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Training the Trainer - Mentoring

Islamic schools have many challenges as they work towards preparing students in achieving spiritual and academic excellence. As our schools are being viewed under an academia microscope, school's strategic planning must be creative and dynamic in looking at the heart of student achievement. This achievement can be affected by many variables, some of which are not easily controlled. As a school looks to identify these variables to improve academic performance, they may find common areas needing support, such as the need for new teacher mentoring.

A mentor is a role model that offers support to another person. A mentor has knowledge and experience in an area and shares it with the person being mentored. In general terms, a mentor is an informal buddy – someone you can go to seek support and advice from. For our schools, mentoring is pairing an experienced teacher with a novice teacher. Supporting the new teacher in such a way provides an opportunity for the school to improve student performance via providing a support structure for the student's instructor. Such support can reduce the new teacher's feeling of being overwhelmed, frustrated, and stressed. Mentor teachers also assist the novice teacher in translating content knowledge, theories and disciplines into successful classroom instructional behaviors. The formation of interpersonal relationships with other teachers provides insight to not only student learning, but also adopting the new school culture. Additional benefits of a mentoring program are:

- Helps the new teacher through rites of passage
- Improves the retention rate of new teachers by up to 50% (Ingersoll, Kralik, 2004)
- Shows the new teacher shortcuts to learning materials and paperwork
- Identifies how teachers can prioritize time and pace themselves
- Fills the need of having someone to talk to in a new environment
- Mentors learn new teaching techniques and strengthen their own skills
- Mentors develop professionalism as an educational leader.

Though many schools have an “unofficial” mentoring program, where a novice will ask a veteran teacher for advice when needed, a formalized mentoring program works toward promoting a proactive approach to identifying areas affecting student achievement through regularly paced coaching and replacing the “crisis management” mode approach.

THE MENTOR PROGRAM

Keys to a long lasting professional mentoring program are:

- Quality
- Training
- Staff support

A mentoring program is a team-coordinated program of individuals who develop, train, and select the mentors who in turn become members of the mentoring team. The program will depend much on the school's culture, including student/staff population, mission of the school, and curricular goals, yet the heart of a school's mentoring program goal will be that of student achievement.

A mentoring team generally includes the school administration (Principal and Vice Principal, Department Directors) and experienced teachers. The teachers can be those not working at the school and have an expertise in an area, but it has to be gauged whether the new teacher's needs are also related to getting situated to the new school, where a working teacher of the school would be a better choice. The number of experienced teachers for mentoring is dependent on:

- The number of new teachers to be mentored
- The expertise or experience in relation to the new teacher's needs
- The teacher's schedule
- Threshold – how committed they are

A sample scenario:

ABC school's has hired 3 new teachers: 2 full time classroom teachers (one elementary, one early childhood) and also a new Arabic teacher. ABC school decides to select 2 mentors instead of 3 because:

- 1. One mentor has 5 years experience in early childhood education and Arabic teaching. Though she will have to observe the classroom teacher in different content area settings, it is less dynamic to work with the Arabic teacher in terms of content areas. She also has a 3-hour a day planning time and is given an incentive that she will not have additional duties at the school, such as bus or lunch duty. She will be able to meet with both teachers regularly without effecting her planning or teaching time for her classes.*
- 2. The other mentor has taught elementary level education for over 10 years and has taught the same grade level of the new teacher. He has only a 2-hour planning time, but he is very efficient, organized and capable of planning his class work with time every day to*

work with the new elementary teacher. Though the first teacher is very committed to the school, the second teacher puts in extra hours because he feels strongly about the success of the school.

