Supporting Beginning Teacher Flourishing: A Mentorship Approach

Saskatchewan Principals’ Short Course
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What do we know?

The effectiveness of a student’s teacher is the most important factor in producing consistently high levels of student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Wong et al., 2005).

Haycock (1998) noted that the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher can be a full level of achievement in a single school year.

In fact, Fulton, Yoon, and Lee (2005) stated that students who have ineffective teachers for three or more consecutive years may never catch up to peers who have had stronger teachers.
Logically, it follows that we want our beginning teachers to be competent, confident, and flourishing in our schools.

So, what does that mean for school-based administrators?

What can you as a principal or vice-principal do to ensure that the beginning teachers in your building are thriving?

That’s what we will discuss today....
Discussion:

What does your school/school division do to support beginning teachers?
What are beginning teachers saying? What do they want?

Professional Support

Veenman (1994) stated (in reviewing 83 studies) that beginning teachers requested support of their professional practice in the following areas:

- classroom discipline
- motivating students
- dealing with individual differences
- assessing students’ work
- relations with parents
- organization of the class work, and
- others

**Personal Support**

In addition, and arguably more importantly, beginning teachers require support of their *personal well-being* (Dollansky, 2014; McCallum & Price, 2010; Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005).

Kane and Francis (2013) advocated for supporting beginning teacher well-being as a way to increase confidence, reduce stress and tension and encourage perseverance.

Huling- Austin (1986) claimed that a healthy personal well-being is integral to classroom success.

Providing support for well-being increases beginning teachers’ sense of belonging in the school and community (Fry & Anderson, 2011; Rwaida, 2012).
A successful mentor-mentee relationship will provide both personal and professional support for beginning teachers (Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2015; Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999; Gold, 1996; Rwaida, 2012; Scherff, 2008; Shwartz & Dori, 2016).

Jorissen (2003) conducted interviews of beginning urban teachers who also described the importance of supporting their professional and personal well-being, particularly through effective mentorship.
What is Mentorship?

Oxford dictionary
...the guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person in a company or educational institution”, or “a period of time during which a person receives guidance from a mentor” (Mentorship, 2017).

A mentor is described as an experienced teacher with superior knowledge of content and teaching strategies, who assumes primary responsibility for providing support and guidance for a novice teacher (Coronado, 2009).
Video File

Academy award-winning filmmaker Davis Guggenheim (An Inconvenient Truth, Waiting for Superman) filmed at Greco Middle School in 2015.

You will get inside the classroom with two promising young teachers as they struggle, then succeed with the help of a fantastic mentor and a supportive principal.

HCPSVideoChannel (September, 2016). *Teach: Mentoring*. [Videofile]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UhQaFd-ID4
Video File key understandings:

• **Retention**
  ✓ The turnover problem, although high for the entire teaching occupation, affects beginning teachers more than others. The data suggests that after just five years, between 40 and 50 percent of all beginning teachers have left the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

• **Life-long learners**
  ✓ Goal of mentorship

• **Sinking**
  ✓ BT Stages of Development (Moir, 1990)
## Stages of Development

### Table 2.2 Beginning Teachers’ Stages of Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
<th>Stage 5</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fuller (1969)</td>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Stages of Concern</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Katz (1972)</td>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Consolidation</td>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Enculturation</em></td>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lortie (1975)</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Advanced Beginner</td>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>*Proficient</td>
<td>*Expert</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moir (1990)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: * levels not experienced by beginning teachers

Stages of Development (Moir, 1990)

- **Anticipation**—following their teacher in-service. There is anticipation as they look toward making a difference in their students’ lives. The excitement of this phase carries teachers through their first few weeks in the classroom.

- **Survival**—recognize the realities associated with having their own classroom; focus on survival; are consumed with the daily routines and have little time to reflect on teaching. Overwhelmed with developing year, unit and lesson plans connected to the curriculum.

- **Disillusionment**—After eight weeks of hard work and stress they begin to question their commitment and competence; issues with student evaluation and parent contact; often exhausted during this phase and find less time for family, with all energies being needed to prepare for teaching.

