

A guide to training mentors

In partnership with



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foreword

People are mentors, not because they think they have so much to give or teach, but because they know they have so much to learn.

P. David Pearson

This guide is designed to support the development of mentor teachers in their important role of mentoring beginning teachers. It is a guide rather than an instruction manual because it assumes that you, the reader, are an accomplished teacher with a broad range of tried and tested teaching strategies combined with a well-developed understanding of the subjects you teach. It assumes that you already work well with colleagues and now want to further develop or deepen your skills and capacity to mentor less experienced colleagues (i.e., beginning teachers).

The people who serve as mentors are the foundation of any mentoring system. The act of teaching is hard — that's why most Induction programmes, and specifically the mentoring, for new teachers focus on skill-related goals, such as improving instructional delivery and applying feedback. But the ins and outs of being a teacher are hard too. Becoming a teacher can come with emotional challenges. New teachers want assurance that the professional and personal challenges they are experiencing are normal. Supporting new teachers needs to be more than just sharing information, providing instruction, coaching and designing professional development. It also needs to come in the forms of empathy, perspective and advice. When mentors work on professional growth goals without probing a teacher's mindset or emotional health, skill development can become distracting, stressful and even counterproductive.

We would like to thank you for undertaking this journey with your mentee.



Introduction

The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.

Steven Spielberg

The terms **mentoring, modeling, and coaching** are frequently used interchangeably by educators. While there are overlaps in meaning among these terms, there are significant differences in concept. **Modeling** is the process of serving as a model. One of the functions of a mentor is to be a positive role model. In the context of teaching, **coaching**, frequently referred to as peer coaching, is the assistance that one teacher provides to another in the development of teaching skills, strategies, or techniques generally within a formal three-part structure: preparation, lesson observation, and reflecting/debriefing. In doing classroom observation in mentoring, the coaching structure is commonly used to structure the classroom observation by the mentor. Coaching by the mentor may also become an essential activity if this type of support is needed by the beginning teacher.

Mentoring is the process of serving as a mentor, someone who facilitates and assists another's development. The process includes modeling because the mentor must be able to model the messages and suggestions being taught to the beginning teacher. Also, as indicated, the mentor must be able to serve as a model of the teacher's role in education. The mentoring process includes coaching as an instructional technique used in apprenticeship at the work place. In addition, it includes "cognitive coaching," a term gaining wider familiarity in education. To be effective, the mentor must be able to demonstrate a range of cognitive coaching competencies, such as posing carefully constructed questions to stimulate reflection, paraphrasing, probing, using wait-time, and collecting and using data to improve teaching and learning. Mentoring, like coaching, is a collaborative process.

This quick-reference guide addresses core aspects that mentor teachers should have in their mentoring toolbox!

Each section begins with framing questions. The purpose of the framing questions is to review what is already known about the topic while receiving an introduction to new ideas.



Mentoring Experiences

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- What will be expected of me as a mentor teacher?
- How will we schedule our time?
- What can be included in an orientation guide?



Time allocation

The Induction Programme has been designed to give beginning teachers structured support in their first 12 months of teaching. Mentor teachers and beginning teachers will follow a weekly guided programme which includes a wide range of education topics and practical activities. Beginning teachers will be expected to keep up a portfolio of evidence, take part in weekly mentor support sessions and regular continuous professional development.

Activity	Time allocation
Support sessions with beginning teacher	1 hour per week
Peer support activities (classroom observation, etc)	2 hours per month



Often mentor teachers are unaware of the need for preparation prior to the arrival of a beginning teacher. One tool mentor teachers can develop in advance of beginning teachers' arrival is an **Orientation Guide** (a few pages). The purpose of the Orientation Guide is to quickly communicate expectations and key elements of the classroom context to the beginning teacher. Some aspects can include:

- ▶ Parking and arrival
- ▶ Dress code
- ▶ Absences
- ▶ Cell phone use
- ▶ Pertinent school policies
- ▶ Use of copying machines
- ▶ Daily schedule, etc.



Needs of Beginning Teachers

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- What does the beginning teacher look like?
- What needs might the beginning teacher have?



Beginning teachers can be overwhelmed by the initiation to teaching and require timely assistance. They need the following:

To receive just-in-time learning rather than just-in-case learning

What do I need to learn, know and practise now rather than later?
What do I need to know about the first staff meeting, the first report cards and parent/learner/teacher meetings?

