

# BUILDING A CULTURE OF INDUCTION



## Case Studies in Mentoring 2020

# Introduction

Supporting teachers at the beginning of their career sets the stage for their development through the continuum of practice.

At the Arizona K12 Center, we believe that providing novice teachers a formal induction program is an important piece in retaining teachers new to the profession, developing teacher leaders, and improving student achievement. We have dedicated the last 15 years to developing mentors who, in turn, support the newest members of the teaching profession. The seminal work of the New Teacher Center has served as the foundation of our program. To showcase the power of this work, we gathered 12 outstanding Arizona educators who mentor K–12 teachers and asked them to share how their work addresses the New Teacher Center’s Induction Program Standards, which focus on rigorous standards-based lesson alignment and culturally responsive pedagogy. Our experience helping districts establish and expand mentoring programs has shown that these two standards in particular speak to the needs of all learners. Supporting learners to reach their full potential is a crucial piece of achieving equity.

The educators writing these case studies work in schools and programs that vary in scope and size. Some work in large, urban districts; some work in smaller, rural districts. Many work solely as mentors or oversee an entire mentoring and induction program, while others mentor alongside teaching in their own classroom. What unites these educators is the way they have seen mentoring transform teaching practices and impact student learning.

These case studies demonstrate the variety of ways mentoring can look, the effect mentoring can have on both novice teachers and those teachers’ students, and the way individualized mentoring can increase teachers’ confidence, effectiveness, and ability to reflect on their practice. Each case study includes questions to guide discussion with your professional learning community or for individual reflection. Explore these case studies with others at your school or district to spark dialogue about the complexities of mentorship, inspire reflection on your current mentoring structures, and create equitable teaching and learning environments for all.

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***“Mentoring is a process, one about people, development, growth, and relationships. It’s what makes new teachers feel valued, empowered, and supported.”***

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Shay Humphreys, Flowing Wells School District

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## Standard 9.2

# Induction Program

Program leader ensures that mentors have the knowledge, skills, tools, and resources to help teachers provide every student access to relevant and rigorous, standards-aligned lessons and curriculum.





# Systemic Support for Mentors

by Anna A. Fermanis

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**Abstract:** Teachers have a huge impact on students' performance, as achievement depends largely on the quality of instruction. Mentors help teachers improve teaching skills, increase resilience, enhance communication skills, and boost self-confidence. The following case study highlights how when mentors are well-trained and are given the time to work intensively with teachers, they offer a commitment to education, hope for its future, and respect for those who enter into its community.

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At the beginning of this school year, the district mentors and I conducted a study of our state- and district-wide assessment data in order to plan and align our yearly goals. Upon completing this task, we found that there was very little growth and also that there was a discrepancy between the assessment data and teacher evaluations, specifically in English language arts.

This finding made our content area mentors very frustrated. "I don't know what else to do!" one mentor exclaimed. "What we're doing is not working, but I don't know why because when we plan together, everyone receives the information and resources and, when I observe, the lesson delivery is great. All students are engaged and teachers are using best practices. Additionally, after analyzing weekly formative assessment data, we place students who have not performed well in tutorials."

There are seven site-based mentors in my district and each has a planning session with all of their site's grade-level teachers each week, then follows up with observations. My role is to support the mentors with their work aligned to the district goals.

Therefore, I began by asking, "How do we know that the students learned what was expected?"

Mentor 1 stated, "By looking at the formative assessment data."

Then I asked, "Is the formative assessment data different than the district and state data?"

Mentor 2 replied, "No."

Resultantly, I asked, "Is what is being taught the same as what is being assessed?"

Mentor 1 responded, "The teachers are teaching the lessons just as we planned, therefore, yes."

As all the mentors affirmed this, I probed, "How do you make sure that the students learned what they were supposed to on a daily basis instead of waiting for the formative assessment data? Additionally, how do you know each student's needs were met?"

Upon asking these questions, one mentor indicated that, during her observations, she focuses on lesson delivery, best practices, and student engagement but that she does not have a system to check what or if the students learned, other than looking at the formative assessment data. As she shared her response, all the other mentors admitted they did the same. From there, we developed an observation tool that would help them check for student learning rather than teacher delivery, as prior observations showed that was not an issue. While observing a lesson, we would check for evidence of student learning.

After developing the observation tool, we observed a few classrooms together, then met afterward. During our post-observation meeting, I used the New Teacher Center's Collaborative Assessment Log to identify areas of success and/or concern. During our conversation, the mentors stated that gathering evidence of student learning was beneficial in order to understand the gaps in student learning, and that is what teachers need to do as part of their lessons. Additionally, they were able to conclude that what the students were learning was not what was initially intended.

I asked them to tell me more about this and they mentioned that the tasks/activities that the students were completing were not aligned to the standards. I asked them to explain to me how they determined alignment and, after walking me through their process, I asked if the teachers knew how to do this same work. After mulling over this question, the mentors realized that they had been guiding the teachers through planning and were not giving them the opportunity to do it on their own, nor the time to consider the different classes, or acknowledging each class' expertise.

They asked what they could do to improve in this area, and we agreed that I would model a process.

As I modeled the process, the mentors took notes. Afterward, I asked them to tell me what they noticed. They stated that the structure I used was very helpful and the strategies and probing questions provided gave the responsibility to the teachers, allowed them to bring their own knowledge to the table, and required them to think of their individual classrooms.

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***“To improve the quality of teaching, a strong professional system that can nurture expertise needs to be implemented in order to have teachers commit to ongoing learning.”***

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Additionally, they concluded that understanding the standards was an area that we needed to focus on, as they noticed they all had a different idea of what the standard was asking for. They then asked, “How do we know if teachers are teaching the correct grade-level standards? How do we shift teachers to the new state standards? How do we differentiate mentoring and training for new vs. experienced teachers, as new teachers have greater developmental needs compared to more experienced teachers?” New teachers are faced with specific challenges in the areas of policy and procedure, materials, curriculum, differentiating instruction, relationships, classroom management, and student motivation. On the other hand, experienced teachers need professional development that affirms the knowledge, experience, and intuitive judgment that they have cultivated.

As I listened to the mentors, I heard their cry for help loud and clear. I realized that they needed support in comprehending the standards, helping teachers discern the grade-level standards, learning how to check for specific student learning, and understanding the different needs for new and experienced teachers while taking into account the students' differences. Therefore, we established individual monthly meetings to pre-plan their planning sessions. I sent them to professional development training relevant to their work (Mentoring Foundations and Seminars and Cognitive Coaching through the Arizona K12 Center, Teaching Reading Effectively, Bold Leadership, NCSM, Tearing Down Silos, etc.); conducted book studies related to effective mentoring; met after their planning sessions to debrief; accompanied them on some observations; and provided feedback on their mentoring.

As a result, the mentors were able to shift the way they conducted their observations and feedback meetings. These changes allowed us to better plan for and meet the diverse needs of teachers and students. Additionally, school culture improved, as teacher input was highly valued and, during quarter 2, our observation data on student learning showed an increase.

After discussing the data with the mentors, they still felt that they needed the support of the site principals in order to get teachers to make a shift, as some perceived it as additional work, specifically the experienced teachers. Therefore, I met with the administrators and explained the concerns. They agreed to participate in the planning sessions for one grade level. Because of that, we were able to plan district-wide grade-level professional learning communities where there would be one principal and one

mentor at each in order to align instructional support efforts, systematize the process, and maintain accountability.

As I reflect on this case, I learned that the design of the teaching should address the learning styles of the participants and take into consideration factors such as mentor knowledge, teacher experience, administrative support, and student needs. The task of designing and implementing professional growth opportunities to meet the professional development needs of teachers as a diverse group is challenging. However, to improve the quality of teaching, a strong professional system that can nurture expertise needs to be implemented in order to have teachers commit to ongoing learning. Therefore, identifying the best practices and strategies for various situations provides a basis for highly effective mentoring and professional development. Well-designed mentoring and training seeks to add to the educator's knowledge base and professional practice. The commitment to ongoing learning and time set aside to do the work on the part of the mentor and teacher is critical for continued learning to occur and to ensure student success.

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***“Mentors need guidance, support, and time that is highly customized in order to meet the challenges that new and experienced teachers and diverse students can bring.”***

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In conclusion, mentors need guidance, support, and time that is highly customized in order to meet the challenges that new and experienced teachers and diverse

students can bring. Careful training gives mentors the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet those challenges confidently and will help ensure that the mentor program is a success. Additionally, continuously training, providing materials, and elevating

the skill bank for mentors will shape a vision of academic success for all; create a climate hospitable to education; cultivate leadership in others; improve instruction; and manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. ➤

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## Reflection Questions

1. Teachers navigate different perspectives, frameworks, students, and advice on teaching. What can multiple advisers cause? How can we address this issue?
2. The mentors' effectiveness ultimately determines the extent the program will support teachers in helping students succeed. How can the school or district allocate support and time needed to develop the mentor program and mentors themselves?
3. How do you measure the success of your mentor program?



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# Demystifying Resources to Reconnect with the Joy of Teaching

by Christena Tenney

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**Abstract:** New teachers come into a profession where they are expected to perform at the same proficiency level as a veteran teacher. They are bombarded with materials, time lines, students coming and going from different pull-out services, district maps, and preparations for district and state testing. Is it possible to help them find joy in teaching their first year, when they are feeling buried alive?

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A first-year elementary school teacher, Ms. R, came to my room nearly in tears. “I am completely overwhelmed. I love reading, but I hate teaching it. I’m so caught up trying to follow the curriculum map, getting my students where they need to be on time, making sure I spend adequate time on each subject area—it is too much,” she cried. She knew her students sensed her stress as well. She wanted to follow directives and practice good teaching, but she also wanted to enjoy coming to work and sharing her love of reading with her students. This teacher is not officially on my caseload. First-year teachers are mentored by district personnel, but I am the site’s reading specialist and meet frequently with first-year teachers. I make sure they feel comfortable coming in with any questions or concerns.

In listening to her lay out what was going on, I realized that new teachers walk into a schedule they had no input in creating and are held to curriculum maps they had no say in. They have little to no experience sifting through relevant information in manuals. Teachers want to connect with

their students and share their passion for learning. Ms. R expressed that reading was of interest for her, so that is where I wanted to focus my efforts. I knew that if I could show her how to go through a refinement process, she could apply it to other areas, which would increase her enjoyment and decrease her stress. Shared reading is when the teacher really needs to show students the love of reading. It should be something that both the teacher and the student look forward to and enjoy.

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*“I knew that if I could show her how to go through a refinement process, she could apply it to other areas, which would increase her enjoyment and decrease her stress.”*

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Right then, I felt impressed to share with Ms. R the process of how the leadership team created the master schedule. I outlined how we had to navigate all the pull-out programs, lunches, recesses,

and specials (physical education, library, computers, and music). Seeing this on a macro level helped her understand how everyone had an ‘imperfect’ schedule and that sacrifices were made by all to ensure that time was best maximized for the majority of the students. This process enabled her to ‘buy in’ to the schedule, as the existing staff already had. We scheduled a time for the next day (Friday) to plan a shared-reading lesson for Monday.

On Friday, we started by looking at the curriculum map put out by the district on shared reading. Speaking to equity, I made sure to point out that this expectation is not something asked of only first-year teachers but is an expectation of every teacher regardless of their level of experience. This way, she did not feel like she was being held to a different standard or had more directives because she was less experienced. Ms. R was familiar with the map, but felt that the document and the teacher’s manual were often at odds with one another. This admission brought a moment of clarity that helped me understand that new teachers need to be explicitly taught how to use curriculum maps in conjunction with teacher’s manuals.

