



Next generation mentoring: Supporting teachers beyond induction

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Experienced teachers express a desire to be mentored for continued professional growth.
- Mentoring can provide meaningful, tailored support for experienced educators.
- Mentoring experienced teachers requires flexibility, collaboration and personalization.
- Post-induction mentoring can help support experienced teachers for a full career of teaching.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 September 2017

Received in revised form

28 March 2018

Accepted 3 April 2018

Available online 9 April 2018

Keywords:

Post induction mentoring

Teacher retention

Mid to late career teachers

Professional development

ABSTRACT

Mentoring teachers during the induction years has long been recognized as a powerful means to support and acclimate new teachers to the profession. Once the induction years are over however, mentoring is rarely offered for experienced educators. Additionally, teachers in their mid to late career stages often find professional development poorly suited to their interests or needs. As a result, frustration, cynicism, early attrition, and 'burnout' occurs.

This study explores the perceptions of 20 experienced teachers in order to understand their professional needs and their perceptions about being mentored. Recommendations for the design of post induction mentoring programs are offered to schools looking to retain experienced teachers and inspire them for a full career of teaching.

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1. Introduction

While the loss of beginning teachers is a significant concern for school systems and a focus of much research on mentoring (Doan & Peters, 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), there is evidence that a risk of high attrition also exists among veteran teachers (Bennet, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013; Hancock, 2008; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) particularly in urban and high needs schools (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). While statistics vary from state to state, it is clear that throughout the United States, the teaching profession suffers from a higher annual turnover rate as compared to other occupations (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Far too many experienced teachers feel discouraged as their needs are often ignored (Kirkpatrick, 2007) while others feeling isolated, frustrated and uninspired tend to disengage, withdraw, and finally

abandon the profession (Steffy & Wolfe, 2001). Some explain that this occurs because few meaningful professional development opportunities are provided for experienced teachers. Whereas professional development and mentoring programs are designed to support beginning teachers, experienced teachers often perceive them as insufficient and inappropriate for their needs (Charner-Laird, 2007). Eros (2011, p. 68) affirmed this point in stating:

Years of teaching experience does not indicate that a teacher no longer requires professional development. Because they no longer face the immediate problems of classroom management or organizational difficulties, it is easy for administrators to allow second-stage teachers to 'slip beneath the radar'.

Experienced teachers, defined as those teachers remaining in the classroom beyond their initial induction years (Eros, 2011), may see "few opportunities for professional growth and advancement and leave in high numbers," according to a study conducted at Harvard University (Donaldson et al., 2008). However, experienced

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teachers, just like novice teachers, need opportunities to reflect, set goals and assess their own effectiveness (Birkeland, 2011). Schools need to recognize that learning to teach effectively is a never-ending process and, accordingly, attention to ongoing professional development must be viewed as a key to increasing teacher motivation, efficacy, and retention. Thus, a meaningful program that mentors teachers for professional growth can help experienced teachers thrive, feel empowered, and make a positive difference in the lives of students (Falconio & Carlough, 2016).

1.1. Purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore mentoring as a central approach in supporting the professional development of experienced educators. Experienced teachers have different professional development needs than those teachers new to the profession. Therefore, understanding the interests, desires and challenges veteran faculty face pose interesting questions about how to help support a continuum of teacher learning in ways that respect both years of experience and accumulated professional wisdom.

According to Susan Johnson, director of the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at Harvard University, “school leaders need to be more responsive to these educators in order to retain them and capitalize on what they have to offer” (Rebora, 2008, p. 2). As a consequence of feeling isolated and disengaged, veteran teachers are at higher risk for leaving the profession, when in reality they are valuable assets to schools (Rebora, 2008). The significance of this research is that it may influence the planning of post-induction mentoring opportunities for those teachers remaining in the classroom well after their induction years are over.

By looking at mentoring with a new eye toward meeting the needs of experienced teachers, a unique, value-added model for school improvement can emerge. Mentoring beyond the induction years can help schools retain good teachers, capitalizing on their experience and insights, and offer a fresh approach to supporting stability, engagement and educational excellence. Recognizing that experienced teachers have their own unique perspectives on teaching and learning and understanding how and why they would like to be mentored, can jumpstart a vital conversation about school improvement through the lens of teacher growth and retention.

