Chapter 3

Comprehension Questions

1. Define and describe physical support.
2. During which phase or phases from Moir's (1999) "The Stages of a Teacher's First Year" do new teachers typically need physical support the most? Why?
3. Give three examples of physical support that a mentor can provide for a beginning teacher.
4. Which types of physical support do mentees only require at the beginning of the school year? Which types do they continually require throughout the year?

Chapter 4

PROVIDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Most beginning teachers reach a point in their first year when they struggle to keep up with their workload. When this happens, they might begin staying very late after school to work, even after all the other teachers have left the building. Beginning teachers may also spend Friday nights and Saturdays in their classrooms, trying to prepare effective lesson plans, catch up on grading and progress reports, and keep up with a flood of emails from parents and colleagues. They might even begin to have second thoughts about becoming a teacher and wonder how they will ever make it to the end of the school year.

From feelings of exhaustion, isolation, and self-doubt to feelings of stress surrounding the overwhelming number of practical tasks and amount of logistical information, the few first years of teaching can be fraught with emotional obstacles. A teacher who requires *emotional support* needs coping strategies for responding to these challenges in a healthy way and reassurance to promote self-confidence.

Beginning teachers typically need the most emotional support during the survival and disillusionment phases (Moir, 1999; see figure 1.2 on page 9). In the survival phase, the sheer number of responsibilities that come with teaching overwhelms them. They often spend inordinate amounts of time at school and find it difficult to nurture a balance between work and their personal life. Unlike the survival phase when beginning teachers are motivated to keep up but find themselves falling short, teachers in the disillusionment phase begin to doubt whether the work is even worth it at all. They begin to question their ability or desire to stay in teaching. Sometimes new teachers even get sick during this period, as their immune systems are weakened from the ongoing exhaustion and stress.

At this phase, a mentor can be a lifesaver. Relieve some of the pressure and feelings of exhaustion by offering strategies for increasing efficiency and cultivating a work-life balance. Continually remind the beginning teacher of his or her value as a person in the school, and emphasize your empathy, support, and availability to talk. Focus on renewing the mentee's confidence, and avoid creating new instructional challenges at this time.

When a new teacher needs emotional support, a mentor can implement the following strategies.

- Engage in active and supportive listening.
- Conduct daily check-ins.
- Validate the teacher's feelings.

- Send encouraging messages.
- Enlist support from other staff members.
- Celebrate success.
- Communicate via double-entry journal.

Here, we explain more about each strategy and give examples for its successful implementation.

Engage in Active and Supportive Listening

When communicating with a beginning teacher, always engage in *active listening*, a practice that involves confirming and restating what the speaker has communicated. In order to actively listen, mentor teachers can:

- Use body language (such as giving eye contact, leaning forward, and nodding) to indicate their engagement in the conversation
- Pause to paraphrase, ask questions, and summarize the conversation in order to avoid miscommunication
- Resist judging the comments that a beginning teacher makes
- Respond in a way that communicates respect and appreciation for what the beginning teacher shares (such as "I hear what you're saying," "It sounds like you really feel frustrated," or "Thank you for sharing that. How can I help?")

In addition to using active listening during conversations, mentors should pay attention to the nonverbal cues a beginning teacher uses. Look for signs of fatigue (such as slow movements or difficulty concentrating), frustration (such as eye-rolling or crossed arms), or despair (such as puffy eyes or other indicators of crying). By paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal communications, a mentor can see indications of distress before they come to a head and show the beginning teacher that he or she cares.

Conduct Daily Check-Ins

Daily check-ins are short conversations between mentors and mentees about how a mentee is feeling and performing, both inside and outside the classroom. Mentors can send emails and text messages to mentees or call them on the phone, even outside school hours. Do not feel obligated to make these check-ins formal or extensive; even a simple "How's it going?" followed by active listening can make a world of difference. Staying in communication with mentees helps them feel supported but also helps a mentor notice when something is amiss. This easy strategy can facilitate the growth of the mentor-mentee relationship throughout the school year.

Validate the Teacher's Feelings

Once it becomes clear how a mentee feels, provide reassurance that his or her feelings are normal and will not last forever. Relate the mentee's experience to the different phases of first-year teaching (Moir, 1999; see figure 1.2 on page 9) to validate his or her feelings and show that many beginning teachers feel the same way. Giving new teachers a chance to relate to these phases can help them feel a

sense of normalcy regarding their emotions and concerns. Some also feel a sense of relief that they are not alone in their journey, particularly during the survival and disillusionment phases. Be sure to point out that teachers do not stay in these phases forever and that the job becomes easier and easier with each passing year.

