

Significance of Mentor – Mentee Relationship and Training for Effective Mentoring Outcomes

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Abstract:

For more than decades, mentoring has gained its popularity and has been recognized to be an effective way in helping novice teachers to deal with challenges facing them in their first years. As mentoring deals with human relation, thus relationship between mentor and novice teachers plays significant roles for mentoring effective outcome. The current article presents significance of mentor-mentee relation to achieve effective mentoring program and the need of conducting mentor selection and mentoring training for optimal collegial mentoring program.

Keywords: Mentor-Mentee Relationship, Mentoring Training

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Introduction

For more than decades, mentoring has gained its popularity and has been recognized to be an effective way in helping novice teachers to deal with challenges facing them in their first years. Not only beneficial in reducing teachers' retention, many studies found that mentoring can help create a supporting climate for enhancing novice teachers' knowledge and for personality development as well as career advancement. For instance, Bond (1999) argues that mentoring is claimed to be "triple win situation" in that all parties involved benefit from it in different ways. Despite these merits, the effectiveness of mentoring really depends on the relation between mentor and mentees as well as how well the veteran teachers have been prepared to be mentors. This paper examines the significance of mentor-mentee relationship and mentor training for mentoring effectiveness. Some other considerations prior to conducting mentor training is discussed as well.

Significance of Mentor Supports for Novice Teachers

Beginning teachers need supports from their environment to be able to deal with stress as the consequent of their professions. If they cannot find good working climate during their transition time, they might decide to leave the job. Gagen and Bowie (2005) argued that teachers will leave their jobs if they do not fit into the social climate, at their working place. Therefore, it is necessary for school leaders and senior teachers to help them feel comfortable. Sargent (2003, cited Gagen and Bowie 2005)) point out that "having friends and feeling comfortable in a setting are key components of self-esteem, a necessary condition for comfort and success". In other

words, when these novice teachers are accessible to supports, guidance and assistance to deal with their teaching difficulties, they could find teaching is enjoyable. These supports should come from the senior colleague or mentors. To put it simply, novice teachers who gain positive environment are likely to find their highway to develop their skills and knowledge, to gain their expertise, and to raise their confidence and to enhance personality development as well as professional growth.

Mentor-Mentee Relation for Effective Mentoring

Mentoring for beginning teacher is definitely about human relation, which links the mentors and mentee emotionally for professional development. This relationship requires communication, time investment, sharing ideas, mutual understanding and trust. Building trusting relationships is essential groundwork for mentoring (Mentor Modules, 2014). Therefore, its success is greatly depends on how mentors and mentees build and maintain their relationship.

There are two types of relationship that is expected to build since the beginning process of mentoring novice teachers, congenial relationships and collegial relationships. Barth (2006) defines the former as personal and friendly relationship while the latter is a mode of relationship getting everyone “play” together to grow a professional learning community. Once a mentoring relationship has been established, mentee will grow not only in specific areas they have identified, but also in ways unexpected and long after their relationship may have ended (Management mentor, 2014). However, Barth believes that collegial friendship is the hardest type of relationship to establish.

In spite of these benefits, building positive relationship might not be that easy especially when there are cultural restrictions that challenge the relation building. In my school for instance, formality seems to be the blockage for congenial relationships that tends to be more personal and friendlier. Senior teachers apparently require respect and they assume that maintaining distances with new comers will allow them to gain respects. However, I would not think that such an assumption is true because there are many other factors that make people respect someone, for instance their professionalism. This implies that prior to designing a mentoring and mentor training, it is important to recognize the landscape, for instance the existing culture, of an institution in order to soften the ground (Bindhi, Pers. Com, April 17, 2014). In other words, being aware of what value people stick to could help in designing mentoring relationship..

Mentor Training for Effective Mentoring Outcome

Bindhi (2003) advises that mentoring effectiveness can be enhanced through mentor training, however incentive should be given to the teachers in that training require them to invest their valuable time. Gagen and Brown (2005) also believe that “providing organized, comprehensive mentorship training is an appropriate way for their profession to begin to address the problem of teacher retention”. Similarly, Hobson, et al (2009) highlight that “the key to maximizing the potential benefits and

costs of mentoring lies in the realization of a number of conditions for successful mentoring, such as ... preparation of mentors". These scholarly arguments emphasize the importance of mentor training to gain effective outcome of beginning teacher mentoring.

In addition, mentor training can help teacher mentors to play their roles as mentors optimally. Many studies suggest that mentors play roles of significance in achieving the mentoring objectives such as to provide supportive learning environment for novice teachers. Gagen and Brown (2005) reveal that mentors can be a source of critical support for teachers and provide the novice teachers' "bridge" to the school community. Despite these importances, not many teacher mentors are aware of such roles. Furthermore, they may not be able to accomplish such roles because they might lack of required qualities. For these reasons, mentorship training is valuable.

Following that, mentor training is useful to avoid misunderstanding or confusion among mentors and novice teachers, which might happen due to different verbalized terminology in instructional strategies. Gagen and Bowie also suggest that mentors are frequently unable to communicate effectively with the novice teachers as the result of vocabulary or terminology changes within teacher preparation programs over time. Littleton & Littleton (2003) also argues that both mentors and mentees might speak the same concepts, yet they verbalized it differently (cited in Gagen and Brown 2005).

Mentor training is vital to increase mentor capacity, which in turn can increase the effectiveness of mentoring outcome attainment. Gagen and Bowie (2005) highlighted that "training mentors for new teachers will increase the quality of mentors and will encourage veteran teachers to undertake the task of mentoring their colleagues". In addition, (Wright & Smith, 2000, cited in Gagen and Bowen, 2005) view that there are skills that required training even though senior teachers are assumed to have sufficient experience to be mentors (Gagen and Bowen, 2005). This indicates that although the mentors being assigned by school have had adequate competencies as professional teachers, they still need training about other aspects, i.e. communication skill, in order to achieve mentoring objectives effectively.

