

Supporting Early Childhood Professionals Through Content-Focused Mentoring

A Resource Guide



Center for Children
and Families
Education Development
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This guide was developed by staff of EDC's Center for Children & Families (CC&F) based on lessons learned from their professional development work with states, school districts, and local communities, and from their participation in a national early literacy mentor-coach initiative supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Head Start Bureau.

CC&F strengthens programs for children and families by combining research and practice, promoting professional development and systemic change, forging community links, and informing policies that affect the lives of children. Visit CC&F's Web site at <http://www.ccf.edc.org>.

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**Supporting Early Childhood Professionals
Through Content-Focused Mentoring
A Resource Guide**

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Introduction

For many years, the Center for Children & Families (CC&F) has provided support related to content-focused mentoring to early childhood professionals. Whenever we use the term mentoring in this guide, we are referring to this special type of mentoring that seeks to transform teachers' practice in key early learning areas and improve child outcomes.

In our *Excellence in Teaching* courses, we provide supervisors with a content-focused mentoring framework, research-based content knowledge, and on-the-job learning strategies to foster teachers' professional growth. We also work with states and communities to develop content-focused mentoring systems for early childhood professionals across public schools, child care, and Head Start settings.

During 2003's Head Start Early Literacy Mentor-Coach initiative, CC&F staff drew upon these experiences as we provided intensive consultation to 60 New England Head Start programs. With the support of the Head Start Bureau, we helped these programs establish strong, content-focused mentor-coach systems to improve teachers' early literacy knowledge and practice. We applaud the hard work and dedication to young children of the programs with which we worked, and we greatly appreciate the Bureau's investment in this important initiative to foster children's school readiness.

In this guide, we share some of the lessons we have learned from our content-focused mentoring work. Highlighting early literacy content knowledge to illustrate our points, we discuss the following five essential aspects of content-focused mentoring and provide extensive lists of related resources for each topic:

- **Charting A Course for Content-Focused Mentoring.**
How to design effective mentoring systems.
- **The Change Process.**
How to understand and address resistance to change.
- **Training and Support for Mentors.**
How to strengthen mentors' skills and knowledge.
- **Training and Support for Protégés.**
How to build protégés' capacity.
- **Evaluation and Continuous Program Improvement.**
How to assess and refine systems.

Content-focused mentoring is emerging as one of the most effective approaches to fostering professional growth in our field. We encourage you to experiment with and adapt the ideas contained in this guide. While the practical tips and insights we provide are most relevant to content-focused mentoring initiatives, they can easily be applied to other mentoring efforts.

Charting a Course for Content-Focused Mentoring

Our program's planning process helped us make big strides toward developing a strong mentoring system!

—Leadership Team Member

A comprehensive, inclusive planning process—including a program assessment, selection of a mentoring model, and development of an implementation plan—provides a firm foundation for an effective mentoring system. Planning processes begin with a leadership team composed of program managers or directors, board representatives, and other stakeholders assessing their program's strengths and challenges. Based on their findings, the team selects a mentoring model that best fits their program's capacity-building needs, organizational structure, available resources, and desired outcomes for children, families, and staff. Possible options include:

1. Mentors as mentors only.

Programs that acquire supplemental funding are able to hire mentors whose sole purpose is to support teachers. This type of mentor typically has more time to spend with protégés and can provide intensive support to large groups of teachers. The function of the mentor is not evaluative, which often makes the protégé feel more comfortable. Because supervisors' and mentors' messages to protégés must be consistent, clearly defined protocols for information sharing and communication between the mentor and the supervisor are essential to this model's success.

2. Supervisors as mentors.

Many programs ask supervisors to take on an additional mentoring role when they are committed to providing increased support to teachers but lack the funding to hire separate mentors. In this model, existing supervisors incorporate mentoring strategies into their work, providing a comprehensive level of support to teachers and promoting staff development in a holistic way. For this approach to be successful supervisors must be supported in developing a non-evaluative, strength-based mentoring style, and teachers must understand the purposes of the mentoring and the supervisors' new roles as mentors.

3. Teachers as mentors.

Peer mentoring can enrich either of the two mentoring models described above or serve as a program's primary form of mentoring. Peer mentoring builds a sense of teamwork and collegiality as teachers share their knowledge and work together to achieve a common goal. Resource considerations for this model include budgeting for release time from the classroom and substitute coverage.