The following general areas are needed for developing the mentoring program:

1. *Develop a mentor selection procedure* – Create a protocol for selecting the mentors. Will you select mentors prior to the new school starts? Who will be involved in the selections? How will the school identify mentoring candidates? Rowley (1999), suggest that certain characteristics and qualities should be apparent in any good mentor:
 - a. Committed to the role of mentoring (committed in acquiring skills and knowledge, and committed to the success and the vision of the school). A teacher leader for example is a good candidate because of previous experience as working as a committed individual who helps other teachers.
 - b. They initiate contact, are consistent, persistent and are dedicated to helping teachers find success and gratification in their work. They believe that mentors will have a significant impact on the life of the other, by investing time and energy.
 - c. A reflector of how beneficial or successful is their involvement in the new teacher's life
 - d. Ability to provide instructional support
 - e. Can recognize that each teacher, and relationship is different and adjust their teaching behaviors and communications to meet the needs of the individual teacher.
 - f. Have excellent communication skills – specifically interpersonal skills
 - g. Can objectively observe the behavior of the new teacher
 - h. A model of the continuous learner – “no it all” are not wanted
 - i. Non-judgmental/accepting of new teachers
 - j. Skilled in providing structural support
 - k. Optimistic and hopeful (A sign of a bad mentors: they give negative attitudes about their roles as mentors, about the school or their jobs or about the mentoring program itself)

2. *Train and define mentor activities* – school must define what expectations they have of the mentor. Rowley (1999), and Denmark and Podson (2000) suggest that schools develop a description of the roles and responsibilities of mentors. They suggest that the description of the responsibilities include:
- a. Mentors focus on new teachers improving instruction, rather than just focusing on providing moral support.
 - b. Mentors are responsible to create goals and activities with the new teacher. Goals can be based on a framework or the school's mission. (Example: Pathwise Framework by Danielson 2000)
 - c. Mentors must do a self-reflection/assessment that raises levels of consciousness about how effective they are as a helper, as well as revisiting their own experiences as first year teachers using research based frameworks. School should provide a mentor with self-reflection inventories.
 - d. Mentors should understand and have knowledge about their colleague. Just as a teacher should have a knowledge base of the age level they are working with in regards to child development, mentors need to understand the problems and concerns of beginning teachers, cultural and educational backgrounds, as well as stage and age theories of adult development.
 - e. Mentors should provide instructional support at wherever the novice teacher's skill level is. This includes class observations of each other and discussions based on shared experiences, and multiple methods of classroom observations, such as team teaching, team planning, mentor observing mentees, mentees observing mentors and promoting collegial dialogue.
 - f. A log, or journal must be kept that documents meetings and activities. These documents are not to be a paper burden nor used in any way that will affect the confidentiality of the mentor-protégé relationship.
 - g. Encourage novice teachers to keep a daily journal as part of their reflection on what's working well and what's not. Or provide a reflection form that includes: what they know, what they want to know, what they learned and what they may do differently.
 - h. Schools should provide additional resources or materials on mentoring (latest study, books)
 - i. Mentors must share and collaborate classroom management ideas. Teachers need to develop their own classroom management strategies, which will differ as each

- classroom dynamic differs. Mentors can share their strategies, while allowing freedom for the novice to tweak it as needed, trying a variety of strategies, which are most effective. A checklist of management standards can be used as a tool in observing effectiveness of the strategy being used. Suggested items include: (Denmark and Podsen, 2000)
- o Communicates clear expectations about acceptable behavior
 - o Manages efficient transitions
 - o Distributes materials efficiently
 - o Provides clear directions for student activities and assignments
 - o Reinforces desired behaviors and promotes on task behavior
- j. Reviewing new staff orientation guidelines for new teachers (review school handbooks, map of school, walk through, during new teacher orientation).
- k. Encourage an appreciation of diversity by identifying assumptions that will affect student growth, such as age developmental expectation and gender ex.(girls are smarter than boys, boys hate to read, by age 8 they don't need so much attention, all gifted students are self motivated). This has an impact on a teacher's ability to work effectively with students. This is also applicable to the school community in terms of assumptions of colleagues.
- l. At all stages, the mentor should continue to engage the novice teacher and support them as a colleague and a full time partner of the school community.
- m. They must establish goals and desired outcomes relative to the novice's teaching performance. Goals should be clearly defined with the following considerations:
- o Which aspects of teaching should the mentor and novice focus on first?
 - o What are the goals and desired outcomes of mentoring from the new teacher's perspective? From the mentor's perspective?
 - o How will observations and meetings be scheduled? Team teaching or team planning?
 - o Which performance criteria and evaluation tools will be used to measure growth?
 - o How can mentoring strengthen each participant's professional development?

