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With a Little Help From My Friends:
A Course Designed for Mentoring Induction-Year Teachers

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Introduction

In the past 20 years, educators have paid increasing attention to the need for mentoring novice teachers within the context of the classroom. This has become a principal component of a number of both state-mandated initial certification programs and preservice teacher training programs (Huling-Austin, 1989a; Huling-Austin, 1989b). Some of this concern can be traced to the stressful nature of teaching which leads to nearly 50% of new teachers leaving education after teaching for seven years or less (Huling-Austin, 1989a). Given the increasingly complex nature of teaching and the demands for accountability by the many stakeholders of schools, including students, their parents, legislators, and business leaders, the stress is not likely to lessen for new teachers. In response, school districts nationwide are designing and delivering various forms of support for their new teachers. However, just because districts say they have a mentoring program in place does not mean that new teachers are provided with the support they need to become successful educators. In criticizing current mentoring programs, Little (1990) stated that many provide assistance but not true mentoring, partially because the mentors do not fully understand their roles. Therefore, to deliver on the promise of mentoring programs, planners must facilitate novice mentors in understanding their roles by providing them with both the requisite knowledge, as well as practical experience, that can help them grow into the complexity required of "real" mentoring (Bey, 1990).

The Legislated Need for Mentoring in Ohio

According to Rule 3301-24-04 of the Ohio Administrative Code for Teacher Education and Licensure Standards, all provisionally-licensed teachers in Ohio will soon be required to successfully complete an entry year program prior to being issued their first professional license. According to the standards, this program will include "a formal program of support, including mentoring to foster professional growth of the individual" (p. 8). Because this standard will be in place in less than three years, districts are beginning now in planning to meet this new demand being placed upon them. They are determining the designs of their mentoring program, how they will select and identify mentors, and how mentors will be trained and supported, in addition to many other concerns. Guidelines are minimal, and the implementation of most decisions remain local concerns. Because education faculty in Ohio have been working on redesigning our own programs for the past 18 months, we are certainly more aware of the ramifications of these standards on new teachers and the districts that hire them. It is because of this knowledge that those of us in higher education can provide a valuable service to local school districts by helping them design mentoring programs that will be contextually-sensitive and meaningful for the teachers who must carry out the job of continuing to support the teachers that we are sending out of teacher preparation programs.

In designing the mentoring program that will be described, several principles helped guide the process. First, it was important to go in as a collaborator rather than director of the program. That meant that it was important that the voices of the teachers, so often acted upon by higher education faculty and institutions, were parties to the design. Second, the delivery of the program must be interactive and meaningful for participants, consistent with the paradigm shift being experienced in staff development. Finally, since this was this district's initial effort at establishing a formal mentoring program, the design must meet the differing needs of novice mentors and induction-year teachers (see Figure 1). The original proposal of the course, therefore, was based upon two equally important principles: 1) that novice mentors must gain skills and knowledge to provide their proteges with substantive feedback within a supportive, non-threatening atmosphere in order to grow into their professional responsibilities; and 2) that current teachers and administrators needed to provide induction-year teachers with information that will promote their "survival" within the culture of the school.

Collaboration Among School—Higher Education Partnerships

In early October of 1998, I was approached by Pat Murphy, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the North Royalton City School District in Northeastern Ohio, to do a Pathwise training session for them. They had recently received a Peer Assistance and Review Pilot grant for a planning year to train mentors to support their induction-year teachers beginning in the 1999–2000 school year. As Pat and I spoke, we became aware that there were greater possibilities for designing a professional development program for their teachers than just the two-day workshop for which she had contacted me. Based on our conversations, I offered to draw up a proposal that Pat and the grant review committee, made up mostly of teachers, would consider. Shortly after this initial meeting, I proposed, and the committee accepted, the general outline of a two-graduate-credit course—Mentoring Induction-Year Teachers—as meeting their needs. At that point they called me in to discuss the proposal in more detail.

