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Abstract

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The Pathwise Classroom Orientation System: A Teacher
Mentoring Model That Really Works

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Abstract

Mentoring beginning teachers in the United States is on the rise due to the alarming attrition rates of recent decades. There is a greater need to attract/retain teachers in suburban, urban and areas of poverty. First year mentoring programs have aided in retention of quality teachers. The Pathwise Classroom Orientation System consists of four domains. It is used as a teaching and evaluation tool for pre-service teachers during student teaching and their first year of on- contract teaching. The four domains consist of planning for a lesson, setting up the environment for the lesson, teaching the lesson, and professionalism.

Education has changed drastically in the past several decades and the task of teaching to the standards has added to the work load and stress to not only veteran teachers, yet less new, novice teachers.
Morgan & Kritsonis (2008) found:

> As a national sense of urgency builds toward greater student preparedness and achievement in public schools, the need for the recruitment and retention of quality teachers has reached a fevered pitch. Urban, suburban, and even rural districts are marketing themselves to prospective teachers in the hope of bringing promising teachers into their districts and keeping them there. (p. 2)

Teachers have much to learn their first year of teaching including the written rules and hidden rules of the school. Today, teachers are more likely to leave the profession early in their careers unless they have a grounded support system guiding their professional growth. The Illinois Educators Research Council found that about 32 to 50 percent of first year public school teachers left the profession in less than five years (Kapadia & Coca, 2007). In a national survey conducted in 2006-07, the National Commission of Teaching and America's Future estimated that teacher turnover and retention cost approximately $7 billion annually for hiring and training new teachers (Shakrani, 2008).

In the effort to attract quality teachers and retain them, many programs have been developed and implemented across the United States, focusing on hiring and retaining teachers in high-risk and poverty/need schools (Yendol-Hoppey & Jacobs, 2009). The new programs are called by many names; however, simply put, they are *mentoring programs*. They are described as organized programs where there is a shared vision of good teaching, the more skilled, experienced teacher guides the new, novice teacher during the first and sometimes second year of teaching and assessment (Stanulis & Ames, 2009; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009).

The model for mentoring in the state of Arkansas is called the *Pathwise Classroom Orientation System*. This system is often referred to as *the Pathwise model*. After college

graduation, in public and private schools, new teachers, (called novice teachers), are inducted into the program of receiving free, Pathwise-trained mentor that have at least three years of full-time teaching experience. The mentors are paid by the state of Arkansas and the mentees (called, the novice teachers) also receives substantial funding for various classroom supplies and resources. The novice teachers have a deadline of three years to prepare for and take the Praxis III teaching demonstration examination where they are evaluated by a trained Praxis III evaluator. The novice teachers must pass all four domains with a certain cutoff store for each domain. Many Arkansas first year teachers take the Praxis III exam during the spring of their first year of full-time, contracted teaching. However, they have the option to wait until the second year of teaching, without the assistance of a paid mentor.

Pre-service teachers in Arkansas have been introduced to the Pathwise model in multiple sequential university training classes. They are immersed in the model during internship and during their first year of full-time teaching. The Pathwise model is not only beneficial to novice teachers, yet it is beneficial also to mentor teachers. Mentors often re-evaluate their own teaching methods while working with first year novice teachers.

The Pathwise model is a relatively straight-forward and simple model to understand and execute. The model consists of four domains. Students fill out detailed papers/lesson plans in preparation for the Praxis III evaluation. Planning for the lesson is vital and novice teachers are observed several times in the school year with the Pathwise model which later will be used in the Praxis III evaluation. Passing all four domains is required to secure a standard licensure. The following domains will be presented: Domains A, B, C, and D. Domain A has to do with planning for the lesson. Domain B has to do with setting up the physical environment for learning. Domain C has to do with teaching the lesson. Domain D has to do with professionalism. The model is an "articulation model." The Pathwise model is an *articulation model.* The novice teacher must be able to verbally articulate the information of all domains. The Praxis III teacher will conduct a pre-conference before the lesson and post conference after the lesson. The Praxis III evaluator does not record opinions; the evaluator records evidence for all four domains of the model.

Domain A: Organizing content Knowledge for Student Learning

Domain A is the planning domain. Quality teachers plan for effective instruction. All criteria on this domain are address in the lesson plan.

A1: Becoming familiar with relevant aspects of students' background knowledge and experiences Domain A1 has to do with the area of diversity. How does the teacher get to know the students in the classroom where the lesson is taught? He/she must be able to answer the following questions: How does the teacher find out about student's backgrounds knowledge and experiences? How does the teacher find out prior knowledge of students? Is the teacher able to describe why it is important to become familiar with students background knowledge and experiences? Is the teacher's knowledge of students' background knowledge adequate in relationship to the number of students the teacher teaches?

