



A Reflective Guide to Mentoring and being a teacher-mentor



Education
and Training

Early Childhood and School Education Group, Department of Education and Training

Treasury Place, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002

February 2016

© State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training) 2016

The copyright in this document is owned by the State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training), or in the case of some materials, by third parties (third party materials).

No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968, the National Education Access Licence for Schools (NEALS) (see below) or with permission.

An educational institution situated in Australia which is not conducted for profit, or a body responsible for administering such an institution, may copy and communicate the materials, other than third party materials, for the educational purposes of the institution.

Authorised by the Department of Education and Training, 2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002

1. Introduction.....	1
How is this guide organised?	1
What role do mentors play in the VIT registration process?.....	2
2. What is the purpose of mentoring?	3
What do we mean by mentoring?	3
Why do we need mentors?	5
Mutual benefits of mentoring.....	6
3. How well does our school context support effective mentoring?	7
Considering our school’s learning architecture	7
Enabling structures to support mentoring	8
How and why are enabling structures important?.....	8
Considering operational constraints	9
What enabling structures are present at my school?	11
4. What kind of mentor will I be?	13
Considering my professional stance	13
How do I approach others?.....	14
How do I position a beginning teacher?	14
What are my underlying dispositions?	16
What might this mean for being a mentor?	17
5. What do I need to know and do as a mentor?.....	19
Who am I mentoring? What kind of support do they need?	19
Strategies and options for supporting beginning teachers	20
The 4Cs: Clarifying, Consulting, Collaborating and Coaching.....	21
Classroom observation as a means of supporting professional learning.....	26
Facilitating professional conversations	30
Giving and receiving feedback.....	35
Evidence-informed conversations.....	36
Difficult or challenging conversations	39
The Evidence Based Professional Learning Cycle.....	41
6: What does the research say?	44
Common themes in the research.....	45
What practices get in the way of effective mentoring?	48
Want to know more?	50
7. What might all this mean for me?	52



1. Introduction

This guide is designed to support the further development of experienced teachers in their important role of mentoring less experienced colleagues.

It is a *guide* rather than an instruction manual because it assumes that you, the reader, are an accomplished teacher with a broad range of tried and tested teaching strategies combined with a well-developed understanding of the subjects you teach. It assumes that you *already work well* with colleagues and now want to further develop or deepen your skills and capacity to mentor a beginning teacher or less experienced colleague.

This means the practices referred to in this guide, drawn from research, are offered for reflection and as *options to be considered and adapted* rather than simply implemented. The ideas represent opportunities to think about and experiment with your practice and to expand your professional repertoire. This should lead to an approach to mentoring

that is appropriate to you, your circumstances and the colleagues you are supporting.

Although this guide is designed primarily for people new to mentoring, many of the ideas and practices should be relevant for more experienced mentors and coaches.

How is this guide organised?

The *Reflective Guide to Mentoring and Being a Mentor* is divided into **six chapters**:

1. Introduction
2. What's the purpose of mentoring?
3. How well does our school context support mentoring?
4. What kind of mentor do I want to be?
5. What do I need to know and do as a mentor?
6. What does the international research say about effective mentoring?

A series of reflective questions, prompts and possibilities are offered for you to consider throughout this guide – these are provided to promote a reflective approach to the text, which recognises an essential need for you to decide how best to support your new colleague.

What role do mentors play in the VIT registration process?

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is the national body that defines and sets out the professional standards that teachers must achieve to qualify for full registration. These standards reflect the qualities, practices and behaviours necessary to be an effective teacher in contemporary Australian classrooms.

AITSL, on their website, say:

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers is a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. The Standards define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st-century schools, which result in improved educational outcomes for students. The Standards do this by providing a framework that makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers' careers. They present a common understanding and language for discourse between teachers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public.

Teacher standards also inform the development of professional learning goals, provide a framework by which teachers can judge the success of their learning and assist self-reflection and self-assessment. Teachers can use the Standards to recognise their current and developing capabilities, professional aspirations and achievements.

AITSL see the standards as contributing to the professionalism of teaching, raising the status of teaching and what it means to be a teacher.

Mentors play an important *supporting role* for beginning teachers as they navigate their way through the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) process for full registration as a Proficient Teacher – this process is organised around the AITSL professional standards. The VIT registration process is a key aspect of inducting new teachers into the profession.

The mentor supports a beginning teacher through the VIT registration process by:

- ☉ Discussing and helping the beginning teacher to understand how the process works;
- ☉ What the AITSL standards mean and look like in practice;
- ☉ How the beginning teacher might go about developing practices that enable them to achieve the standards;
- ☉ Supporting them to identify and capture evidence which demonstrates achievement of the standards and which they can use to support their application for full registration.

*One of the **mentor's roles** is to guide and support the beginning teacher through the registration process, rather than evaluate, judge or assess their performance against the standards. Mentors may however, help the beginning teacher to recognise how they're progressing in relation to the standards and help them to know when they're ready to submit their application for registration as a Proficient Teacher.*



2. What is the purpose of mentoring?

What do we mean by mentoring?

The term 'mentor' is used in this guide to describe a knowledgeable, experienced, highly proficient teacher who works with and alongside a beginning teacher or less experienced colleague – quite closely at first but this gradually diminishes as the new teacher becomes more capable and confident. A mentor is not an instructor and the beginning teacher is not a student – he or she is a colleague.

Mentors know a great deal about teaching and learning, students, parents and the school, which often leads to a kind of practical wisdom that can't be printed in a book – this knowledge and know-how is invaluable to new teachers.

Mentors come in all kinds of shapes, sizes and packages with different skills and ways of working. There are things that you love to do and things that 'rattle your cages'. What makes you, as a mentor, different from your teacher colleagues is that you have volunteered to help someone just starting out as a teacher.

A lot of time, thought, energy and effort are needed to become a great mentor.

Just in the same way that this was necessary to become a great teacher. To make things more challenging, mentoring is not a step-by-step set of instructions or a recipe where you 'just add water'. So, rather than bombard you with theory or what *we know about mentoring* up front, we think there is a value in you reflecting on and recording what you believe mentoring is and what mentors do.

An ideas tree...

Creating an *Ideas Tree* will allow you to clarify your existing beliefs and understanding of what mentoring is and what you perceive mentors do.

On a piece of A3 paper jot down these questions:

What is mentoring?

What do mentors do?

Write down whatever comes to mind as you think about and unpack these questions.

When you can't think of anything else to add, alongside each entry respond to the following question:

If this is what mentors do, what might that mean for being an effective mentor?

In the example that follows, *intended only as an illustration*, you can see how responses to the prompts can be unpacked and deepened. Insights emerge from the unpacking and reflecting, so reading the example below is a poor substitute for the sense-making and analysis prompted by the creation of your own Ideas Tree.

What is mentoring?

Think about your experiences of mentoring or being mentored to frame up your responses.

For example mentoring could be:

When someone offers just the right kind of support, well-suited to the emerging needs of the person they are mentoring because they deeply understand that person and have an extensive repertoire of possible practices/responses which they can draw on, tweak and adapt according to circumstances and needs.

What do mentors do?

Again, drawing on your own experiences of mentoring – what do mentors actually do? For example, maybe mentors:

Put the other person 'at ease'

Draw their colleague out, creating conditions in which they want to speak

Listen attentively

Refrains from 'jumping to conclusions'

Is flexible and open to new learning

If this is what mentors do, what might that mean for being an effective mentor?

If one of the items you jotted down was 'listens attentively' write down alongside this what you believe that could mean for your practice.

How would you behave, what would the beginning teacher see/hear you doing if you were being an attentive listener?

Perhaps you are:

Engaging fully with my colleague, I wouldn't be fiddling with other things, I would be fully present with them, perhaps leaning forward in my chair...

Maintaining eye contact or writing down

what the beginning teacher says

Listening, without feeling the need to interrupt, interject or have 'answers'

Waiting for a pause before asking a question or seeking clarification

After drafting this guide we passed it on to several people to review. In response to the prompts above a teacher created her own Ideas Tree and this is what she had to say about the experience:

To help me create an Ideas Tree, I thought about leaders I have read about in the newspapers and imagined they were my mentors. I also thought about my Grandfather and a neighbour, Barry, who had been wonderful mentors when I needed support. I particularly appreciated their generous, gentle and encouraging approaches to supporting my personal growth and wellbeing.

In our discussions, Pa and Barry always made me feel they had time for me, time to talk and time to listen.

When we talked, they made eye contact and offered their undivided attention. They would ask about my beliefs and why something was important or what I was hoping to achieve before suggesting many possible ways of thinking about the situation. At the end of our discussions I would often feel enlightened, having adopted or adapted one of the ideas they had offered or one that we'd figured out together. I also admired and appreciated how Pa and Barry could both see a humorous side to any situation or difficulty that I came to them with.

Why do we need mentors?

The research is clear on the need for mentors. Having regular access to a

classroom mentor is profoundly important to new teachers and their development as proficient teachers. Without mentor support new teachers can flounder and may leave a profession they have spent years studying in order to join. Consider the system, social and personal costs such early departures bring about and the long-term losses to teaching this represents.

As a mentor you offer beginning teachers an anchor of support in an often challenging, demanding and sometimes chaotic transition from graduate to classroom teacher. Effective mentoring has a formative influence on the practice of beginning teachers and has a significant impact on the level and depth of learning amongst students of early career teachers. Without good mentors the quality of teaching and learning offered by new teachers is demonstrably less effective, new teachers experience more stress and anxiety and may leave the profession - the whole system suffers.

Other significant roles you could play as a mentor include:

Offering an ear to listen – *being interested rather than interesting*

Identifying, acknowledging and appreciating what your beginning teacher brings to their new school

Being passionate, positive and professional in your work with new teachers – offering a strong role model while becoming a trusted colleague

Being approachable, accessible and available when really needed (new teachers identify these qualities in their mentors as being very important)

Assisting beginning teachers to navigate and find their way through the school culture – and to understand *how things are done around here*

Encouraging your new colleague to make decisions and to exercise an appropriate degree of autonomy so that they can develop their own approach to teaching

Encouraging beginning teachers to experiment with their practice (acknowledging that when we first begin teaching it is all an experiment!)

Fostering positive, productive relationships with all members of staff, students, their families and the wider community demonstrating respect for culture and diversity

Mutual benefits of mentoring

There are potentially many benefits of mentoring for both mentor and beginning teacher as well as benefits for the school, the system and the profession. Having opportunities to offer deep, practical knowledge, both pedagogical, content and experience, can be a very rewarding and mutually beneficial aspect of effective mentoring.