The objective of shared reading for day one is to guide students to the core understanding of the story through thoughtful questioning. The core understanding and questions are not stated on the map so, often, teachers feel the need to use all of the questions embedded in the text. Our conversation focused on what the map gave us: the objective. We then focused on what was not given to us: the core understanding and the questions. First, we needed to read the story and determine the core understanding—what

do we want the students to know after reading the story. Then, we needed to plan backward and think about three or four places in the story where she should stop and ask questions. We put sticky notes at those locations. We then looked at what the publisher already had in the way of questions at those locations. Sometimes the textbook’s questions were congruent to the objective; other times, they were focused on something entirely different.

As we discussed which questions to use from the manual, which questions to wordsmith, and which questions we would completely leave out, I saw Ms. R’s body language visibly relax. She even commented that we were going through it pretty fast. I wanted her to feel empowered to use her teacher decision-making to determine not only where to ask questions, but also which ones would lead to the core understanding of the story. I wanted to make sure that she could do this process independently on the following week’s story, so I gradually released responsibility as we progressed through the planning process. We agreed the area I would focus on when I observed her lesson on Monday was watching her love of reading come through as she taught her lesson. To make sure she was feeling optimistic, I shared how I watched her body language change as we planned; she went from being very rigid to very relaxed. I then asked how she was feeling about her lesson. She said she was feeling excited to go into her lesson with more clarity of purpose.

On Monday, I went to observe the planned shared-reading lesson. I was hopeful that the optimism I saw after Friday’s planning could be observed during the lesson. Ms. R read the story aloud as students followed along in their individual readers. She

demonstrated a love of reading as she read with expression and moved around the room with ease. She later reflected that her students looked at her a bit surprised when she started because her voice was stronger and she had more energy in her presentation. She naturally stopped at the preselected locations and asked the questions. She smiled, she laughed; students smiled, students laughed! When we met at lunch, we talked about how much she enjoyed it. She said, “I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. I know what I have to do now.”

The following week, we looked at her quick-write assessments from that first shared reading. Now, 80 percent of her students were able to relate the core understanding to the essential question, whereas only about 30 percent were doing that prior to coaching. Student data improved, which

is a huge cause for celebration, but also, a teacher overcame the oppressive feeling of being overwhelmed, and joy in teaching came through again. This teacher was able to be compliant with directives and be a passionate reader.

When teachers start, we front-load all sorts of information. It is important to check in with them about navigating all of these materials. These check-ins should be ongoing and regular. Not every teacher is going to be as verbal as the one who came to me. I would speculate the vast majority of teachers feel the way Ms. R did. While this was specific to a shared-reading example, the message can be applied to so many other scenarios. Co-planning and having discussions about finding joy in teaching are important ones to have throughout the coaching/mentoring process. ➤

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## Reflection Questions

1. As a coach/mentor, how can I organically check in with my teachers about finding joy in the profession?
2. As a coach/mentor, how can I check that teachers understand what information to use from the curriculum map and teacher’s manuals?
3. As a coach/mentor, how can I help new teachers understand the purpose for directives so they can ‘buy in’?



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# Coaching Conversations that Cultivate Learner Agency

by Ginny Sautner

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**Abstract:** Beginning teachers may recognize the value in developing learner agency in their students, but may not have the experience or skills to implement those structures that lead to self-directed learning. This is where a holistic and formalized induction program can have a powerful impact. This foundation for success includes orientation programming, professional development opportunities, and individualized mentoring. Mr. B's story as a novice high school teacher highlights a pattern of steady growth that improved student achievement and engagement for every student in his classroom and further laid the groundwork for his personal growth into an effective teacher.

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When Mr. B stepped foot into his ninth-grade classroom in a Title I school he was eager, but also realistic about the challenges ahead. He came from an industry with no education experience or formalized training in a traditional teacher prep program. He was taking over for a class midway through the school year and his new students were now several units behind their peers, having previously been taught by a host of substitutes. It was clearly going to be a difficult transition. As his teacher mentor, I knew my goals must be twofold during our initial meeting: first, build a relationship so that we could begin incremental steps toward improvement; and second, focus on his strengths so he can embrace feelings of success, no matter how modest.

I began with the New Teacher Center-designed tool Knowing Teachers, which provides structure for a guided conversation and lays a foundation for professional trust. I posed questions like, "What is the impact you want to have on your new students?"

and "What are your subject area strengths?" His responses gave me context for my next steps. His knowledge of content was strong, but his awareness of pedagogy was minimal. I shared that establishing an optimal learning environment for students was the first step he would have to take to begin to effectively deliver standards-aligned curriculum, so this is where we mutually decided to begin.

Together, we planned for some basic routines that would define how students entered and behaved in the classroom. We continued to meet weekly in a recursive cycle: planning, observation, reflection, and next steps. To be frank, many of these meetings revolved around severe student misbehaviors or deep misunderstandings about pacing and instructional strategies. Students were in the habit of blurting out and had no stamina for independent work time. Collaboratively, we made small adjustments: changing the physical layout of the classroom, updating the bell work

procedures, and establishing a whole-class attention signal.

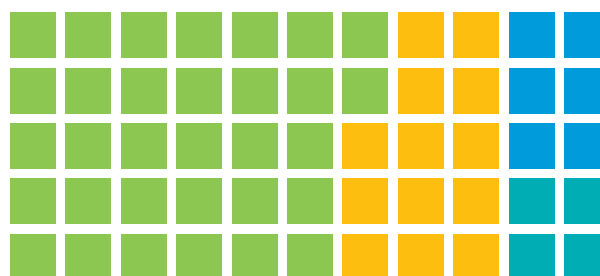
The academic year came to a close, and we invited Mr. B to attend the five-day onboarding program we plan for all new teachers in the fall. It is a 40-hour deep dive into creating and sustaining optimal learning environments, along with planning for standards-aligned objectives and engagement and formative assessment strategies. During the new teacher orientation, I noticed that he was supporting other brand-new teachers based on his experiences the previous semester. I could see his self-reliance growing based on his ability to take a classroom struggle and find a successful solution for students. Likewise, he told me during the lesson planning overview that, even though he knew what a physical lesson plan document was supposed to look like, he never fully understood how or when to incorporate student engagement strategies. That was going to be his first goal. I watched as his mindset and disposition as a teacher began to take shape.

At the start of the academic year, it became clear that classroom management was no longer the most pressing issue, and Mr. B's Collaborative Assessment Logs began to look very different. This is another conversation protocol from the New Teacher Center that I use frequently because it allows the teacher to self-reflect on what is working, thereby improving and even transferring those strategies of success into other areas of instruction. Conversely, it allows space to dig into what is not working. Whereas the first semester's focus was primarily around misbehavior and concerns about instructional strategies misaligning to the content, my goal this semester was to move our conversations

into the deeper elements of effective planning and analysis of student work. I remembered what Mr. B said about wanting to increase student engagement, so I scheduled a classroom observation where I tracked both student talk time and teacher talk time using another New Teacher Center tool, Selective Scripting.

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### Use of Instructional Time



Teacher Talk

No Talking (independent work/transitions)

Individual Student-Teacher Response

Student Choral Response

Student-Student Accountable Talk

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It was clear that direct instruction was taking the majority of instructional time. Mr. B indicated to me in our Knowing Teachers meeting and in other subsequent meetings that equity of voice in his classroom was a tenet he valued. By using the Selective Scripting tool, he was able to identify this issue immediately. In our reflection meeting, I only had to show the categories with time frames from the chart above and Mr. B recognized, "I'm doing all the talking when I want students to be discussing, using the vocabulary correctly, and building off of one another's ideas. They can't do this, because I didn't plan for them to do so." This was my entry point to introduce engagement and accountable student talk structures.

His own identity as an educator was developing: he wanted to transform his class from teacher-centered to student-centered. Because I know that some conversation structures require a high level of learner agency and student autonomy, I initially offered low-risk structures that aligned with his standards and objectives for his current unit. He chose to incorporate a triad grouping method where each student was given a role, a time frame, and the opportunity to independently read, then write, speak, and listen in collaboration. This strategy was successful; class averages of the quiz over this specific content increased from 5 percent to 8 percent in each class period. Seeing evidence of incremental improvements bolstered Mr. B's confidence and increased his willingness to seek out and implement new strategies independently.

Along with individual coaching meetings, our induction program offers teachers nine Instructional Fundamentals seminars each year. These are professional development sessions designed to meet the needs of new teachers. I facilitated the seminar, focusing on engagement strategies to generate accountable student talk and, as a result, Mr. B committed to implement one of those new strategies in an upcoming lesson. The inclusion of conversation starters can support extending, summarizing, and clarifying new concepts learned and promote the kind of learner-centered classroom he was aiming for. When I met with Mr. B for a reflection conversation after his lesson, there was still room for refinement. He was finding success in all but one class period; however, he did not give up. Through a series of questions, we were able to uncover that his challenging class needed more structure and tighter transitions, which we planned for the following day.

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***“His ability to find his own teacher voice grew not because of an isolated coaching conversation, but because of a pattern of mentoring and professional development offerings grounded in student impact.”***

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Mr. B's confidence continued to bloom. He began trusting in his instructional decision-making, evidenced in our next meeting when he told me that he had been observing another teacher using variations of Socratic seminar. This was a riskier strategy with even more autonomy for the students. In another Collaborative Assessment Log conversation, he articulated that he still wasn't satisfied with student-to-student interactions and wanted to build a deeper sense of community among the students and also step back and allow them to take more ownership of their own learning. He planned to use this strategy in an upcoming unit of study, so I asked him guiding questions about what misconceptions he anticipated and what learning outcome he wanted students to reach. He was concerned that students with high comfort in speaking publicly would dominate the discussion, so we planned an initial 'whip around' of conversation that would allow all voices to be heard. He also wanted to ensure the conversation stayed grounded in text. We planned for each student to have a copy of the text, which they would first annotate and then reflect in a quick write before sharing out. The power of this example is not that Mr. B effectively planned and delivered instruction to students in one lesson; it is that he began to find his teacher voice and

an instructional mindset that allowed him to continue to reflect and plan with the same intentionality.

As I reflect on our year together, I see how Mr. B exemplifies the new teacher whose abilities and skills grew incrementally and steadily. His ability to find his own teacher voice grew not because of an isolated coaching conversation, but because of a pattern of mentoring and professional

development offerings grounded in student impact. Luckily, we are in a school system that values mentoring and provides ample instructive and reflective opportunities for Mr. B's growth to take place. Every new teacher enters a classroom with unlimited potential to impact students, but that potential must be purposefully and continually cultivated in order to be realized. ➤

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### Reflection Questions

1. What patterns of support are represented here?
2. How do coaching conversations and formalized professional development work in tandem to improve teaching practices?
3. How does this case study confirm or challenge your perceptions about teacher mentoring?



Ginny Sautner is an Arizona Master Teacher Mentor for the Lake Havasu Unified School District. She is a current National Board Certified Teacher in adolescence and young adulthood English language arts and is a past Fulbright Exchange Teacher and National Rural Teacher of the Year. She has 13 years of classroom experience as a high school English teacher and student activities advisor.



# How Flexible Mentoring Strategies Helped a Teacher Find His Voice

by Heather Mace

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**Abstract:** This case study documents how one mentor supported a struggling first-year music teacher by utilizing a variety of flexible strategies. Although the teacher initially resisted the mentor's guidance, the mentor used strategies such as exemplar teacher visits and restorative circles to creatively reframe feedback. By observing these best practices in action, the new teacher learned to find his own instructional voice. As a result, he improved classroom management and developed curriculum that fostered student agency.

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## An Unconventional Start

When I met Mr. N in August of 2018, I knew right away that this was not going to be a typical mentoring assignment. Mr. N was a first-year middle school guitar teacher with a big problem: he had no guitars. While his principal had placed an order for 30 new instruments, he was told it could be weeks or even months before they arrived. Since Mr. N held a non-standard teaching certificate and had no experience writing lesson plans, I quickly assembled a folder of lessons he could teach without guitar—reading notes, clapping rhythms, studying musicians. But after a few weeks, students were restless and bored. They began to act out, yelling, “I hate this class!” or wandering around the classroom while Mr. N struggled to regain control. As student and teacher frustrations mounted, I knew we needed to reach out for help, and fast.