After selecting a model, the leadership team develops an implementation plan that documents key logistical details in launching and implementing the system, assigns responsibilities, and identifies timeframes and needed resources. Key logistical details include:

1. Identifying selection criteria for mentors (e.g., content knowledge, desire to share expertise and learn from others, ability to assess protégés needs/progress, current program supervisors, current teachers).
2. Identifying selection criteria for protégés (e.g., require mentoring in the topic area, interested in improving practice, all teachers, less experienced teachers).
3. Choosing mentor-protégé matches carefully and realistically, based on geographic proximity, alignment of mentor/protégé schedules, similarity of teaching style, age, and gender.
4. Creating clear, multi-direction communication channels (program leadership to mentors, mentors to protégés, mentors to supervisors, protégés to program leadership).
5. Including roles, expectations, and responsibilities for leaders, mentors, and protégés in job descriptions, personnel policies, and other written documents.
6. Developing and providing training and materials (i.e., manuals that document the system's vision, goals, and expectations) to orient all participants to the mentoring system.





7. Establishing mechanisms to provide ongoing training and support for mentors (*see page 12*) and protégés (*see page 16*).
8. Determining the schedule for mentoring visits and classroom coverage needs.
9. Developing documentation materials and systems, including forms to record goals and accomplishments, frequency of visits, and summaries of observations and discussions.
10. Designing an evaluation process to assess how effectively the system is working and provide information to support continuous improvement (*see page 20*).

Lessons Learned

- ⊗ View mentoring as a core component of professional development—a replacement for less effective training modalities, rather than an additional service.
- ⊗ Build in sufficient time for mentors and protégés to work together and budget adequately for classroom coverage needs.
- ⊗ Involve staff in planning meetings to gain their input on the proposed system—staff who are consulted during this stage feel a sense of ownership and will more readily participate in mentoring.
- ⊗ Understand that a lack of additional monetary and/or staff resources does not preclude establishing a mentoring system.
- ⊗ Assure that the distinction between mentoring and evaluative supervision and confidentiality expectations are clearly articulated.
- ⊗ Consider a pilot or “phasing in” period before implementing the full system.

Related Resources

The Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum: Handbook for Mentors by Dan Bellm, Marcy Whitebook, and Patty Hnatiuk (1997). Washington, DC: National Center for the Early Childhood Workforce. Written specifically for the early education field, the *Handbook* presents a framework for mentoring, information about adult and teacher development, and tools to support the process.

Putting the Pro in Protégé: A Guide to Mentoring in Head Start and Early Head Start by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2001). Washington, DC: Author. This book covers all of the steps in developing an effective mentoring system, from determining goals and philosophy to the mechanics of mentoring, and provides examples of successful mentoring systems and practices from programs around the country.

Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring by Margo Murray (2002). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. A gold mine of information on mentoring in today’s organizations, this book offers a framework, guidance, and resources to develop an effective mentoring system to enhance professional development and impact the quality of services. The author takes the reader from defining mentoring and designing a mentoring process to selecting participants, negotiating written agreements between mentors and protégés, and evaluating the process.

Recruiting and Retaining Low-Income Child Care Workers in Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Child-Care Mentor Project Evaluation, A Summary of the Findings by Alice Burton and Marcy Whitebook (2000). Washington DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce. Available at the Center for the Child Care Workforce’s Web site (<http://www.ccw.org/tpp/pubs/wiscsummary.PDF>), this article summarizes findings from a mentoring initiative that sought to provide low-income people with jobs, increase the supply of child care center staff, and improve child care services. The authors analyze the mentoring model’s strengths and weaknesses and present recommendations.

Principles and Strategies for Coaching and Mentoring by Margie Carter, published in *Child Care Information Exchange* (March–April 1998) and ***Supervising or Coaching: What’s the Difference?*** by Margie Carter, published in *Child Care Information Exchange* (May–June 2003). A bi-monthly magazine dedicated to supporting center directors, *Child Care Information Exchange* has numerous articles on staff development in general and mentoring in particular. These articles by Margie Carter are particularly good. Go to <http://www.childcareexchange.com/> to sign up for a free on-line newsletter.

A Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1993). Washington, DC: Author. Available at NAEYC’s Web site (http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/psconf98.pdf), this position statement is useful for individuals, early childhood programs, and institutes of higher learning charged with early childhood professional development. The author provides a rich discussion of issues, challenges, and assumptions and presents sound guiding principles for effective professional development.