Other significant benefits include:

An increase in the rate of professional growth, self-reflection and problem solving capacity for both mentor and beginning teacher

An increase in confidence, self-esteem, morale and sense of identity

Opportunities for learning new skills, teaching strategies and communic-

ation techniques, including how to engage in rigorous evidence-informed conversations

A greater sense of inclusion or reduced feelings of isolation

Opportunities for close collaboration, shared challenges and the sense of achievement that comes from successfully working through such challenges

Learning from more frequent opportunities to talk about teaching and learning, students, strategies and successes as well as challenges

Opportunities to capture and analyse evidence of student learning, leading to professional insights for both beginning teacher and mentor

Developing a sense of belonging, as a contributor to the school and its community.

What type of support (beyond just the technical) could you, and other members of the school community provide, and what might the benefits of such support be for your beginning teacher?

In what ways can you make yourself available and accessible when the beginning teacher needs support and how might this be an important aspect of effective mentoring?

How might you position yourself and your beginning teacher so that they can deepen their understanding and insights into teaching and learning and become independent, proficient teachers?



3. How well does our school context support effective mentoring?

We have already explored the extent to which effective mentoring is important for developing beginning teachers, what this means for their practice and the potential such support has for keeping new teachers in the profession. There are compelling reasons for schools to develop enabling structures and processes in which successful mentoring relationships can develop.

How enabling is our school culture and the structures and processes we have in place to support new teachers? What might we need to put in place to make mentoring work for us?

Considering our school's learning architecture

The term 'learning architecture' refers to the conditions in which a school becomes a place for professional talk, evidence-informed inquiry, and where a community of professional learners is systematically fostered.

The elements of a school's learning architecture are called 'enabling structures' – in particular the scheduling

of regular committed time and space to reflect, meet, discuss and share evidence and insights into professional practice. Enabling structures also include a formal induction process, professional learning teams (PLTs), triads, team coaching arrangements and classroom observation schedules.

The extent to which these enabling structures are effective depends on the time and resources available to support them, the skills and capabilities of the people enacting them and the extent to which these structures are aligned with and support each other.

The learning architecture usually reflects a school's values, priorities and culture - the fewer enabling structures, or the poorer quality and development of these structures, we can assume that professional learning has a lower priority.

Although you may not have direct control over the learning architecture and enabling structures and processes at your school it may still be helpful to know about the structures that support and lead to more effective mentoring. You will also be better equipped to explain, discuss and negotiate enabling structures and processes with school leaders.

Enabling structures to support mentoring

In Chapter 6 we identify a range of factors which enable effective mentoring, as identified in the international research. The most significant of these relates to the quality of support offered by mentors, underpinned by enabling structures and processes present in schools.

Four main themes emerged from the research (see p.44): (1) how mentors were selected and paired with beginning teachers; (2) the broader context of support available at a school, which included collective responsibility for supporting new teachers; (3) whether or not there was sufficient scheduled time for mentors to work with new teachers; and (4) the extent to which a school promoted capacity building through collegial, evidence-informed inquiry.

Similar enabling structures were revealed in research undertaken by DET in 2010. More effective mentoring was made possible by the following structures:

- ⦿ Time allocated for mentoring – as a reduced teaching allotment, with time for support and professional learning activities built into the work day of mentor and beginning teacher;
- ⦿ Carefully considered teaching load and class/student allocation, which took into account the beginning teacher's experience and learning needs;
- ⦿ Regular and timetabled mentoring support meetings, weekly or fortnightly, with additional meetings when needed;
- ⦿ Mentor and beginning teacher worked in close physical proximity to one another;
- ⦿ Mentor and beginning teacher were teaching the same year or subject level;
- ⦿ The role of 'induction or mentor coordinator' existed as a leadership position in larger schools – this indicated that induction and mentoring were seen as a priority;
- ⦿ Active support from school leaders was evident for both beginning teachers and mentors – this recognised that mentors need support as well as beginning teachers.

How and why are enabling structures important?

Take a few minutes to consider each of the enabling structures listed above.

On a blank page, draw up three columns, headed:

Enabling structure (Copy from list above.)

This enabling structure is significant because...

Without this enabling structure it would mean...

Jot down the reasons why you believe each element is significant and what the implications of that element's absence might mean for a beginning teacher and how it might impact you as a mentor. (Undertaking this reflective exercise will better equip you to **discuss and negotiate** structural enablers with school leaders.)

If all of these enabling structures are present then it is much more likely the mentoring relationship will be effective. When several of these elements are absent, for instance, if meetings are infrequent and ad hoc, the mentor and beginning teacher work in different year levels or subject disciplines and are located in different parts of the school, it is more likely that a mentoring

relationship with such constraints will be less effective.

The DET evaluation of the *Induction and Mentoring for Beginning Teacher Initiative*, also conducted in 2010, reinforced these points. In this study beginning teachers reported more positive experiences of mentoring when their mentor:

- Ⓒ Was approachable, accessible and willing to be engaged;
- Ⓒ Was supportive, empathetic and understanding;
- Ⓒ Had good communication skills;
- Ⓒ Was able to offer honest and helpful advice; and
- Ⓒ Had good pedagogical and subject knowledge and experience.

A mentor with this combination of skills, professional knowledge and dispositions, together with the enabling structures of a highly supportive learning architecture, make effective mentoring relationships much more likely.

Considering operational constraints

Sometimes operational constraints will make one or more of the enabling structures difficult or beyond the scope of a school to practically manage. This means that other enabling structures may need to be strengthened, or a 'missing' enabler may need to be compensated for or attended to in another way.

For instance, if it was impractical for you and your beginning teacher to work in the same year level or subject discipline, how could the impact of this be reduced? What else might need to be in place to support you and your beginning teacher in such circumstances?

What if it were impractical for you and your colleague to work in close physical proximity, how could the need for such nearness be addressed?

What if timetable allotments have already been organised and it is difficult to find sufficient time to meet and work together? What if your meetings are infrequent and often shorter than you both need?

Each of these questions represents a significant professional challenge, which will need to be discussed and addressed with school leaders – mentors cannot tackle such challenges alone. Lack of sufficient time and space effectively compromises the mentoring relationship.

In such circumstances the mentor may be perceived as difficult to access and therefore unable to share their experience, pedagogical know-how or offer advice or guidance – which is exactly what the beginning teacher needs.

Well-prepared and experienced mentors operating within a supportive learning architecture, with enabling structures – time, space and organisational support – are needed in these circumstances.

Something to try...

Work through the checklist on the following page to help you consider the extent to which your school has created the conditions to support successful mentoring experiences.

What is in place already?

What is missing?

What next?

Who needs to be involved now?

What enabling structures are present at my school?

Rather than simply 'ticking the boxes' below, indicate with an 'S' if this structure is a strength in your school, an 'M' if it is moderately supportive, and an 'N' if *not yet*.

You might use this tool to support a chat with your school leader.

- There is a carefully formulated orientation or induction plan and support materials that beginning teachers work through when they first commence at this school
- Careful consideration is given to the pairing of mentors with beginning teachers and the extent to which mentor and beginning teacher are professionally and interpersonally well-matched
- The school has a broad range of people, mechanisms and processes to support beginning teachers, it isn't just seen as the mentor's responsibility
- Mentor and beginning teacher have sufficient time allocated to meet and work together
- Mentor and beginning teacher have regular and timetabled mentoring meetings
- Mentor and beginning teacher share reduced face-to-face class time, recognising a need to have time away from the classroom to work together
- Mentor and beginning teacher have opportunities to engage in professional learning
- Consideration is given to teaching loads and class allocations consistent with the experience, capability and needs of the beginning teacher
- Mentor and beginning teacher work in close physical proximity
- Mentor and beginning teacher are teaching the same year or subject level
- Mechanisms are in place to regularly track and discuss the development, morale, professional confidence and sense of self-efficacy of the beginning teacher
- School leaders provide active, direct support for both beginning teacher and mentor
- Mentors access a network of support arrangements within and beyond the school
- The school has a collegial approach to teaching and learning, where people support and collaborate with each other
- There is a strong focus on professional learning throughout the school
- Mentors, and the work they undertake, are highly regarded and respected
- Mentoring is seen as a priority, central to achieving stronger student learning outcomes, capacity building and school improvement
- In larger schools an *induction* or *mentor coordinator* supports mentors and mentoring



The time (and quality of time) available for mentoring and supporting new teachers really matters.



4. What kind of mentor will I be?

Considering my professional stance

We each bring a professional stance to the ways in which we work with others, which reflect our values, priorities, assumptions and what we believe to be important - this influences what we say and do and *how we work with those around us*.

Our stance is reflected in the ways we position ourselves in relation to our colleagues and how we position them when we work together. Our stance can be quite complex, dynamic and multi-faceted as we often behave differently depending on the people we are with and the circumstances in which we find

In this chapter, **professional stance** is explored in terms of:

ourselves. locked up tight in the ways our beliefs might be – we can take up different positions as mentors once we are mindful of the impacts these positions have on others.

Some questions you might like to reflect on in relation to your own *professional stance*:

How do I position myself in relation to colleagues? How do I position others?

Do I take up different stances in different circumstances?

How can I become more aware of the role my stance plays in being a mentor?

1. How we approach others;
2. How we position others (and our assumptions about them);
3. Our underlying dispositions; and,
4. What this might mean for being a mentor.

Please take a few minutes to respond to the prompts throughout this chapter.

You may find it helpful to jot down your responses, so that you can reflect on the implications for you in your role as a mentor.

How do I approach others?

We often send clues about our stance in how we approach others. Buried inside these clues are our habits and assumptions, which may be hidden from us until we shine a light on them. As you respond to the following prompts, think about your responses in relation to working with a new teacher or a less experienced colleague. Ask yourself:

Where do I stand, in relation to:

- Who knows best?
- Showing, telling or...?
- Whose voice has the most weight?
- Who talks, who listens?
- The purpose of the mentoring?
- Being asked a 'silly question'?
- Who sets the agenda? Who chooses the focus?
- How things will be decided?
- Being approachable, accessible and available?
- How we work together, (including when and where)?

Who will benefit most from mentoring?

Who has the last word?

What clues can the beginning teacher glean from my approach that may reveal to them my professional stance? Are these the kinds of clues I want to send? Is this the kind of mentor I want to *be*?

How might this affect the way I mentor?

These aspects of your stance will have significant implications for how you work with your beginning teacher. In responding to the prompts above, what are you noticing about yourself and what this might mean for your practice as a mentor? How might a discussion about these aspects of stance, with the beginning teacher, inform your work together?

How do I position a beginning teacher?

The ways in which we position others reflect significant aspects of our professional stance and may reveal our assumptions about the people with whom we work. It is important to note that when we position a colleague in a particular way we are also *positioning ourselves*.

As you reflect on the different ways in which you position a beginning teacher, as prompted by the list on the next page, consider *the possible assumptions you might harbour* about that person.

How do I position a beginning teacher (and how might that position me)?

As a *trainee* whose practices need to be scrutinised, weighed and judged.

As an *audience* whose role it is to pay attention, observe and listen.

As a *participant* whose role it is to take part in the mentoring support provided.