College and university faculty are often seen as threatening to teachers; certainly they threaten the autonomy of the teachers who were initially trained by faculty from the college. This teacher-learner/expert-novice relationship, a phenomenon in schools that Smith (1983) refers to as "soft-core ignorance" (p. 3), is often perceived by teachers (and projected by professors) even when unintended. Historically, research faculty have tended to treat schools and teachers as **subjects of**, rather than **partners in**, their projects. As such there is often a great deal of "baggage" that must be dealt with before a mutually satisfactory relationship can be established. This was not the situation into which I walked. The teachers and administrators on the committee had a vision of what they wanted to accomplish, but they needed some guidance. After meeting and stating their views and listening to my vision, they took a leap of faith, willingly relinquishing most of the control for the planning of the course based upon our apparent shared visions for both design and delivery. One point upon which we all agreed was that this was a program designed especially for them.

New Roles for Staff Developers

In developing programs designed to meet the needs of individual districts, staff developers, including those of us who teach in higher education, must be willing to explore new roles. To foster meaningful change in educators, staff developers must provide opportunities that "not only . . . affect the knowledge, attitudes and practices of individual teachers, administrators, and other school employees, but it also must alter the cultures and structures of the organizations in which these people work" (Sparks and Hirsh, 1997, pp. 2-3). The change in staff development inherent in this quotation presents itself in different ways of "doing business" for developers. Sparks and Hirsh discuss the implications of this paradigm shift by acknowledging that the practices they describe are currently being used more than traditional methods, and they argue that the most critical consideration is matching learning processes to the goals of the program.

In order to best match the business of staff development with the learning process and goals for this program, we took into account several of the shifts to which Sparks and Hirsh referred. First, the course was delivered on site rather than at the college. Second, the workshops avoided the typical "sit and get" method of staff development and were built upon constructivist principles, providing participants with opportunities to interact with content, presenters, and each other. Finally, the mentoring program itself represents a systemic change for the educators in this district. This requires that individuals at all levels develop new ways of looking at what it means to do their jobs effectively. While the training itself will aid the individual development of participants, ideally it will also provide them with the cognitive orientations to guide the change process as the district takes more responsibility for developing their new teachers and changes their practices in clinical supervision.

The Program

What began in the discussions previously described has turned into a year-long relationship in which teachers, administrators (both central office and building), and higher education faculty from three institutions have come together to collaboratively deliver a two-semester-hour course, Mentoring Induction-Year Teachers, mentioned previously. While the work still continues, the remainder of this paper will present the general format of the course and some of the process in which we engaged as we continued to modify it to meet the needs of the prospective mentors.

Providing Substantive Feedback for the New Teacher

Prior to their first jobs, the experiences of induction-year teachers will be as diverse as the individuals in terms of the support they have been provided. During the student teaching process, however, all of them will have had at least the support of two professionals: their cooperating teachers in the school and their university or college supervisors. Though even the support here may be quite varied, it is more than most new teachers will receive after they sign their first contract and are expected to live up to all of the expectations of a teacher within the building. It is also highly likely that, given the busy-ness of the opening of school, they may not see another professional in their rooms until several weeks or months have passed. Under these circumstances, and with few experiences upon which to base their judgments, it is not surprising that new teachers may not know how they are doing.

In trying to fulfill this responsibility to new teachers, though, a second problem arises. Unless mentors develop the necessary skills and knowledge to provide new teachers with substantive feedback on how they are doing, a mentoring program may do more harm than good (Bendixen-Noe and Giebelhaus, 1997). The mentors, therefore, need to be provided with training and knowledge to understand both the function of mentoring and the process (Head, Reiman, and Thies-Sprinthall, 1992). To do that, we took a two-step approach. First, we provided teachers with a framework, the Pathwise Performance Assessment (Educational Testing Service, 1995), that identifies teaching behavior based upon a researched knowledge base (Dwyer, 1994). After training prospective mentors to use the Pathwise system, we focused on developing skills in cognitive coaching (Costa and Garmston, 1994) that they could use to implement this framework with a protege.