The Change Process

I was very enthusiastic about my new role as mentor until I ran into resistance from one of my more experienced protégés. We struggled along in our relationship until she revealed that she felt she was being targeted for mentoring because of poor performance. Her statement stunned me, but then it all began to make sense. No wonder she had been resistant! I learned a lesson about openness to change from that experience, and now we are making great progress.

—Mentor

To support mentors and protégés in forming strong, productive relationships, mentoring systems need to be based on an understanding of the five steps of the change process, as described in *Changing for Good* by James Prochaska, John Norcross, and Carlo Diclemente and used below to illustrate the mentoring process. To be effective catalysts for change, mentors also need to understand these stages.

Stage 1: Not Ready to Change.

Protégés do not understand the need to change their practice or classroom environments. Mentors' empathy and patience are very important at this stage. While it may be difficult for mentors to communicate with protégés, providing information about new resources and engaging protégés in information sharing and reflective dialogue can be productive. Mentors should also identify and address external factors that are impacting protégés' readiness to change.

Stage 2: Thinking About Changing.

Protégés realize that they need to change their practice, communicate with mentors, but do not act on mentors' suggestions. Protégés can be in this stage for a long time, and while mentoring is a little easier, it is still challenging. Mentors can support protégés by clearly defining how changes will improve their practice, classrooms, and outcomes for children. Using reflective documentation and encouraging reflection on practice (see page 17) is very helpful at this stage.



Stage 3: Getting Ready to Change.

Protégés begin to discuss ideas to make changes in their practice or classrooms, ask for specific resources and/or help, and start to gather materials. Protégés are willing, but tentative. This is a good time for mentors and protégés to engage in shared goal setting and planning (see page 17) and for mentors and protégés to develop a mentoring agreement that documents their shared goals and objectives, confidentiality ground rules, frequency and type of contact, term or length of the relationship, and approaches to revisiting, assessing, and refining the relationship and agreement. This document must align with the mentoring program's requirements.

Stage 4: Changing.

Changing takes a lot of time and energy, and this stage will demand a lot of both from protégés and mentors. Mentors should use more intensive strategies—including the observation and feedback process—to support protégés' professional growth (see page 16).

Stage 5: Maintaining Change.

Maintaining change is a lifelong process. Mentors can support protégés by recognizing and celebrating their achievements, giving them opportunities to share their knowledge with others and take credit for their accomplishments—through presentations at staff meetings, workshops, discussion groups—and/or encouraging protégés to mentor others. Setting long-term goals for the protégé and for the mentor is an important part of this stage.

Lessons Learned

- 🌀 Understand that the change process is complicated, and individuals move through the process in different ways based on their temperaments, ages, experiences, attitudes, and personal needs.
- 🌀 Understand that change takes time—set realistic expectations and be patient.
- 🌀 During every stage, provide opportunities for reflection—journaling, portfolios, peer discussions, mentor- or mentor trainer-guided reflection—to help protégés and mentors navigate change.
- 🌀 At every stage, support mentors in assessing their own behavior and reactions, and provide opportunities for mentors to discuss challenges with peers.

Related Resources

The Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum: Handbook for Mentors and Trainers Guide by Dan Bellm, Marcy Whitebook, and Patty Hnatiuk (1997). Washington, DC: National Center for the Early Childhood Workforce. See pages 42–44 of the *Handbook* for a discussion of the change process.

Seven Keys to a Change Deployment Process by Sambuddha Chakraborty (2000). Available at Six Sigma's Web site (<http://www.isixsigma.com/library/content/c020826a.asp>), this article examines common change-related issues and identifies strategies to deal with challenges.

Changing for Good by James Prochaska, John Norcross, and Carlo Diclemente (1994). New York: Avon Books. While this book does not specifically discuss change within the context of mentoring, many of the principles discussed can be applied to the mentor-protégé relationship, including information on the psychology of change, how it affects individuals, and how to support efforts to change.

Staff Development and Change Process: Cut from the Same Cloth by Shirley M. Hord (1994) published in *Issues About Change*, 4(2). Available at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's (SEDL) Web site (www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues42.html), *Issues about Change* is a series of briefing papers designed to address school reform. This article discusses thoughtfully planned staff development and its implications for change. SEDL's Web site also provides access to information about other areas of the change process.

A Structure Process for Managing Change by David Hutton (revised 2001). Available at David Hutton Associates' Web site (<http://www.dhutton.com/change/process.html>), this article discusses how to work together to effectively initiate and support change. Although not written specifically about mentoring, it will provide mentors and program leadership with insight into the change process.

