

## *Original Paper*

# How Educational Leaders Can Initiate Mentoring Relationships to Support Their Newest Faculty Members

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### ***Abstract***

*The number of teachers who enter and exit the field of education within their first five years in the profession is said to be near 40-50 percent (Ingersoll, 2012). First-year public school teacher attrition rates have increased from 21.4% in 1988 to 28.5% in 2004 (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). At a time when the number of new teachers exiting the profession within the first five years is 40-50 percent (Ingersoll, 2012), something must be done to support new teachers so they can remain and become successful in their field. Research suggests that students who receive instruction from high quality teachers are more likely to show academic gains. How can students get what they need if teacher turnover is so alarmingly high?*

*Teachers need ongoing and job-embedded support to remain in this challenging profession. By combining the two powerful approaches of mentoring and coaching, educational leaders can foster reciprocal relationships between novice and seasoned teachers while increasing the likelihood that the rates of teacher retention could improve dramatically. Schools with mentoring programs in place reported greater new teacher retention rates as compared to those schools without mentoring programs in place (Di Carlo, 2015).*

### ***Keywords***

*mentoring, coaching, mentoring relationships, novice teachers, teacher retention*

### **1. Introduction**

The number of teachers who enter and exit the field of education within their first five years in the profession is said to be near 40-50 percent (Ingersoll, 2012). First-year public school teacher attrition rates have increased from 21.4% in 1988 to 28.5% in 2004 (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). At a time when

the number of new teachers exiting the profession within the first five years is 40-50 percent (Ingersoll, 2012), something must be done to support new teachers so they can remain and become successful in their field. Research suggests that students who receive instruction from high quality teachers are more likely to show academic gains. How can students get what they need if teacher turnover is so alarmingly high?

Teachers need ongoing and job-embedded support to remain in this challenging profession. By combining the two powerful approaches of mentoring and coaching, educational leaders can foster reciprocal relationships between novice and seasoned teachers while increasing the likelihood that the rates of teacher retention could improve dramatically. Schools with mentoring programs in place reported greater new teacher retention rates as compared to those schools without mentoring programs in place (Di Carlo, 2015).

## **2. Mentoring and Coaching**

A mentoring relationship typically exists between an experienced member or mentor and a less experienced member or mentee in the profession (Dennis, 1993; Mullen & Noe, 1999). In education, a mentor may be someone who provides guidance, especially to a younger colleague. The relationship between the mentor and novice teacher is developed to promote professional and personal growth of both individuals through coaching, support, and guidance. Through this relationship, the new teacher receives feedback, encouragement, and emotional support (1999).

A coach is one who listens intently, asks powerful questions, and provides reflective feedback without evaluating. The coach walks alongside a colleague by being a thinking partner and an expert listener. Coaching is defined as a “confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace” (Robbins, 1991). In this article, coaching is used to describe the relationship between two colleagues within the educational setting.

Mentoring with embedded coaching can provide new teachers the ongoing support necessary for them to be successful in their own classroom with the availability of a veteran teacher’s knowledge, skills, and expertise on an ongoing basis. This support helps new teachers become better able to grow professionally and become intrinsically motivated through the first year. As a confidant, the mentor coaches the new teacher and provides morale support, materials, and other classroom management assistance as needed. The relationships formed between novice teachers and seasoned mentor teachers have the potential to support long term commitment to the field as well as mutual support between and among colleagues who serve a common purpose-educating students.

Mentoring provides new teachers expertise and wisdom from that of the mentor teacher (Sorbet & Kohler-Evans, 2019). Mentoring is both a productive and a professional model of assistance for new teachers. It also can provide experienced teachers a unique way to contribute to the profession (Ganser,

1997). A focused and systematic mentoring program has a positive influence on a new teacher's performance while also providing advantages for the mentor teacher involved as well (Holloway, 2001).

Mentoring with coaching may be a way to engage new and veteran teachers through providing a "challenge" for mentors to mold new teachers while they reflect on the process while improving in the teaching craft themselves (Sorbet, 2018). The new and veteran teachers both "grow" in their relationship as they reflect on the experiences through teaching and observing one another (Sorbet, 2018). The new teacher may teach a lesson while the mentor provides feedback and coaches the new teacher on how to improve instructional strategies and classroom management techniques. Utilizing a program such as this provides veteran teachers the opportunity to pass on their expertise to a new teacher, thus adding a crowning achievement to their careers (Ganser, 1997).