As a *contributor* to the learning, who brings or adds something to our work together.

As a *collaborator*, that I work alongside as we analyse, discuss and learn *together*.

As a *co-creator* and initiator, someone who thinks for themselves, is self-starting, creative and capable – *we design and create together*.

As a *learning leader*, someone who plays a significant role in shaping and facilitating the learning of others, including my learning.

Our assumptions are, in a sense, the teeth of a trap, they potentially limit the possibilities for how we might engage with others. If we position our new colleague as a trainee whose practices need to be scrutinised, weighed and judged, what are we assuming about them and about ourselves?

If we position our colleague as a contributor or collaborator how are our assumptions different? What might this mean for *how we are positioned*? For example, if we position our colleague as a trainee, how might this position us, as their instructor? Or if we position them as a collaborator how are we positioned?

How might the way I position a beginning teacher affect the way I mentor?

If these aspects of your professional stance represent options and choices for how you might position a colleague, what practices and ways of working would support such choices? For instance, if you wanted to position your colleague as a contributor, what would you need to do as a mentor to position them this way? What would we hear you saying and see you doing? If you wanted to position your colleague as a collaborator how would you need to work with them? What role (position) would you take up? How might this affect their professional learning (capacity building)?

Positioning is not a one-way street, however – sometimes it is our colleagues who position us by taking up a position themselves. A less experienced colleague may prefer to be an ‘audience’ to our expert knowledge and know-how or their lack of experience (and confidence) may make them reluctant to be a ‘contributor’ or ‘collaborator’. It often feels good to be positioned as an expert and to have others defer to our superior knowledge and know how, but how might this contribute to the development of the beginning teacher?

How might being alert to such possibilities affect how we work with each other?

How might we benefit from a shared understanding of this tendency for each of us to position the other through our stance and the role we adopt?



What are my underlying dispositions?

The combination of the professional stance we adopt with our underlying dispositions greatly impacts our effectiveness as mentors.

We each bring a range of dispositions to how we work with others. For example, some people tend to have a critical eye and see challenges in something before any benefits. This could result in a tendency to focus on faults and problems rather than strengths and successes.

Some people look for opportunities to offer positive and affirming comments, about the skills, capabilities or achievements of others, which reinforces confidence and a sense of capability.

Others are drawn to asking tough questions and may feel uncomfortable offering praise or affirmation. Some people have a strong desire for order and structure, which could result in a need for control and more frequent oversight to

achieve such control. Some people tend to focus on small details and want to know *all the ins and outs* before proceeding while others are more interested in 'big picture' ideas.

Our different perceptions of time and its relative importance can be another significant disposition that may affect how we work with others.

The following prompts are offered as though they were *two ends of a continuum*, so you may not be at 'one end or the other' but somewhere in-between. Your responses may also differ depending on the circumstances. However, there is perhaps a benefit in considering where you might ordinarily locate yourself on these imaginary continuums while reflecting on what this might mean for being a mentor.

Do you tend to:

- Ⓒ See the challenges or difficulties in something or are you more likely to focus on potential benefits and opportunities?
- Ⓒ Focus on faults and problems more often than strengths and successes?
- Ⓒ Ask tough questions more frequently than recognising accomplishments or offering affirmation and praise?
- Ⓒ Have a critical eye when thinking about things or are you more likely to see them with an appreciative gaze?
- Ⓒ Value order and structure or do you prefer to see where things go?
- Ⓒ Want to control situations or immerse yourself in them?
- Ⓒ Focus on the details more often than the big picture?
- Ⓒ See every minute as precious with not a moment to spare?

How might these dispositions affect the way I mentor?

If these dispositions impact your mentoring role, are there any in particular that you recognise as supporting or impeding your practice? How can you strengthen those that you see as supporting effective mentoring and manage those dispositions that you see as getting in the way of your practice as a mentor?

If we recognise that beginning teachers will also have a range of dispositions, what are the implications of alignments or differences in how you each approach your work? What would happen if you have a strong preference for order and structure and your beginning teacher

would much prefer to see where things go? Or vice versa?

Whose view prevails or are there alternatives?

What might this mean for being a mentor?

What are the implications of your responses to the above prompts for your professional stance and *being a mentor*? How might your stance and dispositions affect:

- Ⓒ Building a mentoring relationship?
- Ⓒ Developing mutual confidence-trust?
- Ⓒ Offering, or responding to requests for, ideas or advice?
- Ⓒ Engaging in professional conversations?
- Ⓒ Capturing and collating data and evidence?
- Ⓒ Analysing practice together?
- Ⓒ Overcoming challenges?
- Ⓒ Promoting independent practice and a (growing) sense of self-efficacy?

Each of these aspects of being an effective mentor is affected by the different stances and dispositions we bring to our work. The combination of them will influence how effective we can be.

How might this affect the way I mentor?

If being an effective mentor means being more mindful about your professional stance, where should you focus your attention at the beginning of a mentoring relationship?

Identify one or two aspects of your professional stance in each of the four elements considered above, (as revealed in your responses to the prompts). Make deliberate efforts to change or adapt your stance to the needs of your colleague and the circumstances in which you are both working.

For example, if you decided that being 'approachable, accessible and available' was a crucial aspect of your stance, how would you make this visible to your beginning teacher and viable in your context? What steps would you need to take for this to be the beginning teacher's experience of working with you? If another aspect of your stance was that 'there is no such thing as a 'silly question'', how would your new colleague come to understand this implicitly and without hesitation?

If we take those two aspects of your stance and consider them in light of how you position the beginning teacher – we can see that things will be very different if the beginning teacher is positioned as a collaborator rather than an audience. How might the idea of 'there is no such thing as a silly question' be different if your new colleague is positioned as an audience compared with being positioned as a collaborator? (Who will they be expecting to 'answer' the questions?).

If we take this reflection a little deeper and begin to consider the impact of our

dispositions, if 'there is no such thing as a silly question' and the beginning teacher is positioned as 'a collaborator', what is the impact of 'focusing on problems and faults more often than strengths and successes' for your collaboration? How would this be different if your focus was reversed and there was greater emphasis on strengths and successes?

Now if we take all that into consideration and reflect on the implications for 'building a mentoring relationship' or 'overcoming challenges' it becomes possible to see the way in which every aspect of our stance and the ways in which we position our colleagues impacts our mentoring practice.

This chapter offers a great deal to think about, so at this point you may be feeling a little daunted or overwhelmed – that's ok, you just need to find somewhere to focus your efforts.

You may find it useful to choose just one or two aspects of your professional stance to experiment with and strengthen at one time. You may find that changes in these two aspects of your stance flow through to others.



5. What do I need to know and do as a mentor?

Who am I mentoring? What kind of support do they need?

Beginning teachers arrive in their new schools with a mixture of excitement, curiosity and trepidation – some will be more excited than anxious, others more anxious than excited.

They will have spent a significant period of their lives as students, first at school and more recently at University. During these two extended periods they will have experienced the practice of many teachers and will have formed their own

views about what it means to be a ‘great teacher’ and how such teachers behave.

The transition from student to teacher and the translation of their perceptions of ‘great teaching’ into practice are likely to be more challenging than many graduate teachers expect. They will have had classroom experiences as student-teachers, however, the first few weeks of teaching independently are likely to disappear in a blur as almost everything they do will be new. In a sense everything they try will be a ‘practical experiment’ in teaching and learning.

However, it is not possible to generalise about beginning teachers any further than this because they will be as diverse as the

students we teach in our classrooms. They will be stronger in some areas than others, they will be challenged by different aspects of practice, they will require different levels of support and guidance, and some beginning teachers will be able to articulate or reveal what they need more clearly than others.

Just as we need to find out a great deal about the learners in our classrooms in order to effectively scaffold their learning, we also need to thoroughly understand the beginning teachers we are supporting.

How can we understand a beginning teacher and what they might need?

Some things to consider first...

Whenever there is a significant difference in knowledge, experience and expertise between two people there is a related imbalance in the power relationship.

The gradual deepening of a mentoring relationship, via different forms of professional conversation and collaboration, is essential to deepening the professional learning that such relationships enable.

The experience of talking with someone who is much more experienced and knows more about teaching and learning than we do can be intimidating. (How might experienced teachers make themselves less intimidating so that BEGINNING TEACHERs feel valued as they learn with and from them?)

Different people are more comfortable/ready to talk about some things than others.

Some people know more, or can do more, than we might assume.

Strategies and options for supporting beginning teachers

As a mentor it is important to consider how to keep the professional learning of the beginning teacher as the focus of the support offered. This allows mentors to find ways of enabling beginning teachers so that they have a strong voice in determining what sort of support they require and how it might be offered.

In this chapter we explore the role that a range of strategies, including classroom observations and professional conversations (of gradually increasing rigour and depth), can play in helping mentors to thoroughly understand and support a beginning teacher from induction through to proficiency.

Readers are encouraged to experiment with the strategies offered. The options available to mentors in this chapter include:

- ☉ The 4Cs: Clarifying, Consulting, Collaborating and Coaching
- ☉ Classroom observations as a means of prompting reflective inquiry
- ☉ Facilitating different types of conversation matched to beginning teacher need and readiness
- ☉ Engaging in challenging or difficult conversations and the role that trust plays
- ☉ Evidence-informed conversations, a contemporary alternative to feedback
- ☉ Using the DEECD Evidence-based Professional Learning Cycle.



The 4Cs: Clarifying, Consulting, Collaborating and Coaching.

Working with the connected practices of Clarifying, Consulting, Collaborating and Coaching offers mentors a series of complementary strategies for understanding and supporting the practice of a beginning teacher.

The 4Cs offer four different ways of working with a beginning teacher depending on their needs and readiness to engage with their practice more deeply. There is also a sense that the 4Cs offer a means of supporting new teachers in the transition from graduate to independent practice, which is also the aim of the VIT process for full registration.

The practice of 'Clarifying' and asking clarifying questions is central to effective mentoring and can help to reveal the kind of support a beginning teacher needs.

Effective mentoring depends on listening closely to, and understanding, the person with whom you are working. Clarifying can be supported by writing down what your colleague says - this will allow you to return to specific comments or observations later that may benefit from further clarification.

The goal of the mentor when clarifying is to be fully present for their colleague and to be 'interested rather than interesting'.

What kinds of questions are clarifying?

When you said... what were you thinking about?

What makes you say that?

Could you say a little more about...

I am not sure I understand, could you explain that a little more?

Which of these ideas (raised by the beginning teacher) is more important or urgent for you?

If you had to choose (ideas raised by the beginning teacher), which of these would help most?

Questions such as these will reward mentors with a deeper understanding of their colleague, their context, circumstances and needs as well as offering clues about whether they may benefit more from Consulting, Collaborating or Coaching support.

Asking clarifying questions, rather than analytical, critical or interrogative questions can be quite challenging at first - the goal of clarifying questions is to *understand something more fully from the beginning teacher's perspective*. Clarifying questions help the beginning teacher to think more clearly and the responses generated can be as revealing and helpful for the new teacher as they are for you.