Building School Capacity: Systemic Support for the Process of Change by the U.S. Department of Education (1998). Available at the U.S. Department of Education's Web site (<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/turning/capacity.html>), this article contains change-related lessons learned from high-performing organizations, examples of school change efforts, and discussion of internal and external resources for support that are useful for change agents in many fields.

Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life by Spencer Johnson (1998). New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. This book uses a parable of dealing with unexpected change to help readers understand the many ways they can respond to change. *Who Moved My Cheese?* videos and workbooks are available for staff development.

Facing the Challenge of Change by Dr. Ben Bissell (2002). Using a humorous style to illustrate common reactions to change, this video discusses the dynamics of change, steps in dealing with change, and coping with the stress of change. Information and related resources are available on-line at the Leadership Resources and Consulting Web site (<http://www.lrandc.com/index.html>).



Training and Support for Mentors

Mentoring Skills

- 1. Interpersonal skills:** maintaining a nonjudgmental approach, flexibility, empathy.
- 2. Communication skills:** reading and responding to verbal and non-verbal cues, active listening techniques, the art of asking open-ended/probing questions.
- 3. Adult learning and teaching:** identifying learning styles, understanding stages of teacher development, and individualizing mentoring strategies.
- 4. Diversity:** acknowledging different points of view, working with protégés from diverse backgrounds.
- 5. Reflective practice:** setting goals, observing and documenting, conferencing.

I've been an early childhood professional for many years. When my director asked me to mentor several teachers, I thought that my knowledge of classroom practice and good people skills would be enough. I soon learned that helping teachers to reflect on their practice meant that I had to reflect on my own. The support that I've received from my fellow mentors and from CC&F has helped me to think about and actually practice new ways of supporting my protégés. I'm even planning to take a class on reflective supervision in the fall.

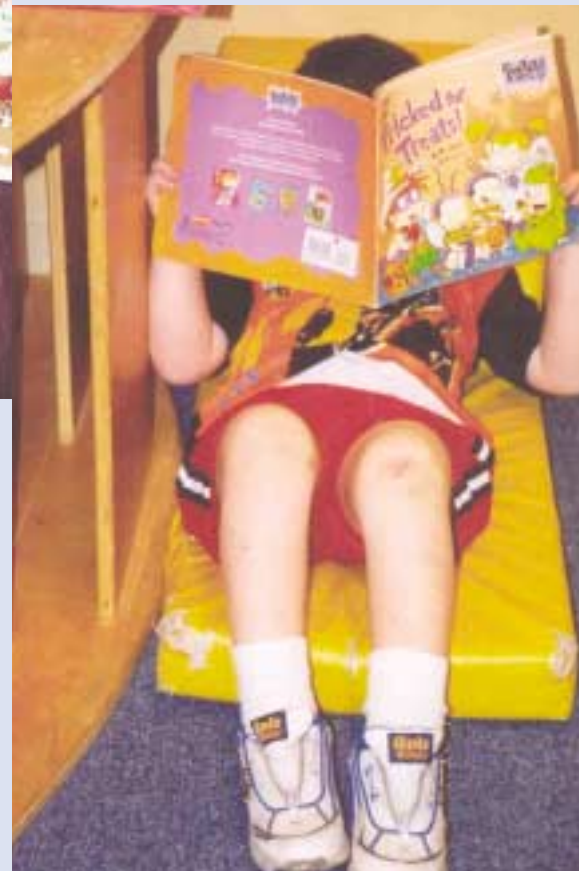
—Mentor

Successful mentoring initiatives provide mentors with high levels of support. Even well-qualified and highly experienced mentors need ongoing opportunities to deepen and extend their content knowledge and refine their mentoring skills. Intensive workshops, peer networking, journaling, videotaping mentor-protégé interactions, and one-on-one guidance from specialists are just a few examples of effective mentor support strategies.

Head Start's 2003 Early Literacy Mentor-Coach initiative's goals required all mentors to be well-versed in early literacy best practices and expert in building protégés' capacity. To advance mentors' efforts, CC&F staff provided intensive training and support focused on five aspects of language and literacy development and five mentoring skills:

Language and Literacy Development

- 1. Research:** empirically-based early literacy concepts (e.g., phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, emergent writing) and strategies (conversations, print-rich environments, book reading).
- 2. Social-Emotional Development:** factors that influence children's ability to communicate and form positive relationships with adults and peers, successful approaches to coping with challenging behaviors.
- 3. Family literacy:** how to build strong home-school connections, the qualities of home environments that encourage learning, and interactive parent-child literacy activities.
- 4. English language learners:** how to partner with families and parents, understanding children who are English language learners, stages of language and literacy development, appropriate curriculum and teaching strategies.
- 5. Children with disabilities:** how to assess and respond to individual needs, partnering with families and parents.