- **Rejuvenation**—is connected to winter break; have become rested and are feeling better about the work they have done; are self-reflective about the first half of the year and are feeling more comfortable as part of the school community.

- **Reflection**—usually around May, teachers are now able to reflect on their first year in their classroom; begin to plan for the next year and start to create a vision of what the following year will look like; results in a new phase of anticipation.
Beginning Teacher Research

*Understanding and Supporting Rural Saskatchewan Beginning Teachers’ Perceptions of their Psychological Contracts: A Pathway to Flourishing in Schools* (Dollansky, 2014)

*To Thrive and Flourish: Supporting Beginning Teachers through an Induction-by-Mentoring Approach in Rural Saskatchewan* (Lemisko, Hellsten, Demchuk-Kosolofski & Dollansky, 2015)

*Perceptions of First Year Teaching Experiences in Saskatchewan* (Lemisko, Hellsten & Dollansky, 2016)

Current Research: *Saskatchewan Beginning Teachers’ Perceptions of First Year Teaching* (Lemisko, Hellsten, Dollansky, Anderson & Demchuk-Kosolofski, 2018)
To Thrive and Flourish: Supporting Beginning Teachers through an Induction-by-Mentoring Approach in Rural Saskatchewan (Lemisko, Hellsten, Demchuk-Kosolofski & Dollansky, 2015)

Participants

- Mentors and mentees voluntarily applied to join the project
- 5 mentor teachers from different elementary schools
  - No high school applicants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Mentee (Beginning Teacher)</th>
<th>Distance Apart</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Larger PK-6 School Gr. 1</td>
<td>Very Small K-6 Gr. 1/2/3</td>
<td>1.5 hours 116 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger K-12 School Gr. 4</td>
<td>Small K-12 Gr. 4/5</td>
<td>1 hour 98 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small K-12 Gr. 3/4</td>
<td>Small K-12 Gr. K/1/2/SST</td>
<td>Same school-release time provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium K-12 Gr. 1</td>
<td>Large PK-6 Gr. 5</td>
<td>45 minutes 90 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large PK-6 K</td>
<td>Large PK-6 K</td>
<td>Same school-no release time provided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods and Processes

• November through April the master teacher mentors were to spend 2 half days or one full day per month in the beginning teachers’ classrooms/schools

• Time together to take a variety of forms including but not limited to observations, co-teaching, planning, conferring and coaching.

• Beginning teachers and mentors encouraged to informally document their experiences through the use of journaling, blogging, and the collection of relevant artifacts

• Along with scheduled classroom visits, beginning teachers and master teachers met with the research team for orientations, relationship-building and for additional opportunities for reflection and planning in September/October, January and May
Findings

• Mentorship provides benefits
  • particular to mentees
  • particular to mentors

• Mentorship provides co-learning for both mentors and mentees, meaning professional growth for both

• Mentorship supports the flourishing/thriving of beginning teachers in relation to their stages of development
Benefits to Mentees

Assisted with learning routines and logistics

....we’re having an assembly tomorrow. That means we wait to get called down or you line up and you sit here; [its] all those little things that you don’t really think about until you’ve hopped into the teaching profession and are on your own, you can really go to your mentor and just ask them, “How do you do this? And what kind of ideas do you have?” And it’s nice to be able to bounce those ideas off each other.

Helped in setting realistic expectations

...focus on what’s important. If it’s not going to make or break your day then don’t worry about it - make sure you’re home by five o’clock so that you have that time to yourself. I’ve started doing that I found after Christmas and I have been so much better at getting things accomplished and I have felt a lot better compared to the beginning of the school year, way less stress.

Provided with emotional support

....It was nice, I was able to talk to her about it when I was going through problems, we were able to talk more about professional things but it was nice having that I guess I felt comfortable going to her about those issues and she would follow up you know – ‘I hope you’re having a better day today, don’t worry things will get better’”
Benefits to Mentors

Learned skills from mentees

...actually I found that my mentee, there’s some things that she’s got way stronger skillset... especially with these initiatives and technology I think sometimes they can have skills that we don’t have.

