Synthesis of Research on Mentoring Beginning Teachers

Mentor teachers and their protégés will be more successful if they are trained for their roles in accord with a five-level Helping Relationship model.

William A. Gray and Marilynne M. Gray

As a way to improve the induction of beginning teachers and to provide leadership opportunities for career teachers, school districts in California and elsewhere are arranging for the experienced teachers to serve as mentors to the beginners (whom we will call protégés). These arrangements promise to make teaching more satisfying, both for the mentor teachers and for their protégés.


Like other innovations, however, formal mentoring programs require planning and support. Laura Wagner (1985), administrator of the California program, asks, "How can useful evaluations be conducted when program goals are intangible and hard to operationalize, when the program is different in every site at which it operates, when evaluation has not been mandated from the program's inception, when required documentation is absolutely minimal, and when timelines are extremely tight?" Without provisions for credible candidate and program evaluation, Wagner warns, "...the Mentor Teacher Program may well become just another bright flash in the fast-changing pan that brings educational reform proposals into the light."

A useful source of information for those designing and evaluating mentor programs is the extensive body of research on mentoring produced in recent years. Most studies of mentoring have been done in the business field, and have typically investigated informal or "happenstance" mentoring some five or more years after less-experienced employees (protégés) realized that they had been mentored in their career advancement or personal development by more-experienced, higher-ranking employees who took a personal interest in them.

Mentor Characteristics

Findings reveal that certain mentor and protégé characteristics are important. Clawson (1979) found that good mentors are people-oriented, tolerate ambiguity, prefer abstract concepts, value their company and work, and respect and like their subordinates. Alleman (1982) found that successful mentors are confident, secure, flexi-
“If mentors ‘get stuck’ at Level 1 or 2 . . . protégés will likely . . . reject them in order to achieve a non-dependent status.”

... 74 percent of teacher protégés credited their mentor with helping them to gain self-confidence; 40 percent said their mentor helped them learn the technical aspects of their job; 67 percent reported that their mentor listened to their ideas and encouraged their creativity; 51 percent indicated that their advisor helped them better understand the school's administration; and 17 percent said their mentor taught them how to work with people. Protégés with one definite mentor were more satisfied with their work than those who had either no mentor or several mentors.

Behaviors of Mentor Teachers

What mentor behaviors help new teachers? Two studies of informal or “happenstance” mentoring provide some answers. Fagan and Walter (1982) found that of 107 teachers who reported being mentored by one or more veteran teachers during their first year of teaching,

MENTOR ROLES

Gehrke and Kay (1984) interviewed 41 teachers who claimed to have been mentored during their first year of teaching. To find out what constituted mentoring from the point of view of these novices, their comments about their mentors were categorized into eight possible mentor roles as identified by Schein (1978). The most frequently filled mentor roles were those of teacher (reported 25 times), confidant (17), and role model (13). Schein's other possible roles were developer of talents (11), sponsor (11), doorkeeper (4), protector (2), and successful leader (0). Employing Clawson's (1979) definition, Gehrke and Kay labeled as “mentor” only those persons who had fulfilled at least three of Schein's eight mentor roles, had shared with protégés a mutual commitment to common goals, and had a comprehensive influence on the protégés' professional and career development. They concluded that only 13 of these 41 inductees experienced a real mentor-protégé relationship during induction—a relationship that gradually developed to become more personally caring and professional (addressing professional growth questions about instruction, curriculum, and classroom management). These mentors were characterized as being genuinely interested in their protégés, helpful, caring, willing to take time, dedicated, friendly, outgoing, patient, influential, and as being professional role models. Interestingly, only four former teachers and three co-workers were named as mentors, while 21 former college professors/supervisors and eight school principals were so named.

SELECTING AND MATCHING MENTORS AND PROTÉGÉS

What factors should be considered when selecting and matching mentors and protégés to work together in a formalized mentoring program? While this has not been rigorously researched, a pilot study of four first-year teachers paired with four support teachers revealed that two pairings were unsuccessful because one pair was located in different parts of the school, which reduced interaction, and the other pair did not teach the same subjects or share similar ideologies about teaching, classroom management, and discipline (Huling-Austin and others, 1985). These researchers concluded that . . . every effort [should] be made to select a support teacher who is not only considered to be a successful teacher, but also teaches the same subject and grade level as the first year teacher, whose classroom is in the same general area of the building, and who has compatible ideologies about teaching, classroom management, and discipline. An effort should also be made to determine if the beginning teacher recognizes the benefits to be gained from working with a support teacher. If he/she does not, these benefits should be explained and the beginning teacher should be encouraged to consider the advantages of this type of relationship.
Voluntary or Required?
These comments suggest that beginning teachers should be able to choose whether to have a mentor or not. Most researchers advise that participation in such programs be voluntary (Klauss, 1979; Kram, 1985; Phillips-Jones, 1985) because achieving a mentor relationship with an older person is like falling in love—you can’t force it to happen. You can, however, make yourself receptive to such a relationship by displaying a teachable attitude and an eagerness to learn (Williams, 1977).

Nevertheless, formally arranged mentor-protégé pairings can work. In a study of 393 beginning teachers in Georgia, significantly more novices demonstrated classroom mastery of 16 competencies related to effective teaching when an assigned “buddy teacher” (mentor) worked with them during their first year of teaching (Tan and Ebers, 1985). In the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Teacher Induction Program (1985), follow-up studies of 50 inductees, each of whom received mentoring from a local staff member assigned to help them, showed that the program had increased the professional skill, judgment, and competency of the participants and had screened some less able candidates from the profession.

Needs of Beginning Teachers
What kind of help do beginning teachers need? After reviewing 83 studies, Veenman (1984) contended that the problems of beginning teachers are person-specific and situation-specific. A study of 602 first-year teachers in New York City (Sacks and Brady, 1985), mentor help for moral support, guidance, and feedback (cited by 24 percent), discipline and management (20 percent), curriculum and lesson planning (18 percent), school routines and scheduling (15 percent), motivational techniques (6 percent), and individualized instruction (2 percent). Because beginning teachers want to achieve professional autonomy and status equality with their colleagues (Lortie, 1975), 92 percent do not seek help from colleagues except indirectly by swapping stories about personal experiences (Glidewell and others, 1983). This hides novices’ weaknesses but does not enable them to obtain help with those factors—inexperience, unavailability of expertise, and ambiguity about goal attainment—that produce 93 percent of teacher stress related to performing professional tasks. More than “experience swapping” is needed: a sense of community must be established, consisting of interdependency, shared concerns, a sense of common fate, and a sense that others “stand by” when one is under stress or uncertainty about what to do.

These support features are found in clearly conceived and properly implemented mentoring programs. Research suggests that such programs should contain the components

Highlights of Research on Mentoring
Research in business and education has found that:
- Effective mentors are people-oriented and secure. They like and trust their protégés.
- Successful mentors take a personal interest in their protégés’ careers, share power and expertise, encourage their protégés’ ideas, and help them gain self-confidence.
- Beginning teachers report needing help with discipline and classroom management, curriculum and lesson planning, and school routines. Most of all they feel a need for moral support, guidance, and feedback.
- The key to successful mentoring is the mentor-protégé relationship, which can be represented by a five-step model ranging from level one, at which the mentor plays the primary role, to level five, at which the protégé becomes a self-directed professional.
shown in Figure 1. Mentors must be carefully selected and matched with protegés, and mentor-protege pairs must be trained to work together harmoniously. Support personnel must be trained to provide supervision, formative evaluation, and additional training during the mentoring process. Summative evaluation must be effective to determine mentor impact, protegé gains, and, thus, the effectiveness of initial training and continual monitoring (Bird, 1983).

The Mentor-Protegé Relationship
Nearly all researchers agree that the key to successful mentoring is the

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**Figure 1. Components of a Four-Phase Formalized Mentoring Program to Induct Beginning Teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1: Select and Match M/P Pairs Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Voluntary participation: want to work together</td>
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<td>2. Same grade, subjects, ideology/philosophy</td>
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<td>3. Close proximity in school</td>
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<td>4. M qualities: competent, people and helping-oriented, open minded, flexible, empathetic listener, confident, resourceful, politically wise</td>
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<td>5. P qualities: receptive, responsive, values mentor help, self-analyzer, and improves</td>
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**Phase 2: Provide Necessary Training**

<table>
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<th>M= Mentor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. M/P pairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Principals</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. District support staff</td>
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**Competency-Based Training**

1. Adult relationship skills
2. Communication skills
3. M/P Helping Relationship model (M-Mp-MP-Mp-P)
4. Four-Phase Mentoring Model (propose, plan, carry out, and present completed project)
5. Professional roles: classroom leader, classroom manager, instructor, curriculum planner, evaluator/reporter
6. Supervision strategies

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**Phase 3: Monitor Mentoring Process Using**

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<th>P=Protégé</th>
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<td>1. Supervision strategies</td>
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<td>2. Conflict-resolution strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Formative evaluation throughout year</td>
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**Phase 4: Year-End Summative Evaluation**

Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation of

1. M & P benefits and problems
2. M's impact on P
3. P's impact on M
4. P's impact on own class, staff members, parents
5. Impact of each phase on subsequent phases
6. Recommendations for improvements

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mentor–protégé relationship, yet we are among the few who have studied the relationship while it was developing (Gray, 1984a, b). Most researchers have asked protégés to recall the stages of the mentoring process in business settings, five or more years after the relationship had ended. When doing this, Phillips (1977) found six stages: initiation, the sparkle (presenting one’s best self to produce mutual admiration), development (mentor gives and protégé receives until the mentor delegates more decision-making responsibility to protégé; discussion focuses on organizational politics and how to attain career plans); disillusionment (when it is realized that little more can be gained by continuing the relationship); parting (to become independent, with or without bitterness, depending on how it takes place); and transformation (becoming a peer, friend, and equal who can now help the mentor). Kram (1983) found four stages that describe a similar progression: initiation (fantasies become realistic expectations); cultivation (mentor provides the five career and four psychosocial functions mentioned previously); separation (protégé becomes competent and independent); and redefinition (either a mutually supportive friendship develops or mentor and protégé feel used and bitter).

We have the dynamic nature of the Mentor/Protégé Helping Relationship in a five-level model (see Figure 2).
Variable and motivation, supervision, counseling, and indirect mentoring (Veenman, 1984). When we train mentors to use this model, they are better able to provide important types of help (leadership, role-modeling, instruction, demonstration, motivation, supervision, counseling, and indirect mentoring) in the varied and appropriate ways a protégé needs to reach Level 5, where he or she becomes competent enough to autonomously handle the problems that beginning teachers most frequently encounter (Veenman, 1984).

At Level 1 (M), mentors do such things as: read about typical problems and concerns experienced by novices; receive training on how to work with protégés and other support personnel; prepare and teach demonstration lessons so protégés can observe specific techniques or materials being used; provide indirect mentoring by arranging for protégés to learn from other competent teachers; protect protégés from foreseeable problems and unjust criticism; promote staff acceptance of protégés; locate resources protégés need for teaching, and so on. Mentors employ the style of situational leadership (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977) in which they "tell" relatively naive protégés what to do and how to do it. When interacting with protégés at Level 2 (Mp), mentors draw on their greater experience, realism, and expertise to do such things as: role-model how to "get things done" within the politics of the school so protégés fit into the school's culture (Sarason, 1971); demonstrate specific teaching techniques and materials; "sell" protégés (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977) on realistic ways of performing tasks such as establishing classroom management; provide external reinforcement; and show protégés how to prepare course unit plans and previews/overviews.

At Levels 1 and 2, mentors exercise more "power" than protégés because they have a greater supply of valued resources. This can present problems because new teachers value the professional norms of equality and autonomy (Glidewell and others, 1983). If mentors "get stuck" at Level 1 or 2 and protégés believe that little more can be gained from mentors at these levels, protégés will likely stop valuing this power-dependent relationship (Auster, 1984) and reject their mentors to achieve a nondependent status. Before this happens, a perceptive mentor will recognize and take pride in the protégé's need to change the nature of the relationship to a more egalitarian one by working with the protégé at Levels 3 and 4.

At Level 3 (MP), mentors acknowledge protégés' existing and developing competencies, and thus provide "participatory" leadership (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977) to enable protégés to make an equal contribution during their interactions. This is facilitated by joint problem solving, brainstorming, consensus reaching, open discussion, and contracting.

Before giving a protégé the blessing to go it alone, the mentor should exercise a new type of leadership by "delegating" greater responsibilities and giving protégés "guided practice" to ensure that they can succeed.
References


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If interested in attending the First International Conference on Mentoring, held in Vancouver from July 21 to 25, 1986, during Expo 86, please contact the authors in care of the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada V6T 1Z5.