Lessons Learned

- ☞ Build in time for mentors to reflect on their own learning and progress. One-on-one conversations with supervisors or content specialists can also help mentors to step back and assess their own effectiveness and paths for growth.
- ☞ Advance mentors' continued professional growth through workshops, higher education opportunities, and peer support groups.
- ☞ Provide mentors with a variety of resources and materials to strengthen their capacity and help them create engaging learning opportunities for their protégés.
- ☞ No two mentors are alike; tailor resources and support to fit mentors' individual needs.

Related Resources

Mentoring Skills

The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships by Lois J. Zachary (2000). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Chapter 6 focuses on creating a learning environment, supporting protégés, building relationships, fostering reflection, and providing feedback.

The Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum: Trainers Guide by Dan Bellm, Marcy Whitebook, and Patty Hnatiuk (1997). Washington, DC: National Center for the Early Childhood Workforce. This guide provides a comprehensive mentor training curriculum that includes activities and resources.

Supervision in Early Childhood Education: A Developmental Perspective, Second Edition by Joseph J. Caruso and M. Temple Fawcett (1999). New York: Teachers College Press. Chapters 9–11 present a reflective practice model and provide strategies for goal setting, observing, documenting, and conferencing.

Supervision that Transforms by Leslie Ross-Degnan and Kimberly Elliott (2003). Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Available at the Center for Children & Families' Web site (http://www.ccf.edc.org/spotlt_f1.asp), this article describes the content-focused mentoring approach in CC&F's *Excellence in Teaching* courses and provides related resources.

Promoting Meaningful Learning: Innovations in Educating Early Childhood Professionals, edited by Nicola J. Yelland (2000). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. This book discusses non-traditional approaches—including active learning and reflection—to teaching early education students, many of which can be used by mentors working with protégés.

Putting the Pro in Protégé: A Guide to Mentoring in Head Start and Early Head Start by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2001). Washington, DC: Author. This guide offers information on mentoring skills and strategies, as well as mentor training and follow-up support, that can be used in many early childhood settings.

A Guide for Education Coordinators in Head Start by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (1986). Washington, DC: Author. While this handbook was written for Head Start education coordinators, it contains useful information for mentors in other settings on the process of observation, conferencing, and feedback and professional development planning.

Professional Development: The Cornerstone for Trust and Empowerment (2002). Head Start Bulletin Issue No. 72, Washington, DC: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. This bulletin offers a succinct overview of mentoring and discusses promoting staff development through collaborations.

The Head Start STEP-NET Portal (<http://www.step-net.org>) is a Web-based tool that contains information—including teaching strategies that are connected to the domains of language development, literacy, and social-emotional development and strategies to promote children's social-emotional competence through mentor-coaching—that will be useful to mentors and mentor trainers in other early childhood settings. Click on the *Conference Materials* button to access these materials.

Language and Literacy Development

Much More than the ABCs by Judy Schickedanz (1999). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Chock-full of ideas and strategies, this comprehensive book presents foundational early literacy information. Chapters focus on preschoolers and books, writing and classroom environments, and early book-handling behavior.

Learning Language and Loving It, Second Edition by Elaine Weitzman and Janice Greenberg (2002). Toronto: The Hanen Centre. This book contains detailed developmental information (0–5) and teaching strategies that focus on following the child's lead, promoting children's conversations with adults and peers, and creating an environment where language learning leads naturally to literacy.

Language and Literacy for All Children by Patton O. Tabors (2002), published in *Head Start Bulletin*, 74. Available at Head Start's Web site (http://www.headstartinfo.org/publications/hsbulletin74/hsb74_04.htm), this article includes strategies for teaching alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, book and print concepts, and vocabulary and discourse skills to English speakers and English language learners and features strategies for incorporating children's home languages into classrooms.

***Young Children*, 57(2)**. The March 2003 special early literacy issue covers a variety of important topics, including the content of early literacy instruction, book selection, environmental print, and reading and writing for multiple purposes.

Emerging Literacy: Linking Social Competence to Learning by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (1997). Available on-line (<http://www.bmcc.edu/HeadStart/Trngds/Literacy/index.html>), this guide provides information on promoting conversations, book reading, and literacy explorations.