Additionally, share personal reflections and anecdotes from your own first years as a teacher to help the mentee feel a sense of camaraderie. Use the essays and reflection questions in appendix B (page 79), which provide a window into the life of a beginning teacher, or reflect individually on the first-year teaching phases (see figure 1.2 on page 9) to recall the unique challenges and emotions that a new teacher faces. Consider difficult experiences from recent years, as well, and describe the different challenges and rewards that each year brings. Alternatively, collect and share stories from other colleagues in the school building. Point out that even the most seasoned teachers began as novices. These shared experiences can stimulate a comfortable and reflective dialogue between a mentor and a mentee.

Send Encouraging Messages

Periodically send positive notes, emails, and text messages to beginning teachers to remind them of your availability and support. Include positive, behavior-specific feedback in letters to mentees to keep their spirits high and to encourage them to press on. For example, write something such as, "I noticed that instead of correcting Jerrod in front of the class today, you spoke privately with him about his behavior—that was very effective!"

Choosing cards that contain reflective quotes or heartening messages can also provide meaningful support for beginning teachers. Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering (2011) pointed out that inspirational quotations that demonstrate examples of *self-efficacy* can be encouraging. As Dale H. Schunk and Frank Pajares (2009) explained, self-efficacy "refers to the perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels" (p. 35). In other words, teachers who have a strong sense of self-efficacy believe that they can execute their duties successfully or learn to execute them successfully. Because a beginning teacher may also be struggling to cultivate self-efficacy, inspirational quotations can serve as powerful reminders of the importance of persevering, striving for goals, and staying optimistic. When providing examples of motivating quotations, mentors can refer to this list of selected BrainyMedia (2014) quotations, as cited in Marzano and Pickering (2011), involving three categories: (1) perseverance, (2) greatness and following hopes and dreams, and (3) optimism.

Perseverance

- "Genius is eternal patience." —Michelangelo
- "Without struggle, there can be no progress." —Frederick Douglass
- "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." —Albert Einstein
- "Don't fear mistakes, there are none." —Miles Davis
- "I've got to keep breathing. It'll be my worst business mistake if I don't." —Steve Martin
- "If you're going through hell, keep going." —Winston Churchill
- "It's not whether you get knocked down; it's whether you get up." —Vince Lombardi

- "When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on." —Franklin Delano Roosevelt
- "If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere." —Frank A. Clark

Greatness and Following Hopes and Dreams

- "I am the greatest; I said that even before I knew I was." —Muhammad Ali
- "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." —Eleanor Roosevelt
- "Every artist was first an amateur." —Ralph Waldo Emerson
- "Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do." —John Wooden
- "Not knowing when the dawn will come, I open every door." —Emily Dickinson

Optimism

- "Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia." —Charles M. Schulz
- "A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities and an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties." —Harry S. Truman
- "We do survive every moment, after all, except the last one." —John Updike
- "It's not the load that breaks you down; it's the way you carry it." —Lou Holtz
- "You cannot climb uphill by thinking downhill thoughts." —Anonymous
- "Change your thoughts and you change the world." —Norman Vincent Peale

Providing positive feedback on effective aspects of or improvements in new teachers' performance, as well as offering an inspirational quote or mantra, can help mentees develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy and optimism.

Enlist Support From Other Staff Members

Often, the most overwhelming aspect of entering the world of teaching concerns the seemingly infinite number of tasks associated with the job. When the mentee seems extremely distressed with his or her workload, a mentor can ask other staff members at the school or district level to volunteer to help relieve some of this stress. Request help personally from individual teachers, or create general sign-up sheets in the faculty lounge or with Google Drive. Faculty and staff members can participate in the following supports for new teachers.

- Share ideas and materials (such as bell-work activities, writing prompts, academic games, activities to use in emergency substitute plans, icebreakers, and so on) with the new teacher.
- Occasionally cover a new teacher's duties, such as filling in during lunch duty or even teaching a class for one period to give the teacher time to catch up on work.
- Provide background information about the local community, insider information about the school or district, notes about working with specific students or parents, and so on.