Using Pathwise to Begin a Conversation on Teaching and Learning. As I talked with the teachers who had volunteered to participate in the mentoring program, I discovered something that I suppose I had always known but that the discussion underscored for me: Teachers do not necessarily share a common language that allows them to talk about teaching and learning. Lest this be misinterpreted, let me add that the teachers who participated were all accomplished professionals who could speak eloquently about the teaching and learning that were taking place within their grade level and/or discipline. Most of them had also worked with student teachers previously, so they had some experience in interpreting the subtleties of a classroom with a novice professional. What they lacked, however, was a comfortable way into the conversation about what good teaching looks like. To facilitate these discussions, we chose the Pathwise Performance Assessment (Educational Testing Service, 1995).

Pathwise is a framework that delineates the characteristics of effective teaching into four domains: planning, creating a learning environment, teaching for student learning, and professionalism. Each of these domains is further broken down into criteria that reflect the effective teaching research knowledge base (Dwyer, 1994). Over the past three years the Ohio Department of Education, in preparation for the previously-mentioned mentoring component of new licensure requirements, has coordinated and facilitated the training of thousands of teachers who have become certified Pathwise observers.

The training consists of two intensive all-day workshops in which teachers learn about the characteristics of the different criteria through readings, direct instruction, collaborative inquiry and general discussion. These activities are designed to assist teachers in constructing an accurate conception of each domain and identifying positive and negative exemplars of teacher and classroom behaviors that indicate a new teacher's skill level under the standards within each domain. In addition to building the knowledge base, over the course of the two days, teachers engage in numerous simulations, by following teachers' sample paper trails under planning and demonstrating professionalism, as well as simulating the observation experience by watching videotapes of lessons. During these videos, the trainees practice gathering the evidence they will need to document teachers' adeptness at creating learning environments and teaching for student learning. They also practice writing summaries that accurately capture the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers' lessons and making suggestions that reflect these same strengths and areas of concern. In the process, the trainees learn about the forms that PRAXIS III assessors will use as they evaluate new teachers for their initial professional licenses.

After they finished the Pathwise training, which was done on consecutive days, the mentors were given three weeks in which to do an observation of another teacher using the framework. Recognizing the amount of paperwork involved and not wanting to put that on their peers, some chose to observe each other. Others decided to collaborate on an observation, having two or three observers enlist one teacher's cooperation. This not only limited the number of teachers that had to be recruited but also allowed the novice observers an opportunity to provide and receive feedback from each other based upon a common source. Regardless of how they did their observations, teachers came back at the end of the three weeks and participated in a debriefing. The session reinforced evidence-gathering procedures and the documentation process, provided further practice in the writing of domain summaries and suggestions, and allowed teachers the opportunity to discuss the process with each other and a certified Pathwise trainer. While this provided a general framework for the meeting, one intent of the debriefing was to model the mentoring process, allowing the concerns of the novice observers to drive the session and providing them with feedback on their own performances as they used the framework for the first time.

Overwhelmingly, teachers commented positively on the concreteness and clarity of the criteria (Salzman, 1999). They reported that Pathwise compelled them to focus on the characteristics identified in the framework as they watched teachers' lessons. In the words of one teacher, the "framework requires you to have **evidence** which takes out any 'bias' you may have. It allows you to be objective." Another teacher, who also cited the objectivity, added: "It also helps the teachers being observed know what things they are doing well." While the structure provided by the framework was cited positively, teachers expressed concern about their ability to accurately document teachers' actions and words under the appropriate criteria. Of course, this is a typical concern of using any newly-learned system or skill and will fade with continued use of the framework. A greater concern of teachers, though, and one that could not be addressed by continued use of Pathwise, was summed up by one who said "There is so much uncertainty about what being a mentor would entail—how I would spend my day, how I would help the mentees . . ." It is this concern that led to the next series of workshops.

Using Cognitive Coaching to Support New Teachers' Development. Prior to their Pathwise observation, not one of the teachers reported having been in a colleague's classroom to observe a teaching episode in the past five years at least. As a group, they indicated they did not feel comfortable entering their colleagues' rooms to watch. For most, the Pathwise observation seemed to shake loose some of that anxiety and provided teachers with a structure to begin to talk with their colleagues about teaching and learning. And with this concern aside, teachers started to focus on the bigger picture of mentoring. In responding at the debriefing session to concerns at this point about being a mentor, one elementary teacher stated: "Would I be able to develop a rapport with the teachers I observe? . . . As a mentor, I want to be a partner in teaching as well as a resource of assistance." This attitude of "partner-ing" provided the ideal starting point for teachers as they acquired the skills and learned processes that would enable them to coach their proteges' development.