Mentor Selection prior to the Mentorship Training

Mentoring is about human relation and relationship is the foundation of partnership. Bindhi (2003) argues that the basis of partnership is relationship, therefore, it is pivotal to select proper mentor to match with mentee particularly in formal mentoring program. This simply means that not every senior veteran teacher can be selected as mentors. Bindhi (Pers. Com., April 17, 2014) confirms that although there are some teachers in a school who possess the quality of being good teachers, they might not be proper to be mentor for novice teachers supports. In line with this, Hobson, et al (2009) hold the view that realization of a number of conditions for successful mentoring such as mentor selection is the key to maximizing the potential benefits and costs of mentoring. These arguments suggest the significance of mentor selection.

However, school might find it difficult to select senior teachers as mentor, for instance in new established school where there are limited senior teachers. Therefore, I would suggest that school leaders discuss criteria of teachers who appear to be good teacher mentor, regardless how long they have been in this profession. Teacher's personality and teaching performance in the classroom could be the main consideration for school leaders in deciding who will be appointed as mentors. They can refer to quality of a good mentor as identified by Rowley (1999). They can also consider teacher's qualities that can be good mentor as suggested Gagen and Bowie's (2005). These qualities include such things as the teacher should have commitment to the role of mentoring; he is model of continuous learning; he is accepting of the beginning teacher, and he is able to communicate hope and optimism.

Another document that can be used as reference for selecting mentor can be found in US NEA foundation for the improvement of education (1999, cited in Bindhi, 2003). In that paper qualities of an effective mentor are highlighted. These qualities include: attitude and character; professional competence and experience; communication skills; and interpersonal skills. By referring to these criteria, school leader can create a checklist to predict which senior teacher appearing to be good mentor.

Nevertheless, there is another alternative of selecting mentor as recommended by Gagen and Bowie (2005). They advised that "to be most effective, a training workshop should be offered to all prospective mentors before assigning them to begin the mentoring relationship. This implies that school leaders should not use only one approach to select mentors and avoid initial judgment about their teachers' quality as mentors. However, in selecting mentors, all these ideas can be combined. The school leaders can run mentorship workshop to all teachers and afterward applying the scholars' criteria to select mentors for their novice teachers.

Having decided the teachers mentor, school leaders need to ask the mentor readiness to involve in the program. This is necessary because some teachers may not have sufficient time to invest in mentoring training or program. It is also vital to consider budget plan or financial sources for running the program because getting teachers involved in the mentoring activities might cost school budget to pay for these mentors' valuable time.

Focus of Mentor Training

Wright and Smith (2000, cited in Gagen L. and Bowie, S. 2005) reveal that although teachers have sufficient experience to be mentors, there are still areas that require training, which should be reflected in the materials training. This suggests mentoring designers should take care of a thoughtful analysis in selecting what material to give in mentor training. Rowley's (1999) proposal about qualities of a good mentor is worth considering as the focus of mentor training. These qualities include things like: a) mentor must be able to communicate effectively with their novice teachers; b) mentor must be able to offer expert feedback on proposed instructional strategies and management routines; c) mentor have ready answers to

questions about designing effective lessons, establishing a productive learning environment, accomplishing tasks such as grading, and managing a multidimensional classroom; d) mentor must be diplomatic when they open discussion on difficult issues about the quality of instruction; and e) mentor should be able to encourage reflective teaching skills that will help the novice teachers to grow as professionals.

Other things to take into account

In my teaching context, mentoring as a mode of induction has never been carried out before. However, informal guidance or assistance from senior college to novice teachers has certainly existed which we do not name it as mentoring. Therefore, introducing and “selling” this concept to the school committee might be challenging. Despite this, personal communication through each individual and organizing a workshop would be one possible way. However, prior permission and support should be obtained from the top leader of the school.

Another important aspect to consider is the provision of mentoring guidance or protocol. Having such a protocol is vital partly because the monitoring I would like to set up in my school context is the formal mentoring. The guidance will be the major reference of all the activities in the mentoring. It will also describe the roles of or what are expected from mentors, mentees, and school leader so that they can give appropriate contribution to the mentoring process. This guidance will also outline the objectives of the mentoring and will be used as the basis of evaluating mentoring effectiveness. Nevertheless, Bindhi (2003) claims that formulating a thoughtful and effective beginning teacher protocol in the school is identified as leadership challenge. However, he recommends a number of pointers that can be used as the guidance to design such protocol (see Bindhi, 2003, p 9)

Finally, it is also necessary to consider ways that mostly proper to train mentors in that they are different in a number of ways. Cercone (2008) has believes that “everyone is different, and each person is an individual. Adult learners are diverse and have their own histories to consider”. Cercone also reminds us about the challenges facing adult learners today such as “multiple careers, fewer stable, social structures to rely on, living longer, and dealing with aging parents”. These are likely the case in my school in that many of them have other responsibilities out of their teaching profession, such as managing business, social activities or else. All these affecting factors should be taken into account prior to designing the mentor training so that mentor training can reach its objectives.

Conclusion

Mentoring is about human relation and relationship between mentor and novice teachers play significant roles for mentoring effective outcome. Mentors play vital roles in establishing a strong relationship that lead to supportive working climate, which allow the novice teachers to develop their expertise, personality and to advance their career. However, these could happen if mentors are prepared through

mentorship training which can increase their capacity enabling them to be individuals that are more qualified.

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