Early Childhood Classroom Setup: A Powerful Tool for Facilitating English as a Second Language by Peggy M. Elgas, Jo-Anne Prendeville, Sally Moomaw, and Richard R. Kretschmer (2002), published in *Child Care Information Exchange*, 143. This article explores the teacher's role as facilitator, selection of materials, and how to create supportive learning environments for English language learners.

Identifying Strategies to Support English Language Learners in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2002). Washington, DC: Author. Available at Head Start's Web site (http://www.headstartinfo.org/publications/english_learners/index.htm), this report presents strategies gleaned from a focus group discussion of key topics such as curriculum, teaching strategies, assessment, and documentation.

What Early Childhood Educators Need To Know: Developing Effective Programs for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Children and Families by Patton O. Tabors (2002) published in *Young Children*, 53(6). This article provides ideas for supporting second-language acquisition, working with parents of English language learners, and developing appropriate assessment methods.

The Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning's Web site has short, practical "What Works Briefs" (<http://csefel.uiuc.edu/whatworks.html>) designed to help programs promote young children's social and emotional development and prevent challenging behaviors.

Training and Support for Protégés

My mentor's specific feedback and follow up helped me make the changes I needed to make and it feels great! We'd talk about strategies I could use to improve my practices and then I knew she would check back with me every week to see how it was going. I feel that what I've learned over the last few months has made me a better teacher.

—Protégé

Mentors bridge the gap between training and everyday practice by providing ongoing guidance and resources that help teachers incorporate new content knowledge and strategies into their practice.

As discussed on page 8, teachers progress at different rates. While mentors must tailor their support to teachers' needs and readiness to change, the following five mentoring strategies are particularly effective:

1. Mentoring Agreements.

Comprehensive agreements with protégés document learning goals and practice goals, expectations about frequency of contact, responsibilities, confidentiality ground rules, and logistical details. As described on page 9, working together to create an agreement signals the beginning of intensive mentoring.

2. Observation and Feedback.

This process includes meeting with protégés prior to observing their interactions with children, observing protégés' practice, providing feedback around specific content areas (e.g., book reading, classroom management, designing child-centered, challenging curriculum), and giving protégés the opportunity to respond to feedback. In the observation and feedback process, mentors and protégés engage in an ongoing process of problem solving, examining when and how to incorporate a particular strategy by evaluating its impact on student learning. Observations can also take other forms (e.g., protégés observing best practices, protégés and mentors observing and analyzing other teachers' classrooms).



3. Reflective Practice.

Journaling encourages protégés to engage in self-assessment and reflection. Videotaping can also be used as a means to document protégés' current practice, record progress, and encourage protégés' self-analysis.

4. Shared Goal Setting and Planning.

In this process, mentors and protégés work together to identify key needs, areas of concern, professional objectives, and plans to initiate changes in their classrooms. During their regular meetings, mentors and protégés can "check in" about progress and challenges in pursuing goals and implementing classroom changes.

5. Collaborative Learning Opportunities.

Guided discussions, study groups, and pairing activities offer protégés the opportunity to engage in effective alternatives to the traditional workshop. All of these collaborative learning approaches foster beneficial peer support, shared learning, brainstorming, and problem solving. Strategies that engage protégés in an in-depth examination of a specific topic deepen their understanding and help them implement and sustain new practices.



Lessons Learned

- 🌀 Develop professional development experiences that reflect that each teacher is at his or her own level and has a unique learning style and experiences to draw upon.
- 🌀 Approach mentoring relationships as professional development for both parties.
- 🌀 Ensure that the goals and plans developed in the mentor-protégé relationship align with overall professional development goals reflected in the supervision and performance appraisal process.

Related Resources

Journaling by Joellen Killion (1999) published in *Journal of Staff Development*, 20(3). Available on-line at the National Staff Development Council's Web site (<http://www.nsd.org/library/jsd/killion203.html>), this article outlines how to use journals to reflect on practice, document ongoing assessment and learning, and capture thoughts and ideas to be processed later.

Giving It Some Thought: Cases for Early Childhood Practice by Muriel K. Rand (2002). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. This book contains case studies that highlight common early childhood teaching scenarios, followed by discussion questions, and can be used to stimulate groups of protégés' collaborative learning, reflection, and problem solving.

Moving Ahead: A Competency-Based Training Program by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (1998). Washington, DC: Author. Available at Head Start's Web site (<http://www.headstartinfo.org>), the guide's *Leading a Guided Discussion* activity has valuable information for mentors who are planning interactive group learning events for protégés.