The term coaching has been used often to describe a cycle of events, similar to teacher evaluation through clinical supervision, that includes a pre-conference interview, observation of a lesson, and post-conference interview. While there are many models available, we made the decision to use cognitive coaching (Costa and Garmston, 1994), partially because of the resources (Costa and Garmston, 1988; D'Arcangelo and Wurzburg, 1988) available to help novice mentors visualize and simulate the process. We also modified this model somewhat, choosing to add mini-presentations: one on current mentoring research, which was integrated throughout the workshops, so that participants could see how cognitive coaching fits into the mentoring landscape; and one on adult learning theory to sensitize participants to some of the learning needs that their colleagues might have that mentors will need to meet.

Cognitive coaching (Costa and Garmston, 1994) is organized around three major goals: building trust between coach and colleague; facilitating mutual learning; and enhancing growth toward holonomy, which is described as "individuals acting **autonomously** while simultaneously acting **interdependently** with the group" (p. 3). Teachers began their work toward realizing these goals by participating in two 3-hour workshops. Session one dealt with developing trust-building and questioning skills. Session two provided mentors with practice in responding to and empowering their proteges. Each of the sessions provided participants with exercises, videos, discussions and simulations of coaching experiences. Whenever possible, as facilitator I made explicit connections between the development of these coaching skills and how to use them in conjunction with the Pathwise framework.

Most participants came into the cognitive coaching sessions not knowing exactly to what they would be exposed. They had not necessarily heard of cognitive coaching and, of those who did express an opinion on what they expected, most merely said that they anticipated that they would learn a "method of mentoring" or words to that effect. During the sessions, a number of the teachers stated that the rapport building skills of matching gestures and tone, as well as some of the questioning techniques, seemed like they were "common sense" reminders of things that one normally does with someone with whom one shares a rapport. One of the dynamics that appeared to be taking place during the training was that the participants had all bonded with each other and felt a high level of comfort and trust. That familiarity and comfort, a real positive in most ways, also seemed to make it difficult for some to initially see the usefulness of some of the techniques in the exercises. For instance, the exercises that involved attempts to build trust were difficult for some to take too seriously because the group as a whole had already developed trust among each other. As we processed the various simulations and examples, though, most participants recognized that knowing these techniques would provide them with strategies that should prove helpful to use with someone with whom they have no prior relationship. It appeared that the opportunity to discuss how the strategies could be used in a mentoring relationship seemed to be especially beneficial for most of the prospective mentors.

Though there seemed to be some initial resistance to the "common sense" nature of some of the coaching sessions, afterwards participants cited several components that were meaningful to them. Almost to a person, they identified the trust building skill of paraphrasing and the questioning skill of presupposition as being especially powerful for them to use in working with a new teacher. One participant stated that she had gained a "deeper understanding of the power of language (both verbal and body) in communication between mentor and mentee. Even the simplest statement can be a presupposition and be taken negatively by the recipient." Several others said they appreciated the positive spin that cognitive coaching techniques took on the mentor-protege relationship. One stated that she found that knowing about presuppositions allowed her to go into a mentoring relationship having an "attitude that this is a good teacher and therefore not putting [that person] on the defensive." And, even though many resisted the trust-building exercises as being common sense, the majority of participants also stated that those techniques would be among the ones that they perceived as being of most use to them as they establish their own mentor-protege relationships.

One unplanned and certainly unintended benefit to many of those who went through training was that they saw immediate benefits of the coaching sessions on their own teaching practice with their students. One summarized this position when she said that she thought "many of the strategies (rapport building, presuppositions, etc.) will be helpful to me in my own classroom when working with students and dealing with parents." Echoing that comment, another teacher said she had gained "a better understanding of myself and how I have been relating to [my] students." One other said she would be a "better listener" in both her classroom responsibilities and as a possible mentor. Finally, almost every respondent in their post-coaching feedback said that what they still need to do is to use these techniques and have "time to practice so that [they] become internalized."

