Center for Inspired Teaching

Students, teachers, and schools achieving their full potential

INSPIRED ISSUE BRIEF:
INVESTING IN TEACHERS THROUGH MENTORING

Teacher mentoring is an individualized form of professional development that involves a holistic approach to personal improvement. Once an unfamiliar and primarily optional form of support, states and districts increasingly require mentoring programs for initial teacher certification.

Teacher mentoring begins with the establishment of a relationship, usually between a novice and a veteran instructor that has experience teaching in the same environment or grade level as the mentored teacher. Unlike traditional professional development, which often involves outside figures, large groups, formal presentations, and lacks follow-up, mentoring is a one-on-one undertaking, and is more often informal and ongoing. While programs vary from casual, friendship-based relationships to closely controlled, district-wide reforms, the duties of mentors generally include meeting with, observing, and corresponding with new teachers. Mentors may also model effective teaching, provide information about current educational practices, help teachers collaborate with colleagues, offer specific critiques, and provide moral support. The overall goals are to improve teacher effectiveness and satisfaction, which then also result in higher student achievement, lower teacher attrition, and a learning experience for the mentor as well as the teacher.

Center for Inspired Teaching has provided mentoring for teachers in DC public schools and public charter schools since 2000, and the program continues to expand and improve. The Mentoring and Teacher Empowerment Program sets up yearlong partnerships between carefully selected classroom veterans and teachers, both novice and experienced. Mentors pay frequent visits to teachers and communicate via phone and email, providing tailored feedback, emotional support, problem solving, and encouragement. Mentors also help teachers create innovative classrooms that ensure active, meaningful learning through questioning, critical thinking, and less time spent on discipline. Inspired Mentors act as a critical*ó* friend, helping Inspired Teachers deepen their practice.

This Inspired Issue Brief presents the findings of many sound research studies that have investigated teacher mentoring as a form of professional development.

Teacher mentoring programs have been shown to lead to real improvements in the classroom-- better instructional practices, higher student achievement, and more positive attitudes.

A New Teacher Center report shows that students whose teachers received strong mentoring support make bigger gains in reading than those from unmentored classrooms. In their comparison of approximately 100 new teachers in three school districts, NTC found that when these teachers received two years of support from mentors, their students made gains comparable to those of the students of veteran teachers on the SAT-9 achievement test. Students of new teachers that did not receive mentoring made much smaller gains. Additionally, full-time mentors with caseloads of no more than 15 teachers were linked to much higher student gains than mentors with less time or larger caseloads. These findings show that not only does mentoring lead to increased student achievement, but the more comprehensive and frequent the mentoring, the better students, and teachers, do.

Strong, Michael. 2006. Does New Teacher Support Affect Student Achievement? Some Early Research Findings. Santa Cruz, CA: New Teacher Center.

A mentoring program for elementary school science teachers led to improved student achievement and attitudes in science, as well as growth in teacher's confidence and knowledge about their subject. Seven teachers underwent an intensive two-year mentoring program in which they were paired with veteran teachers whom they could observe, plan lessons with, and look to for professional support. The program was then evaluated based on changes in student viewpoints, test scores, and teacher practices. Findings showed positive differences in pre-and post test scores for students' attitudes and achievement, and teachers considered themselves more confident and eager to take risks. Additionally, all seven teachers volunteered to become mentors the following year.

Pickett, Linda H. and Barry J. Fraser. 2002. The Role of Learning Environment, Achievement, and Student and Teacher Attitudes in a Science Mentoring Program for Beginning Elementary School Teachers. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Educational Research (New Orleans, LA, April 2002).

In Northern California a program focused on mentoring for equity, resulting in improved classroom climates for students and teachers alike. Leadership Network for Teacher Induction (LNTI) began a program to support 2750 new California teachers placed in multicultural classrooms. Since many of these teachers were teaching children from backgrounds different from their own, the mentoring focused on issues of diversity, equity, and anti-racist practices, as well as differentiated instruction. Extensive interviews and case studies showed that teachers were able to rethink their cultural assumptions and improve instructional practices, which helped alleviate their own stresses and create a more welcoming and appropriate environment for students.

Achinstein, Betty, and Steven Z. Athanases. 2005. Focusing new teachers on diversity and equity: Toward a knowledge base for mentors. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 21 (7):843-862.

Mentoring can improve teacher morale, reducing feelings of isolation, frustration, and insecurity.

In a small urban school district, twelve experienced elementary school teachers found that being paired with a mentor enhanced the teaching experience and was a vast improvement over traditional professional development. Pairs were formed based on grade-level and instructional interests, with mentors and teachers meeting 2-3 times a week. Through interviews, teacher logs, and observations, researchers found that teachers were implementing new instructional practices, and were much happier doing so. Teachers felt like they always had someone to go to for support, and that having a mentor was much more meaningful than other professional development programs.

Vaughn, Sharon and Maggie Coleman. 2004. The Role of Mentoring in Promoting Use of Research-Based Practices in Reading. *Remedial and Special Education* 25 (1):25-38.

A comparison of mentor programs in Los Angeles and Arizona reported that mentors act as local guides, educational companions, and agents of change. Through observation, interviews, and case studies of over 1200 part-time mentor teachers in LA and 17 full-time mentors in Albuquerque, the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning found that mentors help novices fit into new schools, understand policies, grow in confidence, and solve immediate problems. Full-time mentors go further and help teachers with long-term professional goals, as well as foster collaboration.

Feiman-Nemser, Sharon and Michelle B. Parker. 1992. Mentoring in context: A comparison of two U.S. programs for beginning teachers. East Lansing: Michigan State University, National Center for Research on Teacher Learning.

The benefits of mentoring go beyond individual classrooms: Mentoring programs improve system-wide outcomes, increasing retention, cooperation, and overall performance.