- Share grade-level or content-area expertise by providing resources, lesson plans, and curriculum guides.
- Open your classroom to the mentee for observations, and offer to model specific instructional strategies.
- Invite the mentee on walks, bring him or her a surprise lunch on a long day, or offer to get him or her coffee.

The success of a school hinges, in part, on the effectiveness of its teachers. Therefore, it behooves all school team members to do their part to help beginning teachers succeed.

Celebrate Success

Beginning teachers often focus so intensely on day-to-day struggles that they cannot recognize the small successes that occur over time. Keep track of the mentee's general areas of success, as well as specific achievements, and then celebrate them together to give the mentee a sense of progress. Successes may be task-related (such as completing lesson plans or catching up on grading) or interpersonal (such as receiving a positive phone call or email from a parent or connecting meaningfully with an individual student). Keep in mind that while some people do appreciate and enjoy public displays of recognition, others do not. Learn how the beginning teacher likes to be recognized, and respond accordingly. A teacher who enjoys public recognition might love to see an announcement about his or her progress in the school newsletter, whereas a teacher who enjoys private recognition might prefer an appreciative note from the principal, a celebratory conversation with a mentor, or a quick pat on the back from a colleague.

Communicate via Double-Entry Journal

One way to engage in an ongoing, written conversation with your mentee is to use a *double-entry journal.* To create a double-entry journal, create two columns on each page of a notebook or shared digital document (such as on Google Drive). The beginning teacher uses the left column to record his or her concerns, questions, triumphs, and feelings, and the mentor responds in the right column with advice and suggestions.

Mentors and mentees can use double-entry journals as a vehicle for sharing questions, fears, concerns, celebratory remarks, and future aspirations. This medium offers the benefit of a quick turnaround for conversation between mentees and mentors; rather than waiting several days to share a concern or a success face-to-face with a mentor, a mentee can receive a response back whenever the mentor has a moment of free time. Additionally, the double-entry journal encourages beginning teachers to spend time on reflection. Figure 4.1 (page 44) depicts a sample entry that a beginning teacher might write in a double-entry journal.

As shown in figure 4.1, the beginning teacher utilized the double-entry journal to share her concerns about time management. Through writing, she could openly share her concerns and feelings of desperation. In response, the mentor utilized the double-entry journal to provide the support that this beginning teacher needed. The mentor validated the beginning teacher's feelings, explained that what she was feeling was normal, and made this topic a priority for the meeting that was already scheduled for the following day.

Date	Mentee Entry	Mentor Response
10/5/14	Right now, I'm really struggling with time management. I feel like even though I'm working constantly, I'm still barely staying afloat. I feel like I have absolutely no time to work out or see friends, and I'm barely getting five hours of sleep each night. Yesterday I stayed at school until eleven o'clock! I feel like I'm drowning. . . . Is this normal? Please help!	It sounds like you are really feeling stressed, and I'm so sorry to hear that. Still, please know that what you are feeling right now is completely normal. Nearly all new teachers experience what you're feeling—I certainly did—and it gets better. You are still in the survival phase of the first year, but it won't last forever. During our next meeting, let's focus on how you spend your time each day. We can come up with some strategies for you to get a few hours back and have some time for yourself. After all, finding a work-life balance is critical for you and can only help your students. Are we still on for our meeting tomorrow during second period?

Figure 4.1: Sample entry in a beginning teacher's double-entry journal.

Mentors and mentees can utilize the double-entry journal in a variety of other ways, as well. For example, the mentor might pose a question to a beginning teacher to get the conversation going. Ideal questions range from general sentence stems (Something I would like to share is _____.) to specific questions regarding lessons (What positives and negatives stood out to you in today's lesson?). Alternatively, a beginning teacher might only use the journal as needed as a way to express pertinent thoughts, concerns, reflections, and so on. This variation allows the mentor to respond only when necessary. No matter how mentors use double-entry journals with their mentees, their short responses may provide just enough support for the beginning teacher to sleep that night and face the next morning with a fresh perspective.

Summary

As explained in this chapter, providing emotional support involves helping mentees manage feelings of fatigue, loneliness, and insecurity related to teaching. We noted that mentees often require emotional support during the survival and disillusionment phases (Moir, 1999; see figure 1.2 on page 9) and presented seven concrete strategies for mentors to use when supporting their mentees emotionally. The following chapter, which focuses on instructional support, puts forth several strategies for mentors to use in their instructional work with beginning teachers.

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