

On Becoming a Mentor

Presentation #4

Slide 1

NARRATION:

Hello and welcome.

This presentation is entitled “On Becoming a Mentor” and is designed for experienced adult educators who are interested in getting involved as a mentor for new teachers.

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NARRATION:

This presentation has the following aims:

To reflect on the qualities of effective mentors in our own teaching careers

Two: To reflect on our own strengths and potential contributions as a mentor for other teachers

This presentation is designed to be a conversation-starter, a means by which you can share your own experiences with mentorship with others but also contemplate opportunities you have to mentor others.

Slide 3

NARRATION:

When many people think of the word “mentor”, they are reminded of the person named Mentor in Homer’s *Odyssey*. When Odysseus left for the Trojan War, he left Mentor in charge of the care of his son Telemachus. The goddess Athena supposedly took the form of Mentor so she could give advice to Telemachus who was struggling with the decision to leave home and figure out what happened to his father.

The story of Homer’s Mentor reminds us of a very important purpose of mentors in any field: we want to learn from people who have wisdom and influence, people who can offer us their expertise and advice so that we can feel more confident in the decisions we make as teachers.

Now, I’d like to share the definition presented in the AIR Leadership Guide:

“A mentor is an experienced and exemplary teacher who nurtures professional growth in a beginning teacher by sharing their knowledge and insights and supporting the beginning teacher in their professional learning and growth.”

Like Athena, mentors in adult education can offer beginning teachers important “knowledge and insights” as well as emotional support and encouragement. The verbs in this definition – *nurtures*, *shares*, *supports* – are positive behaviors that we should think more deeply about.

While no one would dispute the relevance of these words to our characterizations of mentorship, at the same time, we know that we each of us have very personal expectations, hopes, and motivations for what that nurturance, sharing, and support mean to us as teachers.

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NARRATION:

I'd like to highlight two more stories that give us a slightly different way of thinking about mentorship:

In ancient Africa, when a child was born, it was thought that everyone in the village should share the responsibility for raising and educating the child in the ways of a particular village. The child was nurtured by every member of the village, but there was always one older child, not a family member, who would be tasked with the responsibility to ask questions and listen carefully to the younger child. In Swahili, the person who served in this this questioning role was called, "Habari gani menta" which, in English, means, the person who asks "What's happening?"

In southern France, high in the Pyrenees, there is a prehistoric cave called La Grotte de Niaux. The cave is covered in ceiling paintings that archeologists believe were painted around 12,000 and 9,000 BC. The cave depicts many scenes of horses and bison, but another common motif in the drawings is the scene of a group of adults walking with children to what at that time was considered to be the limits, or the edge of the physical world. The adults are seen to be encouraging the children to be brave and explore beyond the borders of the present world. Some posit that the origin of the word "mentor" can be linked to interpretations of these ancient cave drawings - that being a mentor can be translated into adults taking children on a tour of the world that lies just beyond.

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Narration:

Here is a summary of these 3 depictions of mentorship:

Mentors as experienced, wiser advisors

Mentors as those who ask "what's happening?" in your life as a teacher

Mentors as those who embolden you to "tour" your own practice, to go to the "edge" and look beyond

I invite you now to pause and reflect on these 3 depictions. Please consider the following questions:

Which depiction do you like the most, and why?

How do these depictions remind you of mentors you have had in your own professional life?

Take a moment to think about these questions, and jot down your ideas. If you're listening to this presentation with a colleague, pause the presentation, and take some time (5 minutes or so) to exchange ideas.

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NARRATION:

Now that we have given some thought to the nature of mentorship, let's think more concretely about roles mentors play in adult education. For this purpose, I'd like to introduce you to Steve Hinds, who will share his own experiences with mentors in this presentation.

Steve teaches math, does research, devises professional development projects, and writes curricula, especially for programs that serve adults and community college students who have had difficulty learning mathematics. Steve is presently the Director of a project called Active Learning in Adult Numeracy & Mathematics. Prior to this, Steve was an Adult Numeracy teacher and Math Professional Developer for the City Colleges of Chicago. Before that, he was a Curriculum Developer at the Center for Elementary Mathematics and Science Education at the University of Chicago. Steve also has worked at The City University of New York central office where he led projects serving adult numeracy, high school, and community college developmental math students. He also has served as a Subject Matter Expert for a variety of U.S. Department of Education-funded projects. Steve began his career in education as a high school math teacher in New Haven, Connecticut.

Let's listen to Steve describe his own mentoring experiences in his beginning years as an adult numeracy teacher. As you listen to Steve, think about the different roles that we just talked about in the previous slide: someone who provides encouragement and wisdom, someone who asks questions, and someone who pushes you to think beyond what you already know how to do in your practice.