3. *Equip them with knowledge, and skills for interpretation instead of just the description of the program. Mentors need to understand the following:*
 - a. Empathy is needed (Rowley, 1999) Mentors are accepting of another person without making judgments. Upon first engagement and a few following subsequent meetings, setting aside personal convictions and beliefs is necessary while recognizing the power of accepting the novice teacher as a developing professional. When new teachers show overconfidence, poor preparation, are defensive or naïve, a good mentor will not reject a mentee and will view these traits as challenges to be developed during their relationship.
 - b. Mentors don't always have the best answer to every question every time. Mentors are honest about their own personal growth for better answers and effective solutions. They model life long learning by showing they are also learning from colleagues, taking workshops and pursue a life of learning. They are researching best practices, subscribe to journals and share this new information for discussions with novice teachers in a collegial manner. Share own previous struggles and how they were overcome.
 - c. Acceptance that they will gain fresh ideas from the novice
 - d. Communicate optimism and the human potential in that every person is capable of transcending present challenges and of accomplishing great things in the future.
 - e. Build trust! Who will be admitting to their performance deficiencies if they think the mentor will share this information with others, especially the administration?
 - f. What kind of mentoring support does the novice request as most helpful? Mentors should encourage the novice to talk about their preparations and previous experiences as well as share something about their own educational background and experiences.
 - g. Understand that there is difficulty in mentors critiquing the novice their first year. Constructive feedback must be helpful feedback. Mentors must work hard not to jeopardize their relationship with critiquing. Mentors are not formal evaluators, but look to find potential of novice and encourage freedom to try their ideas, such as implement new lessons, and manage student behavior, while being a guide and a support.
4. *Formal mentor trainings as a prerequisite “weeds out” potentially unqualified mentors when they are unwilling to participate.*

SAMPLE MENTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

AM I READY FOR THIS? After your training, ask yourself the following questions to help you assess the role of mentor and your readiness to serve in this capacity:

1. What tasks, responsibilities and expectations are associated with being a mentor? How much time should mentoring involve?
2. What are the characteristics of an effective mentor?
3. What external circumstances contribute to a productive mentoring relationship, and can novice teachers and mentors count on support in these areas from the school community?
4. What problems may develop in the mentoring process? What resources are available to address difficult situations that arise?
5. What are the benefits of mentoring for all of the parties' concerned – new teachers, mentors and school community?

Consider these questions within the context of your school's approach to mentoring novice teachers. Whether you have a formal arrangement or you're coming to the aid of a beleaguered new colleague, understand the mentor's role in creating a positive, productive partnership.

(Denmark and Podsen, 2000)

5. *Allocate time for the activities* – see “Administrative Roles” below
6. *Specify program decisions and actions* – the mentoring committee will need to formulate a systematic review process to monitor program's effectiveness and define a protocol for taking administrative involvement or action if necessary. This entails deciding on how often the mentoring committee meets to review progress and effectiveness of the program (i.e. after a 2nd classroom observation by the Principal, a noticeable change in the teacher's ability to deliver lessons, the mentors opinion of how well the relationship is developing, a general discussion of how the mentor feels the mentee is progressing, giving documented examples). Again, trust is essential and information being relayed to the committee must be sensitive to this. The program should also define whether administrative action would ever need to be in place – such as the mentor observations of student mishandling, misconduct of the new teacher, etc. Documentation is essential and an action plan for such a scenario should be clearly made during the training process.
7. *Consistency* – follow through! Coordinators must value mentoring highly and seriously in order to attract caring and committed teachers who recognize how complex and

challenging our schools can be. If administrators/coordinators are pumped up and are consistent in supporting the program, it will trickle throughout the school environment.

