Why do we need to mentor beginning teachers?

Given that teachers are consistently cited as the most significant factor influencing student outcomes, supporting beginning teachers at the earliest point in their career, to reflect upon their teaching and question their practice, is critical. Mentors play a key role in supporting beginning teachers to become active agents in analysing and improving their own practice and in doing so develop their identity as teachers.

“Mentors are transformative change agents who bring clarity, voice, compassion, attitude and direction to the beginning teacher. Mentors are transparent in their practice so that beginning teachers are able to connect theory to practice and make these connections in their classroom.” (Moir et al, 2010)

Mentoring is a reciprocal professional relationship which not only helps to improve the professional practice of new teachers, but also aids more experienced teachers to gain fresh perspectives and learn about current educational approaches.

What is the Teacher Mentor Support Program?

The Teacher Mentor Support Program is a joint initiative run in partnership between DEECD and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).

The program is run as 2 x 1 day workshops which enable participants to develop a deep understanding of the skills needed to mentor teachers new to the profession. Activities allow participants, in their role as mentors, to explore how they can support beginning teachers to improve their teaching practice. A natural outcome of effective mentoring is the attainment of full VIT registration.

Who should take part in the Teacher Mentor Support Program?

Teachers who have not yet attended the program and who are eager to share their expertise in classroom practice and passion for teaching can participate. Leadership team members are also welcome to attend.

When and where do the programs take place?

Day 1 programs will be conducted across the state in February and March 2011. Day 2 programs will be held in May 2011. Teachers register online via the VIT website www.vit.vic.edu.au.
Is mentoring the same as induction?

Mentoring is not induction. Induction is one of the earliest stages within the continuum of teacher professional learning and is focused on supporting new staff to become a part of a community of learners. Mentoring is a central feature of successful teacher induction and offers more structured individualised support to beginning teachers.

What do beginning teachers need?

Beginning teachers need:

- to feel that they are supported and embraced within a professional learning community
- to be matched with a mentor who can support their development of classroom practice and provide constructive feedback that supports professional reflective dialogue
- common time to formally meet and work with a mentor
- opportunities to share teaching practice through peer observation of self and others and through professional conversations
- regular and effective communication with and support from the principal.

Do new teachers who have had a previous career need a mentor?

All teachers new to the profession require a mentor regardless of their previous work experiences. Although previous career experience allows for the development of different skills, individuals still need to be supported to develop their professional practice as teachers in the same way as those with no previous career experience.

Who will make a good mentor?

Fundamentally, the people who become mentors need to display evidence of outstanding teaching practice, be good role models who have the respect of their colleagues and be held in good regard for their professional and personal attributes.

Successful mentors generally possess many of the qualities listed below as well as other valuable qualities that are unique to them as individuals:

- people oriented and enjoy working with other professionals
- good listeners and respectful of their colleagues
- possess good questioning techniques that elicit fresh insights about teacher practice
- sensitive to the needs and feelings of others
- willing to contribute to the professional development of others and share what they know
- confident and secure in their knowledge of teaching and make an effort to remain current in their knowledge of teaching theory and practice.

Who do I contact for more information?

For more information about the Teacher Mentor Support Program or the Induction and Mentoring for Beginning Teachers Initiative, please contact Shavaun Thomson, Senior Project Officer, School Improvement Division on 9637 3716.

Top Ten Tips for Effective Mentoring

1. Mentors need a good understanding of what mentoring is. Programs like the Teacher Mentor Support Program are necessary in order to develop this understanding.
2. Begin the mentoring relationship with a dedicated session clarifying the roles and purpose of the mentoring relationship.
3. The mentoring pair should set up the parameters or ‘ground rules’ of the relationship together from the outset. Ensure there are clear and shared standards and goals.
4. Make sure there are agreed meeting times scheduled on a regular basis.
5. The choice of mentor should take into account the same year level or subject area, physical proximity and competency.
6. The focus of the mentoring relationship should be teacher practice in response to student needs. Use the eInstructional Model to deepen understanding about teacher practice.
7. Provide opportunities to team-teach, shadow and observe, learn from and with others. The opportunity to build reflective practice is invaluable.
8. Keep discussions confidential. This is essential for developing mutual trust and will ensure that beginning teachers are comfortable sharing their ideas or concerns.
9. Resist the urge to jump in and act or make decisions for the beginning teacher. Stop, listen and ask probing questions.
10. Share your professional network. Introduce your beginning teacher to other individuals who may be valuable resources or future collaborators.