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Mentors

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Discussion of Mentors, 1000 words

MENTORS

The concept of a “mentor” originates from the epic, “The Odyssey”, where it is discussed in terms of the role of a mentor to support a protégé. The relationship between a mentor and a protégé has been implemented in several different ways in different circumstances and areas. Correspondingly, the roles of a mentor in mentoring have also been conceptualized differently in the professions and organizations. A mentor in the field of education, typically experienced teachers like veteran teachers and senior teachers in the same subject area, helps new teachers adjust in the new teaching environment and supports them to succeed in the teaching profession, especially during their early years of professional teaching.

Demands on Mentoring New Teachers

Major changes in teacher education include high demands of quality education and professional development. The significance of professional mentoring for the sake of quality education has been highlighted in connection to high quality teachers as there has been increasing awareness that the quality of early childhood education programs are related to a teacher’s qualifications and professional dispositions such as teaching efficacy, passion, motivations, interpersonal skills, and so forth.

In order to remedy long lasting problems in the field of early childhood education such as recruitment, attrition, and retention, various mentoring and induction programs

have been developed across the states. Within the field of early childhood education, a mentor's responsibilities and mentoring programs differ by school district and state.

There are discrete concepts, definitions, and functions of mentors and mentoring: There are ambiguities and complexities in defining mentoring and the role of mentoring in interpersonal growth and professional development among mentors and protégés alike.

Nature (or Definition) of Mentoring

Despite the lack of consensus in defining mentoring, there are communalities in terms of definitions of mentoring. First, mentoring reflects a unique interpersonal relationship between individuals. Second, mentoring relates to the acquisition of knowledge and skills to be adjusted in a certain context where the protégés are situated. Third, although the mentoring process seems to be linear, mentoring is a dynamic and reciprocal process, producing new roles and expectations between the mentors and protégés. In other words, mentoring is transformative in its impacts on relationships and expectations.

The variations in defining mentoring often cause discrepancies in perceptions and expectations among mentors and protégés. In the school system, mentoring is perceived as a means of teacher development through *one-on-one interpersonal support* and *the evaluation of professional growth and disposition*.

Mentoring is emotional support provided by mentors to new teachers enabling them to succeed in the new teaching profession. The trustful interpersonal-relationship situates new teachers to develop a sense of community in the school setting through which they can facilitate available resources for instructional use and learn school policies within a short period of time

Mentoring is more than “a peer relationship” between a more experienced teacher and a new teacher within the same area of teaching. Mentoring should produce mutual benefits for both mentors and new teachers through empowering each to enhance professional skills and dispositions required in teaching diverse students and meeting all stakeholders’ needs. In order to make this function work, mentors need continuing training and devote themselves to participate in self-development. Flexible time and reduced workload should be ensured for the mentor training program so that mentors can be fully equipped with professional skills and dispositions to perform desired functions of mentoring beyond a peer relationship. Mentoring programs function differently from induction programs and other types of short pragmatic adaptation programs as well.

Mentoring is more than a supervising process to support and evaluate a new teacher. Power imbalanced mentoring relationships may cause problems to deteriorate new teachers’ experience in the teaching profession. Mentoring protégés are distinguished by the function of formal evaluation or assistance from a director, supporter, supervisor, guider, advisor, proctor, and evaluator.

Mentoring Today in Early Childhood Education

One critical role of mentors is to help new teachers build organizational and political knowledge to expand their insights beyond their teaching venue, the classroom. As educational needs have changed dynamically due to social changes, mentors today need to be re-conceptualized in terms of their position and role.

Mentors and new teachers alike face challenges in meeting diverse children’s needs, collaborating with diverse colleagues, and making do with scant instructional

resources to meet all stakeholders' expectations and needs. Baron (2006) demonstrated that a mentor should act as “an agent of change and induction as the lever” who impacts the system of the school by his or her own ongoing/continuing professional development and by empowering novice teachers to promote equitable practices. In order to make this possible, critical reflection skills are required in order for a mentor to produce a secure and comfortable basis for a professional dialogue, which enables a protégé to be culturally sensitive and responsive to changes in expectations and needs.

Summary

Mentoring ultimately helps improve school effectiveness by preventing behavior problems, reducing dropout rates, enhancing school performance, promoting self-identify, and supporting future career development. However, the practical application of mentoring remains unclear and needs to be reconceptualized.

Due to the reality shock caused by the gap between theory and practice experienced by new teachers, early childhood teachers show a low level of job-satisfaction and a high turn-over rate. A well-structured mentoring program will help solve the teacher shortage in early childhood education by supporting and empowering new teachers to remain in the teaching profession. Time-specific and multi-level supportive efforts will promise successful mentoring for both mentors and protégés and ultimately ensure high quality learning and teaching, which account for the current educational standards.

Hyunjin Kim

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