To be given information and allowed to ask questions

Beginning teachers often do not know what questions to ask and need to be directed to take appropriate actions.

To be accepted

Beginning teachers often move into communities and schools in unfamiliar areas. These new teachers need to be welcomed and valued as contributing members of the school and the community.

To be valued

Beginning teachers come to the profession with a wealth of new knowledge and skills and should be acknowledged and appreciated for the fresh outlook that they bring to the profession.

To be treated as colleagues

Beginning teachers are active members of the profession and deserve to be treated as valued colleagues.

To be valued

How can mentors assist new teachers to grow as professionals in a timely fashion?



Stages of Beginning Teachers

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- What stages might the beginning teacher go through during the first year?
- How can I support the beginning teacher during these stages?
- What support should be provided and when?

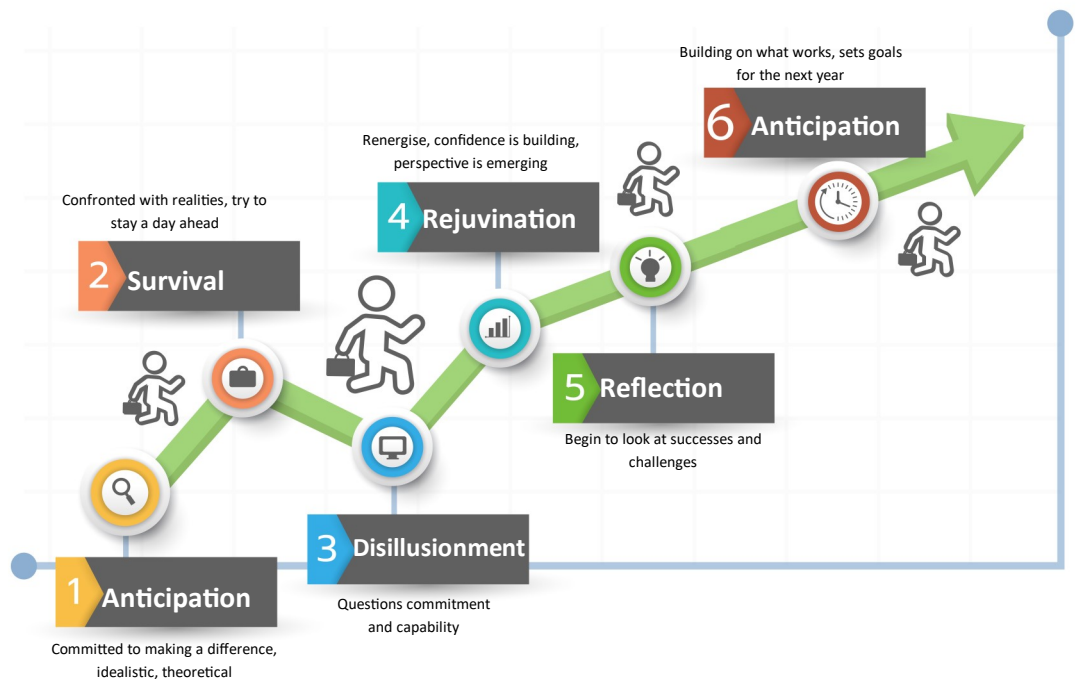


The first year of teaching can feel like riding a roller coaster!

It will be a series of up and downs, of successes and challenges.

When beginning teachers are not supported through mentoring, they confront the complex realities of the classroom and go through an emotional cycle. Research suggests that even when teachers stay in the teaching profession, their focus on their

own survival may lead them to develop teaching strategies that are teacher-centered rather than learner-centered. When beginning teachers are well-supported, their experience is much more positive. They will still struggle as they grow from their experiences; however, research shows they will become more effective teachers because they feel more successful and self-confident. Greater numbers of beginning teachers will stay in the profession and most will stay enthusiastic and learner-centered in their teaching strategies. Although not every beginning teacher will go through this exact sequence, it is helpful to understand these stages as a framework from which to provide needed type and timing of support.



1

Anticipation

Begins prior to the beginning of the school year. New teachers enter with a commitment to making a difference and a somewhat idealistic view of how to accomplish their goals. It is this feeling of excitement carries them through the first weeks of school.

I was elated to get the job but terrified about going from the simulated experience of student teaching to being the person completely in charge.