2. Literature review

2.1. Mentoring as a pathway for sustained professional growth

Mentoring is a practice where a more experienced educator (the mentor) offers support, guidance, advice and encouragement to someone who is a beginner or less experienced educator (the mentee) with the intended purpose of enhancing teaching and learning (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2010). As guides on the side, mentors can help teachers through “developmental transformation” (Daloz, 1999, p. 134) whether they are just entering the profession and learning to navigate the many aspects of classroom life, or are more experienced teachers seeking to advance their knowledge and skills for improved job engagement and professional growth (Rebora, 2008).

There are various models for implementing mentoring programs in schools or other educational settings. For example, informal mentoring programs support relationships which develop in organic or voluntary ways. With informal mentoring, the line between mentoring and friendship may be hard to discern as the individuals involved may share resources, ideas, strategies, and educational philosophies. The relationship may have little or no formal evaluative assessment role. Formal mentoring, on the other hand, is often established through programs that are designed,

initiated, facilitated, and perhaps subsidized by a school system or an educational organization. Formal mentoring may be delivered on a peer-to-peer level, where both the mentor and the mentee are members of the same school or educational setting and the mentor may have an evaluative role, reporting to a principal regarding the progress of the mentee. In some cases, school administrators might invite an “expert” from academia or an educational organization to provide mentoring to new teachers (Efron, Winter, & Bressman, 2013; Ehrich, 2009).

It is important to recognize that mentoring and evaluation seem to work best when they remain mutually exclusive. Mentoring programs that involve evaluative aspects with a possibility of judgmental or even negative consequences are harmful to building relationships based on mutual trust and confidentiality (Daresh, 2001). Hobson and Malderez (2013) warn of the undesirable impact that evaluative forms of mentoring may have on the professional growth of teachers; they apply the term ‘judgementoring’ to describe the harmful consequences of merging the roles of evaluator and mentor. The researchers suggest that for many teachers, “judgementoring has a negative impact on their well-being, with some describing themselves, after their encounters with judgementors, as being ‘disheartened’, ‘demoralized’, ‘isolated’, or ‘lonely’” (p.7). Therefore, to help teachers overcome the anxiety of being judged negatively, it is essential that the teacher feels assured that the mentor is in a supportive rather than evaluative role. The research on mentoring, in general, suggests that change happens when teachers develop a trusting relationship with a mentor and know the mentor is there to help them improve, not formally evaluate them (Efron et al., 2013).

On the other hand, mentoring that embraces the use of formative assessment encourages teachers to think deeply about their own teaching, with an eye toward continuous instructional improvement. “Mentors who see their work in educational terms are well positioned to help new [and experienced] teachers get inside the intellectual and practical challenges of teaching for understanding” (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwillie, & Yusko, 1999, p. 8). Together, teachers and their mentors, can use data-based decision making, without applying judgementoring, to facilitate important conversations about the advancement of teaching for improved student learning outcomes (Hobson & Malderez, 2013).

2.2. Mentoring for retention and school stability

Educational leaders have recognized beginning teachers’ need for high quality support and guidance as they enter the profession (Portner, 2008; Robertson, 2006). Previous studies (Barrera et al., 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Stanulis & Floden, 2009) concluded that mentoring constitutes the primary method of providing support to new teachers. However, Rebora (2008, p.1) notes:

There is a curious gap in schools’ treatment of teachers. While school leaders and policy makers have focused a great deal of attention in recent years on recruiting new teachers and supporting them in their first two or three years, there has been relatively little emphasis on what happens to the educators who make it beyond that stage.

As Ingersoll and Strong (2011) suggest, school staffing problems are to a significant extent a result of a ‘revolving door’ phenomenon where large numbers of experienced teachers depart teaching long before retirement. Other educational researchers (Eros, 2011; Johnson, 2004) recognize the ill effects that teacher turnover creates on classroom instruction. As a result, “students pay the highest price for teacher turnover when they are repeatedly taught by

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