On-the-Job Learning by Fred H. Wood & Frank McQuarrie, Jr. (1999) published in *Journal of Staff Development*, 20(3). Available on-line at the National Staff Development Council's Web site (<http://www.nsd.org/library/jsd/wood203.html>), this article explores on-the-job learning strategies, many of which can be applied to mentoring in early childhood settings.

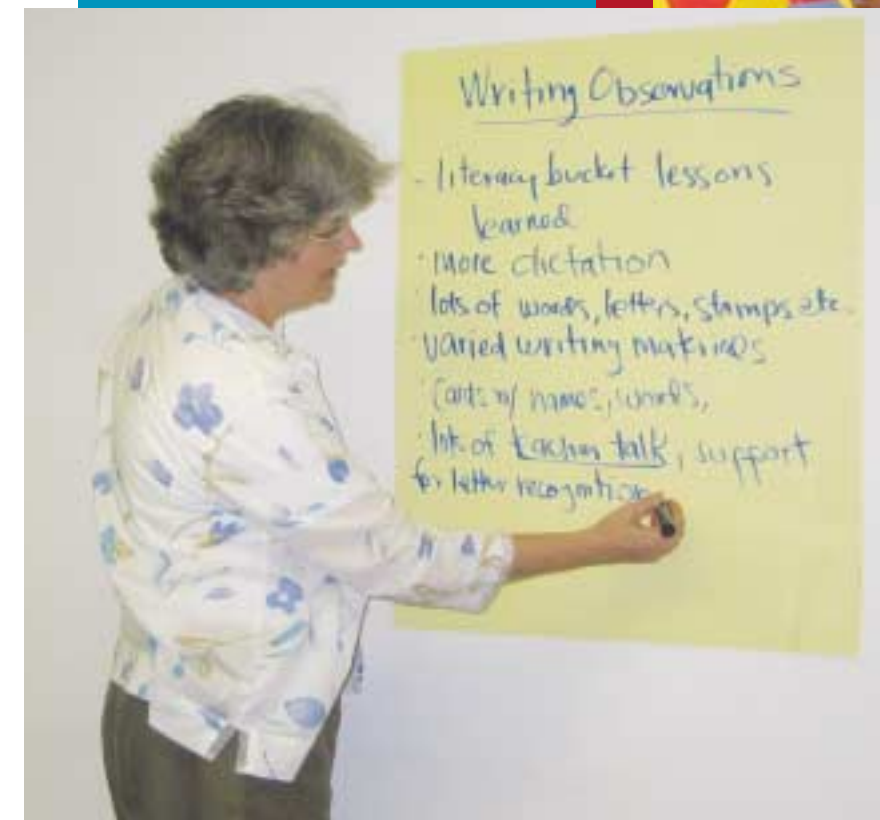
National Head Start S.T.E.P. Teacher's Manual by Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (2002). Washington, DC: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Targeted to Head Start program teachers, but potentially useful for providers in other early childhood settings, this manual provides information and teaching strategies on a variety of early literacy elements.

Preparing Our Teachers: Opportunities for Better Reading Instruction by Dorothy Strickland and Catherine Snow (2002). Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press. This book outlines what classroom teachers need to know and be able to do to give children in preschool through fourth grade the essential opportunities to become good readers. It discusses teacher training strategies and techniques for the classroom.

Learning to Read and Write by Susan B. Neuman, Carol Copple, and Sue Bredekamp (2000). Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. This position statement on recommended practice and policy for teaching young children to read and write, provides key points on instruction and assessment, and includes a summary of effective teaching practices.

J is for Jamal: The Teacher's Role in Supporting Young Children's Writing by Leslie Ross-Degnan (2002), published in *Early Childhood News*, 12(2). This article examines the roles teachers play in encouraging early writing—providing rich environments/materials, documenting progress, and actively supporting children's efforts—and provides a comprehensive list of writing area materials.

The Talking and Reading Together region of the PBS Parents Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/talkingandreading/>) offers engaging literacy-related articles and expert advice for parents of young children. Protégés and mentors will find the site very valuable and easy to use.



