
Teacher-to-Teacher

Making a Difference

A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though, awakens your own expectations.

—Patricia Neal

As you read Chapter 1, we encourage you to reflect upon the following thoughts and questions:

1. Reflect on a current mentoring relationship you have or would like to have.
2. What are the key components of an effective teacher-to-teacher relationship? What works and what does not work?
3. Mentors are . . .

To help you discover your own understandings of these questions, the content of the chapter is organized in the following sections: Teachers Making a Difference, Enhanced Personal Growth, Mentoring, From the Voice of Magda, and From the Voice of Denise. We anchor the content in the context of various scenarios that illustrate the concept of teachers making a difference.

TEACHERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Teachers can and do make a difference in each other's lives. Veteran teachers who serve as mentors are known to be influential in the retention of new teachers (Billingsley, 2005). Many of us have been there—most of us have

been new teachers, some of us have been mentors. We have seen firsthand the difference that one individual can make in our lives. At the core of national reform is the role of the teacher (Kliebard, 2004). The teacher's role in this sometimes-challenging profession is absolutely and without a doubt one of the most important roles in the school. Think of all the people you know in all different walks of life, people of diverse cultural backgrounds, people of varied intelligence and experience, short ones, tall ones, young ones, older ones—each and every individual has been influenced by a teacher. What can be done to ensure that the role of the teacher is of utmost priority to a school system? According to Stansbury and Zimmerman (2002), "A third of beginning teachers quit within their first three years on the job. We don't stand for this kind of dropout rate among students, and we can no longer afford it in our teaching ranks" (p. 10). Comparing the retention of our teachers with student retention is a new twist—Stansbury and Zimmerman make a strong point: We don't tolerate that among students, and we should not tolerate it in our profession. In general, we have found that mentoring programs are critical for the success of new teachers, and a focused program dealing with specific issues such as special education can be beneficial (Salazar, Gudwin, & Nevin, 2008).

ENHANCED PERSONAL GROWTH

Brock and Grady (2007) suggest that such programs expect multiple outcomes, such as retention of qualified teachers and enhanced professional growth. How can teacher leaders help new and early-career teachers thrive in many diverse settings, including a challenging multicultural school district, where there may be over 100 different cultures? In our diverse classrooms, we must be equipped with skills of quality teaching, a positive attitude, a love of learning more about ourselves and others, and the ability to reach a diverse group of teachers and students where there are sometimes more cultures represented in one school than we ever thought possible, at times when we are asked to deal with **intercultural** issues that we may not even be aware of—these important issues are interwoven into the fabric of this book.

It is our goal to enhance your professional growth and demonstrate the guiding factors in the successful teaching experiences.

Such enhanced professional growth is demonstrated in the aspect of mentoring, in which we, the authors, have been involved between us for a combined total of eighteen years. In fact, we ourselves represent the positive outcomes of mentoring: We have worked together for nine years, beginning in the capacity of university professor and undergraduate student, moving into professor and graduate student, from support personnel to new teachers, to supervisor, to colleagues at the central office level and presently as co-authors, with a passion for the field of education. Both of us have alternately taken the lead in the role of mentor in this partnership, with personal and professional growth as an ongoing outcome.

MENTORING

Mentor (noun): lifelong learner, supporter, friend, guide, listener, and role model

Mentor (verb): to observe, listen, analyze, discuss, guide, support

The term *mentor* originated in Greek mythology, initially coming from “Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which a wise and learned man called Mentor was given the task of educating Odysseus’ son” (Pitton, 2000, p. 13), to guide him on the journey to maturity, nurturing him, serving as a trusted friend, and providing a model for what we now refer to as mentoring (Brock & Grady, 2007). What is a mentor? Mentors facilitate learning, model and demonstrate lessons, co-plan, co-teach, and provide feedback, while building and maintaining a trusting relationship (Killion & Harrison, 2005). When tied together with instructional coaching, mentors can help new and early-career teachers see their teaching world through a different lens (McNeil & Klink, 2004).

High-quality mentoring partnerships provide the new and early-career teacher with an opportunity to work closely with and learn from an experienced teacher. The partnership is fostered by structured collegial exchanges, such as peer observations, face-to-face conversations outside of school hours, and effective communication via e-mail or telephone, in which the new and early-career teacher and mentor participate together. Structured time is set aside as a necessary part of the collaborative collegial exchange, as it enables collaborating activities such as co-planning, co-teaching, modeling, and reflecting to take place.

Most importantly, a great camaraderie is formed, where students ultimately benefit from quality instruction.