Well-formed clarifying questions should lead to quite powerful insights for the beginning teacher.

Worth considering...

What would happen if you offered support without spending much time helping your colleague to clarify and organise their thoughts? How much practice have you had asking such questions?

When Consulting the mentor responds to the beginning teacher's questions or requests for information or ideas, and takes into account a stated (or implied) need for specific knowledge or know how.

The mentor, drawing on their broader experience and deeper repertoire of practices, supports their less experienced

colleague with options and alternatives to consider, to which they would not otherwise have access.

When consulting, the ideas, possibilities and solutions flow from mentor to beginning teacher.

The mentor is positioned as 'the expert', the 'giver' and the person who has the greater knowledge and agency in the relationship. It is also quite common for new teachers to position a mentor in this way, particularly at the beginning of a mentoring relationship. They may want (or need) answers and solutions and the mentor can be seen as a ready source of possibilities for practice.

It is also quite common for mentors to position themselves as a consultant.

A technique for gradually increasing the level of agency (the beginning teacher making decisions) can be achieved by increasing the number of options and alternatives offered. This encourages the beginning teacher to recognise that there are multiple ways of addressing the same teaching goal or challenge and encourages them to weigh up possibilities and make considered professional decisions. This also encourages the beginning teacher to engage with you in a professional conversation, which allows you to help them deepen their thinking in relation to the options offered. Clarifying questions can be used to good effect in these circumstances.

Evidence can also play an important role in the consulting relationship when used to help the beginning teacher decide between options offered. This encourages the beginning teacher to see evidence as

an important influence in the decision-making process.

Worth considering...

What are the implications for you and your less experienced colleague if consulting support becomes the only option available to you both? What if such support makes your colleague happy, it's what they 'want' - are there any risks with sticking simply with consulting?

When Collaborating the mentor engages with their colleague in a shared approach to analysis, problem-solving, decision-making and reflection. Their less-experienced colleague has generally signalled a willingness to engage in joint work and brings their own ideas and possibilities to the collaboration. However, the mentor may also prompt collaborating by asking questions such as: Is this something we could work on together?

Collaborating introduces a greater sense of equality and collegiality into the mentoring relationship, offers opportunities for creative input as it calls for contributions from both mentor and beginning teacher. Collaborating encourages new teachers to take on greater responsibility (more agency), it fosters joint or negotiated decision-making and readies the beginning teacher for working in teams. Collaborating also leads to a growing sense of self-efficacy and achievement.

Evidence can play a more significant role when collaborating as the mentor can support the beginning teacher to analyse and dig more deeply into whatever evidence they have captured together. The beginning teacher will feel less vulnerable when analysis is undertaken with their more experienced colleague.

Worth considering...

The relationship between mentor and colleague shifts when the mode of support offered involves collaborating. How and in what ways could this shift be significant? In what ways might you *both benefit*?

When Coaching the mentor supports their colleague through skilful questioning and probing, creating the conditions in which their colleague arrives at their own course of action. When coaching, a beginning teacher is ready to use his or her own evidence and knowledge to decide where to go next. The coach functions as a sounding board, mirroring back their colleague's ideas and possibilities for practice, supporting them through questions they ask rather than offering suggestions or ideas of their own.

Evidence can play a key role in coaching when it becomes central to the beginning teacher's practice in designing, reviewing, assessing, analysing and discussing learning. The beginning teacher recognises evidence as being essential to a productive coaching conversation. The coach supports the beginning teacher by asking rigorous analytical questions.

Worth considering...

To what extent would it matter if we just stuck with clarifying, consulting and collaborating and did not get to coaching support? Or, why not support a beginning teacher just with coaching, why do we need the other Cs? How could the beginning teacher benefit from knowing about the 4Cs, understanding the options they have available to them and choosing their own level of support?

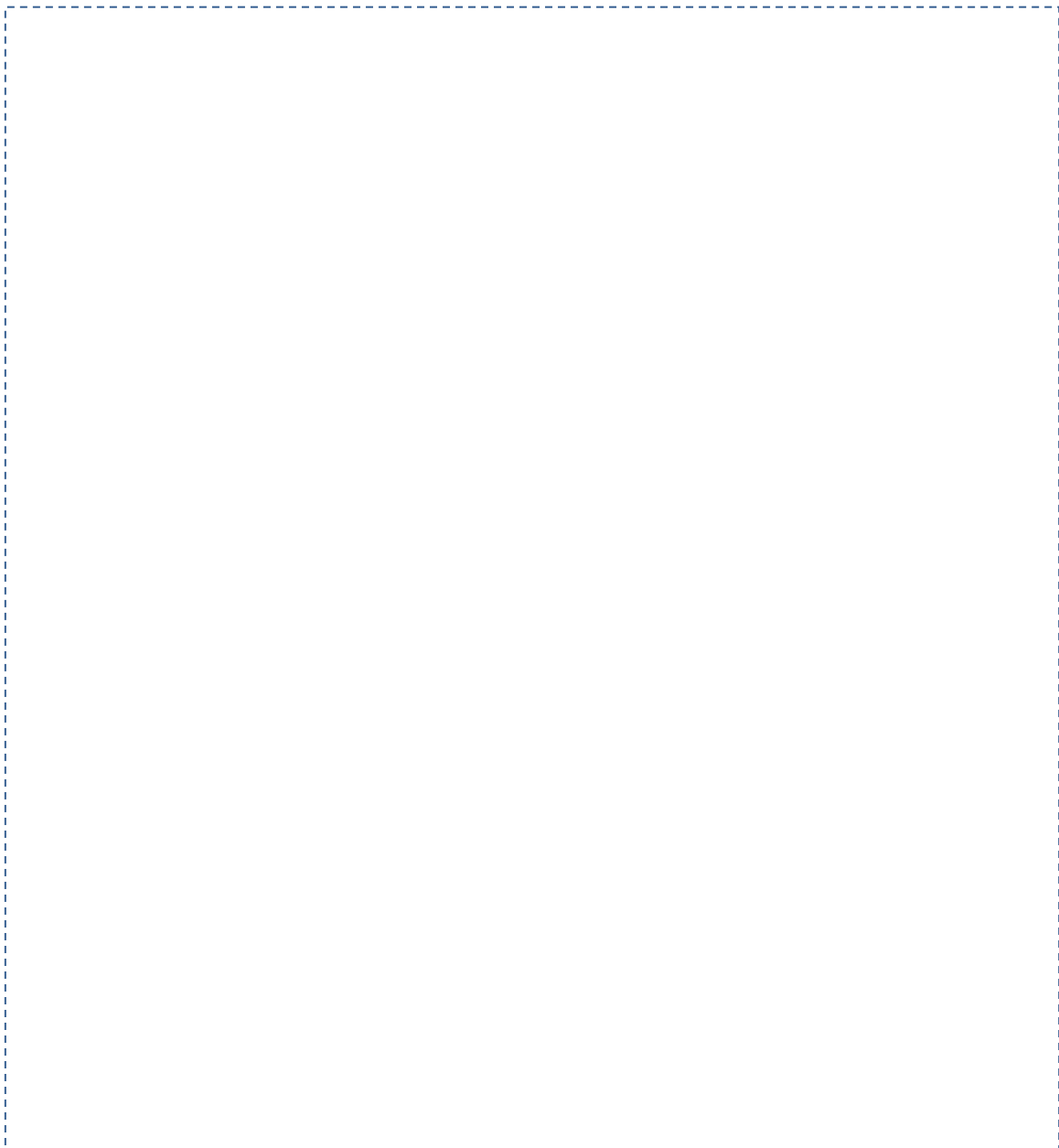
Something to try...

Reflecting on an experience of supporting or being supported by one of the 4Cs, jot down your experience below

Identify a successful experience of either supporting or being supported by someone via one of the 4Cs – clarifying, consulting, collaborating or coaching.

Consider and reflect on the strengths and limitations of the role as you experienced the practice of your colleague (or reflect on your own practice).

Reflecting on an experience of supporting or being supported





Classroom observation as a means of supporting professional learning

One way of supporting new teachers is through the use of classroom observations.

Classroom observation can be a powerful strategy when creating opportunities for on-going professional learning. Through carefully designed and facilitated observations and reflective follow-up sessions, it is possible for beginning teachers to gain valuable insights about teaching and student learning and to more deeply understand their own developing practice.

Mentors will play an invaluable role in supporting the process when they ensure that the *purpose, structure, focus, documentation* and *ways of reflecting on the classroom observation* are negotiated with the beginning teacher beforehand and that there is adequate follow-up after the session. This follow-up will usually involve a reflective and analytical conversation, which is described later in this chapter.

When the beginning teacher is given a strong voice in how the experience unfolds and then has opportunities to debrief afterwards, it is likely to be a more

successful learning experience for both beginning teacher and mentor.

Something to try...

You and one or two experienced colleagues engage in a 30 minute mini-inquiry to discuss and clarify your understanding of classroom observations and develop your stance (see Chapter 3) in relation to this practice.

Briefly respond to the Q's below.

What has been your experience of classroom observations?

Were you observed or were you the observer? How were the experiences different?

What was the purpose of the observation?

How did you feel about observing or being observed?

What did you learn? What were the enablers and barriers you experienced?

How did the observation improve your practice?

How might the experience have been improved?

Were there any common themes in the shared experiences? To what extent were the observations purposeful, positive and supportive of the development of teaching practice? How do you know?

What are you thinking about now that you might not have considered before?

Share and discuss this with your colleagues.

Why use classroom observations?

There are generally three purposes for classroom observations in a mentoring process.

1. *To stimulate and initiate new practice.* Beginning teacher observes an experienced teacher in action, to learn more about a specific technique or strategy that they wish to initiate in their own practice.
2. *To develop current practice.* Beginning teacher is observed by an experienced teacher/mentor who will document specific observations and data in relation to an area of practice that the beginning teacher would like to strengthen.
3. *To help capture and analyse evidence* related to student learning that is then analysed and discussed together

In many systems, mentors are also expected to support new teachers through a formal registration process against a set of professional standards, so there is a fourth purpose for observing a beginning teacher.

4. *To support beginning teachers in their quest to gain full registration as a teacher.* Mentors observe beginning teachers and support them by identifying, and helping them to document evidence of *standards of practice* as part of their journey to full registration as 'Proficient Teachers'.

It is worth noting that there is at least one other potential focus for classroom observation, *performance management*.

Classroom observation as performance management is generally a process designed to judge the extent to which a teacher's practice is considered effective, usually by a line manager. This purpose

can complicate the mentoring process as described in this guide, where the focus is positive collegial support and building trust.

Classroom observation as performance management may conflict with the trusting, respectful and non-judgmental relationship that mentors and beginning teachers need to foster effective mentoring.

