

Educator Guide

Capstone and Portfolio Guidebook

Booklet 3 – Understanding the “Why” and the “What” of Mentorship & Capstone



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THE ROLE OF A MENTOR

“A mentor is someone who sees more talent and ability within you, than you see in yourself, and helps bring it out of you. “

Implementation of portfolios and/or capstones may also require the development of new skills and understanding within the staff. First, all staff will need to understand and embrace the rationale and role for competency-based assessment in an evaluation system. Then they need to understand their role as mentors or advisors in the process. They provide the necessary support system students will need to plan, curate, and present their body of work to demonstrate competence. Additionally, teachers need to understand the competencies and outcomes of the process to be able to guide students to that final demonstration. To be sufficiently prepared in terms of mindset, practicalities and skills, teachers need time and structures to collaborate to accomplish a variety of tasks including (but not limited to): Writing/revising the competencies/outcomes for students

- Writing/revising the rubrics that will be used to assess student work
- Examining student work collaboratively to ensure inter-rater reliability
- Creating the learning experiences for students (e.g., performance assessments, projects, etc.) for students to produce work for the portfolio
- Planning the structure/format of the final student defense
- Recruiting and training people to sit on review panels
- Sharing best practice strategies regarding mentoring students, monitoring student progress, providing students’ feedback, and ensuring rigor throughout the process

CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

Build in time for consistent staff collaboration, as well as time in the master schedule for students to interact with staff as a planned course, CLC11. Dedicated time is also necessary to allow for students to defend their portfolio or capstone project. Neither teachers nor students must be expected to do all the work of the portfolio or capstone on their own time or completely outside of the school day.

SECTION 1 | The Mentor as Growth Agent

LEARNING-FOCUSED mentoring relationships make a significant emotional and intellectual difference in the induction experience for new teachers, as well as in their continuing professional practice. These clearly structured entries into the profession frame the learning journey from novice to expert teaching. Beginning teachers benefiting from skilled mentoring are more likely to:

- Effectively organize and manage instruction earlier in the school year
- Increase their efficacy as instructional problem solvers and decision makers
- Engage in collaborative professional exchanges regarding improving practice
- Remain in the teaching profession

First and Foremost

Who we are as mentors, how we mentor, and what we mentor about, are essential to meeting the current needs of beginning teachers. A central component in a learning-focused mentoring program is a clear understanding of the respective role and responsibilities of each participant. The most important function for mentors is to embrace a growth orientation, understanding that the work is to increase their colleague's effectiveness as professional problem solvers and decision makers. The most important function for beginning teachers is to embrace a learning orientation, understanding that the work is to examine their practice, both collaboratively and independently as a means to professional growth. This disposition for a collaborative relationship launches the multi-year journey towards expertise.

This process begins with establishing and maintaining a learning focus within the relationship. In this way, each party shapes and understands the nature and expectations of the mentoring interactions. We build on the work of Laurent Daloz (2012), suggesting that a mentor's role within such a relationship is to balance three functions:

- Offering support
- Creating cognitive challenge
- Facilitating a professional vision

These functions can operate independently in specific situations, but in the greater context of the relationship they must be interconnected. Balancing these three elements energizes growth and learning. Support alone will provide comfort but may encourage complacency. Cognitive challenge without support may increase anxiety and fear of failure. Support and cognitive challenge without vision may leave new teachers wandering on a journey looking only at the ground beneath them, but not the road ahead.

Mentoring Matters

Plate spinning was a classic vaudeville routine, and these days, a street act. Envision a performer balancing multiple plates and moving back and forth to keep them simultaneously spinning (See Figure 1.1: Balancing the Three Functions). Once the plates are rotating, the performer does not return to each plate in sequence, but steps back to determine which plates might be losing energy and spins those. That is, there is balance throughout – some plates maintain their momentum while others need a boost. So it is with mentors as they provide the three functions described below. There is no correct starting point or sequence to these functions. Attending to the balance of all three is important. Skillful mentors pay attention to the needs of their beginning teacher and offer input accordingly.

Figure 1.1 Balancing the Three Functions



Offering Support

Support for the new teacher occurs in four distinct categories: emotional, physical, instructional, and institutional. Sometimes the novice needs a shoulder to cry on, a hug rewarding an especially exhilarating success, and every range of emotional support in between. Often, the support is physical—perhaps tackling the room arrangement, moving desks and setting up learning centers, creating classroom displays, establishing web connections, or even carting books for a thematic unit from the media center. Instructional support includes contextual application of teaching and learning standards, content area resources, and practical suggestions based on current research and years of rich experience. Institutional support includes guidelines for applying organizational policies and procedures and tips for navigating day-to-day routines, events, and expectations.

