

# Concept of Mentoring: An Effective Means of Teachers' Professional Growth

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**Abstract:** *The main objective of this review article is to explore the concept of teacher mentoring with its purposes, qualities of a mentor and advantages of mentoring process. The paper is divided into four parts: firstly, it presents a discussion about mentoring process; secondly, the definition and characteristics of mentors; next, a list of benefits of mentoring and finally difficulties and implications of mentoring have been presented. Today in a world of education, mentoring has emerged to enhance professional learning and skills. Despite some complexities, mentoring is always an effective approach for the professional development of teachers, especially for the novice ones to inspire them to cope with the challenging teaching situations. So, this theoretical paper intends to show the importance of mentoring for a teacher's professional career which, in turn, becomes a strong means of sustainable development in pedagogical areas. It also serves the purpose of persuading the concerned authority to organize and implement effective mentoring programs for academic betterment of a country.*

**Keywords:** mentoring, mentor, mentee, novice, professional development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'mentoring' is not a new phenomenon in professional areas. It is necessary in every profession regardless of its nature or criteria. In the field of teacher education, mentoring is regarded as one of the major issues to ensure the professional growth and development of teachers worldwide. Various researches and teacher training programs are focused on adopting teacher mentoring to support and retain novice teachers. Teachers work together not only as colleagues; they take the roles of mentors-mentees to support each other to become professionally efficient. The process of mentoring shows the way of a smooth professional journey throughout the career. The major purpose of this paper is to illustrate the mentoring process with its benefits, implications and challenges.

## 2. PERSONAL JOURNEY AS A NOVICE TEACHER

When I newly joined as a teacher at a university in 2017, I was in a dilemma about not what to do but how to do. Some of my senior colleagues appeared to me as guides so that I did not feel lost in the profession. They recognized my potential and started to groom me in term of teaching style, strategies, class management, preparing questions, recording marks and so on. I came to learn about the policies, regulations and norms of the institution from them. Moreover, they motivated me to participate in different workshops, seminars and conferences to do justice to my academic qualifications. They taught me how to show professional attitude and help me to improve my skills and knowledge. During the early period of my teaching career, I could have faced tough situations to survive in the profession. But my peers did not make me realize that I am in 'sink or swim' situation. When I switch to another university my first workplace, I got and am still getting that same co-operation and guidance. Both my former and present colleagues are very supportive to me in every possible way. Thus, my fellow mates guided me to my professional growth and development. In fact, my career has been shaped by their motivating gestures and assistance. Now I feel comfortable, confident and self-motivated to explore my professional qualities and qualifications.

My knowledge, skills and learning are being utilised as well as have been enriched from the previous experiences. In fact, all these have been possible only because of my colleagues' friendly attitude and proper guidance throughout my teaching journey.

## 3. WHAT IS MENTORING?

The term 'mentoring' has been defined in a number of different ways. There are many researches which identify the issues of mentoring process. In teacher education, mentoring can commonly be defined as a complex process of guiding, advising and supporting new teachers. Shannon (1988) defines mentoring as a nurturing process in which an experienced person befriends a less experienced or skilled person for the purpose of promoting his/her personal and professional development (as cited in Peterson & Williams, 1998).

In the context of teaching, mentoring can be related to 'coaching' though there is a significant difference between them. Coaching, also referred as 'peer coaching' is the assistance the teacher provides to another in the development of teaching skills, strategies or techniques. It is an essential part of mentoring process.

Bubb (2005) opines that mentoring provides wide ranges of learning opportunities for the professional, whereas coaching is confined to develop specific skills and knowledge in teaching and learning. Hobson et al. (2009) defined mentoring as a one-to-one

support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced (mentor). According to Roff (2012), mentoring is the collaboration between an experienced teacher and a beginning teacher to assist in a variety of aspects relating to the teaching profession.

Above all, it can be concluded that mentoring is the process designed for the professional growth of new teachers through the support and guidance of experienced teachers.

