



## Mentoring in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Issue VIII

by Paula Rutherford

This newsletter provides advice, insights, and suggestions helpful to mentors and induction program coordinators as they strive to support new teachers. Also included are timely instructional tips mentors can share with new teachers. This month's issue focuses on building mentor capacity for recognizing best practice in instruction.

### What Should We Be Looking for in Classrooms?

The good news is that today far more new teachers have mentors assigned to support them. More good news is that most of these mentors receive training about the mentoring process. Even more good news is that most of these mentors are truly committed to creating a welcoming environment for the teachers new to their schools. Now for the bad news: Far too many mentors focus their mentoring efforts on the welcoming components of mentoring and neglect, for a variety of reasons, the instructional coaching side of the equation.

The goal of 21<sup>st</sup> century mentoring programs is to have fully satisfied and fully qualified teachers in each and every classroom. While important, a high level of satisfaction for new teachers is not enough. We have to be sure that each new teacher is also fully qualified to teach. This is a challenging mentoring task because it is time consuming and requires incredible knowledge and skill on the part of the mentor. Encouragement, suggestions, and praise for the wrong instructional decisions are almost worse than no guidance or feedback at all.

One of the most important knowledge bases and skill sets for mentors is expertise with best practice in teaching, assessment, and learning in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century classroom. Professional developers responsible for designing training and support programs for mentors must provide multiple opportunities for mentors to build capacity in their understanding of and skill in recognition of best practice in instruction and assessment.

In most districts the starting point for building mentor capacity for knowing what to look for in a standards-based classroom should be a focused study of the teacher performance criteria laid out in the district supervision and evaluation process. If the district has not yet developed a standards-based set of criteria for teacher performance, the state guidelines would be the next document to consult.

Mentors need the opportunity to create personal meaning about the descriptors found in those documents and examine their own practice around the listed criteria. This might include creating see and hear charts for selected indicators, viewing and analyzing videotapes of expert and not-so-expert teaching, analyzing case studies, and looking at student work. Just as in the classroom with students, mentors cannot teach novice teachers that which they do not know themselves. Developing a common concept system and vocabulary about teaching and learning across all mentors and their protégées can have a profound impact on the quality of life in the workplace for teachers as well as on the levels of learning for students.

Tools to support this mentor training include:

- **The Lesson Collection videotape series from ASCD.** These videotapes are inexpensive, are from 10 to 20 minutes in length, feature a wide range of grade levels and content areas. They are perfect tools for use in mentoring workshops or in faculty meetings focused on improving instructional practice. Access information about these videos at: <http://shop.ascd.org/>
- The See and Hear Chart(at the end of this newsletter) reprinted from *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mentor's Handbook*, page 328. See *Leading the Learning* pages 34-36 for an example of how the staff at Patrick Henry Elementary School in Alexandria, Virginia, used a Graffiti exercise in a faculty meeting to generate look fors and listen fors as they observed in one another's classrooms.
- A reliable source for dialogue and debate comes from *Instruction for All Students*. Yesterday and Today is at the end of this newsletter. Duplicate and distribute copies, in color if possible, to each mentor. Explain that the left hand column captures past practice and most likely represents the way many mentors were taught - and perhaps teach. The right hand column represents decades of research about best practice in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Further explain that the two columns actually represent the ends of a continuum and that most experienced teachers are on a journey to the right. The task of mentors is recognizing what it looks like to operate on the right side and to develop suggestions (as well as skills at providing those suggestions) for novice teachers who start their careers with any practices represented by the descriptors on the left side. A possible follow-up in the mentor training program is to have mentors each bring three artifacts which represent their practice on the Today side (the right side) of the continuum. The conversations around the artifacts are growth-producing for the mentors.
- Bruce Oliver's *Just for the ASKing!* e-newsletters published monthly often focus on best practice in instruction and assessment. These short newsletters provide stimulating food for thought and practical suggestions about what best practice looks and sounds like in classrooms. Areas of focus include rethinking assessment practice, providing growth producing feedback, and differentiation of instruction. Access *Just for the ASKing!* at <http://www.justaskpublications.com>
- In **Chapter II** of *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mentor's Handbook* extensive lists of ideas to try and best practices to note as well as suggestions to make and questions to ask are presented. These are grouped in the most common areas of performance or standards found in state and district documents: Planning Instruction, Implementing Instruction, Assessing Learning and the Learning Environment, Orchestrating a Positive Environment, Organizing a Productive Environment, and Professionalism and Collegial Collaboration. The segment on implementing instruction is expanded to include guidelines on rigorous instruction and thinking skills, constructivist instruction, small group work, literacy instruction, inclusive classrooms, differentiated instruction, and sheltered instruction. Mentors can use those lists to focus their observations and conversations with novice teachers as the need arises.

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**If \_\_\_\_\_  
was happening in the classroom, we would**

<b>See</b>	<b>Hear</b>

# Yesterday & Today

## Curriculum

What is taught	What is learned
Chapters covered and workbooks completed	Identification of what student should know and be able to do
Academic context	Life context
Textbook as resource	Multiple resources
Individual subjects	Integrated subjects
Basics emphasized for all; thinking skills emphasized for gifted	Basics and thinking skills emphasized for all

## Instruction

Teacher centered	Learner centered
Organized around time	Organized for results
Single teaching strategy	Multiple teaching strategies
Teach once	Reteaching and enrichment
Fixed groups	Flexible groups
Whole group instruction	Differentiated instruction
Passive learning	Active learning

## Assessment

Bell curve	Public and precise criteria
One opportunity	Multiple opportunities
After instruction	Integrated with instruction
Paper and pencil based	Performance based
Grades averaged	Grades on final performance
Proving and accountability	Diagnose and prescribe
Focus on product	Focus on product and process