

Mentoring Matters

A Practical Guide to Learning-Focused Relationships

Guided Interaction

Good Relationship

Structured Training



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Republic of Singapore

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51 Cuppage Road #08-01, Singapore 229469
Email: contact@ecda.gov.sg
www.ecda.gov.sg

Preamble

Following the launch of the “Achieving Excellence through Continuing Professional Development: A CPD Framework for Early Childhood Educators” in 2012 and the “Continuing Professional Development Master Plan” in 2013, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) has developed this Mentoring Guide for early childhood educators, teachers and leaders. This Mentoring Guide aims to support early childhood educators, teachers and leaders in setting up and formalising a mentoring culture and programme within their own centres.

Research has shown that a centre with a strong mentoring culture and a structured and comprehensive induction and mentoring programme leads to higher teachers’ satisfaction and thus better retention of teachers within the centre and/or sector. It is a professional activity that aims to provide career guidance, professional growth and personal enrichment. Thus, time must be invested for it to be effective within a formalised mentoring structure and programme.

A pre-school with strong beliefs in the mentoring culture and a supportive management is able to develop a coherent, systematic and structured mentoring programme which goes beyond coaching or counselling. An individual who is new to the early childhood industry will need some form of induction and mentoring to ease into the organisational environment, values, beliefs or philosophy. An individual who has been in the organisation for some time and is taking on a new role or position would also need mentoring for development.

For educators, a coordinated mentoring programme would provide a seamless continuing professional development plan that continues for two to three years. The ultimate goal is for mentoring to become part of the educator’s lifelong professional development. Hence, all stakeholders – mentor, mentee and the organisation should take this effort seriously to build a nurturing and supportive mentoring culture that goes beyond the individual mentoring program and provide a long-term commitment with a continuum of expectations on mentoring as well as a standard of excellence for mentoring practice.

Planning & Innovation Section
Professional Development Department
Early Childhood Development Agency

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Intent of Guide

Who should use the Guide

This guide is meant for early childhood educators, teachers and leaders to implement effective and sustainable mentoring through a structured programme.

In addition to being a person who provides advice, guidance and emotional support to the mentee, a mentor is also one who promotes professional development and supports a learning culture. This guide aims to promote good practice in mentoring programmes by providing a structured process where both mentor and mentee will benefit as part of their professional development journey. Setting common understanding on the roles of both mentor and mentee, and identifying different types of mentoring which might be needed, are some of the methods this guide utilises to lay the foundation for the development of a strong mentoring structure.

The mentoring model suggested can be adapted by the individual organisation based on their centre's vision, mission and values. However, there are elements which are common to all successful programmes. This guide focuses on these common elements to help those developing and implementing the programme to achieve their goals along the different stages of the process. In addition, the guide provides the foundation to develop centre-specific resources to ensure a high quality mentoring programme through outlining key support structures.



How can this guide be used?

This guide provides an overview of the concept and possible structure for mentoring. Centres should actively use it to design their own centre-based mentoring programme.

1

Centre leaders and mentors may find it useful in:

- Aligning the mentoring programme with existing centre policies for staff professional development
- Identifying ways to integrate mentoring with the induction process
- Deciding how to allocate resources (which includes manpower, time and budget) to support mentoring
- Identifying roles in the processes and system in supporting the programme

2

Mentors and mentees may find this guide useful in:

- Identifying what mentoring entails, e.g. commitment to regular meetings with mentor, taking specific actions to stretch growth and learning, etc
- Identifying the support structures in the programme
- Identifying factors that contribute to a successful mentoring relationship
- Identifying the roles of a mentor and a mentee

The reflection questions at the end of each chapter serve as a guide to help mentors and mentees reflect on the issues raised and are not meant to be prescriptive at the various stages of mentoring.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Mentoring

“Mentoring is about adding value to the professional life of an individual, affecting them in a positive way.”