STEVE'S TRANSCRIPT:

"I'm a math teacher, I was a math teacher then, and I had two people that I would describe as mentors in my early years. One was a teacher who was a master at the social interactions with students, and I would go to this teacher many days after school, almost crawling to his classroom after school with exhaustion, to talk about ways I thought I would try to motivate students, or handle difficult student encounters, either student to student, or me to student. And this teacher was just a great emotional support and source of ideas on communicating with students, and creating the kind of classroom that I wanted. But then I had a different person, another teacher who was really my content mentor; it was the person who taught the highest-level math class in the school who knew a great deal, really more math than me. And whenever I had a content question that really went to the heart of "why are we really teaching this" or "how come it's the case that when I divide by zero it's undefined and not infinity", and I could press questions that arose in my own preparation that were really just about mathematics. So I think one of the lessons I learned from that was that, you shouldn't expect one person to be able to always be all things to a new instructor. And to also not expect that assigning an experienced teacher will always work out, and give a newer teacher the support that they may need."

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NARRATION

As you listened to Steve, in what ways did he talk about the different roles that mentors played in his professional growth?

Who provided him with encouragement?

Who asked him questions about 'what's happening?' in his teaching?

Who pushed him to think beyond what he already does in his practice?

Take some time to jot down your thoughts, or share your thoughts with a colleague.

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NARRATION:

Now that you have had an opportunity to think about different characterizations of mentorships, and reflect on Steve's experience, let's think more concretely about your own hopes for being a mentor.

I invite you to think about this question:

As we have discussed, mentors share wisdom. They encourage. They ask questions and push teachers to stretch themselves. Which of these areas do you feel you would enjoy the most, and why?

Take some time to jot down your thoughts in response to this question. If you are listening to this presentation with a colleague, pause the presentation for 5 minutes, and share your responses.

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NARRATION:

Reflection on these different kinds of mentorship prepares us to be effective mentors. We recognize the many forms of mentorship we have received in our own professional development. And we can articulate our own preferences, strengths, and limitations as mentors. We can also anticipate the diverse needs of the teachers we will mentor in the future.

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NARRATION:

I hope that reflection on the 3 views on mentorship and Steve's story enabled you to articulate your own excitement and hopes for being a mentor.

There are 2 tools in the AIR mentoring guide that can be useful for further self-assessment of your hopes and strengths as a mentor, and skills that you would like to develop as a mentor.

The first tool comes in the form of this chart from the Teacher Induction and Mentoring Brief, which outlines Behaviors of Effective Mentors. One might assume that all good teachers naturally would be great in the mentor role. However, many effective teachers are not aware of what makes them successful because their actions in the classroom and skill with students are second nature. Let's look at this chart as a basis of reflection and discussion of what may be "second nature" to you, and what your areas of strength are as a mentor.

The chart is organized into 3 domains of effective mentor behaviors:

- Mentors are active learners.
- Mentors support beginning teachers' growth and professional development.
- Mentors communicate effectively.

Each column lists several specific behaviors that exemplify effective mentorship in each domain. For example, under the domain of "Mentors are active learners", we see that mentors "know they will learn from the beginning teachers and the mentoring experience and express this to the beginning teachers". In other words, effective mentors signal to the mentee that the relationship is a learning experience for both parties, not just the mentee. Under the second column, we read that mentors "can articulate the art of teaching": in other words, they can express what they do and why to create high-quality learning environments. The third column features a series of behaviors – such as "listen with full attention" – that speak to the need for effective communication skills.

Here is a way you could use this chart for reflection on your strengths as a mentor.

Go through each column, and put a star next to those behaviors that you feel are your strengths as a mentor. Place an exclamation mark next to those behaviors that you would like to work on as a mentor. After you have had a chance to annotate the chart, take some time to review your annotations. Do you have strengths in all domains? Or are your strengths as a mentor concentrated in specific domains? What areas would you like to work on strengthening first?

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NARRATION:

Here is a second tool from the AIR mentoring guide that can be used for reflecting on your hopes for mentoring relationships, your strengths as a mentor, and skills that you would like to develop as a mentor. This tool, like the one on the previous slide, provides you with a list of qualities that describe effective mentors. These qualities are organized under 4 domains, similar in scope to domains in the previous tool:

- Create an open supportive climate for communication
- Effectively communicate experience and elicit thinking
- Demonstrate active listening and good follow-up
- Content mastery

This tool invites you to assess your strengths and limitations as a mentor by assigning yourself a score from 1 to 4 which indicates the frequency with which you exhibit these qualities in your everyday practice. One is “not at all”, and four is “almost always”.