A2: Articulating clear learning goals for the lesson that is appropriate to the students. The Pathwise model uses the term *goals* as what some educators would consider *behavior objectives, instructional objectives* or *learning objectives.* These terms are often used synonymously. Obviously the lesson can have one goal or more goals. However, any goal must be measurable in order for formal assessment (called in this model, *evaluation strategies)* to occur. Teachers can only measure <u>behaviors</u>. Therefore, it is vital that students use measurable verbs (i.e. verbs used on one or more levels of the Bloom's Taxonomy). In Domain A2, the teacher states specifically and clearly what the students are going to learn. Learning must be assessable. The teacher must state the goal(s) in terms of student outcomes, clearly distinguishing outcomes from activities. The teacher must give a clear rationale for the stated goals? In addition, diversity must be addressed. The teacher must provide different goals for groups or individual students (high and low performing students)? The teacher provides an acceptable explanation of why the differentiated goals are appropriate for groups or individual students. Clearly stated goals are vital to curriculum alignment. To reiterate, the goal(s) must be measurable in order for formal assessment to occur. In this domain, the teacher does not talk about activities during the body of the lesson; the teacher speaks to what the students will learn.

A3: Demonstrating an understanding of the connections between the content that was learned previously, the current content, and the content that remains to be learned in the future. Prior knowledge is an important part of connecting to what children know (Domain A1). In planning for the lesson, can the teacher explain how the content being taught in today's lesson connects to what the students have previously learned? How can the current content be connected to future content? Novice teachers often do well connecting to prior content, yet have problems with connecting to future content. This dilemma is often due to lack of experience; this is where the mentor can be most helpful in talking about horizontal and vertical alignment of the curriculum and curriculum mapping.

A4: Creating or selecting teaching methods, learning activities, and instructional materials or other resources that are appropriate to the students and that are aligned with the goals of the lesson. Once teachers have a measurable objective and know what student learning outcomes they expect, many novice teachers do well in this area. As they grow with real and continued hands-on teaching experience, novice teachers improve quickly and drastically in Domain A4. The goal of Domain A4 is to align all methods, activities, materials, and resources with the goal(s) of the lesson. The novice teacher should be able to answer the following questions: Are the methods and activities appropriate to the students' developmental levels? Do they reflect the common and unique experiences of different ethnic groups, of males and females, of different economic groups, of groups with exceptionalities? Are the activities and resources appropriate for students of limited English proficiency?

If a single activity is used, can the teacher provide a sound explanation of why a single activity is appropriate for all students? Is there evidence that the teacher has considered various methods, activities, and materials, and has considered the advantages and disadvantages of each?

A5: Creating or selecting evaluation strategies that are appropriate for the students and that are aligned with the goals of the lesson. As previously stated, the term *evaluation strategies* stand for *assessment.* Here, the model is speaking of selecting one or more appropriate formal assessments. All formal assessments are documented. Not all assessments are used for grading purposes; however, all formal assessments are documented. In this assessment domain, the assessment must be perfectly aligned to the measurable goal(s) to the lesson. Is the plan for evaluation sufficiently systematic to provide the teacher with useful

information about the extent to which learning goals have been met? Is the evaluation appropriate to the students in the class? What kinds of assessments are used? How are students of limited English proficiency and students with exceptionalities provided with opportunities to display their knowledge of content/learner outcomes? The teacher is expected in the post conference to describe specifically and clearly how he or she will use the results of the assessment in planning for future instruction.

Domain B: Creating an Environment for Student Learning

Domain B2 has to do with setting up the environment for student learning. This domain is the first teaching domain. The Praxis III assessor will look for and record evidence in this criterion during the teaching demonstration.

B1: Creating a climate that promotes fairness

This criterion is concerned with the teacher's ability to facilitate and maintain fair classroom interactions between the teacher and the students and among students. The novice teacher will reflect on and answer the following questions: Is the teacher fair in interactions with students during the observed class period? In what ways does the teacher help students to have students during the observed class period? In what ways does the teacher help the students feel equally valued in the access to learning? In what ways does the teacher help the students feel equally valued in the classroom? Are there patterns of either exclusion or over-attention in student-teacher interactions? Does the teacher show evidence of stereotyped views of students? Is the teacher inappropriately negative in remarks to students? Do students treat others fairly? Does the teacher respond appropriately to stereotyped, demeaning, or other unfair comments by students? The goal in B1 is for the teacher to be fair in the treatment of students and actively encourage fairness among students.