—Liana, mentor

When mentors deal with new and early-career teachers who are different in the sense of ethnicity, culture, linguistics, or age, some considerations need to be taken to avoid making judgments. We want to always be sensitive to the differences in the following:

- Time management
 - Time doesn’t always mean the same to all people. Some people feel strongly that socialization is a major part of getting things done. For example, some teachers in the black, non-Hispanic and Hispanic communities weigh heavily on the social connections, which may impact their timeframes. Additionally, in some communities, it is not uncommon to schedule an event an hour before it is really supposed to start, just so that everyone will be “on time” for that event. There are subtle cultural differences to which we must be sensitive without making judgments.

4 MENTORING AND COACHING

- Levels of excitability
 - Some cultures are known for their passion and excitement, such as people from Italian and certain Hispanic heritages. It is the makeup of their personality. As we become more sensitive to our differences, we will understand them more easily.
- Tone of voice or loudness of voice
 - Some cultures, such as Asian and some Central and South Americans, are known to have a soft, quieter tone of voice, while those from Cuba and Puerto Rico, Italy, and some other European countries may be known for a louder, firmer-type tone of voice. These same variances are even seen in different regions of the United States. It doesn't always portray shyness or assertiveness; it is just the culture of the language and the ways of the people that often come across in communication.
- Age
 - People of various age groups may respond in ways that are common for their age group. For example, an older teacher may respond in a way that is normal for her, yet very strange to a much younger teacher. We personally know older teachers who do not know the first thing about text messaging on a cell phone and have no desire to change that, yet in working with a younger teacher, sending a brief text message, "How are things going today?" might be just the pick-me-up that a younger teacher needs. However, we must embrace our differences and not make judgments about them.
- Values
 - The value systems of various cultural groups have a spectrum of what is consistent with their culture. For example, extended families might be extremely important to a Central American teacher, where many members of the family live together, yet that concept may be quite unusual for a teacher from another cultural group.
- Personality types
 - A variation of personality types exists over all groups of people, not dependent on culture, linguistics, or age; sensitivity to what makes each of us the way we are will be beneficial to any mentoring relationship.

In striving for an effective teacher-to-teacher mentoring relationship, we need to keep those differences in mind and be sensitive to the basic differences in all people—especially those teachers we mentor. This is the diversity that makes for a wonderful world in which we live.

As an example in looking at differences in people, Magda started out as an undergraduate student in her twenties from a Central American background, mentored by Denise, an older white forty-something woman. We would like to share our take on this whole mentoring concept from our own personal points of view.

FROM THE VOICE OF MAGDA

In recollection, how we arrived at this process is still unknown to me. So I will retell from what I recall now, which is sketchy since I am in the process of planning for my wedding, writing my dissertation, and co-authoring this book, while trying to still have a social life. In 1999, I enrolled at Barry University as a student in hopes of achieving my bachelor of education degree. I worked at ARC Project Thrive, a private school for preschool students with disabilities. I left fifteen minutes early from work each day to arrive at school on time, and I was in school five days a week for roughly three hours a day. I was in an accelerated program. I am a very organized person and put forth more than usual effort. My first semester was somewhat of an adjustment period. I was going from a part-time to a full-time student and working on my major. This is the time when I met Denise. She was working for the central office, working on her dissertation, as well as adjuncting for two local universities. Talk about having a full plate . . . or platter, I should say. Yet she had the time to provide feedback and communicate with all of her students and provide e-mail or phone communication in regard to the coursework, and even on private matters. I clearly remember one Thanksgiving holiday. Denise was visiting her family in Seattle, and I needed help with a class assignment for her course. She provided a detailed clarification of the assignment requirements, a conversation that lasted well over twenty minutes. I believe this is where the journey of our mentoring relationship began. She aided in helping me become a stellar student—it was her high expectations that I strived to meet and her words of encouragement and confidence that eventually led to my drive for my scholarly endeavors. After a couple of years, our relationship from student to professor evolved to one of beginning teacher to central office relationship. As a first-year teacher, I put into practice all that I had learned while at the university. I created books as she taught us; I got involved at the school level; and, as she highly encouraged me to do, I began my master's program. During my first year, I also joined a support group for beginning teachers, which met after school in Mrs. Gudwin's work site. There, a group of beginning teachers networked and discussed challenges we were facing. She was instrumental in making my first year a success. During the next couple of years, we communicated and occasionally met for dinner as we worked together on several projects. She visited my classroom periodically and presented parent workshops at my school, as well as teacher professional development sessions. Our relationship eventually shaped into one of a more collegial relationship when I came to work for her at the central office. I had acquired enough experience, content knowledge, and confidence in myself that I finally no longer referred to her as Professor Gudwin or Dr. Gudwin, but rather Denise. This truly was reflective of what our relationship had grown into: a reciprocal relationship where I had been coached and was now capable of coaching her if need be. Coaching comes in many forms, and our relationship involved coaching in a nonjudgmental manner that led us to a journey

where we were comfortable with each other, accepting of each other, and maintained an open communication. I hope to think that we have given to each other quite equally in various roles.

