GUIDED REFLECTION: Mentors draw on special skills

Mentors in the Dalton (Ga.) Public Schools practice empathic writing and active listening skills using the tool below as a guide to help new teachers reflect on their work.

Mentors can use guided reflections in face-to-face conversations, in e-mail exchanges, or through journal writing. Doing reflections with a mentor moves the reflection from being a solitary event to a collaborative process which benefits both the novice teacher and the mentor teacher.

USING GUIDED REFLECTION

Objective of interaction	Teacher behavior/response	Mentor response
1. Accept feelings	**1a.** Teacher has difficulty discerning feelings in self and others. **1b.** Teacher discerns feelings in both self and students.	Share own feelings. Accept feelings.
2. Praise or encourage	**2a.** Teacher has high self-doubt when attempting new instructional strategies. **2b.** Teacher has confidence when attempting new instructional stragegies.	Offer frequent encouragement. Offer occasional support.
3. Clarify ideas	**3a.** Teacher perceives knowledge as fixed and employs a single "tried-and-true" model of teaching. **3b.** Teacher perceives knowledge as a process of successive approximations and employs a diversity of models of teaching.	Relate ideas to observed events and clarify how ideas affect students' lives. Accept and clarify ideas and encourage examination of hidden assumptions of pedagogy.
4. Prompt inquiry	**4a.** Teacher rarely reflects on teaching/learning process. **4b.** Teacher consistently reflects on diverse aspects of the teaching and learning process.	Ask questions about observed events in teaching/learning. Ask questions that encourage analysis, evaluation, divergent thinking and synthesis of theory/practice and broader societal issues.
5. Provide information	**5a.** Teacher disdains theory, prefers concrete thinking, and has difficulty recalling personal teaching events. **5b.** Teacher employs abstract thinking, shows evidence of originality in adapting innovations to the classroom, and is articulate in analysis of his or her own teaching.	Offer information in smaller amounts, relate to observed practice, and review regularly. Relate information to relevant theory and contrast with competing theories.
6. Give directions	**6a.** Teacher needs detailed instructions and high structure, is low on self-direction, and follows curriculum as if it were carved in stone. **6b.** Teacher is high on self-direction and needs low structure.	Offer detailed instructions, but encourage greater self-direction. Offer few directions.
7. When problems exist	**7a.** Teacher has difficulty accepting responsibility for problems and blames students. **7b.** Teacher accepts responsibility for actions.	Accept feelings and thoughts and use "I" messages. Accept feelings and thoughts.

SOURCE: Reiman, A.J. (1999, August). The evolution of the social roletaking and guided reflection framework in teacher education: Recent theory and quantitative synthesis of research. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 15*(6), 597-612.

Better mentoring stretches the teacher's self-reflection skills

Marty is a new mathematics teacher. He is earnest, hardworking, conscientious, and polite almost to the extreme. He teaches almost exclusively using a question-and-answer method. Marty says that the children have to learn the facts before they can interpret. The students must cover on schedule the material in the lesson plan. He follows his lesson plan literally. Amy, a seven-year veteran math teacher, has been trained as a mentor and assigned to work with Marty. Marty wants to please Amy and wants her to outline what he must do to gain approval.

Marty is an example of a new teacher who is adequate but highly dependent on others' feedback for direction and self-correction. Amy must encourage Marty to reflect on his own performance and become more able to identify his own areas for growth. Consider a possible e-mail exchange:

Example #1

Amy: Marty, tell me how you thought your lesson went.

Marty: I don't know. All right, I guess. Tell me how you thought it went.

Amy: You did the advance organizer well, but you clearly did not use more than one teaching strategy and your students ended up off task.

Amy gave Marty specific feedback and essentially a "grade" for the lesson. This interaction would approximate the exchange with a college supervisor — a recent experience for a first-year teacher. That sort of summative evaluation is important, but not for a mentoring relationship. The mentoring role is a formative one. If Marty is to become more independent and reflective, an empathic e-mail exchange might serve better.

Example #2

Amy: Tell me how your lesson went, Marty.

Marty: I don't know. All right, I suppose. Tell me how you thought it went.

Amy: It sounds like you're not sure about your lesson. Tell me some things that went well.

Marty:: I thought the question-and-answer format worked well as the students worked the entire period and I didn't have any problems with classroom management.

Amy: It sounds like you're pleased with maintaining control of the class and that you're comfortable with teaching through question-and-answer. Since we know a variety of teaching methods enhance student achievement, what are some other teaching strategies you might want to use?

Amy acknowledges Marty's feelings and then prompts him to reflect by using an open-ended statement. Amy also recognizes that Marty is reluctant to use a different teaching strategy, so she acknowledges the successful parts of the lesson and then stretches Marty to consider new methods.

The fundamental difference in the two exchanges is that, in the second example, Amy prompts Marty to reflect on his experience. In the first example, she gives a specific, brief, and direct answer, and Marty has to do little, if any, reflection. Stretching Marty's self-reflecting skills (e.g., his autonomy) ultimately benefits his students and his own professional growth. Additionally, Amy's reflection on Marty's teaching supports her own professional growth.

SOURCE: Originally published in "Tell me what went well with your lesson, Sam," by Zach Kelehear, *JSD,* Fall 2002.

DEFINITION:

• Mentoring is a intentional, confidential process through which an experienced teacher or professional provides a newcomer with information, support, resources, guidance, feedback, and assistance to help the newcomer refine his or her present skills, develop new ones, and enhance problem solving and decision making in a way that leaves its mark on knowledge and practice related to student learning.

• Mentors refine their own practices, learn from the newcomers, and enhance their reflective capacity. Both mentors and newcomers grow professionally from the relationship.

• A mentor is an experienced teacher who forges a learning partnership with a beginning teacher.

SOURCE: "Mentoring," by Pam Robbins, a chapter in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning,* edited by Lois Brown Easton (Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council, 2004). Available through the NSDC Online Bookstore, store.nsdc.org.