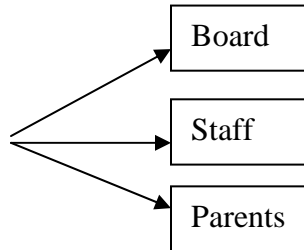
Administrative/Coordinator Roles

Successful Mentoring Attributes

- ✓ Provide continuing administrative support and direction
- ✓ Welcoming of new teachers
- ✓ Frequent contact between new teachers and mentors
- ✓ Time allowance for professional development for both mentor and mentee
- ✓ Compensated mentors
- ✓ Mentoring program needs on-going evaluation

Step 1:

Selling the idea



School Staff

From an academic approach, administrators should focus on what the latest research says on the direct benefits of mentoring on student achievement. The quality of instructional support that the mentor teacher offers is influenced largely by the degree of value the program places on support.

Boards - Incentives to Mentors

With school boards, it usually becomes an issue of finances. Our Islamic school teachers are hard working, dedicated and willing to go the extra mile. Though there are intrinsic benefits in mentoring, such as self-improvement, administrators must avoid taking advantage of such committed employees. Though this is usually attributed to a lack of finances, the administration must take strides in communicating the potential of this program to their budget committees or school boards as a legitimate annual investment. Administrators are creative in finding alternatives for funding, but whichever incentive is promoted, it must be consistent and agreed upon by all parties. Examples for incentives are:

- o Stipends – a designated amount for mentors, such as that paid to teachers who run sports, clubs, or other extra curricular activities.

- o Relieve them of other typical staff duties – no lunch monitoring, bus duty, etc
- o Provide an additional mentoring planning time break during the day
- o Request local business donations (replenished as needed), such as a gift card to a business (ex. \$500 grocery card a year)
- o Offer professional development of their choice – it shows that you value their work

Parents

Relieve the parents of the “my child has a new teacher” blues. Show that the school is committed to the education of every child, and that those bumps in the road a new teacher feels will be cushioned by the support of the mentor. Consider doing a parent night, brochure, or web page link, providing a general idea of the purpose and goals for the program.

Initiate development of the selection committee

This may consist of teachers not involved in either the mentor or mentee role, or departmental directors, established mentors (from previous roles) or other members that have a good understanding of the skills/abilities of the teachers. Coordinate an official meeting to review the criteria for the mentoring needs for the school year (content area, number of new teachers, etc). Have an open discussion of possible candidates using the guidelines listed above, as well as formulate details of the roles and responsibilities of the mentor.

Scheduling and Pairing Mentors and Mentees

Create a schedule that supports classroom observations. Mentors must have time to observe the new teacher, as well as have time to do team planning, or team teaching. Scheduling considerations are many, and the administrator must be flexible and creative while doing planning.

The administration and/or committee should spend time and do much reflection on how to pair the mentor and novice. Considerations of cultural, language, genders, educational backgrounds, grade levels, and content area must be used to decide on which mentor will work well with what teacher. They are developing a relationship, so try to reduce barriers that influence their comfort levels, perceptions, or understanding of their content area.

Mentor Training

Once the mentor list is created, invite the candidates for a preliminary meeting (with a meal of course) to discuss the role of the mentor, general responsibilities and the incentives. If they are interested in serving as a mentor, schedule a formal mentor training using the guidelines listed above.

Initiate a luncheon or orientation

After the mentors have had training, provide an opportunity for the mentors to meet with the new teacher in a relaxed environment. This can be scheduled along side the new teacher orientation (just before the start of the new school year) by having the mentor do the orientation with the new teacher.

Step back but be there as needed

There are many administrative benefits to this program, especially that of acceptance of the new teacher to work intrinsically on improvement, as opposed to from administrative advice. Improvements are seen sooner and administrators are somewhat relieved upon seeing this change. This does not mean you're not still involved. Ensure you establish regular meetings with the committee and let the new teacher and mentor feel that you are always there when they need you.

The Prophet – (peace and blessings upon him) was a model mentor (Abu Ghuddah, 2003). He was the first to do and the first to stop something when it was commanded by Allah before expecting others to do so. He, (peace and blessings upon him), practiced what he preached, never showed arrogance as he did, encouraged everyone to work on themselves (by modeling and his own actions), and supporting him/her in doing so. If we look at his life (peace and blessings upon him), as a teacher, mentor and leader, the latest research, new disciplines and methodologies in one way or another is old news. His life as an educator alone, has the answers for ourselves as educators, for our schools, and our communities to prosper. His life continues to be an example for the world of academia to benefit from.

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