Evaluation/Continuous Program Improvement

We decided to get our feet wet in the Mentor-Coach Initiative by starting with a small group of mentors and protégés. Although we've learned some informal lessons from this unplanned 'pilot effort,' we don't have the data to tell us if mentors actually completed the visits they planned or if the entire effort really made a difference for teachers or children. As we do our planning for full implementation next year, we're looking for ways to track mentor visits and to link our assessment of the mentoring program to the data we already collect on children's learning.
—Leadership Team Member

Efforts to evaluate and refine mentoring based on participants' needs and evolving priorities are key to systems' success. Many factors can prompt programs to modify existing plans including alterations in staffing, enrollment, and program structure; implementation of new legislation; new sources of quality/program improvement funds; and internal assessment findings that highlight areas that need to be enhanced. Programs' evaluation processes need to allow them to anticipate and respond to these changes.



Successful evaluation systems have four key components:

1. Clear Program Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes.

Completing the comprehensive planning process described on page 4 is the first step in developing an evaluation system. All evaluation efforts will be guided by the program's intended goals and outcomes, and clearly articulated and documented objectives can serve as benchmarks to measure the initiative's progress.

2. Appropriate Data Collection Methods and Plan.

Quantitative and qualitative data provides the evidence that program leaders need to make informed decisions. Leaders should identify data sources that will provide information about how the program was implemented as well as expected outcomes. They also need to develop a data collection plan that outlines specific responsibilities and timeframes. Data on implementation and operation can be derived from sources such as mentor documentation systems, monthly program reports, interviews with protégés and mentors, and annual

reports or program self-assessments. Data sources for measuring the impact of mentoring can include child assessment data, teachers' performance evaluations and supervision meeting records, records of protégés and mentors' work, classroom observation and assessment results, and interviews with protégés and mentors.

3. Skillful Data Analysis.

Careful analysis of the data by the mentoring system's leadership team will provide answers to these critical questions:

- Are we meeting our objectives for numbers of protégés served, frequency of mentor-protégé contact, and strategies used by mentors?
- Are our ratios of mentors to protégés adequate?
- Do we allocate sufficient time for mentors to observe teachers and give feedback?
- Are our mentors proficient in content knowledge and mentoring skills?
- Are we providing adequate support to the mentors?
- Are we producing the desired results? Why or why not?
- Are improvements/changes needed? If so, what are they?
- Are resources being utilized effectively? If not, why not?

4. Implementation of Needed Changes.

If data analysis highlights problems, the leadership team should revise the existing system, update written documents to reflect the changes, and present the new model to protégés and mentors, accompanied by training and support.

Lessons Learned

- ⊗ Each year, re-evaluate the mentoring system. If an organization conducts an annual self-assessment, the mentoring system evaluation can become part of that process.
- ⊗ Adopt an evaluation process that best meets the structure and resources of the program. There is no "one size fits all" model.
- ⊗ Be flexible in the design of the mentoring model and make changes when appropriate.
- ⊗ Establish formal mechanisms for gathering and analyzing input from mentors and protégés.

Related Resources

Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach by the United Way of America (1996). Alexandria, VA: Author. This publication describes an in-depth model for outcome measurement designed specifically for human services agencies.

The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families (1997). Washington, DC: Author. This handbook defines program evaluation, describes its importance, and provides guidance on using evaluation to improve services.

The Head Start Path to Positive Child Outcomes by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2000). Washington, DC: Author. While written for Head Start programs, this guide provides a context for understanding child outcomes and continuous improvement strategies that can be applied in many settings.

Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit by Miriam W. Smith, David K. Dickinson, Angela Sangeorge, and Louisa Anastasopoulos (2002). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. The ELLCO toolkit—a Literacy Environment Checklist, a protocol to conduct classroom observations and administer teacher interviews, and a Literacy Activities Rating Scale—can be used to gather crucial information on the quality of early language and literacy environments and instruction. Product and training information is available at CC&F's Web site (<http://www.ccf.edc.org/ellco.asp>).

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) by Thelma Harms, Richard M. Clifford, and Debby Cryer. (1998). New York: Teachers College Press. The ECERS is a comprehensive, research-based tool for improving program quality. It includes many subscales that cover space and furnishings, interactions, activities, and parent and staff involvement.

Assessing Young Children: What's Old, What's New, and Where Are We Headed? by Susan Bowers (2002). Available on-line (<http://www.earlychildhood.com>), this article provides a concise overview of traditional and alternative approaches to assessing young children and will be useful to leadership teams that are designing data collection methods for their evaluation systems.

Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments edited by Lorrie Shepard, Sharon Lynn Kagan, and Emily Wurtz (1998). Available on-line (<http://www.negp.gov/Reports/prinrec.pdf>), this article discusses early childhood assessment techniques to support learning, identify special needs, inform program evaluation and program improvement efforts, and assure accountability.





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