What Beginning Teachers Need

The Beginning Teacher as a Developing Professional
Reflection

- Think back to your student teaching experience. What were your feelings? Describe the evolution of your feelings over the course of that experience.

- Think about some of the beginning teachers you’ve worked with in the past. What were their concerns during the first years of teaching and how did they get them resolved?
Objectives

Mentor teachers will be able to

- Describe patterns in beginning teacher development and how to support the beginning teacher through each stage.
- Identify the types of support a beginning teacher needs.
The Balancing Act

Beginning teachers undergo tremendous professional growth. Mentors must balance the view of the beginning teacher as a novice in need of guidance and a professional growing in independence.
The beginning teacher: An Overview

Research supports stages that a beginning teachers usually pass through as they transition from:

- The ever-busy, barely making it survivor to…
- The well-trained, capable practitioner
Survival Mode

The belief that beginning teachers are focused only on

- Student control
- Mentor reviews
- Making it day to day

Teachers are experiencing a form of “practice shock” and thus are not capable of focusing on higher order processes, such as mastering curriculum and instructional strategies. These issues must be resolved before working effectively with students.

(Achinstein & Athanases, 2006)
Survival Mode

Teachers move through predictable stages, focusing on:

- **Self**
  - Teachers are very self-conscious at this stage and concerned about how they are perceived by their peers, students, and supervisors.

- **Curriculum**
  - As classroom procedures become better established, teachers turn more attention to familiarizing themselves with the curricula and preparing lessons not just to control behavior, but also to teach academic objectives.

(Athanases & Achinstein, 2006)
Survival Mode

Finally, after a great deal of time, the teacher turns his or her focus to

- Student learning
  - The teacher is finally able to use prescriptive teaching, implementing the research based strategies he or she learned in preservice training.

(Athanases & Achinstein, 2006)
Beginning Teacher Phases

This model, proposed by Ellen Moir of the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project, describes the cycle of beginning teacher’s attitudes throughout the school year.

(Moir, 1999)
Beginning Teacher Phases

- Anticipation Phase
  - Begins during student teaching and preservice training
  - Idealistic outlook of teaching
  - Feelings of excitement that last through the first weeks of school

(Moir, 1999)
Beginning Teacher Phases

- **Survival Phase**
  - The teacher is consumed with the day-to-day routine of teaching
  - May spend up to 70 hours per week on school work
  - Spend a great deal of time developing lesson plans and curricula
  - Tired, but maintaining a great deal of energy none the less

(Moir, 1999)
Beginning Teacher Phases

• Disillusionment Phase
  • Begins after six to eight weeks of nonstop work and stress
  • Varies in length and intensity
  • Teachers question their commitment and competence
  • May become physically ill
  • Exasperated by parent teacher conferences and formal administrative evaluation
  • Teachers self-esteem may suffer

(Moir, 1999)
Beginning Teacher Phases

- Rejuvenation Phase
  - Begins in January, after winter break
  - Teachers return to school rested and invigorated
  - The end of the school year is now in sight
  - Teachers focus on curriculum development, long term planning and teaching strategies
  - Often lasts into spring, despite ups and downs

(Moir, 1999)
Beginning Teacher Phases

- Reflection Phase
  - Begins in the last six weeks of school
  - Teachers reflect on successes and failures of the past year
  - Begin to plan the changes for the following year
  - Brings teachers to a new phase of anticipation

(Moir, 1999)
Implications for the Mentor

- The graph would indicate that the teacher is barely making it until half way through the school year.
- In reality, all teachers cycle through these stages as they experience professional growth through the trial and error approach to teaching.
- However, beginning teachers need additional support as they work their way through these stages.
- May make the mentor reluctant to place additional demands upon the teacher who is already overburdened.

(Moir, 1999)
Implications for the Mentor

• The beginning teacher may spend up to 70 hours per week on school work during the “Survival Phase.”
  • The mentor can help target the time spent onto the most important tasks.

• Low morale sets in during the disillusionment phase.
  • Teachers need additional moral support to make it through to rejuvenation.

• Teachers need to be lifted and supported to get through these phases and know that they are common and don’t last forever.

(Moir, 1999)
Implications for the Mentor

While beginning teachers experience a steep learning curve, excessive focus on the “Survival Mode” paradigm of beginning teaching can lead a mentor to focus only on his or her role as:

- A buddy to the beginning teacher
- A guide for local policy
- A counselor for advice in classroom management

(Feinman-Nemser, S., Carver, C., Schwille, S., Yusko, B, 1999)
Implications for the Mentor

To promote student achievement, beginning teachers need

- Experiences that will shape them into thoughtful practitioners
- Support in implementing the skills they acquired in their preservice training including
  - Use of formative assessment and progress monitoring
  - A wide variety of classroom management and data gathering tools
  - Research based instructional strategies
  - High expectations and the collaboration to achieve them

(Kagan, 1992)
Implications for the Mentor

Beginning teachers need two main types of support

- **Instruction-related support**
  - Subject matter knowledge
    - Local standards
    - Familiarizing themselves with the curriculum
  - Progress monitoring
    - Using a variety of measures to monitor and track student growth
    - Standardized tests
  - Instructional approaches and strategies
    - Applying the researched based practices they’ve learned in their pre-service preparation
    - Continuing to build their strategy tool kit

(Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999)
Implications for the Mentor

• Psychological support
  • Sense of self—identity as a teacher
    • A teacher who does not develop his or her identity of the teacher will continue to flounder and likely leave the profession (Kagan, 1992)
  • Ability to handle stress
    • Working through the disillusionment phase
    • Avoiding blows to self-esteem from classroom struggles
    • Balancing work and life

• Balancing responsibilities
  • Classroom responsibilities
  • Committees and extra-curricular obligations
  • Parent communications

(Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999)
Implications for the Mentor

Mentors can help by:

- Helping teachers troubleshoot their classroom management plan
- Balancing imitating successful professionals and finding his or her own voice as a teacher
- Help build the teacher’s confidence through successful experiences by
  - Planning effective lessons
  - Recording student progress
- Work through anxiety regarding parent relationships
  - Establish norms for parent communication
  - Start positive relationships with parents as early as possible