### **3. Role of Educational Leaders**

Educational leaders should understand that allowing experienced teachers to mentor new teachers could ultimately provide benefits to the students taught by both the mentors and mentees while simultaneously positively impacting the overall school organization (Huling & Resta, 2001). By creating mentoring programs to support both mentors and mentees, educational leaders motivate and encourage a sense of community and belonging between veteran and new teachers which also encourages both to remain within the profession (Sorbet, 2018). Educational leaders and administrators can establish mentoring with embedded coaching by pairing seasoned, experienced, and effective veteran teachers with novice teachers. This will create a partnership that collaboratively highlights any new teacher instruction, necessary resources, professional development, and other supportive needs of the novice teacher.

Undertaking a new approach to mentorship generally requires professional development for all stakeholders in processes to be adopted and roles to be assumed. Providing a firm foundation takes a deep examination of numerous factors. Administrators should take into careful consideration the climate and culture of their school and present the information regarding the new mentorship program in manageable stages to maximize effectiveness.

For those who work with teachers, facilitating and leading the process of program implementation can be met with excitement, frustration, or even anger at the suggestion of something new or different being tried (Knight, 2007). It is critical that those who provide leadership in change are keenly aware of how those responsible at the classroom level (the teachers) are receiving the change. This can be daunting for everyone concerned.

While establishing a mentor and mentee partnership takes time, effort, and resources, it also takes creativity and an appreciation for how change works. As with any innovation, successfully implementing a mentoring program with coaching in a school requires understanding and attentiveness to address the individual concerns that each teacher brings to the process. In order for school leaders to

establish any program within their schools, they must have buy-in from the faculty involved, and cultivating commitment takes time. The process of change is a developmental process, and individuals will vary regarding their readiness for change (Hall & Hord, 2006). Some will go through the process faster than others, and some teachers might be in multiple stages at once (Sorbet & Kohler-Evans, 2019).

To begin implementing a mentoring program with embedded coaching, it is critical that school administrators have a deep understanding of the process of change in order to guide the faculty through adoption. Knowing that transparency, clear communication, data collection, and understanding are all essential, the attentive leader explains the logic and rationale behind the change. When initiating a new teacher mentoring program, leaders will need to present the importance of instructional coaching and the need within the organization, placing emphasis on ensuring that new teachers have the support they need in order to continue in the profession.

Successful mentoring with embedded coaching programs begin with relationship-building by recognizing personal concerns for all involved. Using a proactive approach, administrators can effectively implement when they provide a scope of the coaching program to be initiated. This approach enables the faculty to understand the expectations prior to implementation. Informed faculty members will more likely be committed when they are fully aware of all requirements as well as changes that will occur in the upcoming months of the program.

#### **4. Concerns of Novice and Veteran Teachers**

Concerns of novice teachers and veteran teachers vary greatly in the profession. Beginning teachers who enter the first year of the profession frequently feel bogged down with organizing their classrooms and preparing for their first day of students. Any task that is not directly tied to being in the classroom in preparation for the new year may seem to be too daunting initially. Beginning teachers have voiced their concerns regarding entering the profession.

New teachers also have concerns regarding the unfamiliarity of their new environment as well as school and district-level expectations of them. New teachers may express the need for a confidant, peer buddy or mentor teacher who they can rely on to answer their questions while supporting and assisting them with the day to day duties of a classroom teacher.

New teacher concerns may include common practice of a veteran teacher due to many years on the job in that particular school environment but may be unclear to someone just hired in the same school. New teachers have stated that of the concerns of being a new teacher in the profession, classroom management, managing student behavior, and family communication were of the greatest concerns for them (Sorbet, Kohler-Evans, Calhoon, & Wake, 2020). More specific key concerns that new teachers may have could include: grading expectations, special education and individual education plans for students, duty schedules, school wide behavior management procedures, norms for parental

involvement, lesson planning, field trip planning and payment, emergency plans, social and emotional learning, and many more (Sorbet, Kohler-Evans, Calhoon, & Wake, 2020).

Veteran teachers have different concerns than those of the new teacher. Veteran teachers may feel overwhelmed with time constraints of their own and not want to take on a mentee. Veteran teachers may show resentment toward a new mentoring program in that they may not have had such a supportive network when they were beginning teachers. Veteran teachers may feel so overwhelmed with their own schedule that taking on a new teacher to mentor may cause additional anxiety or stress. A teacher who has been in the classroom for several years may also be ready for a new opportunity to share some of her wisdom with a novice teacher, and in turn, gain some fresh perspectives regarding the instructional process and other aspects of classroom engagement and management.

