

## Section 1 The Mentor's Role

**L**EARNING-FOCUSED mentoring relationships make a significant emotional and intellectual difference in the induction experience for new teachers, as well as in their continuing professional practice. These clearly structured entries into the profession frame the learning journey from novice to expert teaching. Beginning teachers benefiting from skilled mentoring are more likely to:

- Increase their efficacy as instructional problem-solvers and decision-makers
- Engage in collaborative professional exchanges regarding improving practice
- Remain in the teaching profession

### First and Foremost

*For beginning teachers, the benefits of a mentoring experience include:*

- *Increased efficacy as problem-solvers and decision-makers*
- *Higher engagement in collaborative exchanges*
- *Increased likelihood of remaining in teaching*

Who we are as mentors, how we mentor and what we mentor about are essential to meeting the current needs of beginning teachers. A central component in a learning-focused mentoring program is a clear understanding of the respective role and responsibilities of each participant. Framing a mentoring identity as one who builds capacity in others is a necessary first step. The most important function for mentors is to embrace a growth orientation, understanding that the work is to increase their colleague's effectiveness as professional problem-solvers and decision-makers.

This process begins with establishing and maintaining a learning focus within the relationship. In this way, each party shapes and understands the nature and expectations of the mentoring interactions. We build on the work of Laurent Daloz (1998), suggesting that a mentor's role within such a relationship is to balance three functions:

- Offering support
- Creating challenge
- Facilitating a professional vision

These functions can operate independently in specific situations, but in the greater context of the relationship they must be connected. Balancing these three elements energizes growth and learning. Support alone will provide comfort but may encourage complacency. Challenge without support may increase anxiety and fear of failure. Support and challenge without vision may leave us wandering on a journey looking only at the ground beneath us but not the road ahead.

## Creating Challenge

In our experience, mentors devote most of their time to providing support, such as that described in the previous section. However, unless support is balanced with challenge, we rob new teachers of the opportunity to grow and learn. If our goal is to nurture independent, effective practitioners, then it is critical that novices take responsibility for their own practice.

Growth requires that beginners develop the capacity to apply and adapt expert information within the context of their own classrooms. This development includes making meaning of new information and experiences. This learning enables new teachers to apply, refine and create alternative strategies based on students' needs, curricular readiness and teacher values.

### Challenge

- Goal-driven
- Data-focused
- Thought-provoking

Skillful mentors balance the supportive aspects of the relationship with challenges that promote continual attention to improvement in practice. In a learning-focused relationship, challenge is created by:

- Structuring rigorous examination and analysis of practice by applying Planning and Reflecting Templates (see Section Three, Maximizing Time and Attention).
- Engaging in goal-setting, and continuing to have goal-driven conversations.
- Maintaining a focus on student learning, including assistance in analyzing student performance information and determining cause-effect relationships.
- Exploring samples of student work, considering the protégé's decisions and experiences and discussing both positive and negative results of instructional practice.
- Actively engaging protégés in problem-solving and decision-making by forming problem-solving partnerships, brainstorming options and generating solutions.
- Assisting in the identification and articulation of criteria for choices and consequences with think alouds and coaching sessions.
- Building connections between current theory and classroom practice.
- Constructing and conducting action research projects, building norms of experimentation and reflective practice.

## Recognizing and Meeting the Needs of Beginning Teachers

Beginning teachers' needs vary widely, as each novice brings a different perspective, experience, and knowledge base about teaching. Further, there are differences in preferred methods of problem-solving, learning styles, and educational philosophies. However, there are some generalizations that can be made about the needs, expectations and emotional phases during the first year of teaching.

In a study conducted by Simon Veenman (1984), more than one thousand preservice teachers ranked their concerns before entering the classroom for the first time. The perceived needs of these novices are consistent with other research studies on beginning teacher concerns (Bullough, 1989; Odell, 1986; Covert, et.al., 1991). These studies identify concerns about students; controlling and managing, motivating, evaluating, and differentiating instruction. They also point to concerns about managing time; for planning, scheduling, completing work load and balancing personal and professional life. Other concerns include relations with colleagues, administrators and parents. As we might imagine, beginning teachers worry about knowing what to do, when to do it and whether or not they will do it well.

