

DID YOU SAY... MENTORSHIP?

How to get the most out of it¹

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A DEFINITION

Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship involving support, discussion and learning in which a person of experience, the mentor, offers his expertise to another person, the mentee, with the goal of fostering the latter's professional development and acquisition of competencies (Cuerrier, 2003). Of all the support tools designed to make it easier for new teachers entering the profession (welcoming and orientation activities, continuing education, professional learning communities, online mutual assistance networks, support groups, etc.), mentoring is the most popular strategy across all types of educational institutions. What's more, it is the strategy that is most appreciated by novice teachers because it allows them to get immediate support that is personalized to their needs.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

Formal mentoring programmes in education emerged towards the end of the 1990s as the result of a partnership between schools and universities to close the gap between theory and practice that many new teachers often experienced. Another goal of mentoring was to counter the teacher shortage that many countries were facing. The focus was to encourage the retention of teachers in the profession by lessening the already well-documented "reality shock" experienced by novices, it was also designed to be a motivating factor for seasoned teachers who wanted to renew their practice by assisting colleagues who were just starting out.

"Some people are like books. They make themselves at home in us. They live in us and transform us. They take the form of a golden suspension bridge between the external self and the inner self. I call these people mentors." (Houde, 2011, p. 1).

WHAT IF I WANTED TO INTEGRATE IT INTO MY PRACTICE...

But how can you get the most out of what mentoring has to offer? Here are a few ideas that can help you identify the behaviours and attitudes of the perfect mentee!

Get involved in the choice of your mentor:

Since one of the main factors of a successful mentorship is the suitability of the pairing of the new teacher and his mentor, it is important to choose a mentor with great care. Here are a few elements to consider for a promising pairing. Choose a mentor...

- Who willingly accepts to take on the role;
- Who shares a similar vision of teaching;
- Who teaches the same trade as you if you want to improve aspects of your teaching practice that are specific to the trade taught;

HOW ABOUT IF WE EXPLAINED IT IN SIMPLE TERMS...

Mentoring has many benefits for the mentee. First of all, it fosters the new teacher's professional development by allowing him to hone his knowledge of the profession, to add to his range of teaching strategies, to better understand the learning process, as well as to develop self-reflection. Mentoring also plays an important role in the new teacher's social adjustment and integration to the practice of the profession. In fact, the information provided by the mentor about a school's culture, how it operates, the types of pedagogy it prioritizes as well as the guidance and encouragements offered to a new teacher are also elements that can ease his adaptation and integration to the new environment. By reducing the feelings of solitude, stress, anxiety and frustration often felt by new teachers when entering the profession, the collaboration of a mentor is also a strategy for emotional support and well-being that is not negligible. Finally, because mentoring allows a novice to become more and more confident in his new role, it aids in forming a positive professional identity. As the mentee becomes more confident and sure of himself, he becomes more autonomous and likely to take initiatives.

¹ This brief is taken from the following document: Gagnon, N. (2017). *Portrait de l'accompagnement mentorale au regard de l'agir compétent des enseignants-mentors œuvrant dans le cadre du Programme d'insertion professionnelle du nouveau personnel enseignant (PIPNE) de l'Ontario*. (Ontario's New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP)) (Doctoral thesis). University of Ottawa, Ottawa.

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- Who teaches a different trade or in a different context than you if you want to innovate, be inspired or introduced to different ways of doing things;
- Who has strengths and abilities that are different from or complementary to your own;
- Who possesses many soft skills (empathy, openness, trustworthiness, reliability, positivity, etc.);
- Who has the same planning periods as your own;
- With whom you share affinities.

Adopt successful practices

It is strongly encouraged to have a meeting between the mentor and the mentee right at the beginning of the mentorship programme for the purposes of establishing and better defining each of the partners' expectations. Here are a few tips to get the most out of mentorship meetings:

- Identify your professional needs and share them with your mentor;
- Plan regularly scheduled formal mentorship meetings;
- Prepare for these meetings (target themes to discuss and tell your mentor ahead of time, prepare your questions, discuss your needs, etc.);
- Take initiatives and ask for help whenever you need it;
- Be open and willing to accept constructive criticism;
- Take some risks and reinvest what you have learned into your practice.

Be a good partner in the mentoring relationship

Successful mentorship lies on the quality of the relationship between the mentee and his mentor. In order to be a partner of choice, the mentee must agree to:

- Be respectful and willingly learn from one another;
- Demonstrate optimism and positivity;
- Accept to work as a team;
- Remain authentic and transparent in the relationship;
- Accept to share his difficulties and concerns.

Know your rights as a mentee

Mentees should understand their responsibilities in the mentorship duo and be aware of their rights! Therefore, the mentee should be able to benefit from:

- A mentorship programme whose goals and expectations are aligned and adapted to his needs;
- A trusting mentorship relationship that is confidential and without any value judgments;
- A relationship of equals, free of any hierarchy or authority structure;
- The right to have access to the coaching which is offered to him;
- The possibility to end the mentorship at any time if an incompatibility with the mentor arises.

Avoid these potential mentoring "traps"

Despite the fact that mentorship is one of the most beneficial devices for new teachers, a mentorship can still have a few "pitfalls". Nevertheless, a wary mentee will know how to avoid them! Make sure you do not:

- Underestimate the importance of staying in regular contact with your mentor: informal and regular interactions are those that truly allow for the development of an efficient and fruitful mentorship relationship!
- Become a conformist: it might be tempting to copy the "successful practices" of your mentor. In fact, the mentorship should in no way promote conformism, which can be a real impediment to innovation, creativity, authenticity and self-reflection!
- Forget to save time for building an informal support network. The fact that you are getting coaching from a mentor should not let you forget that there are many other people in your environment who can also become real informal mentors!

TO FIND OUT MORE

Cuerrier, C. (2003). *Le mentorat et le monde du travail au Canada : recueil des meilleures pratiques*. Québec, Canada : Éditions de la Fondation de l'entrepreneuriat.

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Duchesne, C. et Kane, R. (2010). Le mentorat comme stratégie de soutien à l'insertion professionnelle : points de vue d'enseignants débutants. *Formation et pratiques d'enseignement en questions*, 11, 55-68.

Houde, R. (2011). *Des mentors pour la relève*. Boisbriand, Canada : Presses de l'Université du Québec.

