

Teacher Reflection Log

Reflection Prompts	
I am doing well with:	Significant events that I need to prepare for are:
In terms of supplies, I feel:	As a result of my instruction, my students can:
What I love most about my classroom is:	If I could redo one day or class this week, it would be _____ because:
I am feeling frustrated by:	I need help with a student, _____, because:
I take care of myself by:	When I think about work-life balance, I feel:
I'd love to see this person or strategy, _____, in action because:	I'd like to work with a colleague, _____, on:
I am curious about:	I'd like to contribute to the school or district community by:
I realize I need to learn more about:	I'd love for my mentor to see me:
I am so proud of:	
Significant events that occurred this week were:	
Key Learnings	New Questions

Chapter 6

PROVIDING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

As beginning teachers complete their first few years of teaching, they typically gain confidence in their teaching abilities and burgeoning expertise. Often, this development of higher levels of expertise leads beginning teachers to wonder what opportunities for growth and development on a larger scale (perhaps as a teacher leader) are available. They might also explore opportunities to join content-specific organizations (such as the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE] or the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM]) or to become board certified. This could also include seeking leadership positions in extracurriculars, such as athletic teams or after-school clubs and activities.

As beginning teachers seek to expand their connections within the school, district, or education system, mentors can offer *institutional support*. This type of support helps a teacher find his or her place in the profession and may involve helping a beginning teacher learn more about school and district culture, explore the intricacies of the evaluation process, join local school and district initiatives, or become involved in various local, district, and national organizations. As a mentor, providing institutional support to a mentee who has begun to thrive can be extremely rewarding.

New teachers typically require some school-level institutional support—such as help in understanding the school's teacher evaluation process and the subtleties of the school culture—as soon as they begin teaching, particularly during the initial anticipation and survival phases of first-year teaching (Moir, 1999; see figure 1.2 on page 9). Birkeland and Johnson (2002) summarized the importance of providing institutional support as early as possible:

Achieving a "sense of success" depends largely on the conditions new teachers encounter at their schools—their roles on the faculty, their relationships with colleagues, the availability of curricula and resources, and the presence of supportive structures that focus the life of the school on teaching and learning. (p. 1)

Toward the end of the year, beginning teachers usually need institutional support again during the reflection phase of first-year teaching. Institutional support can help beginning teachers reflect on the school culture from the previous year and anticipate what it might look like in the next year and beyond. As the beginning teacher establishes new networks with colleagues and reaches out to the broader school community, the mentor can assist in facilitating a professional vision.

Mentors can use the following strategies to provide institutional support to beginning teachers.

- Explain the school culture.
- Help establish a support network.
- Clarify the teacher evaluation process.
- Establish collaboration time with appropriate colleagues.
- Share educational research.
- Help secure membership in professional organizations.
- Facilitate involvement in extracurricular activities.
- Foster relationships with coworkers.

The following sections elaborate on and provide examples for each strategy.

Explain the School Culture

As new teachers join a school and learn to navigate its complexities, mentor teachers can help explain the unique characteristics of the *school culture*. Also known as the organizational climate, a school's culture pertains to the school's specific atmosphere created by professional and social interactions between students, parents, teachers, and other staff (Marzano, 2003b). Mentors can be a valuable asset in helping beginning teachers feel included in the school's culture right away.

Professional Interactions

A mentor might find it useful to walk through the staff handbook with his or her mentee, making sure to address questions or concerns a beginning teacher has about its content, while also emphasizing specific, important passages. However, a mentor should also offer extra information to a beginning teacher that gives the mentee an insider's perspective on school operations. If a school memo states that after-school meetings end at 4:30 p.m., but in reality, meetings usually run until 4:45 p.m., share this information with the beginning teacher. Likewise, help the beginning teacher understand the school's philosophy on classroom management. This can include sharing the school and district discipline guidelines, policies, and procedures, as well as informing him or her about unwritten expectations, such as which discipline concerns a teacher should handle and which concerns the administration should handle. Information regarding parental support and involvement can also be important to relate to a beginning teacher. Talk to the beginning teacher about how to communicate with parents appropriately, which can include sharing stories of interactions with both supportive and difficult parents.