### Phases of First Year Teaching

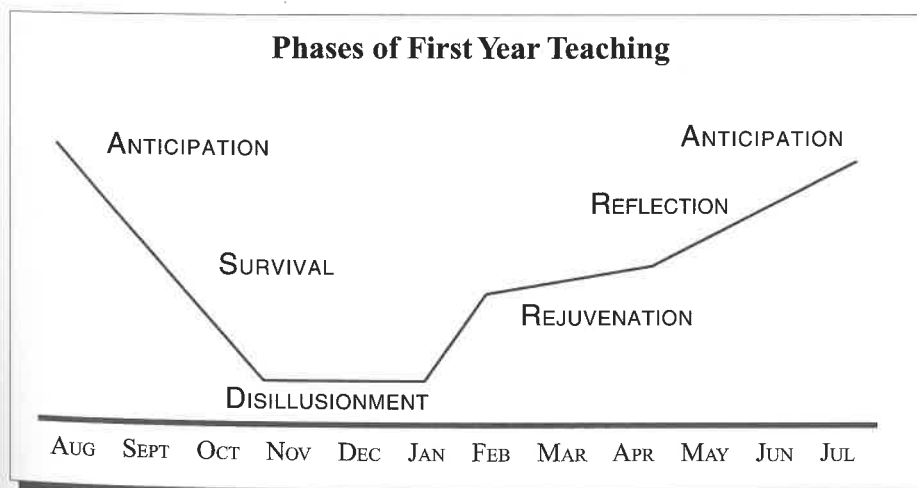
Ellen Moir, Director of the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz and her colleagues, have identified a series of mental and emotional challenges that occur in developmental phases across the first year of practice. They note that while every new teacher does not go through this exact sequence, these generalizations are a useful map for predicting and responding to the needs of novices. The six phases described in their work are; Anticipation, Survival, Disillusionment, Rejuvenation, Reflection and Anticipation (Moir, 1999).

For novices, it is useful to understand that these phases are likely to occur as a normal part of their first year in teaching. As mentors, awareness of

and sensitivity to these phases helps us to maintain a developmentally appropriate balance of support and challenge while facilitating professional vision.

The following pages correlate these identified phases with some ideas for providing that balance as a learning-focused mentor.

Adapted from Moir, E. (1999).  
The stages of a teacher's first year.  
In M. Scherer (Ed). *A Better  
Beginning: Supporting and  
Mentoring New Teachers.*  
Alexandria, VA: ASCD



## Survival

*It is Saturday night, September 30, and the realities of being a teacher are beginning to sink in. Janice is spending at least half of each weekend and most weeknights trying to keep up. She struggles with managing lesson plans, record-keeping, parent meetings and progress reports. She wonders if she really can do it.*

The realities of the day-to-day work of the classroom soon bear down upon new teachers. They are faced with many different problems for the first time and have few of the routines and tricks-of-the-trade in their repertoires that help veteran teachers conserve time and energy. Most are running hard to stay in place and have little time for reflection or advanced planning. Many new teachers spend up to seventy hours a week on schoolwork. Often the core curriculum materials are unfamiliar and the novice teacher is only one or two lessons ahead of the class in preparation for future lessons. There is a constant need to learn the curriculum, develop instructional plans, learn and develop assessment systems, correct student work and develop and gather materials. Many novices do not accurately anticipate the amount of work their chosen profession requires, but most manage to maintain their energy and commitment to student learning during this phase.

- SUPPORT

Offer support during the survival phase by sharing materials and management tips. Time is precious and may not best be spent reinventing the wheel. Share tips for establishing routines and managing the activities of the day. Keep it learning-focused by thinking aloud about your choice points and purposes. You may wish to keep note cards handy during the day to record effective techniques that may be unconscious and automatized for you, but would be useful to share with your protégé. Attend fully and listen empathetically as frustrations and concerns arise. As appropriate, invite your protégé to observe in your classroom, or offer to model a lesson.

- CHALLENGE

Ask questions that help your protégé recognize effective choices. Offer your ideas as a menu. Ask your protégé to share thoughts about what might work best, and why. Gently challenge by asking your protégé to keep a structured Reflection Journal (see Section Eight, Structured Forms, Tools and Blacklines) and use the recording to focus your conversations.

- FACILITATE VISION

Celebrate the goals already achieved (or sub-sets of them) and set new ones. Have conversations about what drew you to teaching, what's been important and/or rewarding to you. Ask your protégé to talk about what made teaching an attractive career choice.

Debunk the myth of professional certainty. Let your protégé know that you do not have all the right answers either, because there aren't any. Emphasize that there is best choice, based on best knowledge at the time, given the context of the situation.

- CHALLENGE

Create challenge by helping your protégé learn from experience. Coach thinking and support reflection. Collaborate on methods for refining practice. If the structured Reflection Journal seems burdensome, use quick forms to focus conversations (see Section Three, Maximizing Time and Attention). Pay close attention to signals that you're pushing beyond 'whelm' into overwhelm.

- FACILITATE VISION

Facilitate professional vision by calibrating existing state and expectations for a novice teacher with the desired state and goals to be accomplished by the end of the first year. Ask your protégé to identify some examples of growth thus far and share specific, concrete things you have observed. Continue to connect the protégé with other staff members, building a sense of community.

## Rejuvenation

*Wow! The job seems much more doable after two weeks away. Time away has allowed Janice to reconnect with friends, family and herself. As she reflected on the first half of her year, she was amazed at how much she had accomplished and learned. Beginning the second semester, routines are in place and her expectations much more realistic. Counting down to the end clearly shows she's made it through the first half, with summer vacation coming into view.*

For teachers on a traditional calendar, the winter break marks a transition in the pace and flow of the school year. Time away with family and friends reminds new teachers of their life outside of the classroom. Rest and relaxation re-energizes body and soul. With new outlooks come a glimmer of perspective and an emerging sense that this is a learnable profession, one that with time and attention, can be mastered.