Observations for the purpose of performance management lie outside the scope of this guide.

Designing, structuring and agreeing on a process for successful classroom observations

Classroom observations can be divided into three phases:

- (1) Pre-observation (**before**),
- (2) Observing (**during**) and
- (3) Analysing and reflecting (**after**).

Each phase has several elements that need to be carefully considered so that the observation experience is productive for everyone.

Beginning teachers and mentors need to be clear about;

- ☉ The purpose for the observation;
- ☉ The focus of the observation;
- ☉ Each person's role;
- ☉ What evidence is to be collected and how;
- ☉ When (e.g. immediately after the observation, the next morning etc) and how (e.g. using a protocol to guide and

prompt the discussion) the beginning teacher and mentor will analyse and reflect on what was discovered; and

- ☉ The most appropriate actions to take following the observation.

Each classroom observation should be treated as a unique opportunity for learning, designed to meet the needs of the beginning teacher, drawing on the professional expertise of the mentor.

On the following page are examples of questions and prompts that mentors and beginning teachers may wish to consider when negotiating and agreeing on a process for classroom observation.

You will notice that the table is organised in a way that implies the beginning teacher is an observer of a more experienced colleague *BEFORE* they are observed by that colleague. This establishes a way of working that is non-judgemental, helping the beginning teacher to understand how colleagues can learn with and from each other.

Negotiating the parameters for classroom observation

What do we need to agree on when observing classroom practice?

Identifying the purpose for our observation: Is the observation to *stimulate new practice* or to *refine and further develop current practice*?

When?	If the purpose is to stimulate new practice... then beginning teacher observes more experienced colleague	If the purpose is to refine and further develop current practice... then more experienced colleague observes beginning teacher
Before:	<p>Setting a focus and agreeing on our roles:</p> <p>What does the beginning teacher want to learn more about?</p> <p>How does this connect to the learning focus of the beginning teacher's students?</p> <p>What is the beginning teacher already doing in this area?</p> <p>What does the beginning teacher want to achieve or change?</p> <p>Who might be the best person for the beginning teacher to observe?</p> <p>What should the beginning teacher be looking for/at during the observation?</p> <p>How will the beginning teacher record what is observed?</p> <p>How and when will we analyse and make sense of what is observed?</p>	<p>Setting a focus and agreeing on our roles:</p> <p>What classroom practice is the beginning teacher working on and why?</p> <p>What evidence does beginning teacher want me to collect?</p> <p>How does the beginning teacher want me to document the evidence they've asked me to capture?</p> <p>What does the beginning teacher want me to focus on and do during the lesson?</p> <p>How and when will we analyse and make sense of what is documented?</p> <p>How will we get the students' perspectives?</p>
During	<p>Collecting and documenting data:</p> <p>Who does what during the session? (E.g. document what the teacher is saying and doing, how the classroom is organised, use of materials and resources, take photos, interview specific students, collect work samples, document transition points, document some of student's conversations or responses etc.)</p> <p>What roles will each of us play?</p>	<p>Collecting and documenting data:</p> <p>Who does what during the session? (E.g. take photos, interview specific students, collect work samples, record transition points, document some of student's conversations or responses etc.)</p> <p>What roles will each of us play?</p>
After	<p>Making sense of what we saw, reflecting on and analysing what we discovered and deciding what to do next.</p> <p>Starting with the beginning teacher's observations before mentor offers their experience or insights.</p> <p>What did the beginning teacher notice?</p> <p>What is the beginning teacher thinking about now?</p> <p>What might this mean for the beginning teacher's practice? What changes might the beginning teacher want to make?</p>	<p>Making sense of what happened, reflecting on and analysing what we discovered and deciding what to do next</p> <p>What does the evidence say to the beginning teacher?</p> <p>Does the data reflect how the beginning teacher felt that things went?</p> <p>What is the beginning teacher thinking about now?</p> <p>What might that mean for the beginning teacher's practice?</p>

Something to try...

With your beginning teacher design and develop a one or two page classroom observation record that enables you to document what you have agreed to observe prior to a classroom visit.

Make sure that in your design you consider how you will document:

- ⦿ The purpose for the observation;
- ⦿ The focus of the observation;
- ⦿ What the observer and teacher will do;
- ⦿ How and what data is to be collected;
- ⦿ How and when the debrief will take place; and,
- ⦿ What next?

Facilitating professional conversations

Perhaps the most productive strategies employed by mentors with beginning teachers involve engaging in professional conversations.

Talking with each other is a natural way to share experiences and to uncover issues and challenges so that we can make sense of what is going on and learn from each other. It makes sense that professional conversations are the cornerstone of mentoring. Significant aspects of facilitating effective professional conversations involve choosing the most appropriate form of conversation to have and finding the right balance between empathy, challenge and support.

Too much empathy, challenge or support will encourage high levels of dependency and uncertainty, likely to lead to feelings of inadequacy. Too little empathy, challenge and support can lead to beginning teachers feeling isolated,

misguided and unsure about how they are going.

By creating time for simple, open conversations, mentors provide opportunities for new teachers to reveal what's on their mind. Mentors will gain insights into the needs of the beginning teacher and together they can determine what kind of support is needed.

Listening with the intention of truly understanding what the beginning teacher needs is an important skill for mentors to develop. Constant 'on the run' conversations run the risk of masking any issues or challenges that may grow into something more difficult to manage later on. Beginning with simple, open conversations should lead to opportunities later for deeper conversations where thornier issues or challenges might be discussed and appropriate plans for action developed.

Skilful questioning and the ability to genuinely listen are vitally important skills for mentors to master. Using these skills, along with developing an empathetic disposition and being authentically interested in the beginning teachers growth and development, are factors that contribute to more effective mentoring relationships.

In this chapter we describe different forms of professional conversation and how these can be facilitated to support the professional learning of beginning teachers, while also considering the role beginning teachers can play in determining the focus of these conversations.

The **four types** of professional conversations explored in this guide include:

Wellbeing conversations, which focus on the beginning teacher's confidence and sense of self-efficacy

Technical conversations that focus on information, policies and processes

Planning and design conversations that focus on designing for learning

Reflective and analytical conversations that encourage beginning teachers to consider their practice, its impact on learners and options for future actions

Why is there a need to distinguish between different types of conversation?

The four conversation types listed above represent a continuum from the most straightforward and least challenging, *wellbeing conversations*, through to more complex and demanding conversations, which have a *reflective or analytical focus*.

Mentors will find that it makes sense to gradually build the intellectual (and potentially emotional) rigour and demand of the conversation as the beginning teacher becomes more confident and as trust in the relationship builds.

The extent to which a new teacher will be ready to engage in rigorous, analytical, evidence-informed conversations will depend on the extent to which their confidence and sense of self-efficacy has developed. Entering into such a conversation at the beginning of a mentoring relationship is likely to be unproductive and may alienate the beginning teacher.

Being mindful of the quality of our professional conversations, and reviewing and reflecting on these from time to time, will help us to recognise how well they are supporting our mentoring practice.

Wellbeing conversations

These conversations focus on the beginning teacher's confidence and sense of self-efficacy – they reveal more about how they're feeling than their work.

Mentors use this form of conversation to learn more about their colleague's perceptions about their teaching, and any anxieties or insecurities they may have. A well-being conversation can also reveal how they are building relationships with students and colleagues, any challenges or concerns they might have about time-management and surface a need to advocate on the beginning teacher's behalf for entitlements such as preparation and mentoring time.

Wellbeing conversations focus on the beginning teacher's emotional welfare within the context of their new career and the 'dailyness' of their work – a setting in which stresses can build gradually or suddenly, which means there is a need for regular check-ins and debriefings.

During such conversations mentors will often empathise with the beginning teacher and find ways to encourage and reassure their new colleague. Mentors become an ally in a new and sometimes daunting environment.

Conversations like this are more frequent in the early days of teaching when building a mentoring relationship is the focus and making sense of the working environment is a priority.



Something to try...

A scaffolded well-being conversation

With your beginning teacher organise to have a 'wellbeing conversation' using the scaffolded prompts below to help you learn more about each other and to discuss how you will work together – allow at least 30 mins

Mentor: Select a variety of images from magazines that could represent how your beginning teacher might be feeling in the first few weeks of school and how you might be feeling as a Mentor as the year begins. The images will help you both to express and share how you are feeling about your work and will function as a lead-in to talk about how you want to work together.

Both respond to this prompt:

If aspects of these images represent how you are feeling now, early in the

year, identify which ones and explain how they reflect your feelings

Share your responses to these prompts:

Similarities/differences? What might that mean for us?

What are you most excited about this year?

What are two things that are challenging you at the moment that you would like to work on with me?

What would you like me to know about how you prefer to work to make sure we get the most out of our partnership?

In what ways will our learning partnership be good for our students?

Technical conversations

Technical conversations are often the easiest to have as they deal with a need for ordinary, everyday information such as processes, policies or procedures.

Beginning teachers require specific information, which is often readily available if you know where to look or who to ask. This type of conversation will occur each time there is an unfamiliar school requirement or event that the new teacher encounters. After providing the information they need, the new teacher usually won't need to ask again.

Topics commonly at the centre of these conversations include: assessment schedules, where to locate resources, report writing and timelines, excursion notices, professional expectations, behaviour management policies, and other school policies and processes.

Mentors may even pre-empt these conversations as specific events in the school year come up. It will be clear that this will be a new experience for the beginning teacher to negotiate and mentors can make the transitions smoother and less worrying for them. Mentors draw on knowledge of the school context and will usually be able to provide an answer to their colleague's query.

Something to try – a brainstorm

With your beginning teacher, peruse the school's orientation or induction materials. Identify and clarify anything that is a little mystifying for the beginning teacher then brainstorm a list of any other kinds of information or processes that the beginning teacher might need to know about.

Clarify what you can immediately, then tag each item on the list with the name of a person who might know answers to the questions or be able to help the beginning teacher find out.

Planning or Design Conversations

Planning or Design Conversations are active and collaborative endeavours. Mentors work with new teachers to guide, question, challenge, offer options, probe for and seek solutions to challenges of practice. Beginning teachers will be designing units of work, planning to use new strategies, working out how to assess student learning or how to evaluate the impact of something they have tried.

The focus of planning or design conversations is the teacher's work in the classroom, which should always connect to student learning.

Mentors in these conversations could refer to the **4Cs**, (explained earlier in this chapter) to help clarify the different possibilities for support in this conversation. With the beginning teacher they will decide whether the mentor is needed in the role of consultant, collaborator or coach. The mentor will draw on their own experience and expertise to support the beginning teacher as they work out learning goals for their students and identify success indicators to track the effectiveness of practices they have chosen to develop.

Planning or design conversations will continue throughout the year with the beginning teacher providing the focus based on their own professional learning needs, prompted by the identified learning needs of their students.

