

T3 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

ROLE: Mentor

PURPOSE: To increase instructional skills of the novice teacher and support schoolwide induction activities

BY JOELLEN KILLION AND CYNTHIA HARRISON

Third in an eight-part series about roles of the school-based coach

School-based coaches often mentor new teachers in their school. Depending on the number of new teachers and expectations for support, this role can be a small or significant part of a coach's work week. Sometimes, rather than mentoring new teachers directly, coaches support other teachers who mentor novice teachers.



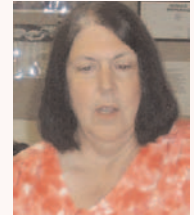
Coaches who mentor new teachers usually couple the role of mentor with other roles, most frequently classroom supporter and instructional specialist. They provide all types of assistance, from facilitating learning to demonstrating lessons, co-teaching, or planning instruction. Building a trusting relationship with novice teachers is essential for a successful partnership between coaches and novice teachers. Assisting new teachers to access and understand district and school expectations and resources is the coach's first level of support. Coaches offer on-the-spot assistance to novice or new-to-the-school teachers because they are "right down the hall" when needed. Coaches can usually adjust their schedules to be in a new teacher's classroom at a variety of times throughout the school day.

In the role of mentor, coaches help new teachers plan lessons, expand their

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SCENARIO:

Mentor at work

On the first day of school, Joseph Garcia*, the student achievement coach at Monroe Middle School, visits the classrooms of each of the school’s new teachers. He has helped each one set up classroom rules and sees them posted in the classroom. He observes teacher-student interactions to get a sense of how well each new teacher has created a climate conducive to learning. On the third day of school, he holds an after-school support group for new teachers and those new to the school in which they discuss managerial and instructional issues that arose during the first few days. Several teachers, even two experienced teachers, indicate that they want some help integrating more instruction for their non-English speaking students. Garcia shares a few quick, effective strategies and asks teachers to brainstorm additional ones.

During the second half of the support session, teachers are eager to share stories about their classrooms. Garcia structures the conversation to focus on teachers’ decision making. He facilitates the group to generate and discuss multiple options for each of the situations they share. In one case, Garcia uses “peeling the onion”

protocol to go more deeply into the problem solving. Garcia wants to ensure that the conversation moves quickly from complaining or story-telling to deep thinking and generating a variety of ideas for each situation. He believes this exercise will expand novice teachers’ repertoires and give them greater decision-making flexibility.

After the first week of school, Garcia learns that one of the novice teachers is struggling with classroom management. He meets with the new teacher to plan a course of action. They agree that Garcia will co-teach the most challenging class for the next three days with the new teacher. Together, they agree on how to structure the classroom and how to divide the instructional responsibilities in the lessons they have planned. They also agree on how to handle behavior problems in the classroom. After each day of co-teaching, Garcia and the novice teacher debrief what occurred and plan the next lesson. Garcia also makes explicit the strategies he used during the lesson to manage student behavior and compliments the teacher on her effective behaviors. After co-teaching with this novice teacher, Garcia checks in daily with other new teachers and plans to observe each one the following week.

** Fictitious person and school*

repertoire of instructional strategies, and differentiate instruction for diverse learners. They help novice teachers manage their classrooms, establish classroom routines, select and implement a discipline plan, and locate resources. Coaches often spend time modeling instruction or observing new teachers and giving feedback on their instruction. Coaches strive to develop in novice teachers a practice of continuous improvement by encouraging them to identify professional growth goals and to reflect on their practice. Coaches help both new-to-the-school and new-to-the-profession teachers understand and implement the district curriculum and acclimate to the school and district culture.

To support mentors, coaches help them solve problems, understand the developmental stages

of teachers, identify strategies to assist novice teachers, locate resources, offer advice, and listen to their concerns. Coaches may meet monthly with mentors to discuss the progress of novice teachers, celebrate successes, and help mentors address specific problems in novice teachers’ classrooms.

Knowledge and skills

To be effective in this role, coaches understand the stages of teacher development, know how to match support with teachers’ expressed concerns, and have a wide array of classroom management, instructional, and assessment strategies to draw upon. Assessing novice teachers’ needs and knowing how to respond to identified needs are important skills for coaches. Knowing

9 roles of the school-based coach

- Catalyst for change
- Classroom supporter
- Curriculum specialist
- Data coach (T3, Oct. 2005)
- Instructional specialist
- Learning facilitator (T3, Sept. 2005)
- **Mentor**
- Resource provider
- School leader

T3 presents one role of the school-based coach each month.

the personalities of new teachers and their learning preferences helps the coach select the best intervention to support new teachers without overwhelming them. Coaches, to be successful as mentors, use a wide range of relationship skills to help new teachers feel comfortable, yet challenged to improve. They use a delicate balance of pressure and support to encourage continuous improvement. Making agreements about how to work together effectively is crucial to having an effective working relationship between coaches and novice teachers.

One of the primary skill sets coaches use is in technical and cognitive coaching. Knowing how to engage teachers in analyzing their own practice, how to collect, analyze, and share data, how to provide specific and corrective feedback, and how to provide a range of alternatives are important skills for coaches. Coaches also depend on a wide range of knowledge and skills related to curriculum, planning, effective instruction, assessment, and classroom management.

Challenges

The greatest challenge a coach faces as a mentor is moving the novice teacher from dependence to independence as a teacher. Balancing directive coaching with more reflective, metacognitive coaching can be difficult, especially when novice teachers seek direction from their mentors. Coaches may find it easier to be more directive with novice teachers by advising them or giving them specific instructions rather than listening and encouraging them to identify their own alternative practices. Another challenge for coaches is to balance the time they spend with novice teachers. It is easy to spend a great deal of time with new teachers because they are often eager to learn and welcome any support. Yet coaches frequently have multiple responsibilities within a school and will want to plan how to balance their varied and often conflicting responsibilities. ♦

From
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