A local nonprofit agreed to provide Mr. N with guitars temporarily, as long as he followed their classical guitar curriculum and allowed their program leader to help

facilitate classes. When the program leader was present, I took note of how he dominated instruction. He insisted that students sit with the posture of classical guitarists and made them play Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* repeatedly until the class mastered it. Students were finally creating music, but they still balked at Mr. N's authority and complained about the song selections. For this group of Arizona preteens, *Ode to Joy* was anything but joyful.

Mr. N and I understood that the current arrangement wasn't best for him or his students, but he felt stuck. Even when the school's guitars finally arrived, he felt indebted to the nonprofit that had helped him, and he didn't know how to take back ownership of his classroom. I tried to initiate discussions about how to proceed, but he was resistant to my input. Since I wasn't a guitar expert, he didn't believe I could help with his specific situation, so I needed to get creative with framing my feedback and suggestions. But how?



## Enlisting Outside Resources

One day, I had an idea. Each year, our mentor department creates a list of exemplary teachers in the district, then we cover the cost for our first-year teachers to spend a day observing these exemplar teachers' classrooms. I searched the list and found two guitar teachers. Maybe, I thought, if I can show Mr. N how other guitar teachers conduct their classes, he can envision bringing his own voice and style to his classroom. I contacted those teachers and set up the visits.

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*“He didn’t believe I could help with his specific situation, so I needed to get creative with framing my feedback and suggestions.”*

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As we watched their classes, I whispered my observations to Mr. N. “See how the room is decorated with superhero posters? That’s a great way for the teacher to show his interests and connect with students!” And, “I noticed a girl is singing to accompany the guitars. What might that look like in your classroom?” After their classes were dismissed, I asked each of the master teachers strategic questions about how they built rapport and created opportunities for self-directed learning. They explained that they prioritized students’ feelings of comfort and safety in their classrooms. They solicited student suggestions when choosing music and offered other instruments to those who were reluctant to try the guitar. As Mr. N listened to their answers, I jotted down notes for our follow-up conversation.

On the ride back, I asked Mr. N if he remembered our district’s culturally responsive framework called ‘SPARKS,’ which I had introduced to him earlier that month. The letters, I reminded him, stood for classroom characteristics like ‘student centered’ and ‘positive learning community.’ I asked guiding questions about how the classes we had just observed aligned with SPARKS tenets and about which parts he could envision incorporating into his own classes. Finally, I said, “I know your background is in classical guitar, but what type of instruction best serves your students? And, how can you develop a curriculum where they feel some ownership?” By the end of the car ride, we had made a decision to cut ties with the nonprofit.

## Restoring Relationships

Before Mr. N could start the second semester with fresh, new music, I knew we needed to repair the relationships in his classroom. Mr. N was angry and hurt by the disrespect students had shown him and didn’t feel it was his responsibility to make amends. It was also clear his students weren’t going to make the first move. Knowing how crucial this step was, I made a plan to bridge the gap between Mr. N’s desired classroom environment and his current mindset of fear and anger.

I asked Mr. N if I could conduct a restorative circle with his most challenging class. This practice allows participants to respond to wrongdoing and conflict in a safe environment where all voices are heard. He agreed to try it. The day of the restorative circle, I started a conversation about what harm had been done in the class and how to repair it. The experience was anything but peaceful. Some students yelled, cursed, or downright refused to participate. But

I continued to ask questions intended to open up dialogue. Slowly, students aired the grievances that had been building all year. When I prompted Mr. N to share his thoughts, he admitted that he had made missteps with the class and explained how it hurt when students ignored or disrespected him. For the first time, both parties felt heard and validated. I had facilitated the initial step toward restoring their broken community.

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***“For the first time, both parties felt heard and validated. I had facilitated the initial step toward restoring their broken community.”***

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### **Fostering Student Agency**

Finally, we could turn our attention toward the curriculum. Thinking back to the ‘student-centered’ component of SPARKS, I asked Mr. N how he might incorporate student-friendly music into his curriculum. He chose to start with simple video game themes from Mario Brothers and The Legend of Zelda. As students’ guitar skills developed, I helped Mr. N restructure his class to allow for differentiated instruction. When he hesitated to implement small groups, I modeled how teacher proximity works to curb behavioral issues. Keeping in line with the school’s Positive Behavior Incentive System (PBIS), I prompted him to survey his students about what incentives they wanted to work toward as their behavior improved. The near-unanimous choice was to end class by watching YouTube music videos. Finally, drawing inspiration from our exemplar visits, I asked Mr. N if he would like to incorporate additional instruments into his class. He

agreed. With Mr. N on board, I drafted a grant proposal to purchase electric drums, a bass guitar, a microphone, and a small PA system. Much to our delight, the proposal was awarded.

### **A Teacher Found His Voice**

When the next school year rolled around, Mr. N was ready. It may have taken a full year, but he had developed his own style, voice, and class structure. He immediately solicited students’ song recommendations and asked who was interested in providing vocals. With students invested in their class, the management problems of the prior year virtually disappeared. Mr. N was using the tools I had offered him to build a solid music program.

By December, students were finalizing preparation for their winter concert. Since many of Mr. N’s students came from Spanish-speaking households, he decided the concert would celebrate the music of Ritchie Valens. I visited his class the day before the big performance, and what I saw floored me. Students who had never even held a guitar 18 months earlier were running their own class. They played their entire concert catalogue—complete with featured vocalists, a drummer, and guitar solos—with almost no direction from their teacher. He sat on a stool to the side, occasionally calling out, “Watch the tempo!” but it was clear these 12- and 13-year-old students knew exactly what to do. By the final piece, I was fighting back tears.

As the students filed out of class, I turned to Mr. N. “You were not only a teacher just now,” I said. “You were a facilitator. Your students were in control of their learning; they owned it. This is what every exemplary teacher aspires to, and you’re doing it!”

## Reflecting on Mentoring

As a result of my experience with Mr. N, I learned that there is no 'one way' to mentor. Conversations and tools that had resonated with other teachers fell flat with Mr. N, but, by remaining flexible and responsive, I was able to support him through other channels. I orchestrated exemplar visits, a restorative circle, strategic questioning sessions, and

even grant proposals to help him envision what his classroom could be. If not for remaining adaptable in my approaches, I may never have broken through to Mr. N. But, by listening to his cues and adjusting my mentoring strategies, I was able to guide him to find his voice as a teacher. When he found his own voice, he could finally amplify the unique, talented voices of his students. ➤

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## Reflective Questions:

1. What are some unconventional strategies that you might utilize to support new teachers?
2. How have you shown flexibility and responsiveness when working with a reluctant teacher?
3. What are some concrete suggestions you could give teachers to make their classrooms 'student-centered'?



Heather Mace, M.Ed., is a beginning teacher mentor with the Tucson Unified School District. She has worked as a public school educator for 14 years in both traditional and alternative settings, teaching students in grades 5–12. She is also a Public Voices Fellow with The OpEd Project.



## Coaching and Content:

### A Better Combination to Support Beginning Teachers of Secondary Mathematics in Order to Accelerate Student Learning

by Michael Perkins

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**Abstract:** All beginning teachers need coaching and support, but with mathematics-specific coaching and mentoring, there can be an acceleration of student learning.

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“I am being given these lessons to teach to my class, but I don’t really like them. I can’t relate to them. I understand the math, but these lessons don’t make sense to me. I know how to solve that problem, but the textbook does it differently. Which way is better? How do I give my students quality experiences with all these standards in such a short time frame? Why aren’t they more engaged? How do I get my students to trust me? My district is telling me that this is the standard that I have to teach this week, and then I have a different standard to teach next week. My administration is really putting pressure on me and my students to do well on the next district assessment. Why aren’t my students getting it? I feel like I need to reteach so many things. What do I do now?”

These were the rambling questions of Jessica, a desperate teacher in the second month of her first year teaching mathematics to middle school students. She was concerned that she had already failed because she didn’t know all the answers to the questions above. Jessica is confident in her own mathematical abilities, but didn’t know how to incorporate the mathematical practices into her lesson design. She didn’t feel connected to her

students, and often felt that they didn’t understand her and, therefore, couldn’t create a mathematical discourse in her classroom. She read and understood the grade-level standards, but didn’t know how they connected to what the students already knew, where they were going, or how they related to district and state assessments. Jessica could feel her students getting lost and disinterested with every passing lesson. She knew specific mathematical guidance and mentoring would be required to keep her in the profession.

The Center for Recruitment and Retention of Mathematics Teachers at the University of Arizona offers the New Teacher Induction Program for Secondary Mathematics. We support middle and high school teachers new to mathematics education. Participants attend monthly Saturday workshops throughout the school year. These sessions provide a format to share ideas, materials, and concerns, model good teaching, and promote collegiality. During these sessions, participants deepen their own mathematical knowledge by being an active participant in mathematical activities that allow them to model mathematics on, above, or below their own grade level

or content area. They reflect on their own work as students in order to increase the effectiveness of their work as teachers. Participants also receive support to be able to mentor their students and, in turn, build relationships with students, parents, the school, and the broader community. Each teacher is also assigned a coach. These coaches are all former middle or high school teachers. Coaches meet with teachers several times per semester to help plan lessons, observe, collaborate, and discuss concerns, including classroom management, best practices, motivation, maximizing classroom participation, time on task, assessment techniques, and more.

As Jessica's mathematics coach, I was able to support and offer resources that she desperately needed and desired. She came to me frustrated with the premade slideshow lessons generously shared by her colleagues. They were designed in an "I do, we do, you do" model with little or no context or explanation. She complained, "These lessons don't make sense to me and my students show very little interest in them." We were able to work together and identify the strengths and weaknesses of this lesson design. I posed purposeful questions to guide her into a lesson design that she felt more comfortable with and that students would find more engaging. We did this by taking the existing lesson design and flipping it upside down. We started with the question from the end of the lesson, but eliminated all the information, criteria, or circumstances that would direct a student to just one solution. The original question was, "If a dime weighs 2.268 grams, a quarter weighs 5.67 grams, and there are 453.592 grams in a pound, how much is a pound of dimes worth? And how much is a pound of quarters worth?"—questions that seem rather dull and boring to even the most mathematically inclined

with procedural knowledge and experience with simple algorithms.

The new question became, "What would you rather have: a pound of dimes or a pound of quarters?" This question does not have a 'correct' answer but allows all students an opportunity to answer and become invested. I helped Jessica lead the lesson by posing the new question to her class. It sparked a great debate in her classroom and her students were leading a mathematical discussion. By intentionally leaving the question very open to interpretation and without certain information, it forced students to want to figure out what is necessary to solve the problem, yet it was simple enough to allow all students an entry point to the problem. It allowed them to set up and create their own parameters to the problem based on their own experiences and previous knowledge.

I ensured that Jessica allowed for all students to think about the question independently and gather and sort their own ideas. We discussed why it was so important to allow students plenty of thinking time before moving to a group- or whole-class discussion and why it was important to start with a question that was very open-ended. I guided her on how to get her students to share these responses in small groups and how to steer the ideas of her students back to the standard and objective for the day, therefore creating a reason for discussing the content. These are important pieces of lesson design but also key components to setting a classroom culture with equity, diversity, and inclusion. Jessica was also able to start seeing these types of lesson designs modeled by experienced mathematics coaches for her during our monthly professional development sessions, tailored to meet the immediate needs of beginning teachers

like Jessica. After implementing this type of lesson design, she said, “I love how the question piques my students’ interest and leaves them wanting more.” I knew that my coaching was having an impact on Jessica after our next meeting when I noticed that she was no longer talking about mathematics to her students, but that she was facilitating the mathematical ideas of her students.

