

The Definition of Mentoring

Mentoring is when a role model, or mentor, offers support to another person. A mentor has knowledge and experience in an area and shares it with the person being mentored. For example, an experienced teacher might mentor a student teacher or beginning teacher.

Source: Adapted from *The Language of Learning: A Guide to Education Terms*, by J. L. McBrien & R. S. Brandt, p. 64, 1997, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

What makes a successful mentoring program?

Barry Sweeney: Where there's an openness to feedback and other ideas to take on some complex professional challenges which may not work perfectly the first few times they do them and then make mistakes in front of each other and to learn, knowing that they're going to be supported. So if you take those values or those norms that are established within a good mentoring relationship, and extend that to the entire school, what you capture then is that the adults who are going into their job everyday go in expecting to learn just as much as the students.

In what ways can a mentor be supportive?

Barry Sweeney: The mentoring relationship creates that kind of support system, where a very effective teacher who's there to support you and encourage you and challenge you in your learning is also there to help you get up off your knees and dust off and try again. It's the trusting relationship that mentors have with their protégés that make that happen.

How can a mentor build a good rapport with the person being mentored?

Melissa Fleischer, coach/mentor: There are different ways you can build that trust at the beginning of the year, before you even sort of get to the nitty-gritty on how to set up your classroom and all those sort of first-week things, you need to just take the time to get to know that teacher a little bit. We took some sort of out of school time to talk about everything else that's going on in her life, so I could get a better picture of who she was and where she was coming from and to begin to build that personal friendship sort of with teaching on the side. That's very important because, then later they're going to be able to come back to you when they need help and they're going to come to you because they know that you have a relationship and they can trust you.

Why is mentoring beginning teachers important?

Robyn Cochran, coach: You're taking them each step of their way and you're giving them new things to learn and new things to try and you're also helping them troubleshoot things along the way.

What are some benefits of having a mentor?

Kristen Doucet, teacher: It's really good to have somebody there to talk to about some of the things that you're noticing in the classroom and even things that they're noticing. Because things that you may know may not come to mind readily and so to have somebody else there to say, "Well have you tried this?" It's almost like a light goes on and you're like, "Oh—no, I didn't think of trying that."

A Better Beginning: Supporting and Mentoring New Teachers

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