



## **New Teachers Need Support**

“Effective Leaders Utilize The Principles of Mentoring”

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### **What Is Mentoring?**

Mentoring is a specific process for “people helping people.”<sup>1</sup> Educators, who model a learning for life attitude, naturally want to help students, parents and fellow teachers to become the best they can be through learning and both effective and affective teaching practices. That is why most teachers come to be teachers in the first place. There is this innate desire to help others learn. Teachers are natural mentors.

I was fortunate in my earliest years of teaching at Pauline Johnson Collegiate in Brantford to have a number of excellent informal mentors who helped me problem solve with curriculum issues and behavioural management in the classroom. The teachers there were so supportive with suggestions, materials, and, most importantly, they allowed me to make mistakes without criticism. Reflecting back on 30 years of teaching and others that I have helped to mentor in return, I hope that I was able to support more youthful teachers with the same open mindedness that I received. And, thus, mentoring continues. We did not have any formal meetings, we did not do much goal setting, although we did talk often about the delivery of curriculum. Teachers talked often in the staff room over lunch about behavioural management strategies to try with certain kids. All of this informal mentor support certainly made a difference for me. I believe that I was a survivor because of the open-ended support received from very special people who also happened to be teachers.

### **Informal Mentoring**

Take thirty seconds, close your eyes, and think of a time in your life when you were helped by someone (where that person acted as a mentor to you) and “thank you” seemed to pale in the gratitude you felt for the gift shared. The gift could have been as simple as a smile or kind words of support. It could be something you saw them do that was exceptional or outstanding for you and you take on that

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<sup>1</sup> Peer Mentor.net 24 Muskoka Court, Kitchener, ON. CA. N2B 3M2 [www.peermentor.net](http://www.peermentor.net)





action as your own. It could be a value statement that spoke to your heart and you chose to imitate that value. As a classroom teacher, you may have observed some strategies that another teacher used and you took on these strategies and found they worked for you too. Mentoring happens between any two or more people when they interact with each other. They find the middle ground upon which they can both agree or aspire to develop. This happens everyday between people who are receptive to learning and it can happen all the time if you are open to it. This is informal mentoring.

I remember those first years of teaching very well. I was taught a very important lesson from one special history teacher that I watched. Massey Ferguson Tractor Incorporated declared bankruptcy and closed its doors in Brantford. Approximately half the city was employed there. The city was not diversified at the time and many were very angry and frustrated because there appeared to be little help for employment. Students at Pauline Johnson Collegiate came to school every day sad, angry, and hurt by things that were happening at home. I observed one particular history teacher stand at his classroom door greeting every kid personally; trying his best to help them feel welcome and safe in his classroom. This was not about the curriculum but about life history in the making. He was an incredible teacher who taught me not to lose sight of what is important when working with the youth of the day. Because I watched him model for me “affective” teaching strategies, I was able to learn from my informal mentor without any words between us. Respect for mentoring was established early for me. He was my informal mentor.

### **Formal Mentoring**

Equally as good is a process of formal mentoring. This is a planned interaction agreed upon by all parties involved. Training for the mentor is required for the greatest impact and results. The mentor needs training to learn what kinds of questions create the best results.<sup>2</sup> The mentor needs training in both effective and affective facilitation skills to help the partner set and achieve specific goals that are meaningful to the partner. There should be a plan on how to begin and how to end the relationship.<sup>3</sup> These structures can make or break a mentor program.

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<sup>2</sup> Mentor Leadership Training. “Questioning Techniques.” Peer Mentor.net Kitchener, ON. CA. N2B 3M2

<sup>3</sup> Mentor Leadership Training. “How To End The Relationship.” Peer Mentor.net Kitchener, ON. CA. N2B 3M2





Over my teaching years, I learned to seek out mentors, set up specific meeting times and specific agenda (goals.) A counsellor at Forest Heights Collegiate mentored me on many aspects of business and how these strategies could be applied to schools and school management. He helped me to allow myself to think divergently and then focus on organizational goals that support student progress. I learned from him how to set realistic time lines, run effective meetings, be and hold others accountable, not to take on too many things at once, and assess what went well and what could be improved. Throughout my teaching career, these strategies had a powerful impact on how I went about the business of teaching and learning. His mentor support was formal, clear, specific and time prudent.