FROM THE VOICE OF DENISE

From my perspective, as a mentor early on in the relationship with Magda, I didn't even realize I *was* a "mentor." My goal was to be a really good university professor, provide all that I could to my students, and share with them the love of teaching and learning. In the process, I became a mentor to Magda. Exactly when did that happen? I'm not even sure! Was it purposeful? It definitely became purposeful, but it may not have been at the very beginning stages of our relationship. Part of the joy of a mentoring relationship is that the mentor learns as much from the mentee as the mentee learns from the mentor. It is that reciprocal relationship that I personally continue to embrace, as I learn from Magda with every facet of our continued collaboration. Another part of the joy of the mentoring relationship was the building of a collegial partnership that eventually interwove its way into a friendship, while continuing to nurture both a personal and professional relationship.

Over the past nine years that Magda and I have collaborated on a variety of professional projects, we have done so in the following capacities in the workplace:

<i>Mentor: Denise</i>	<i>Mentee: Magda</i>
University professor	Undergraduate student
University club sponsor	President of student organization
District support personnel	New teacher
University professor	Graduate student
District administrator	Employee, curriculum support specialist
District administrator	Employee, professional development specialist
Colleague	Colleague

Additionally, beyond the workplace, we have evolved into additional mentoring relationships of best friends, sisters, and even at rare times, mother/daughter, with each of us taking the role of the mentor from time to time, sharing the leadership role, balancing the role while interchanging places as needed or desired. We even co-chaired a state conference together for a state affiliate of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), which involved a year of planning, organizing, coordinating, and implementing. We decided if our relationship could withstand that journey, we could survive anything!

Back in the beginning of our mentoring relationship, and probably the glue that adhered our solid bond, I have vivid pictures of communication—a critical component that, if missing, erases the possibility of mentoring even taking place. One such communication occurred when I was on vacation during the Thanksgiving holiday while I was the university professor of an undergraduate course, of which Magda was a student. I was sitting cross-legged in a soft-pillowed wicker rocking chair by a sunny window at my brother's house with my laptop on my lap, answering e-mails from Magda, writing back on an instant message, reviewing a paper of hers from another class for which she had asked me for grammatical assistance, all the while my family asking me sarcastically, "Why is it so important that you work while we are on vacation?" But I didn't view it as work—I was just helping her out on something, or answering a question, or chatting about her family. She had the extraordinary ability to consistently communicate with her professors (still does to this day), pulling me into her world, truly initiating the mentoring relationship. Over the years, we have successfully lived the mentoring relationship and have both become stronger professionals because of it.

Morris Zelditch's (1990) description of mentors continually shows up in numerous references (Institute Student Mentor Programme, 2007; Johnston, 2008; University of Michigan, 2006). To paraphrase Zelditch:

Mentors are advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge.

Mentors are supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement.

Mentors are tutors, people who give specific feedback on one's performance.

Mentors are masters, in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed.

Mentors are sponsors, sources of information and aids in obtaining opportunities.

Mentors are models, of identity, of the kind of person one should be, to be an academic.

There are times that I am the mentor, the advisor, and there are times that Magda holds that torch. There have been times both professionally and personally that I am the mentor, the supporter, and there are times that Magda takes on that role. There are times when we both become the master, the sponsor, and the model, showing that mentorship is a fluid concept that grows and changes as we ourselves continue to grow and change.

Mentoring words that come to mind when I think of Magda's and my strong mentoring partnership: *safe, nonjudgmental, harmony, teaching, potential, direction, communication, encouragement, journey, comfort, acceptance, guiding*. If reading this book guides other individuals to form quality mentoring

partnerships, then a good deed has been completed. Mentoring is, as our experiences demonstrate to all, a goal for which to strive and an opportunity that will enrich both the personal and professional lives of the mentor and mentee. It is a teacher-to-teacher relationship, making a difference.

One Saturday morning, sharing breakfast out at a local restaurant with my husband, I overheard a conversation at the table next to me where an obviously experienced athletic coach wearing the hat of a mentor for three young players shared two bits of wisdom with them. "If I'm not ready for anything and everything, I am not a good coach," he said to his young players. I expanded this personally in many directions (a text-to-self strategy, for those of you who are reading teachers!), two of which were (1) a teacher working with a struggling student needs to be ready for anything and everything, and (2) a mentor working with a mentee should be ready for whatever needs are to be met. As mentors and instructional coaches, we too have to be ready for anything and everything. Sometimes we are the only lifelines our mentees have. The other words of wisdom this coach imparted to his mentees over breakfast: "You should be tired after that practice. Or you didn't give it your all. That's what it takes." Just a matter-of-fact statement voiced with conviction while he ate his fried eggs and grits. But what an impact it had on me. Yes, sometimes we get tired in both our roles of mentors and mentees, as we should. We do need to give it our all, because in the words of that obviously experienced coach and mentor, "That's what it takes."