Instructional Support includes:

- Establishing classroom routines
- Managing student behavior
- Differentiating instruction
- Developing formative assessment strategies
- Planning and pacing lessons
- Interpreting curriculum

SUPPORT

- Emotional
- Physical
- Instructional
- Institutional

Institutional Support includes:

- Preparing for observations and evaluations
- Maintaining student records
- Acquiring resources
- Managing non-classroom duties
- Implementing school-based initiatives
- Following leave or attendance policies

Table 1.1 Offering Support

Mentor Move	What is it?	Might look/sound like
Attend fully	Respectfully listening when our partner needs to share concerns, frustrations, experiences, and new ideas.	Sitting side by side—no barriers. Put cell phones away. More beginning teacher talk than mentor talk. Mentors mentally bracket their own internal distractions.
Respond empathetically	Acknowledging feelings, and when appropriate, sharing relevant concerns, frustrations, and experiences.	<i>"That can be really frustrating."</i> <i>"That's a common concern at this time of the year."</i> <i>"I struggled with a similar issue early in my teaching."</i>
Create a safe space	Attending to the verbal and nonverbal communications that establish rapport and support thinking.	Pausing frequently to allow for thinking time. Asking more than telling. <i>"Let's look at this student's work to see where she's met the writing standards."</i>
Coordinate schedules	Agreeing on and protecting pockets of time that work for both parties. Establishing agreements for addressing pressing personal or professional concerns.	<i>"I think we should meet every other week – would that work for you?"</i> <i>"Let's protect some regular times/places that will work for each of us."</i> <i>"Let's establish some guidelines for dealing with pressing issues or concerns."</i>
Offer resources	Providing time, energy, materials, and strategies to ease the challenges beginners face.	<i>"Let's meet in your classroom after school to set that up."</i> <i>"As you prepare for that unit, I'll put together a few resources that might work well for your students."</i> <i>"I'll forward some web links on that topic for you to review."</i>
Provide information	Clarifying the practices and policies of the school and district to facilitate induction into the professional community. Sharing expertise and resources about the craft of teaching to support the development of sound educational practice.	<i>"Given this issue, there are a few things you need to consider. . ."</i> <i>"I've highlighted a few sections of the induction manual that you should pay particular attention to."</i> <i>"Let's create a calendar of critical deadlines in the first semester and set up some prep time in advance of them."</i>

Creating Cognitive Challenge

In our experience, mentors devote most of their time to spinning the support plate. However, unless support is balanced with cognitive challenge, we rob new teachers of the opportunity to grow and learn.

If our goal is to nurture independent, effective practitioners, then it is critical to develop the thinking patterns of increasing expertise: envisioning, monitoring, reflecting, and applying their learning to their classroom practices.

Growth requires that beginners develop the capacity to employ and adapt expert information within the context of their own classrooms. This development includes independently making meaning of new information and experiences. This learning enables new teachers to utilize, refine, and adapt strategies to meet student learning needs. Skillful mentors scaffold this growth process through their learning focused interactions.

Learning-focused relationships balance the support function with cognitive challenge to promote continual attention to improvements in practice. The table below illustrates five examples of creating challenge in a learning-focused relationship (See Table 1.2: Creating Cognitive Challenge).

Facilitating Professional Vision

For beginning teachers, it is often difficult to project past the most immediate experience. There are no reference points for envisioning student growth or positive developments in the classroom environment. As a result, mentors need to help set reasonable expectations and reinforce the idea that present choices create future possibilities. The day-to-day operation of a classroom is generally new territory for the novice, so it is often necessary to illuminate the learning pathways (See Table 1.3: Facilitating Professional Vision).

*“We don’t learn to teach;
We learn from our teaching.”*

Facilitating the development of a professional vision early on fosters the belief that a teaching career is a learning career; teachers are lifelong learners who engage in continuous improvement. Promoting this function establishes a picture of sound educational practice and high expectations. It reminds us that we don’t learn to teach; rather we learn from our teaching. Facilitating vision begins on day one of the mentoring relationship, balanced with the functions of Offering Support and Creating Cognitive Challenge.

One way to think about yourself as a growth agent is to imagine the colleague you would like to have teaching next door to you. With this person in mind, create a list of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of your ideal neighbor. Then, note the various approaches you might take to help your colleague develop these resources. You will most likely find yourself crafting lists of ways to provide support, ways to intellectually challenge, and ways to model and foster an emerging vision as a professional.

CREATING COGNITIVE CHALLENGE

- Goal-driven
- Data-focused
- Thought-provoking

FACILITATING VISION

- High expectations for self and students
- Lifelong learning
- Professional identity

Mentoring moments can be isolated action or part of an intentional approach to building expertise. Mentors need to be responsive to the immediate needs and energy of their new colleague as well as attend to their response patterns over time. Monitoring which plates you are spinning, when, why, and how often will help you identify your own habits and increase your consciousness about the choices you're making as a growth-oriented mentor.