Kept their teacher knowledge explicit, felt invigorating, enabled risk-taking

There’s just so many little things that you just do automatically that you don’t actually think of you’re actually doing. Like as a classroom management activity or organization thing or whatever. And then your mentee will go, “Wow that worked great, I’m going to try that.

...because they’re so energetic, enthusiastic coming in and it boosts your energy and enthusiasm because you’re going, oh wow, is she good at that... ....So it really gave me the kick that I needed to try some new things.

Built/reaffirmed confidence

...it was really nice to have somebody who values what I’m doing and appreciated it and confirmed that what I’m doing she was interested in and excited about and wanted to try new things. And it was a bit of a confidence builder for me too.
Mutual Benefits

Opportunity for collaboration and co-learning

Mentor: We were able to actually just create it [blended math] together because she wasn’t sure of what it was too. So we kind of learned together.

Mentee: It’s nice that they’re also learning it with us so it’s not like we’re just new to the thing. ...To have those conversations really about what’s working, what isn’t

Ameliorated feelings of isolation

Mentor: I can still bounce things off her and get the reassurance that yeah, my kids aren’t the only ones struggling with a concept or even just having to chat. We are very similar, like we have similar interests too. Just even having those conversations and being able to work with somebody on a brand new initiative that she probably knows more about than I do. You know it’s always easier to do things when you can bounce ideas and feelings and emotions off each other. Oh and I definitely feel like I’ve benefitted probably more than she has. She’s given me a breath of fresh air, you know.

Mentee: [Mentor’s name] helped in the fact that, you know, we could just talk about it. Sometimes it helps to just have another person to say, man I’m tired and overwhelmed and sometimes it’s good to know that you’re not the only one who feels like that. Even in her however many years of teaching, she’s had twenty years or what not, that she still feels like that sometimes. So it’s comforting to know that you’re not alone when you’re feeling overwhelmed.
Key Recommendations

There are key ingredients in an effective mentorship program:

• Provision of time (release time, preparation time, conversation time)

• Mentors need to possess particular skills and characteristics that go beyond being a good teacher of children/youth

• Mentors & mentees need to volunteer to participate

• Mentors & mentees need ‘orientation’ sessions

• Mentoring processes should not be evaluated

• Building a mentoring culture across the school division contributes to mentorship success
Demographics & Employment

- 69 teachers (female = 55; male = 14) responded to the survey.
- Age range 21 to 59 years of age with 69.6% in their 20s.
- 4 self-reported as Métis; none self-reported as being First Nations or Inuit.
- Most began their teaching positions in August or September (62.5%) with 17.2% beginning in January or February.
- Beginning teachers varied in grade level and subject level taught with many teaching several grade levels (see Tables 1 and 2).
- 65.2 employed in the subject areas/grade levels they had focused on in their teacher education program.
- 85.5 employed full time with 59.4% hired on a continuing contract.
- 31.9% hired on a temporary contract and 14.5% employed on a replacement contract.
- 56.5% employed in an urban teaching position (i.e., Estevan, Lloydminster, Melfort, Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert).
- 37.7% employed in rural Saskatchewan; 7.2% in the North.
- Reported employment in a variety of school sizes: ranging between 2 and 85 teachers in their schools and between 24 and 1300 students.
Preliminary Survey Responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Total Workload</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light ‘1’</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘2’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘3’</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘4’</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy ‘5’</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Degree of Satisfaction:

...the degree to which they felt satisfied by teaching. Half of the teachers reported that they were satisfied at least frequently (47.5%), or all the time (3.4%). However, approximately one third (33.9%) stated that only occasionally were they satisfied, and 15.3% claimed they were seldomly satisfied with teaching.