Social Interactions

To help a beginning teacher understand the social culture of a school, share the school's core values, mission and vision, and place in the local community, including details about how the mission and vision are brought to life every day. This information can help the beginning teacher orient himself or herself within the larger school culture, as well as give an idea of the extent to which community members play a role in school and district operations. Furthermore, point out successes that the school has celebrated in the past. List accolades the school has received, academically (such as a student winning the National Merit Scholarship, an increase in student achievement from a previous year, and so on)

or extracurricularly (such as the soccer team winning a state championship, an art class completing a community mural, and so on). This not only allows the beginning teacher to take pride in his or her workplace and the school's community but also gives him or her talking points on which to build relationships with students and other colleagues. Give the teacher an idea of what to expect from specific student social events such as pep rallies, service days, sports games, spirit weeks, dances, and so on.

Help Establish a Support Network

Mentors can set up school- or districtwide teacher support groups to help mentees connect with other new teachers and experienced teachers in the area. This practice can especially help teachers who have no colleagues teaching the same subject (such as music or technology education teachers). These support networks can exist outside of the school setting or inside a school that operates as a professional learning community (PLC).

Outside Support Networks

To help establish an outside support network, start by arranging meetings between teachers, particularly at the beginning of the year. Reach out using social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, or simply send out a mass email to any colleagues who might be interested. You might also organize logistics (such as deciding a meeting time and finding a location), bring snacks, provide reflection questions and discussion starters, or offer to host a question-and-answer session.

Meetings can be strictly professional, strictly personal, or a combination of the two. For professional meetings, publicly post a discussion topic using social media or an electronic mailing list. Teachers who are interested in the topic can voluntarily attend the meeting. Sample topics for professional meetings might include:

- Creating a community of learners in your classroom
- Pacing a lesson or unit
- Communicating with parents
- Mastering work-life balance
- Understanding the evaluation process
- Increasing student engagement
- Connecting assessment and grading
- Managing student behavior
- Fostering technology skills in the classroom
- Using homework and enrichment efficiently
- Participating in action research

In a personal meeting, simply allow attendees to get to know one another. To break the ice, present some conversation starters on cards at tables or on a projection screen. These could include questions such as the following.

- Who would you like to trade places with for one month?
- If you could have dinner with any five people, who would you choose and why?
- What does your perfect day look like?
- What is the best way to spend a rainy weekend?
- What is your strongest talent?
- Why did you choose to become a teacher?
- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
- What is your favorite home-cooked meal?
- What is your favorite electronic device?
- What books did you read last year, and which were your favorite?
- Which birthday are you most looking forward to and why?
- Who do you spend the most time with?
- What's the best gift you've ever given? Received?
- What is your biggest pet peeve?

For meetings that are both professional as well as personal, provide a combination of the topics above, thus allowing beginning teachers to build support networks and also increase their own expertise in the classroom. Consider staggering the times and locations of these gatherings so that each beginning teacher in the community has an opportunity to attend at least one of them.

Professional Learning Communities

A *professional learning community* is a whole-school or district effort that engages teachers and administrators in a continuous cycle of collective inquiry and review of school culture. Collaboratively, they determine how to reach the goal of success for all students by changing curriculum, instruction, or relationships between community members and assessing the results to enhance their effectiveness as professionals (Hord, 1997). In other words, a PLC comprises groups of teachers and administrators—*collaborative teams*—within a school who actively seek to improve student performance through a holistic look at the school community itself. Collaborative teams are created with attention to a specific subject matter or grade level. If a collaborative team relevant to the beginning teacher already exists within your school, invite him or her to meetings, or connect him or her with the proper contacts to get involved. If collaborative teams do not exist in your school, it may be worthwhile to talk to administrators or other teachers to see if they'd be interested in beginning the process of developing a professional learning community. For further information about professional learning communities, see DuFour and Marzano (2011) or DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010).