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***“I noticed that she was no longer talking about mathematics to her students, but that she was facilitating the mathematical ideas of her students.”***

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During one of our early sessions, Jessica mentioned to me a feeling of disappointment, that she felt like her class often didn’t understand her. Her behavior management issues were not out of control, like some first-year teachers, but she could feel it slipping away from her. As part of our induction program, we support our new teachers in setting up a mentoring opportunity with some of her students in order to get to know them better, build stronger relationships, and develop a sense of community for her and her students. She embraced this opportunity and immediately set up some meetings and brainstormed ideas. Jessica offered the opportunity to all of her students and asked those interested to write a short explanation about why they wanted to be a part of her mentoring group. Jessica said, “I was blown away by the responses. One of my students, who had been struggling with behavior in my class, wrote me this beautiful paragraph expressing his interest in the mentoring group.” One of the mentoring group activities was a trip

to the University of Arizona where Jessica, her mentoring group, and their parents joined others in the community for a night of mathematics games and fun. Once she had built relationships with those students, the behavior-management issues started to decrease and engagement started to increase. The trust and relationships formed with those students started to transcend from the mentoring group to all of her classes. Next, we discussed how to take these mentoring ideas and experiences into her daily lessons and practice. Jessica began incorporating ‘number talks’ and informal learning routines as ways to set up classroom norms, develop a classroom culture, and build relationships while still being connected to mathematics content. These types of activities have increased the mathematical discourse and confidence of the students in her classroom. Jessica shared with me her success, “My students are more engaged and willing to share their ideas because of the relationships and classroom climate I’ve started to create.”

During her fall break, Jessica emailed me, stressed about content standards and upcoming district assessments, complaining of not having enough time to get everything done. We decided to meet at a local coffee shop and make a plan that would ease her concerns. We took the time to breakdown each standard that was expected to be covered in the next quarter and discussed what is really being asked of her students. We looked at the district assessment questions and discussed how they are related (or not) to the standards that she is expected to address. This made for a very lively conversation and it really opened up her eyes to the big picture. At the end of our meeting, she felt relieved, “I’m so glad we did this. I feel much more comfortable with the standards and where I need to lead my students.” Jessica also

had opportunities during our monthly professional development sessions to work alongside other beginning teachers that teach middle school and high school mathematics. “It is really great to be surrounded by and able to work with other secondary mathematics teachers and see how the different standards are connected and evolve over time.”

I feel lucky and fortunate to be the person that was there for Jessica when she was ready to unload these common feelings and questions, before the feelings of misery, inadequacies, or despair pushed her away from a great profession. Jessica felt comfortable reaching out to me because I had made an investment in her and her classroom through a series of timely classroom visits and sessions. She knew and trusted my mathematical

expertise throughout regular professional development sessions facilitated by the program’s highly experienced mathematics coaches. Jessica built stronger relationships with her students and community through mentoring. She embraced her time with and connected to a mathematics community with other beginning teachers sharing the same struggles and questions. My specific background and experience in teaching secondary mathematics allowed for engaging and in-depth discussions on not just teaching practices but mathematical teaching practices and mathematical standards that would help accelerate the learning of her students. A mathematics coach and a mathematics-focused induction program is exactly what teachers like Jessica need in an effort to ensure an excellent mathematics teacher for every student. ➤

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### Reflection Questions

1. How would a mathematics-focused induction program and mathematics coach support student achievement in your context?
2. Not all beginning teachers feel as confident in their mathematics backgrounds as Jessica did. Imagine how this program could support a teacher in a secondary mathematics that does not have a strong mathematical background.
3. How do we make more content-specific mentoring available for our beginning teachers in order to accelerate student learning?



Michael Perkins is the program coordinator for the Center for Recruitment and Retention of Mathematics Teachers and leads the New Teacher Induction Program for Secondary Mathematics. He is a University of Arizona graduate and earned a master’s degree in teaching and teacher education. He has been a classroom teacher at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels and was also a district mathematics specialist. Michael is also a head coach for a local high school women’s basketball program. When not at work, he and his wife are playing games and completing puzzles with their two boys.



# Mentoring: An Invaluable Investment

by Shay Humphreys

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**Abstract:** Support through mentorship is an imperative part of every new teacher's journey. It is important to provide a nonevaluative person in whom a new teacher can trust to guide and coach them as they navigate the ins and outs of their new profession. Mentoring relationships hold the power to transform a struggling novice into a highly effective educator, which is what all learners need and deserve. Mentoring programs are an invaluable investment in both our teachers and our students.

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At the very beginning of my first year teaching, someone handed me a copy of Harry Wong's *The First Days of School* and said, "Check this out. There's a lot of great ideas!" Now, if you've never been a teacher, then you might not know the level of stress and anxiety, as well as the illogical speed of time, that occurs in the few days prior to students walking into your classroom for the first time. There isn't time to "check this out." I didn't need a book. I needed a person, a conversation, a guide, someone to cheer me on, help me when I needed it, and coach me when I felt like giving up. Thankfully, I work in a district that values and invests in new teacher induction, one that provided me with mentor support during my first three years of teaching. Their impact laid the foundations of my teaching practice, paved the way for me to be as effective as I can be for my students, and inspired me to extend my own career into mentorship.

As a mentor, I spent time in an elementary classroom coaching Ms. A, a second-year teacher. I would meet with her before a classroom observation to unpack her lesson and agree upon a focus. Then, I

would observe that lesson, scripting and collecting data, which we would analyze together in a reflective conference. In my first meeting with her, through tears in her eyes, she admitted, "I'm so scared for you to watch me teach. I don't think I'm very good at this." She went on to explain that the feedback she received during her first year felt very negative and that she was nervous, embarrassed, and had even considered leaving the profession. I reassured her that my role as her mentor did not stem from a place of judgment, but from a place of support and collaboration. As we dug deeper into her concerns, it became evident that she knew her content well, but managing her classroom and keeping students engaged was where she felt she fell short and she was seeing the direct impact it was having on her students.

In our preconference, Ms. A expressed concern about her classroom management. She had taken professional development on classroom management, but she could not bridge the ideas on paper to the context of her classroom. She frequently had kids talking while she was talking, which resulted in tasks and class work being done



incorrectly. She expressed concern over this and was worried that her students weren't learning. "I feel invisible," she said. I assured her that I would pay close attention to this when I observed her and that we would come up with a plan to tackle it together.

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***"I didn't need a book. I needed a person, a conversation, a guide, someone to cheer me on, help me when I needed it, and coach me when I felt like giving up."***

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When I observed her lesson, it became clear that Ms. A was right about how much talking was taking place while she was teaching. As I was scripting the student conversations, I realized most of the students weren't talking about their weekend or a video game; they were talking or asking one another clarifying questions about what she was teaching. I also noticed that even though she heard them talking, she continued to deliver content, which put the confused students even further behind. As she spoke, the students grew restless and fidgety, and soon became disengaged with the lesson. As I observed their independent work, it was clear that most of them did not meet the objective.

When we had a post-conference, we addressed the issue of talking. I presented her with data showing the number of students who were talking while she was, and I shared, to her surprise, that students were actually talking about the lesson. When I asked her why she thought that would be happening, she guessed that they were probably confused. As we analyzed

her lesson plan and the order in which her content was presented, she identified areas that she thought could've been confusing to her students. When we looked specifically at my script, she was exactly right. For her next observation, we worked together to task analyze the lesson, making sure that she was scaffolding information appropriately. In her first lesson, she had 16 of 26 kids talking while she was talking. In the second lesson, she had only two of 26. Her students showed a significant improvement on their independent work and informal assessments throughout the lesson.

During the same post-conference, we looked at the students' time on task and started to focus on how the responsibility was divided in her classroom. In the observed lesson, she had spent about 80 percent of the time talking/teaching and students spent 20 percent 'doing.' She saw in the script data that, at the times she had been talking for a long time, the students' time on task began to drop. We brainstormed ways that she could shift some of the responsibility to her learners. She admitted that she felt a little bit uncomfortable with this and asked if she could watch me teach a lesson where I modeled it. She invested her own time to observe a math lesson, taking notes specifically on the language used and how to present opportunities for students to own their learning. We debriefed and she was more confident and excited to try some of the strategies in her next lesson. When I observed her again, the responsibility shifted to about 50–50 and, with that, we watched her students' time on task and engagement increase. At the end of the lesson, her students were lining up and one boy said, "Miss, that was fun!" I could see on her face that she was proud of herself for taking a risk for the sake of her learners.

Sometimes, new teachers know what they are good at and in what areas they need work, but sometimes they don't. One thing that Ms. A had a tendency to do without realizing it was to respond to students with "good job" or "OK," even when they gave a wrong answer. As we reviewed her script, I found a specific instance where this happened. Instead of just telling her she shouldn't have said that, we read the conversation together that she had with the student. She laughed when she heard it aloud and realized on her own that she needed to work on developing more appropriate feedback. She said she had heard of 'sustaining feedback' but couldn't quite navigate the application of it in a way that felt natural to her. Together, we played out multiple scenarios of correct, partially correct, and entirely wrong answers until she found her voice. She discovered words that felt natural and nurturing to her. Her sense of relief was palpable and, in my next observation, when a student gave a wrong answer, she was able to positively use the student's response as a teachable moment for the entire class, showing all 26 of them that it's OK to take risks and get wrong answers.

Knowing how she felt at the beginning of the year, I was very intentional about beginning every post-conference with positivity and a list of things she did well, and I encouraged her to do the same. During the first one, she was hard on herself and had a difficult time identifying her strengths. I was able to tell her at least five things that I thought were done effectively and used my script to show how her teacher decisions had a positive impact on her students. She told me that was the first time she felt like she was truly successful at something during an observation. Over time, as she connected

the dots to things she had learned about effective teaching practices, we worked to shift her mindset about herself as an educator. She no longer felt like a failure, but realized that, like all teachers, she was constantly perfecting her craft.

I continued to mentor Ms. A through her third year of teaching. The growth I witnessed was remarkable. She became more reflective and self-aware. I watched her transform from a talkative teacher to a facilitator of learning. Her increased level of comfort was obvious, and she was clearly a happier person. She never again mentioned wanting to leave the profession to me. Her newfound enthusiasm was contagious. Her students were more engaged and seemed to love learning. She thanked me for helping her and allowing her to feel safe. In my own way, I also benefited from our mentoring experience; it allowed me to reflect upon my own teaching strategies and find ways to make myself a better teacher for my students.

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***"Her newfound enthusiasm was contagious. Her students were more engaged and seemed to love learning."***

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Two weeks into her fourth year teaching, Ms. A. came to my classroom. "I know you're not technically my mentor anymore, but I really need your help!" Regardless of what she needed, I knew I had done my job as her mentor. Not only did I form a meaningful, trusting relationship with her, but she was now a joyful teacher, dedicated to continuing to learn and mastering her practice and, in turn, she became a better educator for all of her students.

Mentoring programs are an invaluable investment. They are vital to the success of new teachers. Not all teachers come from the same walks of life. It is so important to develop well-trained coaches who pave a developmental pathway and cultivate a sense of support for all new teachers, regardless of their background. Mentoring doesn't end when the formal observations end. Mentoring is a process, one about people, development, growth, and relationships. It's what makes new

teachers feel valued, empowered, and supported. It reminds them that they're not alone and often increases teacher retention. The benefit of mentoring in the teaching profession is exponential, and it would not be possible without the investment from mentors, mentees, administration, and stakeholders. Effective mentors help to create successful teachers who create thriving students. And the students? That's what it's all about. ➤

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### Reflection Questions

1. What do you anticipate being a 'return on investment' in a systematic, well-developed mentoring program?
2. How are mentors being professionally prepared for their roles in coaching new teachers?
3. How do we ensure that new teachers are receiving quality, equitable mentoring relationships?



Shay Humphreys is a third-grade teacher at Centennial Elementary School in Tucson, Arizona, and has worked in the Flowing Wells Unified School District for 13 years. She has taught first and third grade, been a New Teacher Mentor and an Instructional Coach, and served as a Cooperating Teacher for students at the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University. She holds her National Board Certification in early childhood education.