3

Survival

Most new teachers struggle to keep their heads above water. They become very focused and consumed with the day-to-day routine of teaching. There is little time to stop and reflect on their experiences. Although tired and surprised by the amount of work, beginning teachers usually maintain energy and commitment during this phase, hoping that soon the tumult will decrease.

I thought there would be more time to get everything done. It's like working three jobs: 7:30-2:30, 2:30-6:00, with more time spent in the evening and on weekends.

2

Disillusionment

After weeks of nonstop work and stress, new teachers begin questioning both their commitment and their competence, and many new teachers get sick during this phase. Important milestones are also occurring: parent meetings, first formal assessments. New teachers express self-doubt and lower self-esteem, and complaints from family and friends about lack of availability are expressed. Getting through this phase may be the toughest challenge they face as a new teacher.

I thought I'd be focusing more on curriculum and less on classroom management and discipline. I'm stressed because I have some very problematic learners who are not progressing as they should, and I think about them every second my eyes are open.

4

Rejuvenation

In the rejuvenation phase there is a slow rise in the new teacher's attitude toward teaching. A better understanding of the system and an acceptance of the realities of teaching help beginning teachers to gain new coping strategies and skills to prevent, reduce, and manage many of the problems they are likely to encounter in the second half of the year. Many feel a sense of relief for having made it through the first part of the year.

I'm really excited about my reading corner, although the organization of it has at times been haphazard. I can do this!

5

Reflection

Reflecting back over the year, beginning teachers highlight events that were successful and those that were not. They think of the changes that they plan to make the following year in management, curriculum, and teaching strategies. A vision emerges as to what their second year will look like, which brings them to a new phase of anticipation.

I think that for next year I'd like to differentiate more and provide the learners with a variety of texts. I am excited about next year!



Characteristics of a Mentor

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- What characteristics should mentor teachers have?
- How will I do as a mentor teacher?
- What support do I need?
- Where can I get this support?



Mentors are an important part of personal and professional development. They are guides through times when people need someone that is able to point them in the right direction. Good mentors are enthusiastic people, enjoying the role they play in helping others achieve their goals. They also show the following characteristics:

Attitude and Character	Communication Skills	Professional Competence and Experience	Interpersonal Skills
<p>Willing to be a role model for other teachers</p> <p>Exhibits strong commitment to the teaching profession</p> <p>Believes mentoring improves instructional practice</p> <p>Willing to advocate on behalf of colleagues</p> <p>Willing to receive training to improve mentoring skills</p> <p>Demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning</p> <p>Is reflective and able to learn from mistakes</p> <p>Is eager to share information and ideas with colleagues</p> <p>Is resilient, flexible, persistent, and open-minded</p> <p>Exhibits good humour and resourcefulness</p>	<p>Is able to articulate effective instructional strategies</p> <p>Listens attentively</p> <p>Asks questions that prompt reflection and understanding</p> <p>Offers critiques in positive and productive ways</p> <p>Uses email effectively</p> <p>Is efficient in use of time</p> <p>Conveys enthusiasm, passion for teaching</p> <p>Is discreet and maintains confidentiality</p>	<p>Is regarded by colleagues as an outstanding teacher</p> <p>Has excellent knowledge of pedagogy and subject matter</p> <p>Has confidence in his/her own instructional skills</p> <p>Demonstrates excellent classroom management skills</p> <p>Feels comfortable being observed by other teachers</p> <p>Maintains a network of professional contacts</p> <p>Understands the policies and procedures of the school district, and teacher associations</p> <p>Is a meticulous observer of classroom practice</p> <p>Collaborates well with other teachers and administrators</p>	<p>Is able to maintain a trusting professional relationship</p> <p>Knows how to express care for a beginning teacher's emotional and professional needs</p> <p>Works well with individuals from different cultures</p> <p>Is approachable; easily establishes rapport with others</p> <p>Is patient</p>



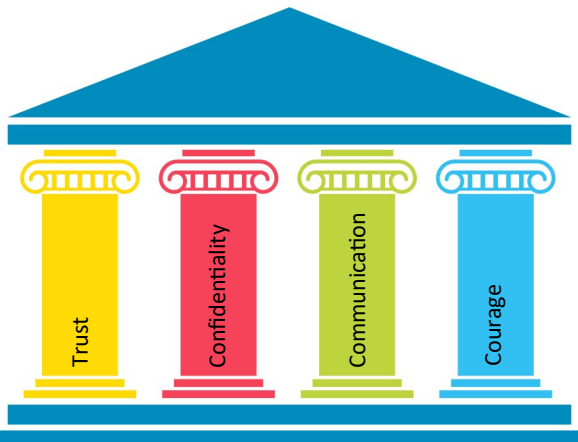
Establish a Mentor Relationship

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- What is your philosophy of teaching?
- How do you build relationships with colleagues?