Clarify the Teacher Evaluation Process

Teacher evaluation systems differ from school to school and district to district. Consequently, a mentor teacher is crucial in ensuring a beginning teacher understands the major components of the teacher evaluation process. Mentors should help the mentee keep track of requirements and deadlines associated

with the evaluation system; send out friendly reminders to a beginning teacher to keep him or her on track and propose formal or informal meetings to discuss the process itself. Make sure that the beginning teacher has a thorough understanding of all elements of the evaluation process during these meetings, and include an itemized list of elements on which the evaluation is based, names of supervisors who will conduct evaluations, the number of observations required, preparation strategies for observations, and what to expect during pre- and postobservation meetings.

Mentees may also find it helpful if the mentor arranges a role play; that is, the mentor teacher observes the mentee during a lesson and does things that an evaluator might do so that the mentee knows what to expect. This practice can help a mentee feel confident and prepared for observations. A mentor can even extend this role play and take the beginning teacher through mock pre- and postobservation meetings. During a mock preobservation meeting, ask the teacher to describe what he or she is working on and what the mentor can expect to see during the observation. During a mock postobservation meeting, give the beginning teacher positive feedback about things he or she did well and corrective feedback about things to work on. Remember that the teacher evaluation process can be stressful, particularly for a beginning teacher, so focus praise on areas of growth or goals he or she has achieved. If the beginning teacher used a strategy ineffectively during the observation, offer tips or advice on how to improve the strategy's implementation. After the beginning teacher has completed the evaluation process for the first time, celebrate his or her accomplishments, and reflect on things he or she might like to do differently the next time.

Establish Collaboration Time With Appropriate Colleagues

Ensure that the beginning teacher has been introduced to all appropriate colleagues, including school counselors, school psychologists, speech pathologists, resource teachers, media center specialists, tech support, custodial staff, office staff, security staff, and so on. Providing pictures of staff members, along with names and titles, can be particularly helpful for a beginning teacher who is faced with learning the names of students and colleagues. Furthermore, make sure that the beginning teacher is meeting with appropriate colleagues as necessary. Although some meetings simply require an introduction, others require ongoing communication and interaction after the meeting is over—the mentor can help the beginning teacher arrange these connections, as well as understand how to navigate these relationships. For example, if the technology support staff respond more quickly to written requests than they do to verbal requests, share this information with the beginning teacher. Additionally, mentors can help beginning teachers prepare for ongoing or upcoming meetings. Mentors should help the beginning teacher cultivate positive meeting-going habits, such as bringing current grade reports to meetings with special education teachers or preparing for difficult or complex meetings in advance. Again, setting up a role play for these interactions may prove beneficial for the beginning teacher.

In preparation for collaborative team meetings, help the beginning teacher brainstorm a list of tasks that might be best accomplished collectively. Once the list is brainstormed, prompt the beginning teacher to identify the team members he or she may want to make contact with and facilitate these interactions. Examples of collaborative tasks might include teaming up with library staff to help students develop better research habits before a research-based, long-term project; coordinating content with other teachers in different subject areas; or reviewing assessments and grading rubrics with colleagues who teach the same classes.

Share Educational Research

Although it can be difficult to do so, it is essential for educators to keep abreast of the latest educational research, theory, and policy. Take steps to help the beginning teacher stay relevant and feel involved in the profession. Although the beginning teacher may feel unable to keep track of educational news at first, a mentor can help by simply sharing the most useful and succinct information with the beginning teacher, ensuring that such information is relevant to his or her subject area or grade level. Mentees can subscribe to educational news organizations such as Education Week (www.edweek.org), The Marshall Memo (www.marshallmemo.com), or SmartBrief (www.smartbrief.com). Websites such as these can help teachers sift through recent news and policy events in the education world and pick out the most important ones. Mentors can share these resources in person, on paper, or electronically, depending on the preference of the beginning teacher.

While providing research is a great first step, help the beginning teacher understand the research he or she collects. After a beginning teacher has read an article, the mentor might consider asking one of the following questions to create a starting point for discussion.

- “What are your initial thoughts on the research?”
- “In what ways could you apply this information in your classroom?”
- “How did the research contribute to your understanding of teaching?”