# Mentoring: A Gradual Release Systematic Approach

by Wendy Sanchez

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**Abstract:** In the following case study, you will meet a teacher who is identified as an ‘exemplary teacher.’ She is in her second year of teaching and managing many moving parts. I have been her mentor for the past two years and have been able to experience the emotional roller coaster alongside a beginning teacher. At the same time, I have witnessed the support given by the administrative team. Things are not always the way they seem to be; sometimes, we have to take a step back and dig deeper.

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As meet-the-teacher night approaches, students are eager to meet their teachers and see their friends after a long summer break. The school’s teachers are eagerly setting up their classroom with name tags, possible seating charts, informational folders for parents, welcome back posters, and other efforts to create that positive first impression.

As the first day of school approaches, Alex, a beginning English language arts teacher, is consumed with training after training—four days of training to be exact. School leaders have created an agenda with success for all teachers in mind; administrators want to make sure teachers are prepared for the first day of school and cover old structures as well as new initiatives. Classroom time is not a priority at this point; teachers are left to develop weekly lesson plans and set up their classroom outside of school hours.

Alex is overwhelmed by her professional responsibilities, not to mention she has not completed her teaching certification. She’s both a teacher and a student. Twice a week, she attends night classes, and, throughout

the week, she has assignments due. She will also complete three formal observations as part of her program and two formal observations by her school administrators. Yes, this sounds like a lot, but her passion for teaching and her commitment to students is at the forefront of her mind. Alex is determined to make this work; she will not give up.

I introduce myself as her new teacher mentor and set up weekly meetings with her. Our coaching conversations start with the basics: entering grades, classroom management, etc. Our meetings progress to standards alignment, student differentiation, and data analysis. By the second quarter of Alex’s first year, she had created a community where all students are getting what they need and feel safe in her classroom. Academic achievement is at the forefront of this classroom and is evident upon observation. She has been labeled an ‘exemplary teacher’ by the administrative team. At any given point, you could walk into her classroom and observe students having deep conversations with

each other, working with peers to solve a problem, or sitting with the teacher editing a piece of writing. It is always refreshing to walk into her classroom.

But there was a slight problem. Although it might appear as if everything is OK, Alex is engulfed in a never-ending spiral of obstacles. As a mentor, I had a focused conversation about her feelings. She expressed feelings of uncertainty and doubt. Some of her thoughts included, “Am I doing what’s best for kids?,” “Does the administration team like me?,” “Why doesn’t the administration team provide me with feedback?,” “Why don’t they ever come into my classroom?,” and “I don’t think I was meant to be a teacher; I will not be returning next year.” These unsettling thoughts consumed her on a daily basis. Alex is a great educator who moves students forward, who knows her students and her content, but is still new to the profession and has needs that need to be addressed.

In the administrative meetings I attend, Alex is identified as the teacher to be left alone, because she is doing great. There are so many fires to be put out in the school that she is the least of their concerns. Little do they know how she truly feels and what she is going through. She is surrounded by toxic teammates who, day in and day out, express their negativity toward the school, students, and profession. She is struggling to find her voice among the fast-paced world of education. Administrators don’t know she is doubting her career choice and possibly seeking alternative options. We cannot afford to lose another teacher, especially one who is evidently passionate about students and their education.

The one-on-one meetings with Alex have now become her safe space. I have

become the person she is in constant communication with and seeks support from. It has become my job to make sure she finds equity of voice among administrators and colleagues. It has also become my job to ensure administrators see the critical component a mentor plays in the development of our new teachers. My role is not to provide a quick check-in and walk away, or one that delivers change/improvement overnight. As a mentor, I know my role is one of consistency and commitment; the program must support the idea of a gradual release model until the new teacher is ready. I strongly believe she is still here because of the partnership between us. My role has been a critical component in helping her find her voice as a professional and as an educator. There have been many situations in which I have had to add an additional meeting time per her request. She is constantly seeking my support and looking forward to our time together. These meetings help her both emotionally and professionally.

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***“My role is not to provide a quick check-in and walk away, or one that delivers change/improvement overnight. As a mentor, I know my role is one of consistency and commitment”***

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Our weekly check-ins consist of classroom observations and feedback. When coaching/mentoring her, I always start with the Collaborative Assessment Log. This coaching tool helps her get grounded on the positive work she is doing for students and pinpoints progress. We then move forward with the New Teacher Center’s Analyzing Student Work. This tool allows

us to create focus groups. She can then go back and address the needs of the individual students. Feedback is a critical component of our time together and provides her with the validation she needs. The feedback is preferably face to face but, when we are unable to meet, I email her with a summary of our conversation, including key points or ideas. There is always an area of refinement and possible next steps.

I have had the pleasure of working with her for two years now and have watched her grow. She has developed her voice and will defend what she believes using data and facts to back it up. She has now become an advocate for her students; she knows they can speak to their individual needs. Although she is in her second year of teaching, she still seeks validation in her work. She continues to have self-doubt and

continuously wonders if she is the right fit for her position. It is hard to identify the needs a teacher has based on the number of years they have taught. Alex had to create her own curriculum the first year, follow a newly adopted curriculum in the second year, and will be teaching a new grade level in her third year. On paper, she will be a third-year teacher but she will begin the school year feeling like a first-year teacher.

I'm hopeful she will have many meet-the-teacher nights in the years to come. Although all teachers might feel like they will never be ready, we need to keep our beginning teachers with varying capabilities top of mind and provide them all with systematic support to meet their individual needs. All teachers need support and guidance, but our beginning teachers need it the most. ➤

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### Reflective Questions

1. When thinking of support for beginning teachers, does your school district have a gradual release system in place?
2. With the broad spectrum of new-teacher capacity we face, what differentiated systems are in place to meet their needs?
3. In what ways are beginning teachers encouraged to find their instructional voice?



Wendy Sanchez has had the pleasure of working for the Tolleson Elementary School District for 13 years. Her journey began as a student teacher from the Arizona State University Teachers College. She was then hired as a teacher and taught third through fifth grade over the course of 10 years. During this time, she hosted more than 12 student teachers in her classroom within five years. Three years ago, she began her journey as a beginning teacher mentor. Education is her passion and she looks forward to supporting both students and teachers for many years to come.

## Standard 10.2

# Induction Program

Program leader guides mentors to assist beginning teachers in using culturally responsive pedagogical practices to provide every student with equitable access to rigorous, grade-level content.





# That Class, That Student: Disrupting the Narrative

by Christie Olsen

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**Abstract:** Professional development experiences help develop the skills and knowledge a mentor needs to recognize and address issues of equity. Through conscientious and deliberate mentoring conversations, a mentor and mentee explore systemic inequities that limit student access to curriculum. Collaboratively, they create solutions to promote equity and inclusion.

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“I am so angry. I spent hours preparing this lesson. I made all these stations so the kids could do science experiments, and they acted like jerks. The principal was in here observing and they still weren’t doing what they were supposed to do. I am not wasting my time doing anything like this ever again. From now on, they can just read the science book and do worksheets. Clearly, they don’t respect me or my time, and they don’t deserve these kinds of lessons.”

As I listened to this novice teacher, I recognized I had heard this narrative before. The reputation of the class was legendary. Tales had been told over the years in the staff break room that confirmed they were, in all aspects of the word, ‘That Class.’ Veteran teachers of previous grade levels had barely survived them, some still bearing the emotional scars of 10 long months spent with That Class. The class struggled with self-regulation, motivation, and peer relationships. They were rough. In one defining moment, I recognized I had the opportunity, the responsibility, to disrupt the narrative about That Class. That Class was filled with deserving students. Each and every one of its students deserved

the very best a teacher had to offer every single day, in every single content area. As I listened to this angry, frustrated, defeated teacher, I recognized inequity based on ‘deservedness.’ These students were being denied equitable access to the curriculum based solely on their behaviors. As her mentor, I knew the intention of my coaching conversation was going to be about addressing inequity, one class at a time, one student at a time. I was about to disrupt the narrative that had been perpetuated about That Class.

Based on my knowledge of Cognitive Coaching, I knew I wanted to move the teacher from generalizations to specificity. I posed one simple question: “Which specific students in this class don’t deserve science experiments?” Her mouth dropped open and she began to stammer. “Well, that’s not what I mean. They just don’t listen. They don’t follow directions. They don’t do what they are told.” Through our conversation, we came to the conclusion that most of the students in the class had not mastered the tools to consistently self-regulate within a classroom. On the surface, our conversation seemed to revolve around classroom



management—defining, explicitly teaching, and reinforcing structures, expectations, routines, and procedures. On a deeper level, the conversation was about creating an equitable classroom culture where every student could successfully access curriculum. Equity occurs when an educator makes a conscientious decision to create opportunities for every student to experience success. Based on my knowledge of optimal learning environments, I mindfully asked questions about the classroom culture: “What specific things does a student need to know or be able to do to be successful in this classroom? How have you communicated these expectations to students? What structures, routines, and procedures do you have in place to help students be consistently successful? Do students have the opportunity to practice these understandings regularly?” As a result, the teacher defined success criteria for her students and created a visual anchor chart to display the success criteria.

The next time I observed the classroom, I noted the teacher and the students were revisiting the success criteria anchor chart after each transition. Additionally, the teacher was using the anchor chart as a classroom management tool for students to self-monitor their behavior, by gently reminding them of expectations and routines. At the end of the observation, the teacher told me, “Yesterday, I taught the entire mathematics lesson, and my kids were able to finish their math fluency page before lunch. This is the first time all year that has happened. I usually have to stop every five minutes during a lesson and correct someone’s behavior.” Her classroom was transforming into a space where students were successfully engaging in classroom routines, procedures, and structures; this transformation was going

to provide the structure for students to access the curriculum.

Routines and procedures began to solidify, and students began to take ownership of their behaviors. During our next mentoring conversation, the teacher and I collaboratively planned one student-to-student discourse structure. The structure provided a safe environment where students could dialogue about a topic and an opportunity for each of them to contribute to the conversation and be ensured equity of voice. By carefully planning, practicing, and reinforcing one structure, both the teacher and her students felt success. Students were speaking to each other in respectful tones, and building on each other’s ideas. They were learning.

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***“The climate of the classroom was transforming for almost every student.”***

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During a reflective conversation, I noted how the climate of the classroom was transforming for almost every student. I broached the subject of the most challenging student, That Student, the student who was most often the catalyst of disruption. Anger and frustration reappeared. It was evident the teacher had developed the mindset that, through his behaviors, this young man no longer deserved her best effort at teaching him. “He is just wasting my time and everyone else’s time. As far as I am concerned, he can just sit in the back pod and listen while the rest of the kids learn. Maybe that will teach him how to act in a classroom and how to treat me.” The relationship between teacher and student had been damaged. I suggested the teacher attempt

to rebuild the relationship with the student by initiating a daily two-minute conversation about anything that was not related to school. She tried, but he resisted, responding tersely. I encouraged her to continue to engage the student. She reluctantly tried again and again, but his resolve was strong. He had no interest in connecting with the teacher. The school year ended, and That Student moved to the next grade level. However, the teacher was not ready to give up on the student after all and courageously shared the story of the broken relationship between herself and the student with the next year's teacher. She shared the idea of the two-minute conversations in the hope that the student would connect with his new teacher and somehow find his place in his new classroom. Through this courageous conversation, the novice teacher continued to disrupt the narrative of inequity within her school.

Issues of equity do not always revolve around race, religion, or language. Students are deserving of equity no matter what—it is not contingent on behavior, on their gratitude, or the expression of positive reactions. Educational inequity occurs when educators allow a culture to exist that marginalizes a group or even an individual. I know I disrupted the status quo of that classroom. I know I disrupted a system of inequities within a school. That Class is now in sixth grade. The narratives in the staff break room are now empathetic and solutions-oriented in nature: “I wonder if ...? What do you anticipate would happen if you tried ...?” The professional development I have experienced has helped me hone my knowledge, mindset, and skills to recognize and address bias in teachers' classrooms and school environments. I know a systematic mentoring program has the potential to promote and ensure a culture of equity for That Class and That Student. ➤

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### Reflection Questions

1. How do the mentors in your context recognize and address inequities that exist within the system?
2. What tools, resources, and professional development do you provide to the mentors in your context to disrupt the status quo of inequities?
3. How will a systematic mentoring program provide space to address issues of equity in your context?