B2: Establishing and maintaining rapport with students

This criterion is concerned with the teacher's ability to relate positively to students as people. Traits such as genuine concern, warmth, sincerity, and sometimes humor are demonstrated. More ways of establishing rapport includes demonstrating an interest in students as unique individuals, acknowledging the traditions and customs of students with differing ethnic backgrounds, and taking time to listen to students. There are many ways to establish age-appropriate rapport with students. Questions to consider are: Does the teacher attempt to relate positively to students? Does the teacher show concern for the students? Does the teacher tailor personal interactions according to the individual characteristics of students? Do the teacher's attempts to establish rapport take into account the students' background and experiences? Are the teacher's attempts to establish rapport appropriate to the students' developmental levels?

B3: communicating challenging learning expectations to each student.

Effective teachers have challenging expectations, yet reasonable ones. They expect students to actively be engaged and on task. They expect learning to occur. Students should communicate either explicitly or implicitly a belief that each student is capable of significant achievements. Questions to consider are: How does the teacher show, by words, actions, or attitude, that each student is capable of meaningful achievement? In what ways do the students demonstrate a clear understanding of the teacher's expectations for achievement that may have been stated explicitly at the beginning of the lesson? Are the learning expectations for students challenging but within their reach? Good teachers expect all students to learn and be successful.

B4: Establishing and maintaining consistent standards of classroom behavior.

This criterion refers to the desired standards of teacher and student interaction that will ensure an appropriate climate for learning. Both students and teachers may contribute to the development of appropriate classroom behavior. The teacher who makes no attempts to respond to disruptive behavior would not meet this criterion. The teacher who responds to disruptive behavior in disrespectful ways would also not meet this criterion. To meet this criterion, the teacher must make appropriate attempts to respond to disruptive behavior in ways that demonstrate respect for the students. However, if a student displays minor misbehavior that does not disrupt the class and the teacher ignores this behavior, this criterion is met. Also in meeting this criteria, the teacher should respond to disruptive behavior consistently with reasonable success. In cases that all behavior is acceptable, this criterion is also met.

B5: making the physical environment as safe and conducive to learning as possible

This criteria focuses on the physical setting in which learning is to take place. How much control does the teacher have over the physical environment? Some classrooms are small; some are large. Some classrooms have physical risk factors; some do not. The novice teacher is to be concerned with the safety of the room. Are there any places that are unsafe? What areas can the teacher physically correct and make improvements for safety? What places are out of the teacher's control? To what extent is there a match between the lesson or activity and the furniture or room setup? Is the learning space arranged so that all students, including those with special needs, have access to the lesson? How does the room reflect the learning that takes place? The teacher uses the physical environment as a resource to facilitate learning. Provisions are made to accommodate all students. If the teacher does need to control the physical environment because the environment is already conducive to learning, he or she effectively adjusts the activities to the existing physical environment.

Domain C: Teaching for Student Learning

Domain A has to do with teaching and learning. The Praxis III assessor records evidence in both Domain B and C during the lesson. The assessor is looking for evidence of effective teaching strategies. This domain focuses on the pedagogy of teaching.

C1: Making learning goals and instructional procedures clear to students.

There is no hidden agenda in teaching. Clear learning goals are communicated to students, usually at the beginning of the lesson. However, the lesson may be a discovery lesson and the students are made aware of the learning goals at the end of the lesson. Students know where the lesson is going. Questions to consider are: Does the teacher communicate learning goals to the students, either explicitly or implicitly? Are the directions to students for instructional procedures clear? How does the teacher help students of different backgrounds understand the learning goals of the lesson? Are the students able to carry out the instructional procedures of the lesson? In Domain C1, the students receive accurate information about the learning goals and the instructional procedures during the lesson.

C2: *Making content comprehensible to students*

This criteria focuses on how the teacher's understanding and organization of content which connects back with Domain A where content connects to prior content and future content. In order for content to be comprehensible, it must be meaningful to students in some way. Effective teachers connect the lesson with prior knowledge. The content must be accurate. The content must *appear* to be comprehensible to students and as a whole, have a coherent and organized sequential structure.

C3: *encouraging students to extend their thinking*

At times, C2 and C3 can be confusing to novice teachers. However, there is a difference in making content comprehensible and extending students' thinking. This criterion focuses on the teacher using strategies and methods to get students to think on their own. The teacher is able to use the current content appropriately as a springboard to get students to think either independently, creatively, or critically. The teacher specifically structures learning activities that encourage students to extend their thinking. Students are actively engaged and seeking new knowledge.