The four pillars of a productive mentoring relationship



Every interaction with your mentor/mentee presents an opportunity to either build or erode the mentoring relationship. A productive mentoring relationship is supported by four pillars: trust, confidentiality, communication and courage (cf. Figure 5)

NOTES



Pillar 1: Trust

Actions you can take

Be open to discussing the following with your mentor at the onset of the relationship:

- Personal and professional background
- Thoughts about the mentorship initiative
- Confirm expectations/measures of success

Collaboratively develop the mentoring relationship

Use self-disclosure; share your personal thoughts:

- "I personally feel..."
- "What I don't like ..."

How to build

- Use plain-speaking, straight talk
- Be honest and open
- Demonstrate respect in all interactions
- Practice accountability; do not blame others when something does not happen as discussed
- Be transparent and consistent; "what you see is what you get"
- Be flexible and accessible
- Keep commitments, as commitments build hope; delivering on hope builds trust
- Base feedback on first-hand observation, whenever possible

How to build

- Agree on boundaries and do not cross them
- Before agreeing to be in a mentorship relationship, be candid about confidentiality principles and boundaries
- Clarify HR/Program Administrator's expectations about topics that should be reported
- Be open to sharing and discussion that isn't directly tied to your goals
- Demonstrate your belief in confidentiality by acting with integrity with all information that is confidential, regardless of the relationship

Pillar 2: Confidentiality

Actions you can take

Demonstrate your understanding of what is confidential by clarifying what "is and is off the record" at the conclusion of mentorship sessions

Seek your mentor's approval to share information with others

Immediately share if confidentiality has been inadvertently broken

Clarify when a topic seems to be headed in a direction where confidentiality may not be able to be protected

During conversations, ask for permission before taking notes

Pillar 3: Communication

Actions you can take

Prepare for one-on-one meetings:

- Identify 2 to 3 key discussion topics
- Review agreements from prior meetings

Apply active listening skills:

- Repeat back (paraphrase) what you heard
- Ask follow-up questions
- Share your point of view
- Ask for clarification/confirmation

Empathize with your mentor/mentee:

- Listen to understand versus protecting your position/opinion
- Express appreciation for meeting with you

How to build

- Be present and attentive to your mentor/mentee
- Be timely with your questions, thoughts, and opinions
- Look for the unspoken message
- Use non-verbal signals to invite dialogue and demonstrate that you are listening and understand (e.g., sitting forward, eye contact, nodding head)
- Provide thoughtful responses to your mentor's questions; avoid "yes/no" responses that close the door

How to build

- Mentees ask clarifying questions to understand your mentor's advice, suggestions, etc.
- Seek permission to provide feedback, remember that feedback is a gift and your mentor seeks development from this relationship, too
- Provide specific, actionable feedback to your mentor/mentee around the relationship, your needs, etc.



Pillar 4: Courage

Actions you can take

When faced with tough issues or challenges, ask yourself the following questions to ensure you face the situations with courage:

- "What could be a great outcome?"
- "What results do I hope to achieve?"
- "What is likely to happen if I do not address this issue?"
- "What makes this a difficult issue for me to address?"
- "Is the value of change greater than the pain to remain the same?"

Classroom Observation

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- What core aspects should you focus on during the key steps of observation (preparation, observation, self-assessment, and debriefing)?
- What tools can you use during each of these steps?



Classroom observation is a process whereby a mentor teacher participates as an observer in a lesson taught by the beginning teacher or vice versa for the purposes of exploring the learning and teaching process and environment and where this observation leads on to reflection and discussion, with the underpinning long-term aim of improving learners' learning. The development of effective classroom observational skills is vital for the mentor.