These concerns are very real to both parties involved, and they should be heard and validated throughout the change process. For some educational administrators, the expectation for all teachers is the same, regardless of the number of years teachers have been working with students. An assumption might be made that a teacher who holds certification in a grade level or subject area has all the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to function fully within the four walls of the classroom. The savvy leader recognizes that teachers bring with them an array of concerns; some of their concerns might be similar, but others might vary greatly. By recognizing and addressing these concerns, the school leader can successfully introduce and implement a mentoring program with embedded coaching. When this happens, students are the ultimate beneficiaries.

## **5. Model for Implementing Change**

One method for addressing personal concerns in adopting a mentoring program with embedded coaching is to utilize the Concerns-Based Adoption Model or CBAM (Hall & Hord, 2006). Through the use of CBAM, the concerns of all involved in the adoption of a mentoring program with coaching could be addressed. Utilizing a model such as CBAM when implementing change within an organization allows individual organizational members' needs to be acknowledged throughout the change process (Hall & Hord, 2006). CBAM applies attention to the concerns of the individuals involved in or experiencing the change. CBAM allows administrators and leaders to look at the implemented change through a lens of multiple perspectives of all involved while carrying out the change.

CBAM consists of three diagnostic dimensions: the Innovation Configuration, the Levels of Use, and the Stages of Concern. This article targets the Stages of Concern dimension of CBAM. Utilizing a model such as CBAM when implementing change within an organization allows individual organizational members' needs to be acknowledged throughout the change process (Hall & Hord, 2006). CBAM applies attention to the concerns of the individuals involved in or experiencing the change while allowing leaders to view the implemented change through a lens of multiple perspectives of all involved through implementation.

An essential element of CBAM is the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SOCQ) which has been used for measuring implementation of practices and facilitating change. The purpose of the questionnaire is to determine what implementers who are using or thinking about a new program, in this case a mentoring program, are concerned about at various times during the adoption process. Consisting of 35 items, the SOCQ was developed from typical responses of educators who ranged from no knowledge at all to many years of experience regarding various programs. While completing the questionnaire, respondents are urged to indicate how they feel about their involvement or potential involvement. They are urged to utilize their own perceptions and respond based on present concerns about the program being considered.

Using the SOCQ assists school leaders in understanding novice and veteran teachers' concerns and where they fall on a continuum of change. The attentive and proactive administrator recognizes and addresses these concerns and reassures the faculty members that the change being implemented will not only assist beginning teachers but also provides opportunities for veteran teachers to grow and move into new and engaging leadership roles. When the administrator has a comprehensive view of where all his/her teachers are regarding the implementation of changes, responses to their concerns can be intentional and purposeful and may well lead to a more deeply engaged and highly committed faculty.

There are seven stages on the continuum from the Stages of Concern Questionnaire. First is awareness (not concerned with change and not interested in implementation), then informational (beginning to show interest and would like to know more about the intervention/innovation), followed by personal (beginning to think about how a change might directly affect them). Next comes management (beginning preparation, thinking about resources and application), consequence (being concerned how change will impact students), collaboration (becoming interested in sharing innovation with others), and finally, refocusing (exploring ideas for making the innovation better or how it might be improved upon).

The seven stages of concern for novice and veteran teachers are presented below with recommendations for addressing each level of change for both coaches and teachers involved in the implementation of a new faculty mentoring program.

Stage 0-Awareness Concerns (unconcerned with change and not interested in implementation):

- Involve mentors and new teachers in discussions and decisions about the innovation and its implementation.
- Share enough information to arouse interest, but not so much that it overwhelms.
- Acknowledge that a lack of awareness is expected and reasonable, and that no questions about the innovation are foolish.
- Encourage unaware persons to talk with colleagues who know about the innovation.
- Take steps to minimize gossip and inaccurate sharing of information about the innovation.
- innovation.

Stage 1-Informational Concerns (beginning to show interest and interested in more knowledge about the innovation/intervention):

- Provide clear and accurate information about the mentoring process and expectations of all involved.
- Use a variety of ways to share information-verbally, in writing, and through any available media. Communicate with stakeholders and with small and large groups.
- Have persons who have used the innovation in other settings visit with your teachers. Visits to other schools can also be arranged
- Help stakeholders see how the innovation relates to their current practices, both in regard to similarities and differences.
- Be enthusiastic and enhance the visibility of others who are excited.