Reflective and analytical conversations

Reflective and analytical conversations encourage beginning teachers to consider the various aspects of their practice and its impact on learners to guide their future actions

Mentors and beginning teachers use reflective and analytical conversations to gain insights into practice by analysing evidence related to a specific area of practice. Such evidence can reveal a great deal about the learning that occurred.

Mentors can help beginning teachers to make sense of classroom events by documenting and recording specific information that can be analysed and discussed afterwards. The evidence provides an objective starting point for beginning teachers to examine, question and compare what happened with what they intended to happen in the lesson.

Together the beginning teacher and mentor can consider the implications for future actions and build from a reflective conversation towards a planning one.

Mentors will find that they need to use skilled questioning techniques to clarify and probe the evidence to draw out different perspectives that may offer new insights, which will influence what the beginning teacher does next. It is important to use a variety of strategies to document classroom events. Analysing different forms of evidence will spotlight and amplify unexpected perspectives that will enrich the new teacher's thinking.

Strategies that mentors and beginning teachers might consider include: video of the beginning teacher teaching, student work samples, student interviews, lesson plans, classroom running sheets and data

captured when mentor or beginning teacher take up the role of 'student for a day'. Different forms of evidence offer potentially rich insights into the nature and impact of the new teacher's practice.

Something to try – a WOW conversation

This is a reflective conversation scaffold designed for beginning teachers and mentors to share and discuss their classroom experiences. The WOW conversation invites insights and suggestions in response to the wonderings of both beginning teacher and mentor.

Allow at least 30 minutes.

- 1. Prior to the conversation beginning teacher and mentor agree to reflect on a specific lesson or period of time e.g. the past week and using a sheet of paper divided into three columns - Wins, Obstacles and Wonderings - record important or significant events for them in that period.*
- 2. Beginning teacher and mentor bring their WOW documents to the conversation and these act as prompts for the discussion.*
- 3. After the mentor leads the beginning teacher through analysing and discussing what is recorded, using both clarifying and probing questions, the mentor offers insights and suggestions to address the beginning teacher's wonderings.*
- 4. Beginning teacher then shares any new thinking or resolutions that have become apparent to them during or following the conversation.*
- 5. Beginning teacher and mentor reverse roles, beginning teacher supports the mentor to consider, analyse and reflect on their WOW document.*



Giving and receiving feedback

There will be times when new teachers seek opinions and advice from their mentor and there will be times when mentors would like to offer an opinion or advice to their less experienced colleague.

The term often used to describe this process is, 'giving and receiving feedback'.

This process sometimes leaves the person 'receiving the feedback' feeling judged, demoralised and inadequate and the person 'giving the feedback', who is usually positioned as an expert, uncertain about its impact, especially when they encounter a dispirited response. Neither of these outcomes is ideal or desirable, nor will such responses support the development of an effective mentoring relationship.

The issue with feedback is that it always requires a 'giver' and a 'receiver', implying

a didactic or 'transmission' approach to learning. It involves someone else's judgement, which is at odds with contemporary views of adult learning and how adults learn best.

Mentors and beginning teachers seeking opinions and advice from each other, discussing, analysing and designing learning together does not have to take the form of 'giving and receiving feedback'.

The idea of feedback is better suited to performance management or a performance and development process. There are pedagogical alternatives that are better suited to supporting the development of effective mentoring relationships, such as evidence-informed professional conversations.

Evidence-informed conversations

Evidence-informed conversations are a contemporary alternative to the practice of giving and receiving feedback.

Earlier we explored different forms of conversation defined by their focus – wellbeing, technical and planning conversations as well as conversations that promote reflecting and analysing.

Evidence-informed conversations fall into the fourth form of conversation as they involve analysis and decision-making based on insights derived from evidence. Such conversations are likely to be more challenging, require more time, more effort, more pre-planning and preparation and involve deeper thinking and discussion.

Evidence-informed conversations create opportunities for beginning teachers to seek their mentor's opinions and advice and to benefit from their professional insights. However, that advice needs to focus on and be connected to evidence captured and analysed in relation to *what the beginning teacher has chosen to work on or strengthen in their practice*.

Analysing the evidence together will reveal specific professional challenges, which will provide a springboard for beginning teachers and mentors to share ideas and insights. They can discuss how the beginning teacher might address what has been revealed and identify options together. In an evidence-informed conversation the mentor's advice will be both focussed and supportive – offered as possibilities to consider rather than as 'expert opinion' to be implemented or a judgement or instruction to be acted on.

How to work with evidence as part of a professional conversation

Before mentors begin to refine their skills in facilitating evidence-informed conversations, it is important to consider what we mean by evidence and how we can work with evidence as an alternative to 'giving and receiving feedback'.

Evidence is any form of information that in some way captures, documents or creates a picture of something specific that is worth noting, which might help us to better understand that something, which may then allow us to act (or not) on what we have discovered.

Another way of thinking about evidence is that it's 'information' we can learn a great deal from. To become evidence, 'information' needs to be a 'lens' for something we want to learn more about. Information becomes evidence when it reveals something that is present or absent or shows us something we had not previously seen or recognised. We know that something is evidence when it allows us to understand something more deeply.

Anything can become evidence if it can be somehow captured or collected – sometimes this requires some ingenuity or pre-planning because a lot of what happens in a classroom, for instance what the students are doing or saying, disappears as soon as it is said or done. At other times what the students are working on becomes the evidence, just by retaining samples of their work.

When evidence is analysed it can help us to understand the extent to which learning intentions and teaching practices have had the impacts we set out to

achieve. There are many forms of evidence that can provide beginning mentors and teachers with information that will enable them to discuss and reflect on practice in a purposeful way. The most useful forms of evidence to analyse will be those that most accurately reflect the teaching practices enacted, the student learning they prompted and the outcomes that resulted. Some forms of evidence that are useful include student work samples, student interviews, video of teaching and classroom photographs that capture aspects of the beginning teacher's practice as well as what students were doing or saying.

There are many possibilities for how mentors and beginning teachers might use evidence in their professional conversations. Mentors may at times be challenged to consider how best to use the evidence. Is it to affirm and encourage their beginning teacher or does it enable the mentor to offer respectful insights that address any issues that arise.

Each of the following ideas needs to be considered in terms of the potential benefits and limitations each involves when preparing for evidence-informed conversations.

Purpose of capturing evidence is clear:

This raises the question: 'What might this be evidence of?' It also raises considerations about the context of the evidence, reasons for collecting, who collects the evidence and why. The mentor can support the beginning teacher to understand why and in what circumstances they may want to capture evidence and what this evidence might help them to understand or decide. With this kind of discussion the mentor can play both a clarifying and consulting role

early in the mentoring relationship, gradually moving to collaborating and coaching as the relationship develops.

Offered and discussed with care:

Mentors offer and discuss evidence of what they have observed with respect and sensitivity. They offer insights, which are informed by their professional knowledge and experience, however this type of evidence is usually anecdotal rather than systematically collected and documented. In such circumstances mentors support the beginning teacher to reflect on their work using evidence captured as a prompt for their conversation. This kind of discussion often positions the mentor in a consulting role.

Invited by the beginning teacher: The beginning teacher invites the mentor to help them consider what kinds of evidence could be collected, how it could be collected and in some cases to help them capture or collect that evidence. The beginning teacher invites the mentor to analyse and discuss the evidence with them. Such invitations allow the mentor to support and challenge their colleague to identify areas of success and concern and to discuss and identify next steps. This kind of discussion can readily prompt clarifying, collaborating or coaching, sometimes moving backwards and forwards between the three roles.

Offers choices for change: Evidence can prompt beginning teachers to want to change their practice but change is more likely when they are supported *but not compelled* to change. Mentors will respectfully and tactfully use evidence to support beginning teachers to canvas and discuss possibilities, weigh up alternatives and consider the implications of each of these options in terms of potential impact

on students and what the beginning teacher is trying to achieve. This kind of discussion offers mentors the possibility of all of the 4Cs – *clarifying* can play a particularly useful function in these circumstances, helping to reveal the kind of support needed.

Considers the context: Evidence is usually open to different interpretations rather than providing a simple statement of the facts. Mentors and beginning teachers need to consider the context of the evidence before making decisions about what it means and what actions to take.

Mentors and beginning teachers can work together to uncover multiple meanings in the evidence, being alert to the subtle clues that might otherwise be overlooked. The mentor can prompt the beginning teacher to consider the significance of the evidence, given the context, which has shaped or influenced what it now reveals. The mentor can ask questions that encourage the beginning teacher to explore the evidence more fully.

This again offers possibilities for each of the 4Cs – the clarifying role will be essential in these circumstances.

The evidence is essentially ‘objective’
Factual information captured or collected is the focus of the conversation. It clearly relates to particular events, behaviours or practices. The facts are free from opinion, which allows mentor and beginning teacher to discuss, analyse and interpret these from different perspectives – to decide whether the facts constitute evidence of desired learning. Clarifying, consulting and collaborating can all be used to good effect in these circumstances. As the beginning teacher becomes more accustomed to working

with evidence the mentor can encourage them to take a lead role interpreting and analysing the evidence – the mentor shifts to a coaching role.

Follow-up discussions and analysis are well timed: Evidence is most useful to the beginning teacher when the follow-up discussion and analysis are sufficiently close to the particular event being reviewed and discussed. The event or learning which the evidence reflects need to be fresh in the beginning teacher’s mind. The more time that elapses between when evidence is collected and when mentor and beginning teacher get together to discuss, the less impact it is likely to have.

Is practical and relevant: The evidence is about something that is useful for the beginning teacher to understand and should offer them opportunities to act on, respond to or make changes because of what is revealed. Evidence concerning matters outside the control of the beginning teacher will be of little value.

Something to try:

*Think of a time when you were ‘given feedback’ that was useful to you **OR** alternatively, think of a time when you were given ‘feedback’ that was not useful to you.*

Who offered the feedback and why?

What made it useful to you? What made it not useful to you?

What happened as a result of this feedback?

How could evidence have been used to make the experience more productive?

How might the conversation you engaged in have been different?



Difficult or challenging conversations

Despite our best efforts to develop seamless and trouble-free mentoring relationships, which are always positive and encouraging, there will be times when a conversation we have becomes difficult or challenging for both of us.

We know when someone we are working with, or mentoring, is challenged by something we are discussing – they become defensive, agitated, perhaps visibly upset or quieter, more deferential or they respond in mono-syllables.

Sometimes the conversations we want to have with a beginning teacher will explore territory that one or both of us experience as difficult or challenging. These are the

types of conversation we sometimes put off, engage in when we are frustrated with a colleague's practice or when we are insufficiently prepared, because a negative response was unanticipated.

There is a strong connection between the level of trust we develop towards each other and the extent to which we can have a conversation about something that is potentially challenging – the greater the level of trust the more likely it is that we can cope with talking about 'the hard stuff'. The less trust there is in our relationship, or the greater the difference in power between us, the more likely it is that challenging 'topics' will place one of

us (usually the beginning teacher) in a vulnerable or defensive position.