I’d like to offer a quick comment about the scoring system. The scores are a useful way to get a sense of your strengths. You don’t need to think of a score of “1” as “bad”, and a score of “4” as the “best” score. Rather, I think the patterns of scores can help us get an overall picture of our strengths and limitations. Those domains with a lot of 3s and 4s may signal your areas of strength. Those domains with more 1s and 2s may signal your limitations, or more positively, those areas you might wish to work on as a mentor.

This tool could also be used to self-assess at the start of mentoring relationship, and then again at a later point (such as at the end of a semester, or program cycle). By looking at changes in scores, you would be able to gauge your own progress and growth as a mentor.

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NARRATION:

Now I’d like to invite you to choose one of the 2 tools, and go through the tool more thoroughly and reflect on your own strengths and areas of need as a mentor.

Please pause the presentation and choose one of the 2 tools.

- After you have read through the tool and completed the suggested self-assessment steps, summarize your strengths and areas that you would like to work on.
- Make note of steps you would like to take to build on your strengths and work on areas that need attention.

If you are listening with a colleague, take 10 to 15 minutes to share your responses.

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NARRATION:

Now that we have given some thought to the qualities of effective mentors, let’s move to think about more concretely about the kinds of practical strategies that mentors can use to support teacher growth and improvements in classroom practice. Here is a list of 4 recommended, “over-arching strategies that effective mentors integrate into their ongoing work:

- supporting reflective practice,
- giving effective feedback,
- using a gradual release approach,
- and using student work to inform practice.

These are strategies that have been shown to support teacher change; in other words, these strategies are important tools that mentors can use to help “build a beginning teacher’s deep understanding, reflective practice, and capacity to continue learning independently”.

In this presentation, we will only discuss the 2nd strategy -- giving effective feedback -- in a bit more detail. I have chosen this strategy to highlight because I think that the giving of feedback is one of the most challenging aspects -- if not the most challenging -- of a mentoring relationship.

To learn more about the other 3 strategies, you are welcome to check out the section entitled "Four Key Mentoring Strategies" in the AIR Mentoring Guide. Let's move on and think about the characteristics of effective feedback.

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NARRATION:

Each person has his or her own expectations for what constitutes effective feedback, but we do know, from research on mentoring relationships, that there are some key characteristics of feedback that is most effective for new teachers. Here are some common characteristics:

Effective feedback is evidence-based, specific, concrete, and descriptive.

The feedback is focused on the behavior, not the person.

It takes into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback: this means that effective feedback considers what "amount of information the receiver can use rather than the amount the [giver] would like to give".

It is timely and well-timed. This means that feedback is most effective when the receiver is ready to hear it, at a time when the receiver has optimal support from others.

Effective feedback involves sharing information, not giving unsolicited advice.

It also involves balanced communication. Both the giver and receiver of feedback need to be able to ask questions and contribute to the conversation.

Another key characteristic is that effective feedback should be actionable, meaning that the receiver should be able to use the feedback to inform their classroom practices.

You may wish to check out the Mentoring Guide for a more detailed description of effective feedback, but for now, I'd like to point out an important theme that I think underlies many of these characteristics -- and that is the emphasis on the experience of the person receiving feedback. An important question to keep in mind is "whose need is being met when we give feedback?"

To help us think more about the experience of getting feedback, let's listen to the experiences of Ana Wu, an ESL teacher in San Francisco, California, who shares her different experiences with getting feedback from two mentors.

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NARRATION:

I would like to introduce you to Ana Wu.

Ana is currently an ESL teacher at City College of San Francisco in San Francisco, CA. Born and raised in Brazil, Ana has been teaching for over 20 years. She taught in Japan for several years. In 2009, she helped to spearhead the Non-Native Speakers of English (NNEST) in TESOL Interest Section.

You will now hear Ana talk about her experiences getting feedback from two mentors.

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NARRATION:

You will now hear Ana talk about her experiences getting feedback. As you listen to Ana describe her experiences getting feedback, think about this question: How does Ana describe her experiences getting feedback from mentors? What kind of feedback does Ana find most useful? least useful?

After listening to Ana, pause the presentation and share your responses with a colleague.