Another mentor that influenced me considerably was a teacher at Grand River Collegiate. He taught me that anyone can listen; however, there are advanced listening skills that will help to be more “effective and affective” as a listener and mentor. He organized and developed one of the most powerful student retention mentor programs in the country.<sup>4</sup> He referred me to mentor leadership programs for additional training. I pursued these formal accredited programs<sup>5</sup> relentlessly because of the powerful impact these training programs had on me as a partner and mentor to others. These skills eventually transferred to all aspects of my life and I think I am a better person for it. As a result, I highly recommend formal mentor training to anyone involved in teaching and helping professions.

### **Pilots Begun, Data Collected**

In an article, ‘Mentoring For New Teachers,’ Curriculum Update, December 2004, there were references made that 21 Ontario school boards have started pilot projects to develop mentoring support for new teachers. These efforts toward induction programs are to be commended. However, this is a very small start. Less than 20% of new teachers participate in any informal mentoring program. Yet, new teachers themselves identify mentoring as the number two most important support mechanism for them, second only to their own classroom experience.<sup>6</sup> Beginning teachers are asking for this support.

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<sup>4</sup> Care For A Kid. “Mentor Program.” Tom Connolly. Waterloo Region District School Board. 52 Aredelt Rd. Kitchener, ON. CA.

<sup>5</sup> Peer Resources. “Peer Helper Program.” Victoria, BC. CA. [www.peer.ca.html](http://www.peer.ca.html)

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education. Fifth Discussion Paper. “Teacher Excellence: Unlocking Student Potential Through Continuous Professional Development.” (v2.) August 16, 2004.





Now that I am now a retired teacher and I am supply teaching in many different schools, it allows me to see new teachers and aspiring teachers who are also supplying. I have been asking these young teachers if in fact they are getting any support whatsoever. For the most part they are responding with “little to no support.” There is some back-room politics going on where a vice-principal or principal may view this one teacher as a “keeper” and behind the scenes they are lobbying to help this teacher land a first position. However, there is no real mentoring going on for beginning teachers. The leaders of the day are imploring that educators need to begin a process for mentoring support to sustain these new teachers. Robert Hargrove, in his book *Masterful Coaching*, talks about “transformational learning and that extraordinary results can happen by impacting people and the way they think and work together through effective mentoring practices.”<sup>7</sup> It is clear that we need to redefine leadership to include specific training for mentoring.<sup>8</sup> So what is keeping this process from moving forward to its natural state of support?

There were times in those first years of teaching that the pressure just about broke me. This has been reported by so many teachers over the years—the first two to five years of teaching are the hardest. The list of expectations on teachers is phenomenal: curriculum expectations, student and parent demands, marking (oh...the marking), report cards, department and staff meetings, system level meetings, coaching two sports each year, trying to meet kids after school for extra help and meet with parents when things were not going well, limited prep time, system change expectations which occur more frequently now than they did for me 30 years ago, training sessions after the work day because of the rate of system changes, etc, etc, etc. Many teachers can add to this list. What I couldn't figure out was how do you do all this and still have a life (like getting married, buying a house, managing a home, children, etc.) I was fortunate to have worked in five occupations before coming into teaching. I was paid more per diem and had little to no homework. When I came to teaching, I just wanted to work with kids. I had no idea how hard that might be. At that time, I ‘had a life’ outside work. What I didn't realize when I started teaching is that ‘teaching is my life.’

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<sup>7</sup> *Masterful Coaching*. Robert Hargrove. Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer. San Francisco, California, US. 1995.

<sup>8</sup> *Mentoring: Leadership Redefined*. Wayne Townsend. Peer Mentor.net. Kitchener, ON. CA. N2B 3M2 [www.peermentor.net](http://www.peermentor.net) June 2005.





Beginning teachers are often given the ‘dog’s breakfast’ (whatever is left over from the night before.) In the secondary panel, department heads and veteran teachers feel they have paid their dues and save the ‘best’ courses for themselves and leave courses for the new teacher that are least favourite to teach with the highest number of students. In the elementary panel, the veteran teachers often know the families of the kids coming in and choose the best students for their class, leaving the toughest behaviour and special education issues to the rookie teacher who often didn’t get hired until the last minute. Oftentimes, new teachers get the toughest programs with the more difficult classroom management issues. The more effective leaders find ways to use the principles of mentoring and do not allow these things to happen. Mentoring can and should be provided for every new teacher to help them become the best they can be.