Domain C4: *Monitoring students' understanding of content through a variety of means, providing feedback to students to assist learning, and adjusting learning activities as the situation demands*

Many Pathwise trainers simply call this criteria *monitoring and adjusting instruction.* This criterion is not to be confused with formal assessment. Monitoring and adjusting instruction as the need arises in the lesson is much different than the formal assessment stage. During the lesson, does the teacher monitor students' understanding of the content? Is this done equitably among students? Does the teacher provide substantive feedback to students? Does the teacher adjust learning activities as needed for the whole group of students or individual students? C4 requires that the teacher monitors individual students' or groups of students' understanding of the content and makes appropriate instructional adjustments if necessary. If appropriate, students receive substantive and specific feedback. Some groups of students and individual students need more feedback than other students who need less feedback. The keenly aware teacher is sensitive to group and individual needs.

C5: *Using instructional time effectively*

Effective teachers use instructional time effectively. They waste little time with non-instructional activities. This criterion refers to the teacher's skill in using time effectively during the lesson. Time effectiveness must occur during the lesson. The teacher provides students with activities of instructional value for the entire instructional time and paces the lesson appropriately. Any necessary non-instructional procedures are performed quickly and efficiently.

Domain D: Teacher Professionalism

Domain D has to do with teacher professionalism. The domain has to do with dispositions of teachers and a willingness to reflect on their teaching strategies, collaboration with other professionals, and establishing two-way parent partnerships.

D1: *Reflecting on the extent which the learning goals were met*

D1 directly relates back to A2 where the teacher has to clearly and specifically articulate the extent of learner outcomes. Based on the assessment and/or multiple assessments, did the students learn? Qualitatively or quantitatively, how much did student learn? The teacher will speak to the formal assessment and show the Praxis III assessor physical evidence of this assessment and/or assessments. The assessment is evidence of student learner outcomes. The teacher accurately analyzes the data and describes the strengths of the lesson in relation to the learning goals and describes in general how to use the results of the assessment in future instruction. The novice teacher supports his/her judgments with specific *evidence* from the observed lesson (the formal assessment).

D2: *Demonstrating a sense of efficacy*

In essence, the teacher answers the following question: In my teaching, did I make a difference? The novice teacher makes no excuses for lack of learning because of what home environments children come from. The teacher takes responsibility for learner outcomes or lack thereof. The teacher also attempts to find ways to address the specific learning needs of students and suggests practical, appropriate ways that he/she has tried and could use in the future.

D3: *building professional relationships with colleagues to share teaching insights with colleague to share teaching insights and to coordinate learning activities for students*

Collaboration as a team is important for student learning. Sharing of ideas, insights, and resources benefit all teachers, including the mentor, novice teacher, and fellow teachers in the school building. This criteria focuses on two distinct, though related aspects of a teacher's professional relationships with colleagues. The first of these is seeking help from other professionals on matters related to learning and instruction or to other concerns related to teaching. For example, the novice teacher should know who in the school is experienced in working with students of the same level or in the same subject area, and should be aware of other people in the school or district who can help improve his/her instructional skills. The teacher also should be aware of other professionals in the school such as the librarian and technology specialist who can provide instructional assistance when needed.

D4: *Communicating with parents or guardians about student learning.*

This criterion focuses on the teacher's contacts with the parents or guardians of students. The belief of educators promoted today is: Students learn more when parents are informed and more involved. Contacts can take on many forms: scheduled conferences, phone calls, emails, written notes, etc. The main goal during the first few weeks of teaching is to document two way contacts where the teacher encourages the parent/guardian to respond back to the teacher. To promote healthy parent partnerships, teachers should contact parents about good behavior/academics of students. All communication should be handled positively and in a non-threatening way. Contacts should respect the cultural diversity of the community. As teachers gain skill and more experiences, familiarity with forms of communication should broaden, and they should become more knowledgeable about which forms are likely to be effective in particular situations. For standard licensure, the novice teacher is to show documented evidence of at least two different kinds of two-way contacts with parents/guardians.

In conclusion, during the last decade, the Arkansas state Department of Education has been proactive providing mentoring programs for first year novice teachers in both public and

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private school districts. There are many state certified Pathwise trainers training hundreds of new mentors every year. Certified mentors continue to stay updated with Pathwise recalibration training sessions every two years. Teacher training programs' interns go to classrooms where supervising teachers are Pathwise-trained. Arkansas university training programs incorporate Pathwise training in the pre-service programs. Those students preparing for licensure have exposure and training to the Pathwise model that promotes best practices in planning, teaching, and professionalism. The model is one important and vital aspect in preparing quality teachers that hopefully will teach many years in Arkansas schools, especially in high-need schools.

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