's swim to shore. As with any educational program, basic questions come to mind when examining use of mentors in induction programs.

1. What should be the primary aims of a mentoring program?
2. How should mentoring programs be evaluated?
3. What are the characteristics of an effective mentoring program?
4. Who should be in charge of deciding?

These questions offer an argumentative framework for viewing various mentoring efforts and for analysis of issues associated with the diversity of programs. Answering and exploring the gray areas provides an avenue for defining the critical issues. Using this perspective, two critical elements in teacher mentoring and induction programs emerge - what should be the primary aims and how should the program be evaluated? From answering these two questions, the other questions are resolved.

### Take Aim

First, mentoring programs need to take clear aim at how they will interact with the early career teacher. In examining the diversity in programs goals, most mentoring efforts can be divided into either evaluative (where the mentor is part of the evaluative process for retention or certification) or developmental (where the mentor has no authority to evaluate but assists in the teacher's development based on situational needs). Because first-year teachers have different personality needs and behavioral tendencies which are illustrated in such factors as gender, marital status, age, parenthood, educational level, school placement, and other such factors and because each is placed in different school climates, it is apparent that for mentoring programs to be effective they will have to offer individualization and diversity through meeting both personal and professional needs. Following this logic, potent programs would base most of their interaction on meeting the situational personal and professional needs as perceived by the beginning teacher and not only on outside evaluation deficits derived from mentor observations.

As with any effective program, whether developmental or deficit oriented, the specific aims should be derived from a clear philosophical orientation and research oriented rationale. Though different induction programs delineate their goals in various fashions, effective programs contain part or all of the following aims. Clearly focused, effective programs typically:

1. Have a fundamental philosophy which recognizes the beginning teacher as one who has a set of skills and needs, and as a result of the program:
  - a. Develops, extends, modifies, or refines these skills;
  - b. Orients the beginning teacher to the school system; and
  - c. Addresses and meets the perceived personal and professional needs of the teacher.
2. Have a well defined set of rationales and goals.
3. Provide continuous year-long support from the pre-school orientation to third-year tenure through various organized support systems.
4. Use various personnel to offer a vast array of materials, instruments, and activities to personalize each beginning teacher's year.
5. Have mentors selected, trained and focused using current knowledge available about the beginning teacher.
6. Provide frequent support interaction and targeted topics to help the beginning teacher in adjusting, expressing needs, and developing.
7. Offer a large number of instructional and non-instructional areas on which the beginning teacher could focus when the need surfaces;
8. Not interfere with the school evaluation system but allow for the program to provide an improvement system for any weaknesses found in the formal evaluation.
9. Be able to show positive growth from the beginning teacher's own perceptions of skills and knowledge as well as other qualitative and quantitative data.

From this set of aspirations, influential mentoring programs take aim and develop mentors who can effectively accompany our Cinderella across the swimming hole. Through the program, they understand their roles as a swim coach and can personally facilitate the development of the Cinderella's swim strokes, realizing they can't swim every stroke at once. They have been trained and can help the Cinderella cope with the waves that throw her off course.

Because of the importance of continuous daily support through mentor activity, an effort is made by effective programs to train the participating mentors in specific interaction skills and research-based activities which could be effectively used with the beginning teacher. To help effective programs take aim, specific goals are usually established for mentor proficiency. For the training to be successful, the mentor should be able to:

1. Conceptualize the general characteristics, needs, concerns, and expectations of the beginning teacher;
2. Understand the components of developmental beginning teacher induction programs;
3. Interact and communicate with the beginning teacher in a non-threatening, supportive manner;

4. Assess and interpret specific classroom needs and problems of the beginning teacher using checklists, assessment instruments, and personal conferences;
5. Analyze, focus, and support specific teacher classroom needs using peer coaching techniques and conferencing;
6. Use data collection instruments in observing class activities to focus classroom observations;
7. Incorporate the personal, professional, and personality needs of the beginning teacher into activities and interaction;
8. Implement developmental activities that will offer the beginning teacher additional knowledge, skills, and attitudes for successful teaching performance; and
9. Serve effectively as a developmental mentor who can provide an orderly, personalized transition from preservice preparation to the first three years of teaching.

In essence, mentors should aim to be more than simple colleagues who occasionally help the beginning swimmer through the nuances of the American educational waters.

#### Assess

Next, mentoring programs need to clearly assess how well they fostered the development of the early career teacher. In examining this area of how mentoring programs should be evaluated, convincing programs offer both quantitative and qualitative data to illustrate to what extent its aims and aspirations were met. In order to assess, modify, and refine programs, it is important to construct an evaluation system which is multifaceted. Questionnaire responses and perception differences from both beginning teachers, mentors, and principals could be used to assess the program subjectively. Retention rates, teaching performance standard compliance, student performance, portfolio documentation, and quantitative positive growth from the beginning teacher's own perception of skills and knowledge could be used to show statistical data.

One of the most promising avenues for evaluating mentoring programs involves using the theoretical framework that each teacher is in a state of becoming and each tends to move through defined stages from a survival mentality to making an impact on every child. Numerous researchers have examined developmental stage differences of beginning teachers from different angle (Fuller and Bown, 1975; Hall and Jones, 1976; Pataniczek, 1978; Hunt and Michael, 1985; Cruickshank and Callahan, 1983; Hitz and Roper, 1986; and Smith and Sanche, 1993). However, one of the most promising examples of using a developmental stage framework to assess program effectiveness can be found in the Kansas Early Career Teacher Development program. This program is a continuous teacher training partnership between Pittsburgh State, Emporia State, Southeast Education Service Center, and 68 school districts in Kansas. Through its evaluation instrument, the *Teacher Needs Assessment Questionnaire (TNAQ)*, the program for early

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career teachers is capable of identifying developmental stages and illustrating group and individual movement from one stage to another.

Evolving from seven years of research and six statistical studies with over 700 teachers of various years of experience, the *Teacher Needs Assessment Questionnaire* was developed and a three stage theoretical base crystallized (Runyan, Sparks, Lipka, et. al., 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998). Designed to measure specific instructional and professional needs by examining the teacher's own perception of importance, mastery, and desire to improve on 49 given statements, the instrument numerically derives a Need/Desire (N/D) score which is used to establish individual need priorities. The researchers took the position that to establish a need there should be a perception that it is important, that it is not presently being done well, and there is an aspiration to improve. These need/desire scores could then be ranked and prioritized to help set target areas as well as track development through stages.

To trace progression, the program collects data on the beginning teachers development three times a year using the *TNAQ*. Using as a foundation the Fuller and Bown (1975) stages of survival, mastery, and impact, the instrument statistically uses the 49 items to show quantitative professional progression for early career teachers through three stages—Establishing Structures (Survival), Developing the Science of Teaching (Mastery), and Cultivating the Art of Teaching (Impact). In essence, by using a theoretical stage framework, the program strives to move each teacher from a survival mentality to making an impact on every child. These stages and their characteristics are:

#### **Establishing Structures**

- Acquiring supplies and establishing room layout
- Knowing school policies, norms and culture
- Building staff relationships
- Establishing classroom procedures and routines
- Setting rules and reinforcing them to gain respect of students
- Expanding subject matter knowledge
- Planning lessons for high time on task
- Coping with evaluation, other's opinions, and fear of failure

Knowing parents and opening lines of communication

#### **Developing the Science of Teaching**

- Using various models of teaching correctly
- Acquiring innovative techniques, activities, and ideas
- Asking classroom questions effectively and providing review and practice
- Providing timely assignment feedback and furnishing justification for grades
- Giving clear directions, illustrations, and transitions so classroom activities move smoothly
- Identifying learning styles, characteristics, and needs of class

- Providing sponge activities to keep students busy
- Managing time pressures

#### **Developing the Art of Teaching**

- Being novel, vivid, and varied in teaching strategies
- Achieving equity in monitoring, questioning and feedback
- Showing high expectations for every student and motivating all students to succeed
- Striving to meet the individual academic, emotional and social needs of students
- Developing consistency in enthusiasm, fairness and humorous disposition
- Being a role model who shows empathy, warmth, and respect to each student

By using the beginning teacher's own perceptions of need at various times throughout a three-year period and tracking the data, a program can illustrate each teacher's movement through developmental stages. This kind of developmental orientation holds great promise for inspiring mentoring programs to assess their performance and provide focus towards an end result.

So what can be done to make the waters calmer for our Cinderellas? One answer is to aim and assess developmentally. Programs must understand that not all Cinderellas dress the same or swim in the same pond; they don't all react to the same currents in the same manner. But because they are all swimmers they tend to learn the strokes in like manner, some taking more time than others, all hoping to have an impact on every child. By providing a needs-based developmental environment where there is positive, targeted, non-threatening mentor interaction, and by grounding much of its evaluation on the quantitative and qualitative perceptions of the beginning teacher as they are perceived in a state of development, a mentoring program has a good chance of penetrating the isolation so destructive in beginning a career and developing master swimmers who have the capacity to make a difference with every child.

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## ***A Letter from the President Regarding MWERA and the 21st Century***

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The Mid-Western Educational Research Association has had a stellar history, but its future looks very bright too. Yes, for nearly a quarter of a century MWERA has been a home for researchers, scholars, professors, teachers, and administrators. During this period of time, collaborations have developed, research has been shared, and good times have been had by all. As the current president of MWERA, it is obvious to me that these benefits will continue well into the next century because we're not just fellow researchers, teachers, and administrators, etc., from around the midwest and the nation, but we're all very good friends too. Truly, it has been said that the only thing better than aged steaks is ol' friends, and it's upon that foundation, i.e., friendship, that the Mid-Western Educational Research Association—and its members—will continue to grow together well into the next century, and perhaps long after that! So may we always look forward to the next meeting, hoping that it will be as good as the ones we've had, but we must keep in mind, however, that what really makes MWERA so great are our many positive interactions, and all the fun we've had, as well as the full realization that the best really is yet to come and that MWERA is not a fad.