In New York City, a new mentoring program brings positive changes not only to beginning teachers, but the school system as a whole. The mentors' collaborative experience links teachers, principals, administrators, and the community in working toward reform. In "perhaps the largest, most aggressive overhaul of teacher induction in the country" 6,000 New York public school teachers along with over 300 full-time mentors are busy facilitating positive change. Increasingly, principals see mentors as allies in reform and improvement, and the Department of Education calls mentors "assets" in reshaping education through their abilities to pool resources, work as a team, and involve the community. Chancellor Joel Klein has called for mentors to become teacher advocates, working to improve the system from within.

2006. Understanding New York City's groundbreaking induction initiative: Policy implications for local, state, and national education leaders. Santa Cruz, CA: New Teacher Center.

A study of Texas' state-wide mentoring program shows that mentored teachers are much more likely to remain in education than unmentored teachers. 15% of new teachers in Texas participated in an induction initiative and were provided with a support team of a mentor, an administrator, and a representative from an educator preparation program. Surveys, interviews, and administrative data revealed that 90% of teachers who participated in the program returned to teaching, a significantly higher number than those in a control group. After three years, 75% remained, still significantly higher than the control group. These effects held up even in high-poverty, high-minority enrollment schools, and across all school levels.

Pan, Diane T., Sue E. Mutchler, Kelly S. Shapley, Joan Bush, Robert W. Glover. 2000. Mentoring Beginning Teachers: Lessons from the Experience in Texas. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

The experiences of mentor teachers in Kentucky show that mentoring can provide long-term benefits, even for the mentors themselves. At elementary schools in Louisville, mentor teachers felt as though they were "contributing something important" the teaching profession through their discussions, observations, and reflections with new teachers. Additionally, the veteran teachers found the program to be "a real wake-up call" and made them "more aware of modeling good teaching practices" in their own classrooms. The mentoring program also helped cement a partnership between the school system and a local university. Programs like this show that mentors can be learners as well as teachers.

Kyle., Diane W., Gayle H. Moore, and Judy L. Sanders. 1999. The Role of the Mentor Teacher: Insights, Challenges, and Implications. *Peabody Journal of Education* 74 (3&4):109-22.

Effective mentoring relationships are built on mutual trust and respect. The best mentors listen to teachers and adjust to meet their specific needs.

Researchers call for a humanistic approach to mentoring in which mentors are not all-knowing authorities, but teachers' companions on a journey towards better teaching. An examination of over 30 expert opinions from the fields of education and psychology led researchers to conclude that a **"**teacher-centered" approach to mentoring gives rise to passionate, effective teaching. This approach, based on a counseling perspective, asserts that each teacher has the ability to attain his or her potential, and by listening, mentors can support teachers in their development. Instead of pointing out failures, mentors should allow teachers to express their thoughts and feelings, which then empowers them to engage in self-improvement. The most effective mentor-teacher relationships involve listening first, and only later offering advice.

Norman, Donald M. and Tom Ganser. 2004. A Humanistic Approach to New Teacher Mentoring. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development* 43: 129-140.

A large study of teacher mentoring in Scotland identified the most effective relationships as those that focused on time, listening, empathy, and a true partnership between mentors and teachers. Information from surveys of 271 mentored teachers show that mentors are best when they offer both support and challenges, adapting to each teacher's unique needs. When mentors take the time to really understand and connect with teachers, through classroom observations and frequent meetings, they can tailor their guidance to the situation at hand. It is the nature of the relationship itself, instead of the knowledge or skills of the mentor and teacher, that is paramount to a successful induction experience.

Rippon, J. and M. Martin. 2003. Supporting Induction: Relationships Count. *Mentoring & Tutoring* 11 (2): 211-226.

Participants at the National Education Association's Teacher Mentoring Symposium agreed that mentors shouldn't make assumptions about new teachers' needs. A synthesis of respected research from Ohio to Georgia to Alaska as well as first-hand reports from teachers, administrators, and mentors identify different stages of teacher needs. Findings demand that mentors not follow a one-size-fits-all approach, but instead put in enough time to appropriately shift their focus. Teachers may go from needing help with practical skills and information, to wanting to learn about the art of teaching, to developing as professionals. The most effective mentoring relationships involve sharing, give-and-take, and constant discussion.

1999. *Creating a Teacher Mentoring Program* National Foundation for the Improvement of Education. [Available from www.neafoundation.org/publications/mentoring.htm]

Data from beginning teachers and their mentors in England identified an ideal mentoring process: experience, reflection, learning, and experimentation. Through case studies, almost 150 questionnaires, and dozens of extensive interviews, researchers determined that effective mentoring is not just an apprenticeship, but a complex interpersonal relationship. The teachers' relationships with their mentors blossomed when mentors acted as collaborators, engaging teachers in discussion and reflection, broadening their experience, and encouraging independence and risk-taking. Teachers enjoyed the feeling of self-determination, and felt most empowered when they were able to bring their experiences to the mentors, reflect on them, learn from the veterans, and then develop new strategies.

Harrison, Jennifer, Sue Dynmoke and Tony Pell. 2006. Mentoring Beginning Teachers in Secondary Schools: An Analysis of Practice. *Teaching & Teacher Education* 22 (8): 1055-1067.

Additional Resources

Denmark, Vicki, and India Podsen. 2000. The mettle of a mentor. *Journal of Staff Development* 21 (4).

Johnson, Brad and Charles Ridley. 2004. *The Elements of Mentoring*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rowley, J. B. 1999. The good mentor. *Educational Leadership* 56 (8):20-22.

To learn more about Center for Inspired Teaching's teacher mentor program please call our office at 202.462.1956 or visit our website at www.inspiredteaching.org.

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