While it is possible to engage in challenging conversations without first establishing a sense of trust, such conversations may not lead to the professional learning, insights or changes in practice they were intended to promote. However, we often believe that it is precisely these thorny issues that most need to be discussed if the person we are supporting is to progress.

How can we be respectful of a new teacher's potential vulnerabilities while not shying away from what we perceive will make a difference to their practice?

Building trust is essential to engaging in challenging conversations

If we accept that developing a strong sense of trust is essential to productively engaging in challenging conversations and that trust will influence the extent to which a mentoring relationship succeeds, then developing trust is an important goal for mentors and beginning teachers.

How does trust develop in a mentoring relationship? What factors enable or inhibit trust?

Professional stance (see Chapter 4), our demeanour, disposition, tone and the language we use will significantly influence the level of trust that develops in a mentoring relationship. If we position ourselves as 'experts' and the beginning teacher as 'trainee' we are more likely to behave in ways that demonstrate that we know best and reduce the likelihood that beginning teachers will act independently. In such circumstances answers or solutions are likely to flow in one

direction. The beginning teacher will be expected to implement, not question, the theories and practices of their more experienced colleague.

If a beginning teacher is positioned as a contributor to the discussion, by being asked thoughtful questions or respectfully prompted to explain or elaborate, trust is more likely to develop. If the mentor's tone is supportive and curious rather than critical or condescending, trust is cultivated. If the language used is accessible, and the beginning teacher understand the concepts and terms used, (or these are discussed and explained), it is more likely they will feel a sense of inclusion in the conversation. They are more likely to see themselves as a respected colleague rather than a student or novice. Trust grows alongside respect.

If the focus of a professional conversation between a mentor and beginning teacher, particularly at the beginning, is about the **beginning teacher's successes** and wins rather than their faults and failures, trust and confidence are more likely to develop.

Faults and failures are often more obvious, when someone first begins as a teacher, so it takes a great deal of discipline as a mentor to look for and focus on the positive aspects of a new teacher's practice. Sometimes mentors are joined by the beginning teacher in a critical review of their teaching, focusing on what they perceive to be 'weaknesses and mistakes' in their practice, ignoring or overlooking their classroom successes.

Confidence and trust can be compromised in an unsympathetic setting and conversations that set out to deal with a challenging subject become more difficult instead of easier.

The Evidence Based Professional Learning Cycle

Research around effective mentoring advocates that mentors support beginning teacher's induction into the profession and local context through collaborative inquiries into a genuine aspect of teaching and learning. The aim is to develop or further consolidate the beginning teacher's knowledge and use of progressive, learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning.

One of the ways in which mentors can support this is through collaborative use of the DET *Evidence-based Professional Learning Cycle*.

The Cycle can support a beginning teacher to identify their own professional learning needs based on the learning needs of their students. It enables them to:

- © Recognise what their student's currently know and can do;

- © Work out what they need to know and do next; and
- © Reflect on and develop their own professional capacity to meet these student needs, by being clear about what they need to learn.

As their practice develops it is important that the beginning teacher is supported to reflect on and analyse the impact their teaching has on students' learning and well being – the Cycle prompts this.

When working with your beginning teacher you can use the cycle in two ways:

To support you and the beginning teacher in identifying and attending to the beginning teacher's learning needs

To support the professional learning of the beginning teacher through a collaborative inquiry that aims to progress student learning.

The DET Evidence-based Professional Learning Cycle



The Cycle consists of five dimensions and is designed to prompt reflection and responses to the 'big question' which is at the heart of being a proficient teacher:

'Based on the needs of my students what do I need to know and do differently in my teaching practice to progress the learning of my students?'

In terms of the role of a mentor supporting the learning of a beginning teacher this can be translated as:

'Based on the needs of my beginning teacher what do I need to know and perhaps do differently to support their learning?'

The use of the Cycle by the mentor to support a collaborative inquiry positions both mentor and beginning teacher as *learners*.

The **five dimensions of the Cycle** can be adapted to support teacher mentors working with a beginning teacher and are offered as a series of guiding questions.

1. What does my beginning teacher need to know and be able to do/learn (to meet the needs of their students)?
2. What do I need to know and be able to do to support and attend to my beginning teacher's learning needs?
3. How do I go about supporting my beginning teacher in deepening their knowledge and refining their skills and practices?
4. What happens in the classroom when I support the beginning teacher's learning (what are the impacts of the professional learning support I am providing)?
5. What impact did my professional learning have on my practice and on the learning of my beginning teacher?

At the core of this cycle, when used to support the professional learning of beginning teachers, are opportunities to consider a range of different evidence sources, which position evidence at the centre of professional learning.

Possible evidence sources to consider:

- Photos of how students are learning
- Audio recordings of student conversations or responses to teacher prompts
- Interviewing specific students
- Collecting work samples
- Video footage of the mentor and beginning teacher teaching,
- Lesson plans or running sheets
- Evidence captured when mentor or beginning teacher take up the role of 'student for a day'
- Photos or video or observation notes of transition points

Photos or video of the ways in which the learning environment is set up to meet students changing needs

These forms of evidence are important to the conversations between mentors and beginning teachers because they can help you both to:

- ☉ Agree on a focus for an evidence-informed conversation;
- ☉ Identify and respond to the needs of students' based on evidence
- ☉ Prompt and facilitate an ongoing inquiry into teaching
- ☉ Evaluate the impact of your professional learning on students' learning.

When using the cycle to collaboratively engage in an inquiry you will be able to

- ☉ Support your beginning teacher's knowledge and confidence when reflecting on their practice.
- ☉ Provide a support for the beginning teacher to articulate what they do and why they work in these ways
- ☉ Develop and extend a shared professional language

Use of the Cycle will also enable your beginning teacher to more confidently meet the VIT full registration requirements, as outlined in the VIT guide, *Supporting Provisionally Registered Teachers*.

The DET *Evidence Based Professional Learning Cycle* is modelled on the work of Professor Helen Timperley and is a product of her 'Best Evidence Synthesis'.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/profdev/Pages/cycle.aspx>



6: What does the research say?

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in wanting to understand and develop effective mentoring practices. People have been searching for ways to support new teachers, which enable them to provide high quality learning experiences for all learners.

This is in response to a growing demand for new teachers as baby boomers retire and leave the profession. This has led to a significant increase in international research into effective mentoring and induction processes and practices. Systems around the world are looking for ways to support and retain new teachers.

In this chapter we will explore some of the themes emerging in the research.

- © *What does the research say about mentoring? What clues or tips does it offer about being a more effective mentor?*
- © *Which factors or practices get in the way of effective mentoring, things that I might need to avoid or overcome in my own practice?*
- © *What else might I read (and perhaps discuss with others) if I want to understand more about being an effective mentor?*

Common themes in the research

A review of recent research (see p.49) indicates that the most successful approaches to induction and mentoring incorporate quite similar practices, which lead to learning and growth for both mentors and beginning teachers. These approaches and practices enable new teachers to become more confident and capable professionals.

A number of common themes were uncovered in this review - these included:

- ⑥ How mentors are selected and paired with beginning teachers;
- ⑥ The need for mentoring to be situated in a broader context of support;
- ⑥ The time (and quality of time) available for mentoring and supporting new teachers – especially in the first two years;
- ⑥ Schools that promoted capacity building through collegial, evidence-informed inquiry had more effective approaches to mentoring.

Selection and pairing of mentors and beginning teachers

Research¹ in this area suggests that the ways in which mentors and their beginning teachers are selected and paired has an impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship.

Mentor pairings that considered local contexts, taking into account the beginning teacher's strengths and limitations and the ability of mentor and beginning teacher to get along both personally and professionally, were crucial to the success of mentoring relationships.

This research also found that mentors needed to be accomplished practitioners,

able to model effective professional practices, as it was essential that beginning teachers developed a sense of 'professional respect' for their mentors. This meant seeing their mentors as knowledgeable, capable and experienced – someone they perceived to 'know what they were doing'.

This review commonly found that mentoring effectiveness was reduced significantly when the mentor was the beginning teacher's line manager. This may be because line managers are usually responsible for judging and assessing the performance of the people they manage. Beginning teachers in such circumstances are perhaps more likely to defer to the expertise of line managers, to see them as 'bosses' rather than colleagues. Beginning teachers may also be reluctant to question their line manager or reveal personal or professional challenges. Mentors generally play a more collegial and supportive role than line managers, they are someone that does not judge their less experienced colleagues.

When selecting potential mentors leaders needed to look for people who were:

- ⑥ Willing to make their work public (which implies a sense of professional confidence);
- ⑥ Able to explain and make explicit the factors underlying their classroom decisions and practices;
- ⑥ Committed to the work of mentoring and being a mentor;
- ⑥ Approachable and accessible (with an approachable demeanour);
- ⑥ Trustworthy – someone that keeps the confidences of others, that is implicitly

- trusted and respected by colleagues;
- Ⓒ Ready and able to empathise with others;
- Ⓒ Good listeners (which implies being able to create the conditions for a colleague to openly share what's on their mind);
- Ⓒ Genuinely interested in the beginning teacher both personally and professionally.

Mentoring practices situated within a larger context of support

An important enabler of effective mentoring involves the provision of support *and support structures* within a local context, which promotes the learning of everyone in that context. This recognises that everyone, at some point, needs support for their professional learning.

Other research² identified that successful induction was made possible by effective mentoring and that mentors were most effective when they themselves received support. This involved access to a network of support arrangements both within and beyond the school.

Support from within the school included school leaders providing guidance, expertise and emotional support that recognised and acknowledged the complexities of mentoring. Support also took the form of collective understandings within a school about mentoring and common ways of working with others, which reflected school values. This was usually achieved through formal and informal meetings that involved mentors, mentees, members of the leadership team and other teachers.

Support was also provided through professional development opportunities that focused on building mentoring knowledge and skills and assisted mentors

to understand themselves and their professional stance. Such development was most effective when it was ongoing and part of a deeper engagement with mentoring, where mentoring was seen as “central to the task of transforming the teaching profession itself” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000, p.1).

Having a designated member of staff whose role it was to oversee sustainable mentoring practices within a school was also identified as a positive enabling factor for effective mentoring.

Several researchers, (Britton et al 2003, Hudson 2012) identified the effective use of several people to support beginning teachers - someone that focused on assisting the beginning teacher to strengthen their pedagogical practice, and others that supported the beginning teacher to understand the local context and culture. In such circumstances support for new teachers was seen as a collective responsibility rather than the sole responsibility of a teacher-mentor.

The time and quality of time available for mentoring and support

Time was a central concern that either enabled or became a barrier to both effective mentoring and successful induction. A number of researchers³ clearly identified that schools where mentoring was most effective recognised and valued the importance of having time to collaborate, experiment and reflect. This allowed beginning teachers to further deepen their learning and encouraged the development of practical measures to support mentors and beginning teachers.