#### 4. PURPOSES OF MENTORING

The main purpose of teacher mentoring is to support the novice teachers to tackle a variety of difficulties in their teaching situations. It has been observed that usually the first few years remain the most difficult phase of a teacher's career. Teacher mentoring is necessary to help those new teachers in overcoming the challenges and therefore, helps them to retain in this noble profession. According to Ingersoll and Strong (2011), mentoring programs can foster beginning teacher's confidence, enhance teaching practice, improve job satisfaction, and provide the support that novice teachers need to remain in the profession. Jones (2012) opined that beginning teachers need mentoring to help them examine, reflect upon, and grow in the teaching profession.

Mentoring is viewed as one method of retaining teachers. Grossman and Davis (2012) mentioned that "to support beginning teachers, keep them in the profession, and improve their instructional effectiveness, schools need to make sure that the mentoring they provide is a good fit for each teacher's individual background, needs and school context" (p.55). Mentoring can assist beginning teachers in making the difficult transition from student to teacher (Stock & Duncan, 2010). Mentoring is necessary to improve the qualities of teachers and thus, brings positive impact on their teaching career. Boyd et al (2009) opine that mentoring emphasizes on collaboration and support while helping beginning teachers to become competent and comfortable in the classroom.

#### 5. 'MENTOR' AND 'MENTEE'

In simpler term, a mentor is the person who plays the role of a guide and coach to the novice people joining in profession. A mentee is the one who gets support and suitable guidance from the mentors to sustain his or her jobs and improve as true professionals.

The term 'mentor' is used to define the person who is responsible for guiding and nurturing others early on in their profession. Mentors change their roles to fit the needs of their mentees. The role of a mentor is to help acclimate the mentee to the climate of the organization and build upon the mentee's prior experience by offering support (Dziczkowski, 2013). In education, a mentor is one who provides support and guidance to help beginning teachers during the transition into their roles as educators (Hudson, 2010).

It is expected that a mentor teacher leads, guides and advises new teachers or mentees by mutual trust and belief. He or she provides valuable suggestions and advice to them for shaping their professional attitude.

#### 6. CHARACTERISTICS OF A MENTOR TEACHER

The mentor teacher is a career professional who facilitates the development and education of novice teachers. The functions of the mentor vary depending on the needs of the new teachers, the goals of the mentoring program, and the broader educational context. But it must be kept in mind that the mentor teacher is only a helper, not a supervisor or evaluator and "a very special person, a model of professionalism" (Office of personnel services, 1993).

According to the Hawaii (1993), mentor teachers should have following qualities-

- i. A range of interpersonal skills to fit a variety of professional encounters and situations.
- ii. Good working knowledge of repertoire of teaching methods, alternative modalities of learning, and styles of teaching and learning that affect student achievement.
- iii. Ability to use coaching processes that foster increased self-direction and self-responsibility of the beginning teacher.
- iv. Effective communication skills that facilitate the growth of the new employee and accommodate the employee's emotional, social and cognitive needs.
- v. Understanding about the stages of teacher development within the context of how adults learn.

In fact, a mentor teacher should have these qualities to play various roles such as a coach, problem-solver, facilitator, assessor, advocate and so on.

#### 7. BENEFITS OF MENTORING

Several researches have found a lot of benefits of teacher mentoring which are mentioned in the following:

- One of the major benefits of mentoring is improving professional competence. Mentor teachers assist their mentees in improving their teaching qualities. In this way, both of their efficiencies as teachers develop. As a result, student learning and education improve to a great extent.