1 Preparation for observation

Preparation involves deciding the purpose, what will be observed and how it will happen? How long will it take? What will the role of the observer be? Will notes be taken during the observation or later? As part of a classroom observation, mentors can invite their beginning teacher into their own classroom to demonstrate and model a certain aspect of good teaching practice, or be invited into the beginning teacher's classroom as an observer. The purpose should be linked to building the skills and capacity of the beginning teacher.

2 Observation—collecting the data

Observation involves expectation, selective perception, interpretation and recall. As teachers, we are accomplished at observing our students with practised eyes, but we are less used to observing each other's teaching practice. 'Developing the discipline of noting and talking about evidence takes practice', according to Parker Boudett et al. (2005:104), who describe a principal who actively models the process of observation, calling it 'learning to see. I noticed that ... I saw that ... I heard that, followed by examples of what was seen and heard'. Instead of evaluation, learning to see teaching practice relies on description, which helps us to generate a shared understanding of the current reality in our classrooms. During the observation section, it should be made clear what the mentor teacher as well as the beginning teacher will be focusing on.

3 Preparation for observation

After the completion of the observation, and in preparation for the post-observation consultation (debriefing), the beginning teacher should engage in a process of self-assessment and reflection. The beginning teacher might reflect upon what they were thinking or feeling at key points in the lesson while performing certain tasks. The goal is to reconstruct and analyze one's teaching context and performance to identify teaching strengths and areas for improvement. Then, when the feedback is received from the mentor teacher, the beginning teacher can compare and contrast their self-assessment with the mentor's observation. Reflect on the following:

- What was challenging?
- What was surprising?
- What was a success?
- What would you do differently next time?
- Name one thing you will work on – Your action plan?



4

Discussing the observation and its meaning to assist in identifying ideas and strategies for effective teaching practice. Sharing observations respectfully is a means of building on the relationship. This is also an opportunity to practise listening empathically and presenting ideas clearly and specifically, without criticism and evaluation. The debriefing should be planned to happen as soon as possible after the observation and should be conducted face to face.



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Reflective Practice & Questioning

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Why is it important for you to reflect as a teacher?
- How can you “teach” this skill to beginning teachers?
- Why is it important to share your thinking with beginning teachers?



Reflective practice

Reflection, as a process of inquiry, is how mentors facilitate thought and growth, both for the new teachers and for themselves. To mentor is to meet colleagues where they are and explicitly support them in achieving the goals they set for themselves.

Reflection bears a strong relationship to the unique improvisational thinking teachers do on the spot while teaching: they use what they know about teaching to implement planned instruction in the classroom, and as they do this, they think about which strategies are and are not helping specific learners learn; and on the basis of that thinking, they continuously adjust their strategies until learning occurs. The practice of reflection formalizes this thinking. This practice can help teachers become more aware of their instructional thinking. Thus, teachers are asked to extend this formalized process by turning their skill with reflection on themselves to determine how to become more effective practitioners. The two outcomes are closely entwined: teachers refine their own planning and practice to promote the learning of learners.

Mentors support beginning teachers in thinking about teaching decisions by explicitly modeling their own reflections. By thinking aloud as they plan their own lessons, work through a challenging task, or interpret information they have collected about their learners' performance, mentors demonstrate the complex thinking that teaching requires and the kinds of reflective questions that experienced educators ask themselves. Mentors also support reflective practice by asking beginning teachers to look at information—to collect, examine, and interpret data about student learning and classroom participation—to ground their reflection in evidence. Analyzing data from classroom observations allows teachers to notice new aspects of their instructional practice and develop new understanding of what is or is not working in their classes.



The DISJ strategy for reflection

This section shows how the mentor teacher can foster beginning teacher thinking by asking them to describe, interpret, strategise and justify (DISJ) their teaching. Verbalising their thinking helps beginning teachers integrate their experiences into a more coherent view of teaching. This strategy draws from theories that describe development in beginning teacher thinking as moving from experiencing isolated incidents (describe), to interpreting patterns of behavior in particular contexts (interpret), to predicting behaviours and designing appropriate strategies (strategise), and then justifying those strategies theoretically (justify) (Korthagen, 2010).

Describe: Describe how you handled the situation

Interpret: What did you learn about teaching from this incident?

Strategise: How would you handle the same situation differently in the future?

Justify: What is your rationale for using these strategies?

Questioning

The **purposive guiding questions** presented below can be used by mentor teachers during the mentoring process.

The following types of questions can be used to facilitate reflection.