Some of these measures included⁴:

- Ⓒ Providing time for mentors and beginning teachers to regularly plan, share ideas, teach and reflect together and in doing so, time to develop the foundations of a respectful, trusting and professional relationship;
- Ⓒ Reducing the face-to-face teaching time/load of graduate teachers, particularly during the first two years of their teaching career, thus enabling beginning teachers to utilise this time to:
 - Observe other learning environments;
 - Engage in rich learning conversations including reflective learning conversations with a range of educators beyond their local context (other beginning teachers, universities, experienced teachers in other settings and/or schools);
 - Learn about their specific school and community contexts; and,
 - Meet with members of the leadership team to discuss and seek guidance on a wide range of matters.

Availability of adequate time and space for mentoring and support is essential – there is no substitute for the time that new teachers spend with their mentors. This is one of the key structural enablers of effective mentoring which needs to be negotiated with school leaders. See *chapter 5* for a detailed elaboration of other structural enablers.

Capacity building through collegial, evidence-informed inquiry

Capacity building through collegial inquiry and innovation has been well supported as a means of deepening the beginning teacher's learning and teaching practices.

Such collaborative practices have also been found to have a positive influence on the culture in which the learning takes place.

Other studies⁵ found that when evidence-informed conversations are at the heart of these inquiries, the mentor and beginning teacher are able to collectively focus on pedagogy and the practice of learning and teaching. They are able to concentrate on, and consider their impact on student learning in purposeful ways informed with evidence and creative intent. There is also the opportunity to gently and respectfully challenge assumptions based on the evidence captured or collected.

Such an approach supports the beginning teacher in being able to articulate what they do and why and therefore further develop and extend a shared language amongst teachers.

Overall, Malone (2013, p.31) found that what 'builds capacity are spaces where teachers feel open to share, learn, challenge, fail, innovate, and succeed both individually and collectively'.

Such practices have been found to have far greater impact on student learning and teacher practices than individual learning experiences – teachers learning with and from each other rather than in isolation. (Stoll, 2013)

Teachers are well placed to make decisions about what their students need to learn. They work closely with their students everyday. They listen to what they have to say about their learning, they look for clues about what makes sense to their students and what doesn't, they collect artefacts and samples of work that reveal something about their learners.

Over time teachers get better at seeking out, attending to and uncovering what students need to learn and the actions they can take to advance their learning.

Aitken et al (2013) endorse this view of the highly competent teacher, drawing on a wide range of resources including their knowledge, skills, dispositions, ethical principles and concerns for social justice. They also found that this was reflected in decisions teachers made about:

Student learning priorities – What learning is most important given where each of my learner's is now?

Teaching strategies – What evidence-informed teaching strategies will help me connect with each of my learners and are most likely to help learn this?

Enacting these strategies – How well am I enacting these strategies? In what ways are each of my learners experiencing their learning? What are my interactions and relationships like with each of my learners?

Examining and analysing Impact – What happened? Have I made enough of a difference for each of my learners?

Identifying and acting on professional Learning Priorities – What is most important for me, the teacher, to learn and do so that I can make a bigger difference for my learners?

How is this important to mentoring? How does this reflect the need for collegial practices and a culture of professional learning in schools?

What practices get in the way of effective mentoring?

Various international studies⁶ identified ineffective or counter-productive

mentoring practices, which had a negative impact on beginning teachers, both personally and professionally. Such practices impacted quite heavily on whether new teachers remained or were lost to the profession. These same studies uncovered similar findings in relation to mentoring practices that were ineffective. The most significant of these included:

Providing insufficient support

This included a lack of much needed emotional support, particularly during the first weeks and months of a beginning teacher's career. Mentors were found to be particularly 'tough' on beginning teachers, dominating the relationship in a non-collaborative and non-inclusive manner.

Offering insufficient challenge

Some mentors were either unable, misread the needs of their beginning teacher, or were unwilling, to offer sufficient challenge to stretch their colleague's current levels of knowledge and expertise. Some mentors also failed to provide sufficient scaffolding to encourage self-challenge or critical reflection about their teaching and learning practices.

Some of the reasons revealed for there being insufficient challenge included:

1. Mentors assuming they were the 'experts' who were certain about their craft and all they needed to do was pass on its principles to beginning teachers. Instead Fullan and Hargreaves (2013, p.3) recommend '...new and experienced teachers work on and inquire into the problems of teaching and learning in a situation where everyone acknowledges

that teaching is inherently difficult and even *experts* do not have easy answers’;

2. Mentors failing to provide their beginning teacher with sufficient and gradually increasing levels of autonomy and the freedom and opportunities to innovate and take measured risks;
3. Mentors guiding the beginning teacher into ‘low risk’ activities. Such mentors had also been reluctant to allow the beginning teacher to take on responsibilities in the learning environment;
4. An excessive emphasis on externally determined goals and agendas such as prescriptive criteria for teaching practices;
5. Mentors tended to overly focus their interactions on technical matters such as classroom behaviour management, subject content. In doing so, mentors devoted ‘little or insufficient attention to pedagogical issues, to the promotion of reflective practice incorporating examination of principles behind the practice, or to issues of social justice’ (Hobson et al, 2009, p.211). The authors suggest that this may have come about due to some mentors limited understanding of concepts such as critical reflection and their inability to see the relationship between theory and practice.

The impact of such measures has been devastating in terms of the extent to which beginning teachers were readied

and equipped to function effectively as independent professionals.

These restrictive forms of mentoring often resulted in the promotion of conventional norms and practices ‘rendering beginning teachers less likely to develop or consolidate their knowledge and use of progressive and learner-centred approaches and less likely to challenge the inherent conservatism in teaching’ (Hobson et al, 2009, p.211).

This means that we, as mentors, play a crucial role in shaping the profession of teaching, both now and well into the future.

¹ Britton et al 2003; Cameron Lovett & Berger 2007b; Hargreaves & Fullan 2000; and, Hobson et al 2009.

² Aitken, Sinnema, Meyer 2013; Britton et al 2003; Hargreaves & Fullan 2000; Hudson 2012; Hobson’s et al 2009; Scherer 2012; and, Timperley’s 2013.

³ Aitken, Sinnema, Meyer 2013; Britton et al 2003; Cameron, Lovett & Berger 2007b; Darling-Hammond 2003; Hobson et al 2009; Scherer 2012; and, Timperley 2013.

⁴ Britton, et al, 2003; Hobson et al, 2009; and, Cameron et al, 2007.

⁵ Aitken, Sinnema, Meyer 2013; Hobson et al 2009; Malone 2013; Scherer 2012; and, Timperley 2013.

⁶ Aitken, Sinnema and Myer (2013); Darling-Hammond (2003); Hargreaves & Fullan (2000); Hobson et al (2009); and Scherer’s (2012)

Want to know more?

The following are a selection of the works reviewed for this study, which have directly influenced the themes identified.

Aitken, G., Sinnema, C., & Meyer, F. (2013). *Initial Teacher Education Outcomes: Graduate Teacher Standards*, The University of Auckland.

Britton, T., Paine, L., Pim M, D.I., & Raizen, S. (2003). *Comprehensive teacher induction - Systems for early career learning*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands- Kluwer Academic Publishers

Cameron, M. (2007) *Learning to teach. A literature review of induction theory and practice*. Wellington: New Zealand Teachers Council

Cameron, M., Lovett, S. & Garvey Berger, J. (2007) *Starting out in teaching: surviving or thriving as a new teacher*. Wellington, New Zealand Council for Educational Research Press.

Darling-Hammond, L. *Keeping Good Teachers: Why it matters, what leaders can do*. *Educational Leadership*. Volume 60, Number 08, May 2003, p.6-13

Darling-Hammond, L., Hammerness, K., Grossman, P., Rust, F. & Shulman., 2005. L. Darling-Hammond, L. & Bransford, J. (eds). *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do. The Design of Teacher Education Programs*. U.S.A., Jossey-Bass., p.390-439

Hargreaves, A. Fullan, M. (2000), 'Mentoring in the New Millennium' in *Theory into Practice*. Vol. 39, No.1, College of Education, Ohio State University.

Hobson, A., Ashby, P., Malderez, A., & Tomlinson, P. (2009). *Mentoring beginning teachers: What we know and*

what we don't. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25 (2009), 207–216.

Hudson, P., 2012. *How can Schools support Beginning Teachers? A Call for Timely Induction and Mentoring for Effective Teaching*. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol 37, 7. p. 71-84

Malone, H.J. (2013) *Leading Educational Change: global issues, challenges, and lessons on whole-system reform*. New York, Teachers College Press.

Nemser-Feiman, S. *What new teachers need to learn*. *Educational Leadership*. Volume 60, Number 08, May 2003, p.25-29


New Zealand Teachers Council, (2011), *Professional Learning Journeys: Guidelines for Induction and Mentoring and Mentor Teachers*, N.Z

Nolan, A. Assoc Prof., Morrissey, M. Dr., Dumenden, I. Dr., 2012 *Mentoring for Early Childhood Teachers: Research Report 2012*. Victoria University and Deakin University.

Scherer, M. *The Challenges of Supporting New Teachers: A conversation with Linda Darling-Hammond*. *Educational Leadership*. Volume 69, Number 08, May 2012, p.18-23

Stoll, L. (2013), *Capacity for learning: Getting serious about practice improvement*, in Helen Janc Malone (ed) 2013, *Leading Educational Change: global issues, challenges, and lessons on whole-system reform*. New York, Teachers College Press.

Timperley, H. (2013) *Learning-To-Practice: A paper for discussion*. Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland



7. What might all this mean for me?

The authors of this guide assume that you are an accomplished teacher, well-placed to support the learning of a beginning teacher but still keen to learn and grow as a professional.

The aim of this guide has been to offer options and possibilities to strengthen your mentoring practice. We hope the ideas have prompted you to think and talk about mentoring and being a mentor and to reflect on what that means for you and your beginning teacher.

There are some ideas we can offer you with confidence.

The use of evidence promotes professional learning and makes a difference to the practice of teaching. The research tells us that capturing, analysing and discussing evidence can help teachers to make better decisions about their work. If you want to strengthen your

practice as a mentor and build the capacity of your beginning teacher, then evidence could play a useful role.

The 4Cs provide four practical options to consider when working with a colleague. They provide a means of understanding and supporting a beginning teacher from their early uncertain practices through to becoming a more confident and capable teacher.

Being mindful of your professional stance and dispositions will allow you to more effectively connect with a less experienced colleague, while engaging in regular professional conversations will help you to build rapport and better understand how you might support them.

Why not try some of these ideas and see how they could work for you?

Written and created by

Larissa Raymond, Jill Flack & Peter Burrows,

EdPartnerships International for the

Early Childhood & School Education Group,
Department of Education and Training (DET)

February 2016