- Ms Irene Wee

Principal, Bethesda (Katong) Kindergarten

A growing body of research is pointing to structured mentoring as a key strategy to enhancing the effectiveness of teachers and increasing teacher retention. Many educational organisations have hence begun to embrace mentoring as an essential strategy, for new teachers in particular, to understand the highly complex role of teachers and to build good habits of learning. The improved teacher quality and enhanced teaching and learning practices that result from high quality mentoring will ultimately lead to better outcomes for children.



What is Mentoring?

There is no single definition of mentoring. In the context of early childhood, we have defined mentoring as the professional interactions between a more experienced and knowledgeable individual [mentor] and a less experienced individual [mentee], for the purposes of development and support. Mentoring is both a relationship and a process, and it is important to understand that both the mentor and the mentee will benefit from this relationship.

Mentoring, as professional practice, can be characterised, and may be distinguished from other forms of professional development, by:

- The highly relational and guided interactions between a mentor and mentee,
- The in-depth and customised development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in both the mentor and the mentee,
- The high level of fidelity of transference of these knowledge, skills and attitudes from the mentor to the mentee, and
- Its ability to help mentees transit into all aspects of the school culture.

Hence, mentoring can be seen as a reciprocal, dynamic and reflective process within the context of professional support. The emphasis of mentoring as a process enables the mentee to develop holistically as a professional - in knowledge, skills, dispositions, attitudes and values - in an accepting and safe environment.

Mentoring is not meant to produce a replica or a disciple of the mentor, and definitely not for proving one's competence or gaining control over another. Mentoring should also not be tied to performance assessment as this may affect the characteristics of trust and transparency of a mentoring relationship.

Case Study – “Recollections of a Beginning Teacher”

Ms Firoza is a passionate and confident pre-school teacher who has been teaching in Honeydew Pre-school for the past five years. She has been encouraged by her Centre Leader, Ms Juliana, to take on the role to mentor new teachers to the centre.

Prior to joining Honeydew Pre-school, Ms Firoza was a struggling pre-school teacher who was expected to teach a Nursery 2 class after graduating with a Diploma in Early Childhood and Care Education in Teaching. She did not receive any formal mentoring and was assigned a buddy who would give her ad-hoc advice when she was available. Ms Firoza decided to join another centre after three months of struggling in that centre.

After joining Honeydew Pre-school, Ms Firoza went through the induction programme that the centre had planned for all new teachers. Ms Firoza was also given the opportunity to work as a teacher assistant to observe several teachers in the centre for a week to have a better understanding of the centre’s culture. Ms Juliana, who was Ms Firoza’s mentor then, also planned for weekly meetings to discuss about specific issues that they would like to work on.

- *What was different about the approach Honeydew Pre-school had adopted towards new teachers compared to Ms Firoza’s previous centre?*
- *What are the benefits of mentoring to Ms Firoza, Ms Juliana, the pre-school and the sector?*



Purpose of Mentoring

The purpose of mentoring is to accelerate development of new teachers; to ensure that new teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to meaningfully and purposefully engage children in their learning; and to have significant influence on the development of teachers as teaching professionals. There are different stages to mentoring that will occur in an educator's career. These stages are broadly represented below. It is crucial that while using these stages as a guide, centres also tailor each mentoring relationship and process based on the needs and prior knowledge of the teachers.

Mentoring for Practicum/Internship

Practicum/Internship is undertaken by student teachers undergoing training to become certified early childhood educators. The centre attachment aims to strengthen the connection between theory and practice as well as improve work-readiness. Mentoring is critical in ensuring a purposeful and positive learning experience. Some key roles of mentors at this stage include the following:

- Orienting the student teacher to the centre's culture, vision and values
- Delineating clear expectations and responsibilities for the attachment
- Applying theory to practice, through helping the student teacher gain critical insights into her mentor's tacit knowledge of early childhood development, engaging in dialogue and observation targeted at understanding why she teaches in certain ways, using particular strategies, or sequencing lessons in specific ways; and supporting the student teacher as she plans her lessons and works with individuals or small groups of children
- Guiding critical reflections
- Providing and directing to appropriate resources
- Maintaining open dialogue and communication



Mentoring for Induction

Teachers new to the sector or to the centre should be inducted and mentored. Centres should not assume that experienced teachers, new to the centre, do not need to be inducted as they already have the knowledge and skills in delivering lessons.