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# Mentoring: A Dimension of Operationalizing Equity

by Daniela Robles

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**Abstract:** Operationalizing equity requires the mentors that support our newest teachers to understand the dimensions of equity. Such expectations demand high-quality mentor selection. This case study shares the impact of a mentor serving new teachers in a system focused on equity.

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## The Journey

Equity. One is hard pressed to engage with a school system in the country that is not immersed in the topic of equity. New positions are being created to address equity; equity statements are published and placed on display for public view; professional libraries are expanding as new texts are released on the topic; and, yet, educational leaders stay up late at night wondering if equity is operationalized in their system.

As a district-level administrator and program lead for our district's mentoring and induction program, I have the unique perspective and experience to shift a system from words to action. The intention to operationalize equity serves as the underpinning of our district. Our district defines equity as Curtis Linton does in his 2011 *The Equity Framework*, "All educators ensuring each individual student meets or exceeds a common standard."

Toward the end of the 2017–2018 school year, the school, frustrated with complacency regarding dismal student achievement scores, declared the system, serving 90 percent students of color, was not serving

students well. No longer was quantitative data highlighting the number of students demonstrating proficiency on common measures the norm. Rather, the practice of highlighting the number of students not proficient became the practice. All stakeholders, including governing board members, interest-based negotiation members, principals, and teachers, began to focus on who was not meeting grade-level expectations.

As our district was recalibrating, fueled by knowledge gleaned and validated from sources such as Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain* and Kate Gerson from UnboundEd, a veteran of the system was stepping into a new role as district mentor. The district mentor would serve as the instructional support for novice teachers.

Each and every instructional leader in a system sets the professional norm for the how, what, and why of serving students in a district. The induction to a district's professional norm is housed in that district's mentoring and induction program. The ambassador of that program is the

district mentor. Failing to attend to the selection process for at least one district mentor all but ensures a district's journey will encounter detours and derailment.

### Mentor Selection

Beyond the completion of an application and successful interview, Ms. T was selected as our district mentor. Ms. T meets all qualifications to serve as a novice teacher mentor. She possesses the skills and knowledge of a 10-year classroom teacher, site instructional coach, National Board Certified Teacher, Arizona Master Teacher, Cognitive Coach, and Instructional Rounds trainer, and she easily exceeds 80 hours of professional development a year on topics ranging from critical literacy to trauma-informed teaching. More consequential than knowledge and skill are her beliefs and disposition. Ms. T's disposition is to listen rather than speak, act when grounded in evidence, think strategically, seek multiple perspectives, and maintain a consistent temperament. And, when unpacked, she understands that we exist in a world populated with institutions that perpetuate inequity. She accepts the truth that in a school system we, the adults, create equity or inequity.

The launch of the 2019–2020 school year set the focus of equity clearly in motion for our new teachers. My job as the program lead is to guarantee that the foundation of our work is to operationalize equity by having high expectations for all students to reach or exceed grade-level standards. The expectation for any one individual to address inequity must be tightly aligned to the culture set in the system. As such, this year's new teacher orientation held collaborative conversations based on the article *Inequity in Education is Your (and My) Responsibility* by Kate Gerson, while revolving slides filled with alarming truths

about students of color played during breakfast and anchored our day. I knew that disrupting inequity would become a first-hand experience during the 90–120 minute biweekly support session with our new teachers. This meeting, anchored in standards-based instruction, was provided for 16 teachers ranging in contexts from kinetics to fifth-grade science. For every new teacher, the moment that inequity is revealed in their practice is not based on a schedule, but the moment that Ms. T identified as 'the right moment.'

### The Right Moment

In late August, our district mentor, Ms. T, walked into my office for our weekly meeting proclaiming, "I did it. I called out equity with a new teacher."

Ms. T's proclamation piqued my curiosity, and I began to mentally go through her caseload in an attempt to identify which new teacher revealed an issue of inequity in their practice. I asked Ms. T to tell me more and she began to recount a debrief session with Miss R, a fifth-grade teacher, who continued to dismiss Ms. T's attempts to address the omission of student learning during an observed lesson. 'The right moment' emerged in their exchange:

"It sounds like you are concerned about your students' well-being," Ms. T said. "Tell me what that means to you."

Miss R responded, "Well, my students, these students, don't have anyone that cares about them; no one loves them, no one cares for them and, because of their circumstances, it is important that my students are happy ...that they like me."

Ms. T posed the question, "Is the fact that your students are happy and like you more important than their learning?"

“Yes,” replied Miss R.

Ms. T then paused, sat up straight, and stated, “Let me introduce you to the word ‘equity.’”

When Ms. T concluded her recount, I simply sat there and smiled. Addressing equity when we are immersed in inequity is not easy. However, I know that the countless conversations with Ms. T about the best way or the right moment to face inequity has made a difference. Conversations about inequity have fallen flat with previous mentors, as their lived experience creates an impermeable shell to accepting the truth that inequities are alive and well in the 21st century—inequities that are not the ‘fault’ of unmotivated parents/guardians or a society that has lost its moral compass. I wonder if issues of inequity are now revealed, labeled, and addressed during mentor support because both Ms. T and I are educators of color.

For Miss R, equity was not an afterthought or a passive suggestion to consider. Inequity and equity were labeled for that teacher.

And yet, Ms. T had intentionally gathered evidence of this teacher’s practice over multiple points in time, which led to the turning point, following a 60-minute planned observation that was recorded through a selective script of both teacher and student actions. Data from the observation showed that four of 27 students were engaged during the intended learning for that lesson. This was unacceptable data as a result of unacceptable practices grounded in an unacceptable mindset.

### Disrupters

Deliberate disruption of the status quo, like labeling equity and inequity, are actions taken when an entire system is on the journey to operationalize equity. A system will only move from words to action if the system has multiple individuals willing to serve as equity ambassadors. Who are those individuals in your system? What are the truths of those individuals? Do their truths move your system or derail your system? Are those individuals willing to disrupt the status quo? ➤

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### Reflection Questions

1. How does mentoring support operationalizing equity in a system?
2. As we consider surfacing inequities, what qualities must a person possess to do this work?
3. How are the truths of a system expressed?



Daniela Robles is a native of Arizona and earned her Bachelor of Arts in elementary education with an endorsement in English as a second language from Arizona State University. Following her passion for leadership, she obtained her Master of Arts in educational leadership from Northern Arizona University. Daniela Robles has 23 years of experience spanning from the classroom to the district level.



# Once Your Mentor, Always Your Mentor

by Elizabeth Sanchez Sgrillo

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**Abstract:** Mentoring is a valuable service a district can provide to ensure a new teacher transitions successfully to the district, school, and profession. Mentoring, by facilitating for thinking and not for action, can result in new teachers becoming efficacious and empowered. In this case study, you will experience the phases of mentoring.

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The journey of mentoring is a continuous transitional process for both new mentors and teachers. Much like your first job interview, the feelings of excitement, anxiety, enthusiasm, and worry are experienced by both, making this working relationship unpredictable from the start. During the second year of my mentoring journey, I met Ms. Z on the first day of induction. She was described to me by the administrator as inspiring, dedicated, committed, passionate, and loyal—all characteristics one might notice in many new teachers. When you meet Ms. Z, you notice right away that she commands a room, has a strong presence, and is impeccable with her words. Making connections with students is one of her strongest attributes as a teacher. This is evident by the number of success stories she has had working with students who had discipline and academic issues. Students will usually comment that “Ms. Z listens to me and gives me advice so I can work better with other teachers.” Other teachers seek her out because of her ability to connect with difficult students and provide guidance and strategies to improve classroom management.

## The Struggle Is Real

As the teacher’s eyes welled up with tears, she said, “I will not be disrespected. Don’t they realize I am here to help them be successful? I’m spending lots of time creating lessons and activities to help these students improve and move on to other classes. What should I do? Maybe this isn’t for me. I don’t think I can do this.”

“So, you feel angry because students are disrespecting you?” I asked

“Angry? No, frustrated!”

“You’re frustrated and sad your students are not valuing your time?”

“Yes, I work with them daily and spend hours to differentiate instruction so they can succeed, yet my student, Jacob, has been written up two times this semester, and administration is not helping me.”

“You are feeling discouraged, because you want to be supported with Jacob’s issues, and you’re looking to find a way to make that happen.”

“Yes,” she said. “At this point, I’m angry

and exhausted, especially because Jacob continues to cause issues in my class and bothers other students.”

“You’re feeling ignored because Jacob’s behavior isn’t improving.”

“Yes, this is the second time they’ve said they would help me and ... I don’t know ... maybe I’m just not important,” she said as tears welled up again.

“So, what you want is to be heard and noticed.”

“Yes! This is the reason why I don’t trust people.”

Although Ms. Z seemed prepared and aware of what teaching would bring, I soon discovered that, behind the mask, she had kept hidden her insecurities. This demonstrates one way new teachers benefit from individualized mentoring support to help them transition to the district, school, and profession.

### Complexities in Coaching

As I began to think of the different types of support I could provide Ms. Z, based on my training in Cognitive Coaching, I identified the states of mind that would most help her increase her confidence in situations that involved trusting herself and others: flexibility and interdependence.

“If you could wave a magic wand and trust administration,” I asked, “what would they be doing?”

“Well, they would remove Jacob from my class because he disrupts everyone and makes it difficult for me to focus on other students. I’m so worried he’s going to disrupt students from learning, and we have a big state test coming up. I have to make sure my students show improvement.

He isn’t even doing well; I don’t think he cares anymore.”

“So, you feel pressure to do well on this state test?”

“Yes, I’ve worked hard on making sure all my students pass, and they deserve a chance to test out and move into other classes that would benefit them.”

“You’re worried that if Jacob is still in your class, because he can be disruptive, he will be the reason why students don’t do well, and what you want is for administration to have trust in your decisions?”

“Yes, if they would have trusted and listened to me the first time I wrote the referral, Jacob wouldn’t have all these problems.”

“You feel ignored by administration?”

“Yes, I just don’t feel important, and I get that Jacob needs help, but I’m just so tired. Sometimes, I don’t feel like anyone really cares about the work I do with my students or values the time I put in every day.”

“Where should Jacob go to be successful, if not in your class?”

Clearly, what Ms. Z needed was an opportunity to feel heard and valued. As she spoke, I thought, ‘Does she notice the patterns, the triggers? How do I help her make the connection when she doesn’t get her way or doesn’t get affirmation for her work? What insecurities does she have? She really trusts me. How can I help her?’ I decided to facilitate for thinking, not for action.

“How has our conversation supported you?”

There is no doubt that in the teacher-mentor journey there are phases similar to the New Teacher Center's Phases of First-Year Teaching: anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation. Ms. Z was clearly teetering between the phases of survival and disillusionment.

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***“There is no doubt that in the teacher-mentor journey there are phases similar to the New Teacher Center’s Phases of First-Year Teaching: anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation.”***

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Since she started the year strong and clearly confident with classroom management, Ms. Z didn't begin to experience feelings of self-doubt, low self-esteem, and being overwhelmed until it was time to plan and manage behaviors simultaneously. Like a relapse, she was losing control and confidence in her teaching decisions, becoming increasingly frustrated, and isolating herself.

Based on my experience with Cognitive Coaching, facilitating Ms. Z's thinking would be the most powerful strategy I could offer. Otherwise, it would be too easy for her to always seek me out when she was faced with challenges.

### **Just Tell Me What to Do**

“I wish you would just tell me what to do instead of having me reflect on what I'm actually saying. You've clearly been

teaching a long time and have the answers. I know coaching helps me when we conference, but we could get to the solution much quicker if you would just tell me what to do.”