- Mentoring to the novice teachers motivates them to value their profession as well as reboots their self-confidence as teachers. Clark and Byrnes (2012) expressed the fact that beginning teachers are found to be more motivated to learn when they receive expected support from more experienced teachers who have knowledge and experience to share.
  - Mentors apply their cognitive skills such as listening, inquiring, providing feedback etc. They gain and share new ideas and suggestions from the novice teachers through working and monitoring them closely. Perunka and Erkkilä (2012) have drawn the fact that the mentoring process provided mentors with opportunities to engage in cooperation, innovate new teaching methods, and acquire new perspectives about student knowledge. Thus both mentors and mentees contribute greatly in positive pedagogical outcomes.
  - Mentoring promotes peer collaboration through observing, motivating and providing suggestions on each other's teaching styles and strategies. Gilles et al. (2009) opine that teacher development occurs while beginning teachers actively contribute to the learning. Mentors collaborate to help them plan, teach and observe.
  - Mentoring helps teachers to be critically reflective about their own beliefs about teaching, learning and learners. Reflective practice through mentoring provides an opportunity for both the experienced and novice teachers. Mentors can have the scope to regenerate their professional knowledge by grooming the beginning teachers.
  - Mentoring also includes psychological benefits. It enhances the self-esteem of veteran teachers and empowers them. Yadav (2018) states that mentoring "gives the teacher psychological and emotional support to adjust and develop professionally, which in turn may help in students' progress" (p. 208). Thus constant mentoring gives the mentors a greater sense of confidence and self-significance in their teaching career.
  - Continued contact of mentors with the mentees provides collegial interactions. Based on the research of Hudson (2013), it is evident that the collaborative teaching process allows both the mentor and the mentee to benefit from the healthy exchange of ideas in a setting defined by mutual respect and a shared interest in a topic. Thus mentoring helps to create a supportive collegial relationship built on trust and negotiation.
  - Mentoring helps teachers to make their tacit knowledge about teaching values and beliefs explicit. Thus it develops supportive attitude for professional learning.
  - Mentors' capacities for leadership can be built through proper mentoring along with training and experience in class observation of their mentees. They become recognized for their knowledge and expertise in various fields and required for leadership roles. Experienced teachers move into leadership positions for being successful mentors.
  - Mentoring emphasizes the enhancement of individual abilities. A mentor facilitates the learning of novice teachers and improves academic environment through continuous assistance. Cook (2012) believes that teacher mentoring fosters "a relationship of ongoing support, collaboration, and the development of knowledge and skills that translate into improved teaching strategies" (p.3).
  - Beginning teachers need specific skills for learning to teach (Hanson, 2010). Mentoring helps to acquire specific learning skills which the new teachers can apply with full confidence through their performance in their workplace.
- To sum up, mentoring is essential for developing teaching efficiency, gaining confidence in profession, upgrading knowledge and skills, becoming critically reflective, encouraging good collegial relation, creating new leadership and so on.

## **8. CHALLENGES OF MENTORING PROCESS**

Some difficulties can fail to fulfil the desired purposes of mentoring. For example-

- Lack of proper training and unwillingness of mentor teachers can be a challenging issue. If the senior teachers are not well-trained for mentoring or simply if they are not willing to guide the novice ones; such situation cannot bring any positive result to the professional growth of teachers.
- It might be difficult to find qualified mentors to guide the mentees. The mentor must be honest and matured enough to them as unprofessional and immature mentoring can be more harmful than beneficial (Kafle, 2008).
- Moreover, limited time allocation and sometimes lack of time management skill hinder the mentoring process. According to Ingersoll and Strong (2012), limited access to the mentor because of inadequate time and overwhelming demands is a challenge for many beginning teachers.
- Peer conflict in mentoring can also be another obstacle. Beginning teachers' negative attitude towards fellow colleagues, lack of mutual support and conflicting ideas among the senior mentor teachers and the junior mentees create barriers in successful mentoring process.

In short, some existing complications in mentoring process include different factors such as indifferent outlook of senior teachers, lack of training and professionalism, time limit, conflict among fellow teachers etc. influence the successful implementation of mentoring programs in a negative way.

## **9. IMPLICATIONS**

Despite some challenges in mentoring process, it has important implications in educational reform. Mentoring is a valuable resource for growth promoting experience for mentors and mentees. Helping and guiding the new teachers in a systematic way enable the experienced teachers to develop their own teaching practices as well as improve their qualities. Mentoring is a positive mechanism for developing management and organization skills. It plays a fundamental role in institutions and organizations that aim to be a professional learning community. Teacher mentoring can be a powerful tool to bring positive changes by ensuring the quality performances of teachers. In order to achieve sustainable developmental goals, teacher mentoring has a great effect. It can develop human potential to become valuable assets to be used for further developmental projects, especially in educational fields.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Mentoring is very much essential to induct new comers in teaching profession. It serves as a vehicle for helping beginning teachers to deal with various difficult situations in their initial years of teaching. If novice teachers emerge from the initial years feeling positive about their accomplishments, they would likely to be more dedicated in this profession. As teacher quality is connected to student learning, the need for effective teacher mentoring programs is increasing for the professional growth and development of teachers. So effective mentoring programs should be established in every institution.

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