Table 1.2 Creating Cognitive Challenge

Mentor Move	What is it?	Might look/sound like
Engage in goal-driven learning	Based on the new teacher's concerns, needs, and interests, identifying learning goals, and using the Planning Template to structure goal-driven conversations.	<i>"As you anticipate this first semester, what are some specific goals you want to focus on?"</i> <i>"Given your progress with classroom management so far, some new goals you might consider are. . ."</i>
Maintain a focus on student learning	Assisting in analyzing formative and summative student performance information, discerning patterns, and determining cause-effect relationships.	Explore samples of student work to focus conversations. <i>"The examples that you're using in this unit may be causing confusion for kids who have a different cultural background than yours."</i> <i>"Let's compare this month's reading data to last month's to assess your students' progress."</i>
Structure rigorous examination and analysis of practice	Applying the Planning and Reflecting Templates to focus and guide conversations (See conversation templates, pp. 30-32). Considering the beginning teacher's decisions and experiences and exploring causal factors for both positive and negative results of instructional choices. Assisting in identifying and articulating criteria for choices and outcomes.	Share the conversation templates with your beginning teacher prior to scheduled conversations. <i>"Given the responses on these exit slips, what's your hunch about what may be causing gaps in understanding for some of your kids?"</i> <i>"Let's brainstorm a list of options with pros and cons for each."</i>
Engage in problem solving as a teaching/ learning tool	Forging problem solving partnerships, brainstorming options and generating solutions. Structuring conversations by applying the Problem Solving Template (See p. 32).	Frame concerns as problems to be solved. Teach and model the Problem Solving Template to your beginning teacher to encourage independent application. Think aloud: <i>"When I see this kind of thing happen, some questions I consider are. . ."</i>
Develop norms of experimentation and reflective practice	Building connections between current theory and classroom practice. Constructing and conducting action research projects based on the new teacher's concerns, learning goals, and interests.	<i>"How do your own observations of student behavior fit with what this article is suggesting?"</i> <i>"Let's each try this new comprehension strategy and compare results."</i>

Table 1.3 Facilitating Professional Vision

Mentor Move	What is it?	Might look/sound like
<p>Frame the journey from novice to more expert levels of teaching</p>	<p>Referencing teaching and learning standards and related rubrics to set high, yet achievable, expectations for the beginning teacher.</p>	<p><i>“As we look at the standards for responding to students, let’s clarify some differences between level two and level three.”</i></p> <p><i>“As you imagine your own teaching six weeks from now, in what areas would you like to have greater confidence and skill?”</i></p>
<p>Envision an equitable, identity-safe classroom focused on high levels of learning for all students</p>	<p>Modeling and articulating dimensions of a powerful classroom climate: strong relationships between teachers, students, and their parents; responding to students respectfully; and communicating belief in their capacity to learn.</p> <p>Painting the bigger picture of content integration: teach subject areas with culturally relevant, real world applications; using technology to connect to the wider world.</p>	<p><i>“What are some things you monitor to know that students feel safe in your classroom?”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s important to connect with parents early in the school year. Here are some strategies and tips for you to choose from for getting started with that.”</i></p> <p><i>“Let’s generate some specific examples that your students should be able to relate to for the next two social studies units.”</i></p>
<p>Create collaborative opportunities with other beginning teachers, their mentors, and within the faculty</p>	<p>Encouraging your beginning teacher’s participation during grade or department level planning meetings and PLC’s.</p> <p>Creating a community by orchestrating learning meetings with other mentors and their beginning teachers.</p>	<p>Host early morning gatherings for coffee and conversation about teaching.</p> <p><i>“Let’s sit together at the next PD session to process and apply new learning.”</i></p> <p>Coach your beginning teacher about ways to get their voice heard at meetings.</p>
<p>Model your own professional learning journey</p>	<p>Sharing your vision for your own classroom; articulating your own learning goals and the thinking behind them.</p> <p>Sharing professional reading or blogs and websites you find useful.</p>	<p>Do a think aloud classroom tour of your own classroom: share some of the things you’ve learned, your reasoning for your choices, and what you’re hoping for.</p> <p><i>“Given our conversation today, I’ll email some links to related resources you might find useful.”</i></p>

“Mentors need to help set reasonable expectations and reinforce the idea that present choices create future possibilities.”

The Three Functions of a Mentor

FUNCTION:

What does the mentor do in this role once a learning focus is determined?

What are some moves that the mentor might make in order to fulfill this need?

Give some specific examples of how one or two of these moves might look and sound.

FUNCTION:

FUNCTION:

The Three Stances of Learning-Focused Conversations

“Within learning-focused conversations, *mentors* flex between consulting, collaborating and coaching stances to develop their protégés’ capacities to reflect upon practice, generate ideas and increase professional self-awareness”.

<u>STANCE</u>	<u>ROLE</u>	<u>SOME STRATEGIES TO USE</u>
CONSULTANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produces or supplies the information • identifies and offers expert analysis of any gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • think aloud about your own ‘What & Whys’ • offer a menu • produce an idea bank • conduct a model • review videos of teaching • reference & highlight current research
COLLABORATOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share idea development and gap analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brainstorm reasons, ideas, solutions, and interventions • co-plan • co-teach • become study buddies • conduct action research • explore case studies
COACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentee produces the information and analyzes the gaps as the mentor paraphrases and inquires to enlarge perspectives and clarify details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain a non-judgmental stance • inquire about successes, concerns, whatever the mentee brings up • reflect on goals

NOTES: