“My Mentor Is My Lifesaver!”

5 Tips for Working With Your Mentor

Many school districts use mentoring to support the professional growth of new teachers. Mentoring pairs a new teacher with an experienced teacher who provides individualized support on a variety of topics, such as managing stresses that often accompany the first year of teaching and developing classroom efficacy (Adams & Woods, 2015). Mentoring topics might include content knowledge, pedagogy, assessment practices, technical assistance, and navigating the realities of teaching (Mahboob, 2014). Several studies demonstrate numerous benefits associated with new-teacher mentoring, including enhanced perceptions of self-efficacy, increased competence with teaching, and greater levels of confidence (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009).

Teaching is a complex profession, and new teachers typically carry the same responsibilities as experienced teachers; therefore, your mentor serves a critical role in helping you successfully navigate your first year of teaching. Working with your mentor can be an extremely rewarding and valuable experience. Use these five tips to enhance the effectiveness of your mentor relationships.

1. **Spend quality time with your mentor.**
   New teachers who spend more time with their mentors foster more successful mentor relationships. Your mentor has walked in your shoes and can provide insights, advice, and direction on a wide variety of topics, as well as scaffolded support through coaching or demonstrations. However, more time with your mentor does not automatically translate into greater success (LoCasale-Crouch, Davis, Wiens, & Pianta, 2012). Be sure that time spent with your mentor is quality time and focuses on your development as a new teacher.

2. **Trust and respect your mentor.**
   Trust and respect are vital components to a successful mentor relationship. Your mentor has walked in your shoes and can provide insights, advice, and direction on a wide variety of topics, as well as scaffolded support through coaching or demonstrations. However, more time with your mentor does not automatically translate into greater success (LoCasale-Crouch, Davis, Wiens, & Pianta, 2012). Be sure that time spent with your mentor is quality time and focuses on your development as a new teacher.

By Laurie A. Sharp and Yolanda Delaney
Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O’Brien, 1995). Trust that your mentor will have your best interests in mind and respect the support and guidance you receive.

3. Communicate clearly and frequently. New teachers often feel overwhelmed with questions and concerns (Bentley, Morway, & Short, 2013). Approach your mentor frequently to ask any questions that arise and discuss any concerns you may have. Mentors are rarely surprised, and they have rich and diverse teaching experiences from which they can address your questions and concerns without judging.

4. Build your own agenda. New teachers’ needs vary, which makes an individualized mentor relationship optimal (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2012). With this in mind, your mentor may not have an established checklist to guide your interactions. As you identify specific areas that require additional support, create your own agenda. Compose your agenda in writing and share it with your mentor prior to scheduled meeting times.

5. Be positive. New teachers experience much anxiety (Bentley et al., 2013). An excellent way to cope with anxiety is to maintain a positive relationship with your mentor. You have an experienced teaching professional who is eager to guide you during your first year; express your gratitude often. Smile, say thank you, and send periodic notes or small tokens of appreciation to your mentor. Just as you need encouragement as a new teacher, your mentor needs reassurance for their professional guidance.

A first-year teacher recently shared, “My mentor is my lifesaver!” A successful relationship with your mentor requires quality time, trust, respect, and strong communication. As the new teacher, you know your needs best, so take the initiative to build your mentoring agenda. Most importantly, have a positive perspective and be appreciative of your mentor’s efforts. By following these tips, you will develop into a confident, knowledgeable, and experienced teaching professional.

References


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