Ana's Transcript:

From my experience, I got the most from mentors who were really committed to the role of being a mentor, who were providing me effective feedback, and we're willing to share wisdom, not just tell me from their experience what they had done or what they would've done, but be committed to share wisdom and help me brainstorm options based on my reality, based on my potential. I say this because many times people have the tendency to share their experience, and tell us what to do, because they want to be supportive. However, what I wanted was to have someone with more experience, with more wisdom, to help me brainstorm options. And most of the time, at the end of a conversation, I left, I went home very inspired, very willing to try different things. And I felt that there was a lot of optimism and hope in the conversation that I had with my mentors. And I think that this is what you want to seek in a mentor. Not someone who only understands you, but someone who is willing to get the most of you.

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NARRATION:

I hope you found Ana's insights useful.

Ana's story reminds me of one of the key characteristics of effective feedback mentioned a few slides earlier: "Effective feedback takes into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback". Ana's story reminds me of the importance of taking into account what kind of feedback the receiver needs to hear, not only what feedback the giver wants to give.

Ana notes that (quote) "many times people have the tendency to share their experience, and tell us what to do, because they want to be supportive". (unquote) I think this is an important

point about our best intentions as a mentor: we want to be supportive, so we try to share our experience, and give advice to the mentee. Ana seems to suggest that this kind of feedback is not as useful because it privileges the mentor's experience, and thus is less helpful to the mentee. Ana wanted someone to help her brainstorm options about her classroom experience.

Ana's story also reminds me that it's important to avoid being so focused on giving feedback that we end up closing off opportunities to engage in collaborative problem-solving.

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NARRATION

Ana's story reminds us of the importance of taking into account HOW we want to receive feedback. I'd like to recommend this tool, created by an Australian educator Kathy Lacey, that invites you to assess your own preferences for **getting** feedback. The statements in the table address a variety of needs and preferences that people have regarding the getting of feedback.

This tool can be completed by both a mentor and mentee at the beginning of a mentoring relationship, as a way to gain a working mutual understanding of one another's preferences for getting feedback.

I'd like to give you the opportunity to reflect on your own preferences for getting feedback. Pause the presentation, and complete the steps as outlined here.

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NARRATION:

As we saw in Ana's story, feedback is most effective when it is shared in a "spirit of inquiry". "Just as [our adult learners] need feedback to understand how to improve their learning, beginning teachers need feedback to help them see their practice from a new angle or consider information they may have overlooked".

I'd like to invite you to reflect on your own experiences by reflecting on this question: Recall a time when you were given advice about your teaching that led to a positive change in your practice. What was the advice? Did you act on the advice right away? What did you learn?

Take some time to jot down your thoughts in response to these questions. You can pause the presentation, and share your thoughts with your colleagues.

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NARRATION:

Now that you have had an opportunity to think about your experience getting meaningful advice, I'd like to invite you to listen to Steve, who you met earlier in this presentation.

Steve talks about working with a group of new math teachers. He also talks about advice he gave to a math teacher who was learning to take a problem-solving approach to the teaching of math. As you listen to Steve, think about the following questions: What advice did Steve give to

the new math teacher? Why did Steve feel this advice was important to share? In what ways do you think Steve's advice can help new teachers see their practice from a new angle?

Steve's Transcript:

"Mentees were largely observers, but would confer with me after lessons to talk about what to place, what was upcoming, interesting things that might lead me to make adjustments in what I had been planning to do for the next lesson. In the semesters where I was engaged in this mentoring relationship, I waited several weeks before really having the mentees try and lead an activity themselves in my classroom. I wanted to really immerse them in what a student-centered classroom really is. Knowing that there were so many forces in our culture that leading teachers towards lecturing and telling students how to solve problems, I knew that we needed really an intensive experience to break them away from some of those habits. I can remember telling a teacher who was in my classroom with me, who was studying the teaching that we were trying to prepare her to do, I can remember one of the first times I had her get up and circulate in the classroom to work with students, while they were working on some problems. And my direction to her when I first allowed her to get up and start to walk around and perhaps engage with students was a very short direction. I said, "No statements, only questions". And what I meant by that was I didn't want her to tell students how to solve problems. If anything, if she felt like she needed to talk to students, I wanted her to ask them about their thinking, to make the students explain their thinking. And it was a very simple way of me communicating what my intentions were for her."

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NARRATION:

I hope you found Steve's story useful for thinking about the kind of feedback that stimulates new thinking in beginning teachers.

I appreciate Steve's story as it is a good example of how a very concrete, specific piece of advice can help a new teacher think about their teaching and their interactions with students in a new way. I also like that Steve's advice can be linked to classroom data, and by that, I mean real observations about the kinds of questions teachers ask and the kinds of answers learners give. For example, which students did you talk to today? How many students? What questions did you ask? How did the students respond? Which questions were more effective than others?