Alternatively, a mentor might choose to tailor questions to the research itself. This method can be effective in ensuring that a beginning teacher fully understands the research and allows a space for mentors to correct any misunderstandings surrounding specific content. These research-related questions can also serve as interesting discussion topics for support network meetings.

Help Secure Membership in Professional Organizations

Encourage the mentee to participate in appropriate and useful professional opportunities, such as conference events, educational organizations, and so on. Encourage mentees to investigate professional organizations at the local or national level. Numerous general education associations, as well as grade- and content-specific organizations, can open up new networks of colleagues and resources for a beginning teacher. Some of the largest and most well-known organizations include the following.

- International Literacy Association (ILA; www.reading.org)
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM; www.nctm.org)
- National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE; www.ncte.org)
- National Science Teachers Association (NSTA; www.nsta.org)
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD; www.ascd.org)
- New Teacher Center (NTC; www.newteachercenter.org)

Reach out to other faculty members to learn about their involvement and experiences with professional organizations that might interest the beginning teacher. Often, schools have set aside money in the budget for teachers to attend professional development conferences. Help the mentee explore options for financing if he or she wants to get involved, including connecting him or her with the necessary administrators. Additionally, teaching organizations often have numerous resources on their websites, ranging from mock lessons and unit plans to helpful articles from experienced teachers, as well as social

networks where beginning teachers can connect with fellow educators from around the country or even the world. Encourage the beginning teacher to explore these online resources and make use of the ones that are relevant to him or her.

Facilitate Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

Once a beginning teacher feels comfortable with the workload and expectations of the job, a mentor can help him or her become involved in the school in different and engaging ways. After a mentor builds an effective relationship with a mentee, it becomes easy to identify extracurricular activities that he or she may be interested in leading or joining. For example, a mentee who is interested in the arts might enjoy directing a play or helping the choir director plan a musical event for students. Other activities outside of teaching include athletic coaching, leading student clubs, working with student organizations, and offering to volunteer at school events (such as sports games and dances). Connect the teacher with other teachers who share similar interests to help the mentee get involved in student extracurricular activities. Help him or her understand the processes to start a club and any associated tasks, such as how to make a morning announcement, complete necessary paperwork, or arrange transportation for students. If nothing else, encourage new teachers to attend schoolwide events (and attend with them, if possible) as a way of feeling more involved in the school community. Attending schoolwide events can also help new teachers get to know their students outside the classroom, which helps build student-teacher relationships and foster communication with parents. Building relationships with students and colleagues outside of the classroom can be extremely powerful and rewarding for all teachers, but particularly for beginning teachers who still struggle to find their place within the school community.

Foster Relationships With Coworkers

At first, beginning teachers may find it difficult to fit into the broader school community, especially if the faculty is primarily composed of experienced teachers. Because of this, the mentor should strive to make sure that staff members generally include and accept the beginning teacher. Invite the beginning teacher along to gatherings outside of school. If you notice that the mentee has not been invited to all-staff activities and functions, remind your colleagues to think about the beginning teacher when they plan lunches, Friday-afternoon happy hours, weekend activities, book clubs, fitness teams, and so on. Additionally, encourage the beginning teacher to accept these invitations. If possible, attend these events with the beginning teacher so you can help him or her make connections with more experienced staff members. Getting to know colleagues outside of school is a healthy way to build a positive school culture, as well as an opportunity to create an environment of genuine care and concern for one another.

Summary

This chapter centered on institutional support, which includes helping mentees broaden their school- and districtwide networks, as well as helping them get involved in larger communities in the world of education. Mentees typically need institutional support at the beginning and the end of the first year. During the anticipation and survival phases at the beginning of the first year (Moir, 1999; see figure 1.2 on page 9), mentors should provide school-level institutional support. During the reflection phase toward the end of the first year (Moir, 1999; see figure 1.2 on page 9), mentors can support mentees as they develop a long-term professional vision and reach out to the education community on a wider scale. The chapter also presented eight strategies for mentors to use when offering institutional support to their mentees.