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Educative Mentoring

It is often assumed that novice teachers will just somehow learn to teach. That they will naturally figure out what works and what doesn't as they place themselves in the front of the room. That they will informally observe the teaching of experienced teachers and automatically absorb good practices. In other words, these newbies will figure it out. And if these new teachers find themselves struggling? They can always seek out help, ask questions and/or observe their mentor. Educative mentoring however, provides a much more intentional support system. As Schwille (2008) stated "Educative mentoring means mentors purposefully and intentionally shape learning opportunities for novices that lead toward better understanding of teaching, learning, and learning to teach" (p. 140-141). She went on to explain that educative mentoring is a dynamic and complex process (p. 164) that requires the mentor to truly know their mentee (p. 162) and to have an "understanding of the intellectual nature of teaching and learning to teach" (p. 141). Educative mentoring is a process that must be learned (p. 143). This is something that many schools, administrators and mentors do not understand.

It is critical that novice teachers are provided with educative mentoring because when done correctly mentor teachers can help novices "get inside the intellectual and

practical tasks of teaching” (p. 139). This is not going to happen if the mentor teacher just views himself on standby, waiting to answer questions when needed. Novice teachers need to hear the thinking that goes on during the planning. They need to see how the mentor teacher handles things on the spot. They need to understand the types of questions they should be asking their students. They need to learn how to reflect on how things went after a lesson was delivered. This requires intentional, structured and thoughtful guidance on the part of the mentor.

While I appreciated many of the “mentor moves” outlined by Schwille (2008), three of them stuck out: Teaching Together, Debriefing, and Coplanning. Teaching Together is basically a type of collaborative teaching where both the experienced mentor and the inexperienced novice are involved in the teaching. Often, they will take turns taking the lead role (p. 147). This technique allows the novice to observe how the mentor handles things while also allowing the mentor to assess, critique and guide the novice. It's the best of both worlds! After the lesson, the mentor and mentee can discuss how things went and more importantly, discuss why the mentor did what he did. In order for this to work, the mentor and mentee must have a schedule that overlaps. For pre-service teachers, this shouldn't be an issue. However, for a first year teacher, this means that the administration needs to intentionally build this co-teaching time into the mentor's schedule. Debriefing involves scheduling time for the novice and the mentor to discuss how a particular lesson or activity went. Schwille (2008) described this as a “time for the mentor to guide the novice through a reflection on either the novice's teaching or the mentor's” (p. 151). The mentor is able to ask the novice questions about

why they did something a certain way while they can also explain other strategies, methods, etc that may have worked better. Another way to look at debriefing is that it is a time for the novice to analyze their own teaching. Again, in order for debriefing to be possible, administrators need to schedule a common time between the mentor and mentee. While it is possible for them to meet before or after school, this puts more stress on an already overburdened novice teacher. By building this common time into the school day, there is a much better chance that regular debriefing will occur.

While teaching together and debriefing were “inside the action” strategies, coplanning is an “outside the action” strategy where the novice and mentor sit down together to design learning activities. By planning together, the mentor can scaffold their planning by allowing the novice to hear the thinking that goes on. As Schwille (2008) stated, “the novice not only sees how the mentor tackles planning but also tries out her own design work with the mentor’s support, guidance, and analysis” (p. 154). This is also a time for brainstorming about activities which can lead to discussions of best practices and sound pedagogy. The effectiveness of this strategy is greatly increased when the mentor and mentee have time to engage in this planning. Again, this can be supported by the administration as they plan the teaching schedule. It is clear that if a school district wants to support educative mentoring, they need to be intentional in their scheduling of teachers just as the mentor is intentional in the support they provide the novice.

Reference

Schwille, S. (2008). The Professional Practice of Mentoring. *American Journal of Education*, 115, 139-167.