### **Mentoring And Portfolio Development Go Hand In Hand**

All teachers need to develop a portfolio of professional practice and this fits the mentoring concepts very well. In its simplest form, a portfolio can be merely a chronological listing of professional development activities. There are so many workshops and training programs through which teachers are further developing their expertise that it is essential for teachers to focus when developing an overall career plan. Mentor Leadership Training can impact all aspects of the portfolio development.<sup>9</sup> Many change processes involve the best of: what was, what is, what should be and what will be.<sup>10</sup> This is a positive framework from which to plan using a portfolio. Select those things that are most relevant and worthy of pursuing. In this way, a mentor can assist the partner to plan for him or herself what actions will be taken. Guidance counsellors define ‘occupation’ as a term which refers to the collection of jobs that you do in order to carry out your business day to day.<sup>11</sup> So in teaching, there are many jobs (marking, preparing lesson plans, etc.) within your occupation. Your ‘career’ would include your family and personal life as well as teaching for an occupation.<sup>12</sup> When you view your whole occupation and career path with your mentor you will develop a better sense

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<sup>9</sup> Mentor Training. Wayne Townsend. Peer Mentor.net 24 Muskoka Court, Kitchener, ON. CA. N2B 3M2 [www.peermmentor.net](http://www.peermmentor.net).

<sup>10</sup> Appreciative Inquiry. “Relational Realities and Constructionist Approaches to Organization Development.” David Cooperrider, PhD. Case Western Reserve University. 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Guidance and Career Education. Ministry of Education. The Ontario Curriculum. 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Guidance and Career Education. Ministry of Education. The Ontario Curriculum. 2004,



of the whole self and be able to plan better the occupation of teaching through a portfolio.

My mentor was able to support me in designing an approach that allowed me to include my whole self in the total career plan. What a relief it was to gain a clear focus on those things that were important and to be able to eliminate those things that did not fit the total career and life plan. Being able to say 'yes' and 'no' to the right things that did or did not fit into my portfolio and career plan made life much simpler. Having a trained mentor with experience and empowering mentor skills, it helped me to design a portfolio and total career plan that worked for me and my family.

### **The Art of Principaling**

As in the subtitle, *Effective Leaders Utilize The Principles of Mentoring*, there is the implicit suggestion that if you do not use empowering skills as the 'lead teacher' to support your staff, then you are less of a leader. It is my belief that some administrators achieve vertical mobility by demonstrating effective plant management. Mentor skills are about 'people helping people.' Principals have multifaceted jobs and need to utilize all these skills to be effective. There is little doubt that those principals who naturally support staff through empowerment will have the greatest success. A leader's skills are best measured by those who are willing to follow. With all of the changes and the speed of these changes, a principal, as a leader, cannot do it alone. The principal will need a team of teachers who are willing supporters. Mentor Leadership Training can help a principal to use both effective and affective skills as a lead teacher.<sup>13</sup> Mentor Leadership Training should be part of every leadership selection process for skill development.

### **Mentoring Is Not Just An Answer, It Is A Way Of Being**

Mentor Leadership Training brings another set of skills which are transferable to all aspects of teaching and personal life. Mentor training can help even the most experienced teacher develop more effective and affective language skills that empower others. Senior teachers have a great deal to gain from helping other beginning teachers and the overall school culture will improve as these practices engrain themselves in all school activities.

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Mentoring, as a process, empowers all that use the principles. It is helpful for both the mentor and the partner. Teaching and learning are what schools are all about. All teachers mentor whether they know it or not. The difference would be the varying skill levels that teachers choose to use and to the level that they might choose formal versus informal mentoring. Teachers who practice the art of mentoring become more effective and affective in all aspects of their working, personal, spiritual, and social life. Rey Carr at Peer Resources Canada states that: “As a result of our 25 years of work with school districts, corporations, and community organizations across Canada, we have been able to identify the few, simple principles associated with best practices in mentoring.” Peer Mentor.net has listed many of the best practices on our web site [www.peermentor.net](http://www.peermentor.net) and for those educators who want to create sustainable mentoring programs to maximize retention of staff, we have designed interactive training seminars.<sup>14</sup>

As a consultant, trainer, and educator, I have found that participants not only learn the key elements of effective mentoring programs, but also have an opportunity to gain coaching from experts on their ideas and skills and customize mentoring principles to fit their back-home circumstances.<sup>15</sup> These leading-edge seminars are regularly available in Waterloo, Ontario and Halifax, Nova Scotia and can also be delivered in any area of Canada.<sup>16</sup>

With a little reorganization and strong leadership, formal mentoring could happen in all schools. They will be able to keep more of their new teachers, improve the range and quality of teaching practices, empower their veteran teachers to use mentoring skills in more aspects of their teaching life and improve the quality of leadership development for the entire system. The whole culture of the school can be impacted in positive ways because everyone would be better versed in the power of mutual support. This is my dream of the ‘ideal school culture.’

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