- 1. Knowledge questions:** Get at the specifics of what happened. *Who/What/When/Why or How did it happen?*
- 2. Comprehension questions:** Get the interpretation of events. *Tell me about/describe/discuss/explain or summarize today's class or an event. What does the student's work tell you?*
- 3. Application questions:** Encourage them to relate events to knowledge. *How was the lesson addressing the objective? What does the student's work tell you?*
- 4. Synthesis questions:** Encourage them to put together knowledge and events. *What might happen if you asked them to do something? What ideas do you have about it?*
- 5. Evaluation questions:** Identify areas of strength and areas to work on. *What was the best thing that happened today? What was the most challenging? Describe your strengths as a teacher. Identify a goal to work on.*
- 6. Support questions:** Provide emotional support. *How do you feel about ...? What could I (and your colleagues) do to help you with this issue? What are you doing for fun / exercise / stress relief?*
- 7. Observation questions:** Use data (Video, audio, notes, descriptions) to help develop the ability to reflect. *What is happening here? I saw / heard.... tell me about that.*
- 8. Cause/effect questions:** Help see the relationship between action/students and the learning. *Why do you think this happened? What would have happened if...?*
- 9. Viewpoint questions:** *How might this look to a parent/the student? What do you think he was thinking at the time? Tell me your perspective on this?*

- 1. Questions to support summary of and reflection on the lesson, identification of impressions/assessments, and recall of data:** *As you think back over the lesson, how would you describe what occurred? How do you think the lesson went? What makes you say that? What did you notice about the learners during the lesson? What evidence did you see that learners were learning and understanding what you wanted them to?*
- 2. Questions to support comparing the intent of the lesson with what occurred:** *How did what occurred compare to what you had intended? Were there any surprises related to your teaching decisions? Related to learner responses?*
- 3. Questions to support inferences about how teaching behaviours and/or decisions impacted the learning of the learners:** *What did you notice about your own thinking and decision-making during the lesson? How did your thinking and decision-making affect learners? (If applicable) What was the effect of the shift you made from what you had intended?*
- 4. Questions to support reflection on how new learning and insights will inform future practice:** *What were the "keepers" during this lesson? What makes you say so? What, if anything, would you change? What will you do as a follow-up to this lesson? As you reflect on this lesson, what other implications, if any, are there for what you will do in the future?*
- 5. Questions about what was valuable and what could be improved about the mentoring cycle:** *What was most valuable and/or helpful to you? How could this process be improved to better serve your needs?*

Actionable Feedback

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Why is providing feedback important?
- How should feedback be given?



In practice, feedback tends to be infrequent, uncoordinated, vague, or not actionable. Teachers may wonder whether feedback is meant to evaluate or improve their performance. When more than one person provides feedback, a lack of coordination among individuals can lead to teachers receiving conflicting messages, or simply more ideas or improvement than they can reasonably accommodate. Research indicates that when feedback is anchored within a strong instructional framework all participants know what is expected of them. If districts, schools (school management teams), mentor teachers and beginning teachers share a vision of good instruction and a common language, they are more likely to support teachers' instructional improvement efforts with feedback that is consistent and coherent among feedback providers.

Feedback will be influenced by the mentor's perceptions and correlating expectations. When the feedback is given through the 'lens' of the mentor's perceptions and expectations then the feedback can be coloured and may often simply reinforce what the mentor was expecting to find. Feedback not based on evidence may not only be not useful, but may also be potentially damaging to the beginning teacher's growth and development. This may occur for both the perceived high performer (whose areas for improvement are not identified) and for the perceived low performer (whose skills are not recognised).

As a mentor, there is a need to challenge any preconceptions or perceptions developed and how they may influence the conversation and the feedback provided. Active listening, observation and reflective practice are, of course, necessary skills in the process of giving and receiving feedback. The synergy of these skills is very powerful and fundamental to effective mentoring. Giving and receiving constructive feedback can be among the most challenging interactions in the mentoring relationship. To ensure that feedback becomes a relationship-building experience for all participants, we need a framework that includes the following:



Clarify the purpose in giving the feedback.



Describe what you have observed – the beginning teacher's behaviour and actions and the impact of this behaviour.



Use open-ended questions to elicit a comment or response.



There may be a need for a solution; it may also only be an opportunity for a reflective conversation with improvement in mind but not a specific solution.





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