Many novice teachers return from break with a clearer understanding of the realities of their classroom, the system in which they work, and ways to access available resources. They begin to have a small sense of their accomplishments as well.

Confidence in routines and relationships increases as the novice automatizes patterns for behavior, time and instructional management. These, in turn, free time and energy for explorations of curriculum development, new teaching strategies and longer term planning.

End-of-the-year routines require time and energy at this phase. Parent communication, closing up the classroom and a mountain of paperwork demand attention to detail. For many, the emotional leave-taking from the first class or classes marks this moment in time.

- SUPPORT

Offer support during the reflective phase by providing information and tips regarding end-of-year paperwork. Share your routines for organizing end-of-year tasks. Make a gift pack of colored markers, tape and stickers for labeling boxes. Start a list of items to order for next year.

- CHALLENGE

Mediate a rigorous analysis and interpretation of student performance information. Facilitate reflection through learning-focused conversations; surfacing insights, applications, and goals for the coming year.

- FACILITATE VISION

Do a gap analysis. Make connections between what was expected, what was desired and what actually occurred. Explore student successes and mark the specific turning points for them and your protégé. Collaborate on constructing a professional growth plan for the coming year.

## And Celebrate!

*The Calendar of Options on the next few pages offers an array of ideas for a learning-focused first year organized by phases of beginning teaching, and research on the concerns of new teachers.*

## Calendar of Options

**T**HIS calendar offers a menu of activities, correlated with time of school year, the developmental phases of beginning teachers, (Moir, 1999) and Frances Fuller's stages of concern. In her research with beginning teachers, Fuller (1969) defined the phases of concern as Self, Task, and Impact. Self concerns involve feelings of adequacy, questions of ability and potential effects on personal time and lifestyle; surfacing questions such as "Can I do this?," "What might happen if I can't?," "What does this mean for me?" Task involves management concerns such as scheduling, sources of materials, and many logistical issues, surfacing questions such as "How long will this take?," "Where do I

find . . . ?," "Am I allowed to do this?" Impact addresses concerns for others, including students, colleagues, and the school community. Questions that occur in this stage include "How will this choice affect my students?," "What are some ways I could support my team?," "How can I improve on this plan?"

It should be noted that these activities are provided as a menu of possibilities, and not a mandatory list. Activities marked with an \*asterisk are described in detail in Section Six, Strategies for Success.

Phases	Concerns
Anticipation	Self

- Letter or phone call to make informal contact
- Informal get-acquainted meeting
- Joint Planning Session\*
- Informal sharing of teaching materials, files, bulletin board displays, etc.
- Share Incredible Ideas Scrapbook\*

### AUGUST

*At least two weeks prior to school beginning*

Phases	Concerns
Anticipation	Self

- Share school plant layout, discipline policies, location and availability of resources/materials, etc.
- Clarify record-keeping/management procedures
- Check for readiness of texts, kits, equipment, etc.
- Begin a Collaborative Staff Development activity\*
- Share a Welcome To . . . Basket\*
- Schedule a Meet, Greet and Share\*

### AUGUST

*Week prior to school*

Calendar of Options continued

Phases	Concerns
Survival	Self

- Joint planning for time management and new instructional units
- Discuss purchases and priorities for using any remaining funds
- Review teaching videos and discuss strategies/applications
- Protégé Support Group Meeting\*
- Apply the Reflecting Template for a learning-focused conversation
- Emphasize personal, informal contacts

OCTOBER

Phases	Concerns
Disillusionment	Task (Management)

- Create some Lively Lifelines\*
- Encourage contact and activities with colleagues
- Discuss impact of student extra-curricular activities
- Think aloud regarding student motivation
- Share personal time management strategies or offer an Idea Bank
- Schedule a Problem-Solving Partnership meeting\*

NOVEMBER

Phases	Concerns
Disillusionment	Task (Management)

- Discuss pacing and curricular progress
- Calibrate overload and assist in determining priorities
- Provide information/clarification regarding end-of-course exams, grades and report cards
- Think aloud regarding goals for second semester
- Celebrate Success

DECEMBER



Calendar of Options continued

Phases	Concerns
Rejuvenation moving to Reflection	Impact

APRIL

- Mutually share progress on professional growth plans
- Discuss end-of-year schedules, final evaluations, student testing, field trips, etc.

Phases	Concerns
Reflection	Impact

MAY

- Schedule a reflecting conversation
- Identify successes
- Assist in analyzing student performance data and exploring cause-effect relationships
- Facilitate connection-making between personal learnings and application to future decisions
- Final check for clarification on parent contacts and reports

Phases	Concerns
Anticipation	Impact

JUNE

- Celebrate successes
- Think aloud regarding completion of recordkeeping and other end-of-year activities
- Presentation of Portfolio
- Share the load while Packing Up\*