Stage 2-Personal Concerns (thinking about how the change will affect each individual on a personal level):

- Legitimize the existence and expression of teachers and coaches' personal concerns. Knowing these concerns are common and that others have them can be comforting.
- Use personal notes and conversations to provide encouragement and reinforce personal adequacy.
- Connect these stakeholders with other stakeholders across the school district whose personal concerns have diminished and who will be supportive.
- Show how the innovation can be implemented sequentially rather than in one big leap. It is important to establish expectations that are attainable.
- Do not push innovation use, but encourage and support it while maintaining expectations.

Stage 3-Management Concerns (beginning preparation and thinking about resources and application):

- Clarify the steps and components of the process and expectations. Information from innovation configurations will be helpful here.
- Provide answers that address the small specific "how-to" issues that are so often the cause of management concerns.
- Demonstrate exact and practical solutions to the logistical problems that contribute to the concerns.
- Help teachers sequence specific activities and set timelines for their accomplishments.
- Attend to the immediate demands of the innovation, not what will be or can be in the future.

Stage 4-Consequence Concerns (being concerned about how change will impact students):

- Provide stakeholders with opportunities to visit other coaching settings where the innovation is in use and to attend conferences on the topic.
- Don't overlook all teachers involved. Provide them with positive feedback and needed support.

- Find opportunities for all involved to share their skills with other mentors and other teachers in the profession.
- Share with all involved information pertaining to the innovation.

Stage 5-Collaborative Concerns (becoming interested in sharing innovation with others):

- Provide mentors and new teachers with opportunities to develop those skills necessary for working collaboratively.
- Bring together all involved, who are interested in collaboration.
- Help collaborators establish reasonable expectations and timelines for the collaborative effort.
- Use these persons to provide technical assistance to others who need assistance.
- Encourage the collaborators, but don't attempt to force collaboration on those teachers and coaches who are not interested.

Stage 6-Refocusing Concerns (exploring ideas for making the innovation better or how it might be improved upon):

- Respect and encourage the interest these coaches and teachers have for finding a better way.
- Help all involved channel their ideas and energies in ways that will be productive rather than counterproductive.
- Encourage stakeholders to act on their concerns for program improvement
- Help all involved to access resources they may need to refine their ideas and put them into practice.

## **6. Recommendations for Implementation**

There is great need for educational leaders to utilize an approach like CBAM when implementing change such as using veteran teachers to mentor and coach new teachers. Leaders within an organization must recognize there may be resistance to any change that will be brought to an organization. When rolling out such a change as creating a mentoring or coaching program and establishing partnerships, everyone's concerns must be considered. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model or CBAM helps educational leaders by addressing each stage of concern for all stakeholders invested in the change.

By gaining an understanding of both the change and the process of change, the CBAM model allows assurance that potential actions can be taken to facilitate successful change, and professional development activities, with the greatest potential impact, can be provided to those who are being affected by new programs. Using the framework provided by the Concerns-Based Adoption model increases the chances that the person(s) undergoing change will be positively impacted by professional development and systematic change (Saunders, 2012).

Through utilization of CBAM, all concerns of those involved in implementing a coaching program are addressed. Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators all have the opportunity to fully understand the program being implemented, voice concerns and feel comfortable prior to the coaching



program being initiated. CBAM allows stakeholders time for the new initiative to take place in a supportive and positive manner so that all involved feel supported and heard.

If educational leaders are looking for an opportunity to support new teachers while motivating veteran teachers to be more successful in the profession, then they should look to establish a mentoring program with embedded coaching. Teacher support is critical to maintaining a fully-capable and trained teacher workforce. Through addressing the concerns of everyone involved, administrators can create a network of support in a positive and open environment that meets all concerns and needs. Educational leaders who utilize mentoring with embedded coaching could strengthen faculty relationships and their school community while increasing teachers' motivation to remain in the profession.

## 7. Final Thoughts

Educational institutions everywhere are facing mass teacher exodus from the classroom in this ever-changing world. As a result, educational leaders must seek effective and affordable methods of providing supportive assistance to both novice and seasoned teachers. Implementing a mentoring program with embedded coaching allows the veteran teacher opportunities to share authentic experiences with those of a new teacher leading to effective and long-lasting results for all. Seasoned and novice teachers bring with them a variety of concerns that focus on their responsibilities in the school building. New teachers as well as veteran teachers may feel overwhelmed at times by the enormity of the task of educating students. All teachers need support to remain in the teaching profession, and the Stages of Concern Questionnaire from the Concerns-Based Adoption Model is a tool designed for educational leaders who want to be responsive to the needs of all teachers, especially when initiating change. The likelihood that all teachers will remain committed to the profession and the students they teach is enhanced when educational leaders implement mentoring programs with embedded coaching and ensure that they listen to and are responsive to the various concerns their teachers' voice.

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