In Cognitive Coaching, “if there is no paraphrase, there is no thought,” and one thing I knew was that, if Ms. Z did not feel heard, we would be reliving the same experience each time we conferenced. I wished I could take away the anxieties and frustrations she was experiencing. I also wished I could ease the stress she was experiencing every day, and help her understand that teaching is not about perfection, it is about progress. “Your decision to teach is making a significant difference,” I wanted to tell her. “I wish you could believe in your abilities like I believe in you.”

### **Have I Made a Difference?**

“Teaching feels like a roller coaster,” said Ms. Z as she burst into my office, wanting to share her students' test results, excited that they would be transitioning out of her class into the more advanced class. “You're not going to believe this, but Jacob improved the most out of this class and will be moving to the next level. He's excited about doing so well; I'm very proud of him!”

“So, you're feeling proud of this accomplishment?”

“Yes, but...” she replied. “On one hand, I'm feeling proud of my students' improvements but, on the other hand, I'm feeling sad because my students, especially Jacob, helped me grow in so many different ways. I'm glad Jacob never left my class because when you asked the question, ‘Where should Jacob go to be successful, if not your class?’ I realized he deserved to be in my class, and the way I managed his behavior



needed to be different because he was unique. Your mentoring empowered me to believe in myself when I was feeling tired and overwhelmed. I really wanted to quit.”

“You’re feeling relieved?”

“Yes, I feel at peace knowing I’m doing the best I can every day and, while I may not always have the best days, neither do my students. I want to be an example of how to persevere when situations are difficult. Like you always say, ‘Things don’t happen to you; they happen for you.’”

### Once Your Mentor, Always Your Mentor

When I became Ms. Z’s mentor, she was reluctant to commit to a new teacher program for two years, saying, “I don’t have problems with classroom management. I’m not sure how you can support me ... maybe you can help me make copies.” Four years

later, she regularly seeks me out for support, having said, “I know you are helping new teachers, but I’m still encountering new students, curriculum, and situations. Does that count?”

Mentoring provides a safe space for new teachers to share their fears, doubts, and concerns without judgment. Districts with no established mentoring program may have misconceptions from stakeholders that all teachers are prepared and understand what to expect in teaching. When schools invest in teacher mentoring programs, they are investing in not a one-time orientation event, but an onboarding experience that continuously provides teachers with professional development and on-the-job training that results in happier teachers, effective instruction and, most important, student achievement. ➤

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### Reflection Questions

1. When and where else does a teacher have an opportunity to reflect?
2. How effective are teachers who are not supported by a mentor?
3. How do unsupported teachers’ training or lack of training impact student achievement?



Elizabeth Sanchez Sgrillo is a full release mentor and a secondary career and technical education certified teacher in the Tolleson Union High School District. She supports new teachers with less than two years of experience in the district, school, and profession. She began her teaching career for Tolleson Union High School 20 years ago and is in her seventh year of mentoring. Elizabeth is also a high school graduate of Tolleson Union High School.



# The Invisible Work of Mentorship: Relationship Building, Establishing Trust, and Shifting Biased Mindsets

by Jesse Delgado

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**Abstract:** Investing in mentoring opportunities impacts students, teachers, and educational stakeholders. The professional development I received as a mentor has provided me with the skill set and tools to build relationships, influence a teacher's thinking, and develop teacher leaders within my district.

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As educators, one of the biggest things we value is time. Often we say, "Why do we have to go to this PD?," "How does this impact me?," or even, "Why do I have to attend another professional development on something that I already know?" How would your experience be if the professional development you received dug deeper into your content and allowed you time to explore and apply your new learning? Perhaps it would be a game changer for you to gain new skills and perspectives, and discover a completely new lens to view teaching through.

As I reflect on my time outside the classroom as an exceptional student services mentor, I often think about the professional development trainings that have impacted my own reflective thinking, practices, and overall perspectives in education. The professional development available to me focused on my work and was very intriguing. Before I accepted my new role as a mentor, I never even knew of the support that existed outside my district for professional development. When I discovered the Arizona K12 Center, an educational organization that provides professional development in multiple

content areas and subjects, my educational lens completely changed. Workshops that specifically focused on mentoring teachers were aligned to what the mentors within my team would be doing day to day. Arizona K12 Center opportunities that supported mentors in my district were Cognitive Coaching, Mentor Forums, and Arizona New Teacher Induction Network. These series of professional development trainings allowed my team to role-play school scenarios, reflect with colleagues, and create systems that support teacher growth.

Often times, I wonder what I would sound like or look like without the skills I have acquired through effective professional development trainings that impact mentoring and teacher learning. I know that I certainly would not have the same mindset as I do today and would feel unequipped to support an educator's teaching and learning. Surely I could show them how to operate a school's computer program or even provide them with resources that affect their classroom, however, as a mentor, I have experienced that the most challenging and empowering thing about mentoring is shifting a teacher's biased mindset. Intentional and

specific professional development has allowed me to mentor through an equity lens, raise awareness, break down barriers within my own biases, and use mentor tools and training to support and accelerate teachers' practices.

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***“With the use and support of the New Teacher Center, I am more equipped with tools directly related to mentorship in order to prepare a teacher with planning equitable lessons, implementing learning strategies, or even to being a trusted listener.”***

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### **How I Applied My Learning From Professional Development**

Much like teaching, applying the newly acquired skills to a group of teachers is an art form. I remember when I first transitioned to the mentor position; I did not magically gain new skill sets with the job title. Rather, it was through a series of continuous specific and intentional professional development trainings over a period of time that allowed me to apply skills that directly and indirectly influence teachers' growth, mindset, and daily teaching practices. For example, implementing Cognitive Coaching strategies has allowed me to provide reflective and nonjudgmental feedback to teachers. As teachers share and reflect on their teaching practice, one typically will ask, “How did I do?” or say, “I don't know what to do to support my students.” With the professional development training

offered through the Arizona K12 Center, I am able to support teachers through reflective prompts like, “What decisions have you made that contributed to success?” or, “What do you want to be mindful of as you prepare your upcoming lesson?” These reflective questioning prompts have guided my practice supporting teachers in their growth.

Looking back at myself as a classroom teacher, I was less aware of how my body language and nonverbal cues delivered messages. It was not until I received specific training on communication skills that I recognized how valuable that form of communication was. In my experience, I have found that ‘listening to comprehend’ instead of ‘listening to respond’ has allowed teachers to fully share their own thoughts and experiences uninterrupted and without judgment. When sharing feedback or strategies with others, my first thought is now to always be mindful of my own nonverbal cues, tone, and reflective language. With the use and support of the New Teacher Center, I am more equipped with tools directly related to mentorship in order to prepare a teacher with planning equitable lessons, implementing learning strategies, or even to being a trusted listener. Teachers often share with me that they simply want someone to ‘listen’ to their thoughts or feelings. Sometimes, not saying anything and listening to someone express their thinking can be a powerful tool in and of itself. As a mentor, I found that building trust with someone leads to a foundation of positive rapport. As that foundation of trust and rapport continues to build, teachers and mentors are able to form positive relationships that can build teachers capacity. In education, we usually hear the term ‘evaluation’ tied to overall classroom performance. In mentorship or

coaching, how can we evaluate the things that we cannot tangibly see on paper but know have been built, such as trust, rapport, and relationship building? These seem to hold value not only in our role as teachers, but as individuals. I like to think of this as the ‘invisible’ work of a mentor ... something that may not necessarily be in the job description, but can transform beginning teachers to experienced teachers, and experienced teachers into teacher leaders!

### Impact on Teachers and Students

It seems that the work of a mentor or coach can never be complete. I like to think of that work as continuous and fluid. Colleagues often ask me, “Would you rather teach students or teachers?” While I have never had a definitive answer for that question, I have come to realize that mentoring adult learners comes with its own set of challenges. As a third-year mentor, I continue to directly and indirectly recognize teachers’ biases that negatively impact student learning. During conferences or casual conversations with teachers, I have observed teachers make negative generalizations about students with exceptionalities. Hearing a teacher say “They are special education; they are never going to pass anyway,” or “He/she is SPED,” is always difficult to hear in general, however, it is more disappointing when it is from someone that you work with every day. This type of closed mindset or biased thinking could easily be ignored or encouraged by responding with the same type of generalized language or thinking. In fact, I have found it takes a lot of courage to initially correct the thinking or language of a colleague who I highly respect not only as an educator, but as a person. As a mentor, responding to teachers with this type of mindset may sound like, “So, a belief that you hold about students with

exceptionalities is that motivation seems to be a challenge. What are some assets that your students with individualized education programs (IEPs) bring to your classroom?” Shifting the mindset of this type of thinking begins with the language that is commonly used among educators. Undoubtedly, these conversations can be uncomfortable at times. However, I can say with certainty that these types of conversations are easier to navigate with effective professional development that supports mentors with tools and strategies for teachers that ultimately impact students. As mentors or coaches, it is said that we, ‘wear many hats.’ With that said, if the hats keep changing, how can the work of a mentor ever be complete?

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***“The support of educational organizations that provide effective professional development can keep mentor teams aligned to district missions and goals.”***

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While it may be unclear to some of our own community stakeholders about the job of a mentor, the work often goes beyond the classroom. The professional development that is invested in mentorship and coaching is invaluable. As mentors and coaches receive valuable professional development, they, in turn, create professional development that is intentional and meaningful for beginning teachers in induction programs. As teachers build capacity, they create a foundation of confidence that can be empowering. When teachers feel empowered, students feel empowered, thus, creating a positive school culture. While building trust and

rapport, shifting teacher mindsets, breaking down biases, influencing teachers' reflective thinking, and building relationships may not necessarily be on the job description or visible to some, they are all key components of the day-to-day operations of a mentor. The support of educational organizations that

provide effective professional development can keep mentor teams aligned to district missions and goals. I invite you as a learner, leader, and educator to discover new trainings that will impact not only your practice, but teachers and students. ➤

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## Reflection Questions

1. What professional development opportunities has your team discovered outside your district?
2. How would you address negatively biased mindsets with colleagues?
3. What do you want to be mindful of when delivering professional development to other educational stakeholders?



Jesse Delgado earned an associate degree at Glendale Community College in 2006 and a Bachelor of Arts degree in cross-categorical special education from Arizona State University in 2008. He is dual certified to teach elementary education and K–12 special education. Through his role as a resource teacher and co-teacher, he has kindergarten through 12th grade classroom experience teaching students with disabilities. Currently, he serves in the Tolleson Union High School District as the special education mentor, supporting first- and second-year teachers to accelerate their pedagogical practices while building trusting and positive relationships. In addition to facilitating professional development at TUHSD, Jesse serves on the Arizona K12 Center's Arizona TeacherSolutions® Team and focuses on identifying and breaking down inequitable barriers that challenge both today's and tomorrow's learners.



# Supporting the Mentor

by Kathleen Paulsen

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**Abstract:** If the primary role of a mentor is to impact student learning, continued professional development needs to be provided to ensure that issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion are part of the mentor conversation. This case study shares the changes that can happen when a mentor is provided opportunities to see their influence. The experience changes for teachers and students when mentors continue to grow in their practice.

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For five years, I worked as an instructional coach at one site in my district. Since that school did not have what is considered a high teacher turnover rate, my work as a coach felt successful due to the fact that I had established relationships with all the teachers. Coaching cycles happened frequently and feedback was always provided for next steps. In those five years, I felt valued by the staff and my principal. In the 2018–2019 school year, I decided to move into the role of district mentor, focusing my work with only first-year teachers. This full release position allowed me to work with teachers pre-K to 8 on all campuses in our district. Surprisingly, I did not have hesitations entering this new position. I had already been an instructional coach, and I worked as a part-time mentor for teachers who were new to the district. Even though my responsibilities were only part-time, I did think the mentoring training I received was enough. I also knew that my success as an instructional coach would help me transition to this new position.