Helping the New Teacher Survive

Both the Pathwise framework and the cognitive coaching techniques were perceived by participants as powerful tools for them to use as future mentors. From the proposal and our initial discussions, however, all parties agreed that the capstone component of the course would allow prospective mentors to develop mentoring handbooks. Though this would be the last thing we do, it was one of the pieces of the proposal to which planning committee members responded most enthusiastically. As of the date of submission of this article, teachers had not yet engaged in this process, so it is difficult to determine exactly what form these documents will take. However, based on nearly ten years of developing mentoring programs, Bercik (1998) offers a number of suggestions that will guide this process. First, she suggests that handbooks need to be sensitive to the culture of the school. Because of this, it is probable that each school's mentoring handbook will likely look different. Currently teachers are brainstorming ideas for items and information that they may include, and they appear to be settling on handbooks that contain two sections: 1) a section that describes the mentoring program in general terms, explaining the roles and responsibilities of both mentors and induction-year teachers; and 2) a section devoted to the individual school. This latter section may include information about the school and district and/or lists of resources and expertise of individuals on staff and in the community. It could also be used to collect forms (e.g., IEPs, media requests) and assemble information (e.g., protocols for field trips or accessing a materials budget) that new teachers will find helpful and/or necessary to know in order to concentrate more fully on their planning and teaching.

As teachers are engaging in the series of workshops designed to prepare them for their mentoring roles, they are gathering documents, considering the information they want to include, and formulating mission and policy statements. The final scheduled meeting of the course is a work session that will allow teachers to begin to compile and format the materials on which they are working. Teachers recognize that they cannot anticipate everything that a new teacher will need but they are looking to have a document that can ease the transition for their newly-hired peers. They also recognize that this handbook is a dynamic and fluid document that will continue to grow as the program grows.

Summary

Ringo Starr sang that he could get by "with a little help from [his] friends," and that is what new teachers are asking of their mentors as they begin the difficult task of being inducted into the teaching profession. New mentors will probably be asking the same question, especially as they work to overcome their own anxieties about the awesome and uncomfortable task of coaching their peers' development as teachers. Certainly that is the refrain I sang as I embarked on this odyssey, and I was fortunate that old friends and new stepped forward to help me, collaborating with me as we designed a program intent on helping good teachers mentor their colleagues into being good teachers, too.

It is naive to think that in the course of 30 contact hours that novice mentors will come away as fully-functioning super mentors, capable of leaping tall stacks of curriculum guides in a single bound. Also, as this is still a work in progress, there is much work yet to be done. The beginning, however, is encouraging for all involved. District personnel, especially the teachers who will be on the front line of the mentoring process, have had opportunities to shape the design of the program. To this point, the teachers in North Royalton have interacted in significant ways with the concept of mentoring and looked at teaching and learning through the lens of the Pathwise framework. They have also considered how they will use the techniques provided by cognitive coaching to empower their proteges as these new teachers develop into self-directed and autonomous teachers in their own rights. As of this writing, they were preparing to write and compile the document that will guide, and upon which they will begin to measure the success of, their initial efforts. They recognize that this is their starting point. Though none of us can yet anticipate the future needs of the participants, teachers can build on this effort as they search for the external and internal sources of assistance that can lead to significant changes in the districts' support for new teachers.

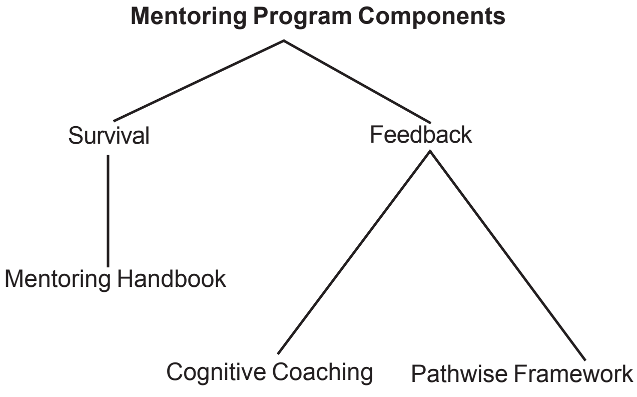

Figure 1. Guiding Principles for Planning a Mentoring Program

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