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NARRATION:

I also like Steve's advice because I can imagine how his advice leads to new questions about teaching and learning. This dynamic can foster a culture of inquiry between the mentor and mentee.

For example, I can imagine new questions that might arise during conversations between Steve and the new teacher after this class:

What kinds of questions will you ask again in future classes?

What should I be thinking about when I listen to learners' answers about how they are solving a math problem?

What emotions got in the way when I was asking questions and listening to learners' answers?

What did I feel the learners understood but didn't have clear evidence to back it up?

Perhaps you can think of new questions that Steve and the new teacher could talk about after class. If you wish, please pause the presentation, and share those ideas with your colleagues.

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NARRATION:

As we near the end of this presentation, I'd like to invite you to reflect on the promise – and challenges – of investing in mentorship in our field. To do this, I invite you to listen to Tom Kennedy. Tom currently is an adult ESL teacher at City College in San Francisco where he teaches in the non-credit ESL program. He is interested in beginning-level literacy development, critical pedagogy, and teaching for social justice. Because I have known Tom for many years, I have been privileged to see his career trajectory from a graduate student to a full-time instructor. I have seen his valuable contributions as a mentor for new teachers. I have also been lucky to participate in several rich conversations about effective teaching and learning for beginning-level language learners. I was curious to get Tom's views on the promise of mentoring in our field.

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NARRATION:

I asked Tom, *If you could wave a magic wand: how would you improve the mentoring that takes place in our adult education field?* Let's listen to his response. As you listen, think about these two questions:

To what extent can you relate to Tom's concerns about the capacity for mentorship in our field? What are some possible solutions to improving the capacity for mentorship in our field?

Tom's transcript:

"I think that many teachers are reluctant to take on pre-service mentees because of the extra time that it can take to work with them. Of course, it adds greatly to have a second teacher in the class. It adds to the classroom experience for the students. But it also takes time, and I think that many teachers are reluctant to take on that extra bit of work. If there was compensation, not just monetary, but in terms of work load that allowed for teachers to work with pre-service teachers, teachers would be much more eager to do that. It would also be wonderful if there were funding available for teachers already in the field to work with more experienced teachers – when they enter new programs, or perhaps are teaching a new kind of class that they haven't taught before. If there were a structured program to introduce new teachers to their schools, to their programs, or to new classes and if, again, not just money, but time, time in their

workload dedicated for this mentoring, were allowed, we would all benefit greatly. So, yeah, give me the wand, I'll gladly wave it."

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NARRATION:

I appreciate Tom's comments because they remind me of an important reality in our field: for the mentorship of new teachers to be effective, we must also support experienced teachers in their work as mentors. We cannot expect experienced teachers to thrive as mentors if they themselves do not feel nurtured and supported as professionals in their own right.

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NARRATION:

We have come to the end of this presentation. If mentoring is a new endeavor for you, I hope the presentation has piqued your interests in becoming a mentor. If you are an experienced mentor, I hope this presentation has affirmed your commitment to serving our field in this leadership role.

I would like to close with a quotation that goes to the heart of why many of us are drawn to the mentoring dynamic as teachers. This quotation comes from professional development materials produced by an Australian teacher professional development group.

"Who teachers are to one another matters. In a sometimes lonely profession, isolation within the individual egg cell crates of a school does not promote professional or personal growth. Parallel play may socialize youngsters in sandboxes, but it limits learning for adults."

I love the line "who teachers are to one another matters". This quotation reminds me that our relationships with other teachers often define us as teachers. Thank you for listening, and most of all, thanks for your commitment to mattering to other teachers in our field.

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NO NARRATION

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NARRATION:

The Literacy Information and Communication System or 'LINCS' website includes a wealth of resources to support the induction of new teachers through mentorship and enhance teacher effectiveness in adult education. In particular, the Teacher Effectiveness page features a comprehensive Adult Education Teacher Induction Toolkit. The Toolkit is an integrated multimedia resource intended for instructional leaders, mentors and beginning teachers. The Toolkit contains information briefs, instructional strategies and techniques, online interactive tools, online courses, and role-based step-by-step implementation guides.

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NARRATION:

The *Mentoring Guide for Teacher Induction* and the *Adult Education Teacher Induction Toolkit* give guidance and resources as well as support a systematic process for orienting and training beginning teachers in adult education. The *Guide* includes tools for beginning teachers to assess their strengths, needs, and teaching context; identify professional learning priorities; and work with their mentors to improve their instructional practice. It also supports mentors with effective mentoring strategies and tools to guide mentoring activities, such as classroom observations. It supports reflection and discovery and offers suggestions for improved teaching practice.