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (72.9%) reported their overall first year teaching experience as satisfactory or better, with 5.1 % stating that the experience was outstanding. However, 27.1% felt that their experience was unsatisfactory.
Energized by Students:

...how often they felt energized when working with their students. Nearly half (49.2%) of beginning teachers felt frequently energized by their students. Approximately one quarter of the beginning teachers (25.4%) felt occasionally energized, and 13.6% seldomly felt energized by their students. 11% felt energized by their students all the time.
Frustration Levels:

...how often they felt frustrated by teaching. **More than three quarters of the respondents felt occasionally frustrated (33.9%) or frequently frustrated (45.8%).** Approximately **10% felt frustrated all the time**, and near **10% seldomly felt frustrated during their first year of teaching.**

With respect to extreme frustration levels, specifically when they had “had it” with students, approximately one third (32.7%) expressed that they had never or seldom “had it” with their students, while 36.2% found they occasionally felt so. **Over 30% of those asked stated they felt an extreme level of frustration frequently, or, in fact, all of the time.**
Teacher Retention:

...had contemplated quitting teaching, over half (55.2%) stated that they had seldomly or never considered leaving the profession. **About one third (27.6%)** had occasionally thought about leaving, while **17.2%** thought about leaving frequently or all the time.

...ever felt that they would be better able to apply their abilities in another profession. Over half (57.6%) indicated that they seldomly, or never felt that they would be able to apply their abilities better elsewhere, and a third of the respondents (28.8%) occasionally felt that their skills would be of better use elsewhere. **About 13% frequently, or at all times** felt that their skills would be better suited for another profession.
Administrative Data

The administration at my school:

• met with me prior to the beginning of the school year (19.4%)
• explained their expectation and norms of teacher professionalism (36.4%)
• visited my classroom and provided me with feedback based on their observations (22.4%)
• talked with me about my teaching practices (19.7%)
• provided me with information on policies, procedures, and practices important in my school (22.4%)
• provided professional support when requested (13.4)
• provided personal support when requested (29.7)

Scale:
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Slightly Disagree
Slightly Agree
Agree
Strongly Agree
Success (Flourishing):

...had achieved success at this point in their teaching career, 86.5% placed their degree of success somewhere between not at all successful and completely successful. However, at the extreme ends of the scale, 6.8% felt they were unsuccessful, and 6.8% also reported feeling completely successful after one year of teaching.

Cantril’s (1965) Ladder:

Respondents indicated that on their first day of teaching they were near the midpoint on the 10-rung ladder (around 4.5/10) and after one year of teaching, their degree of flourishing had slightly improved (to 4.9/10). At the time that survey was implemented (beginning of their second year), respondents felt greater flourishing (at 5.9/10 on the scale).
Are your beginning teachers *flourishing*?

How do you know?

- Ask them
Cantril’s (1965) Self-anchoring Striving Scale

- Imagine a ladder with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top.

- The top of the ladder is best possible life; bottom is the worst possible life.

- Respondents are asked to place themselves on the step of the ladder, where they personally feel they stand at that time.

- Responses are grouped in three categories: thriving (7+), struggling (5-6; moderate or inconsistent), and suffering (4 and below; poor ratings of their current life situation).

So what can you (as principal) do?

• Get in touch right after the hire
• Provide information for them to read before they get to the school (policies, handbooks, etc.)
• Meet them at the school—provide an orientation walkabout
• Help connect to the community/parents
• Be in touch—be visible—visit the classroom (not as a supervisor)
• Reduce/limit extra-curricular responsibilities—have this conversation
• Support inter-school/divisional classroom visits
• Be cognizant of teaching assignment/workload

• Formalize the mentorship process
• ASSIGN a MENTOR (should be a volunteer; a good teacher; strong relationship skills; be provided training; same grade/subject)
• Train the mentor (support of professional and personal growth; non-evaluative, etc.)
• Provide time for mentor-mentee relationship (cover classes)
Resources


Resource List


*Teacher Education Journal, 2*(3), 113-121.


HCPSVideoChannel (September, 2016). *Teach: Mentoring*. [Videofile]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UhQaFdB5Q


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