In my first year as a full release mentor, I had 15 teachers on my caseload that ranged from pre-K to 8th grade in a variety of

content areas. I had a general yearlong plan for each teacher that provided structure and checkpoints to ensure that everyone made progress. When I began coaching cycles with the teachers, I quickly realized that beginning teachers required specialized support. Classroom management, lesson planning with standards alignment, and data analysis was not only the focus, but it required me to fully know each teacher and their own level of understanding with these areas. I found myself engaged in conversations at a simplistic level. I was worried about getting structure in place so that teachers could plan, deliver their lesson, and provide appropriate assessments. I did not use the word ‘equity’ in any of my conversations that year. In my mind, it was part of advanced learning that could take place after the basics of teaching were mastered.

At the end of the school year, I had several opportunities to reflect with my induction program leader. Each time we met, she provided guiding questions that allowed me to reflect on the year. Some of the questions she posed were: “How did you build trust and rapport with the new teachers on

your caseload? How do you know that the teachers were successful this year? What was your influence on their practice?"

These questions stayed with me and offered a reflection opportunity where I could make a change in my approach to mentoring. There were two experiences that I was fortunate to take part in during that year that provided a new perspective.

### Coaching Light vs. Coaching Heavy

My program leader believes in providing continued support and new learning to coaches and mentors in our district. During one professional learning day, she shared a chapter from the book *Coaching: Approaches & Perspectives* by Jim Knight, featuring Joellen Killion's work. It was a chapter that shared the ideas of coaching light versus coaching heavy. The author detailed the differences between the two approaches and emphasized that when we coach heavy, we move past what coaches do and move into beliefs. The collaborative discourse around this topic shaped my thinking about next steps. Even though my beliefs about equity continued to surface throughout the school year as I worked with these teachers, I did not address it because I made the judgment that it was something that could wait. I separated issues of equity from support with basic skills about content knowledge and pedagogy because, up until that point, I did not see just how much influence I had on their practice. I've come to realize that mentoring includes offering new perspectives, helping to shape beliefs, and providing teachers with the time and space to build from shared commitments to students. Over the years, my focus was on being valued. I worked to build and maintain relationships with the idea that I was there to support the teacher. I began my conversations with questions like, "How

are you doing? What can I do for you?" This professional learning about coaching heavy has changed my thinking in that it is not about being valued. It is more about being needed. My purpose as a mentor is to improve teaching and learning by focusing on the students. The conversations needed to begin with, "Tell me about your students. After analyzing their last assessment, what did you realize about student performance? What might some of our next steps be?" The shift in approach puts the students at the center of the work and establishes that mentoring is an important component of supporting student learning.

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***"I wanted to build the capacity of teachers to not only identify issues of equity in the classroom, but also engage in collaborative dialogue about effective changes based on evidence."***

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Going into my second year as a full release mentor, I wanted to put myself in a position of change. I realized that equity conversations needed to happen, but I needed entry points into those conversations. Having a well-thought-out approach could make the difference in the outcome of those difficult conversations. So, as I entered the 2019–2020 school year, I had two goals in mind. First, I wanted to ensure that equity was at the forefront of my mentoring conversations. Second, I wanted to build the capacity of teachers to not only identify issues of equity in the classroom, but also engage in collaborative dialogue about effective changes based on evidence. At the beginning of this school year, I chose one mentee to use as a case study to see if my new thinking would make a difference.

## Instructional Rounds

Mrs. J, a primary-level teacher, was who I chose as my case study teacher. During our first official mentor meeting, I shared with her my new protocol for observing classrooms. This observational protocol is the biggest change to my approach to mentoring for this school year and comes from a learning process for school improvement. My induction program leader and the Arizona K12 Center staff know the value of continued professional learning and supported me in attending an intensive training for Instructional Rounds. At the time of this training, I learned how this process supports schools and districts, but I was not aware of the connection it could have to individual teacher mentoring and equity. Keeping in mind my two goals, I decided to use the observational protocol for this process to support my work with my case study teacher. While traditional classroom observations take in the overall learning environment, the focus is usually about the teacher and their practice. The data collected and shared with the new teacher often centers around best practice strategies, behavior management, and curriculum implementation. Instructional Rounds focuses on the task. The ‘task’ is defined as what students are actually doing during the lesson versus what you as the teacher planned or assigned. This means that it is the task that actually predicts performance and not what you hoped the students would learn during that lesson. After my first observation in Mrs. J’s classroom, we met to discuss the lesson. The questions she asked as we sat down were, “How did I do? Was it good?”

As I reflect back on our time this year, I realize Mrs. J and I have both changed. Our conversations now focus on students, as opposed to her performance during the

lesson. She regularly asks, “What data did you collect about my students? Did our planning for the subgroups make a difference?” These questions show her shift in thinking. She knows that changes to her practice come from examining the students and their work within the classroom. Mrs. J is now prepared to continue this work without me.

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*“I am no longer satisfied with just reflecting on my practice but, rather, am looking for changes that continually shift me and those around me into a stance where we focus on student learning and the systems that support them.”*

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As a mentor, I must intervene and work to influence all new teachers in their beliefs about students. By addressing matters of equity up front, we build the capacity of teachers to take on the work themselves, help them improve their practice and the experience for the students, and create a sustainable system that can be mirrored in all classrooms, not just the classrooms of our newest teachers. I realize that I have become increasingly aware of the beliefs that move me into action. I am no longer satisfied with just reflecting on my practice but, rather, am looking for changes that continually shift me and those around me into a stance where we focus on student learning and the systems that support them. I am fortunate to be in a system that believes in continued learning. The professional development opportunity offered by my program leader created the discomfort that I needed to recognize



my own misconception about my role. It helped me acknowledge that my mindset about mentoring and my influence needed to change. The professional development with Instructional Rounds gave me an entry point into my conversations about equity. Using the observational protocol to collect data provided me a different way of

talking about the classroom. I was able to make conversations about equity the norm in every meeting. This new learning not only offered me the confidence and new skills needed to work with my mentees, it also changed my perspective about my influence as one mentor. ➤

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### Reflection Questions

1. How do you support your mentors in seeing their influence?
2. What kind of mentoring approach do you promote in your program?
3. Does your program provide its mentors opportunities with new learning on issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion as they relate to standards-based, scaffolded instruction with teachers?



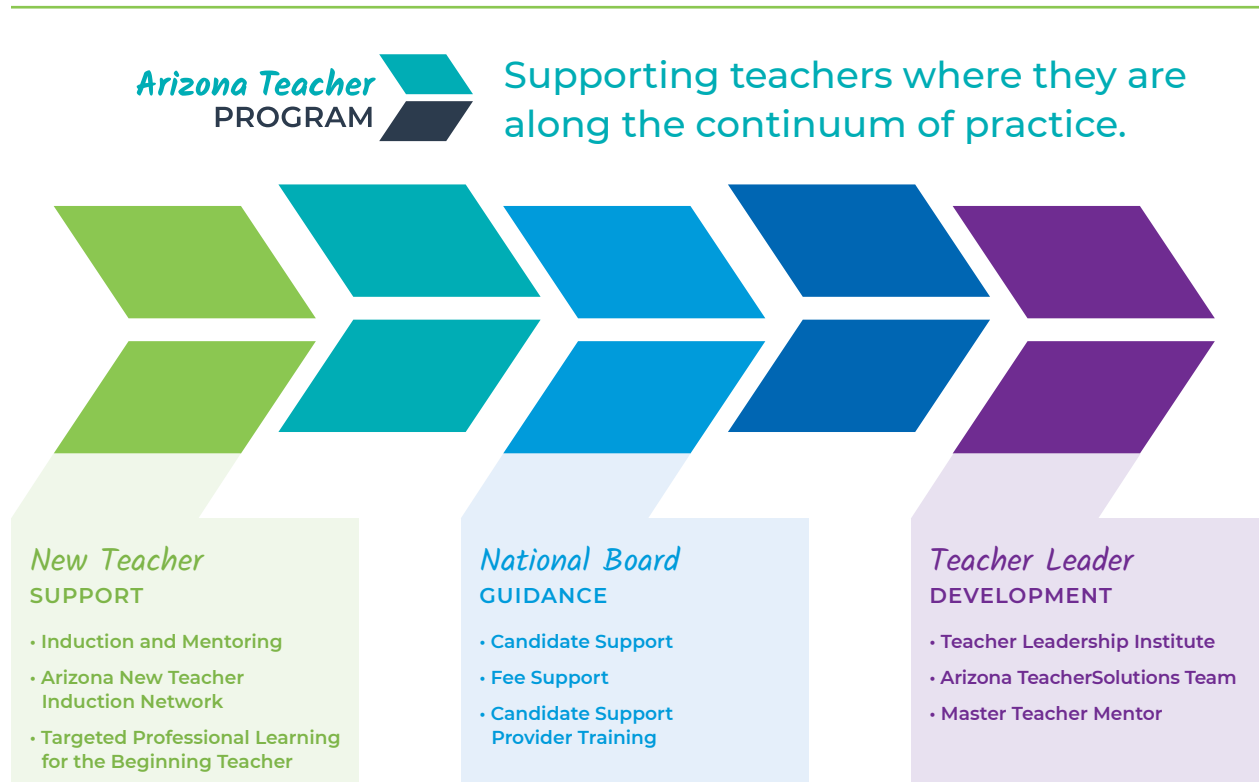
Kathleen Paulsen currently works with first-year teachers in K–8th grade in the Balsz School District. She has previously worked as an instructional coach, a kindergarten teacher, and a second-grade teacher. This is her 13th year in education and fifth year as a mentor. She is also a National Board Certified Teacher in reading-language arts in early and middle childhood.

## About the Arizona K12 Center

Founded in 1999, the Arizona K12 Center supports Arizona teachers with rich and relevant learning opportunities. With the practitioner standing at the intersection of theory and practice, the Arizona K12 Center develops and facilitates leading professional learning solutions for our classrooms today. The Center is home to the Arizona Teacher Program that supports teachers wherever they are along the continuum of practice and is renowned for its comprehensive system of support for those seeking National Board Certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

## About the Arizona Teacher Program

The Arizona Teacher Program supports teachers across the continuum of practice, building capacity for teacher leadership while providing support to the newest members of the teaching profession. For novice teachers, the program provides a robust system of induction support that includes mentoring and targeted professional learning opportunities. For their mentors, it includes connection to the Arizona New Teacher Induction Network and opportunities to hone their skills as a mentor or coach. The program provides support to those who seek National Board Certification and teacher leadership development opportunities through the Arizona TeacherSolutions® Team and annual Teacher Leadership Institute. The Arizona Teacher Program builds on the premise that the success of Arizona's students is directly tied to the success of their teachers, and it is through this program that Arizona teachers can advance their skills.



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the 12 Arizona educators who shared pieces of their journey in this collection of case studies. Their work inspires us, and we are grateful for their time, reflection, and willingness to share. We can only advance the profession when others are willing to make their practice public.

Thank you also to Emily Davis, Tia Frahm, Tomasita Villareal-Carman, and Anne Watkins for their willingness to be thought partners and guides in this work. Their expertise and insight provided direction to this work. Working alongside us, they took an idea and helped us put it into motion.

We are able to advance our work when others are willing to share theirs. To that end, we would like to thank Nasue Nishida and our friends at the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession. Their work in elevating teacher voices in the development of case studies served as the impetus for this work. We appreciate their willingness to be a thought partner in the advancement of this teacher leadership work.

When we all work together, we make a stronger profession where all of our students are the ultimate beneficiaries.

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*“Mentoring provides a safe space for new teachers to share their fears, doubts, and concerns without judgment.”*

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Elizabeth Sanchez Sgrillo, Tolleson Union High School District

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***“Every new teacher  
enters a classroom  
with unlimited potential  
to impact students.”***

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Ginny Sautner, Lake Havasu Unified School District

Learn more about induction and  
mentoring at **AZK12.ORG**

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