Mentoring for induction will contribute to the smooth running of centres as mentors can help new teachers in their transition to the 'classroom', orientate them to the culture and ethos of the centre as well as utilise the experience of mentors to help mentees navigate their way in the new environment. The role of the mentor in this stage is to guide and provide moral support while balancing the unfamiliar demands and expectations of children, parents, and the centre. It is envisaged that the need for a mentor will diminish over time as the new teacher develops her own network of peers.

For teachers new to the sector, mentors have the tremendous responsibility to bring them to a high level of teaching in their first few years of teaching. Typical responsibilities of mentors include:

- Strengthening the theory-practice nexus through modelling lessons, including modelling the use of technology to enhance instruction; observing and coaching; curriculum and instructional planning; analysing assessment; and gathering and developing resources
- Guiding teachers to implement effective classroom management strategies; and
- Demonstrating a reflective approach to teaching

Mentoring for Development

There are a number of instances where mentoring will facilitate the development of teachers' professional practice. These include but are not limited to:

- Teachers who need support in specific areas of teaching practice
- Teachers working with a new age group
- Teachers assuming new roles, such as senior teacher or curriculum specialist.

Benefits of Mentoring

There are many benefits of mentoring. While it is easier to see the direct benefits of mentoring on the mentor and the mentee, the impact on the organisation, and ultimately the early childhood sector are less explicit, but definitely no less significant.

Mentors

Benefit through:

- Enhanced personal and professional development, e.g. gaining new insights and knowledge
- Honing of leadership skills
- Greater collaboration with colleagues
- Increased capacity and capability to champion professional development and growth of colleagues, and other educators in the early childhood sector

Mentees

Benefit through:

- Strengthened content and pedagogical content knowledge, as well as administrative and management skills in the classroom
- Increased capacity and capability to bring about positive outcomes in children
- Strengthened reflective practice and self-directed learning
- Greater level of emotional, mental and even physical resilience during transitions or challenging situations
- Increased confidence and sense of belonging to the organisation
- Greater access to an experienced teacher's knowledge, skills and experience



Organisations**Benefit through:**

- Strengthened culture of shared values, teamwork, genuine learning and responsiveness to change
- Effective integration of important processes such as reflective practice, self-evaluation, collaboration and constructive communication
- Increased fidelity in transfer of knowledge and organisational values, and sharing of good practices
- A more competent, confident and qualified team of educators
- Judicious succession planning and talent management
- Staff retention

Early Childhood Sector**Benefits through:**

- Enhanced professionalism
- Strengthened solidarity and collaboration
- Increased retention of teachers
- A stronger culture of mentoring

Although the most overt outcome of mentoring is a more competent early childhood workforce, we must remember that the ultimate beneficiaries are our children; hence it is imperative that positive outcomes for them remain the core impetus for the change we are seeking.





Reflection: Part A

General:

1. How do you think mentoring helps increase teacher effectiveness?

2. Why is building a professional relationship an important aspect of the mentoring process?

For Mentors:

1. Was there someone who played the role of a 'mentor' in your professional journey? How have you grown from that experience? What are some 'strengths' of that relationship you would adopt as a mentor? What are some 'weaknesses' you would not adopt?

For Mentees:

1. The role of a mentee in a mentoring relationship is as important as the mentor's. What roles would you consider to be pivotal for a successful mentoring relationship?



Reflection: Part B

General:

1. Identify your strengths.

2. Identify your working style.

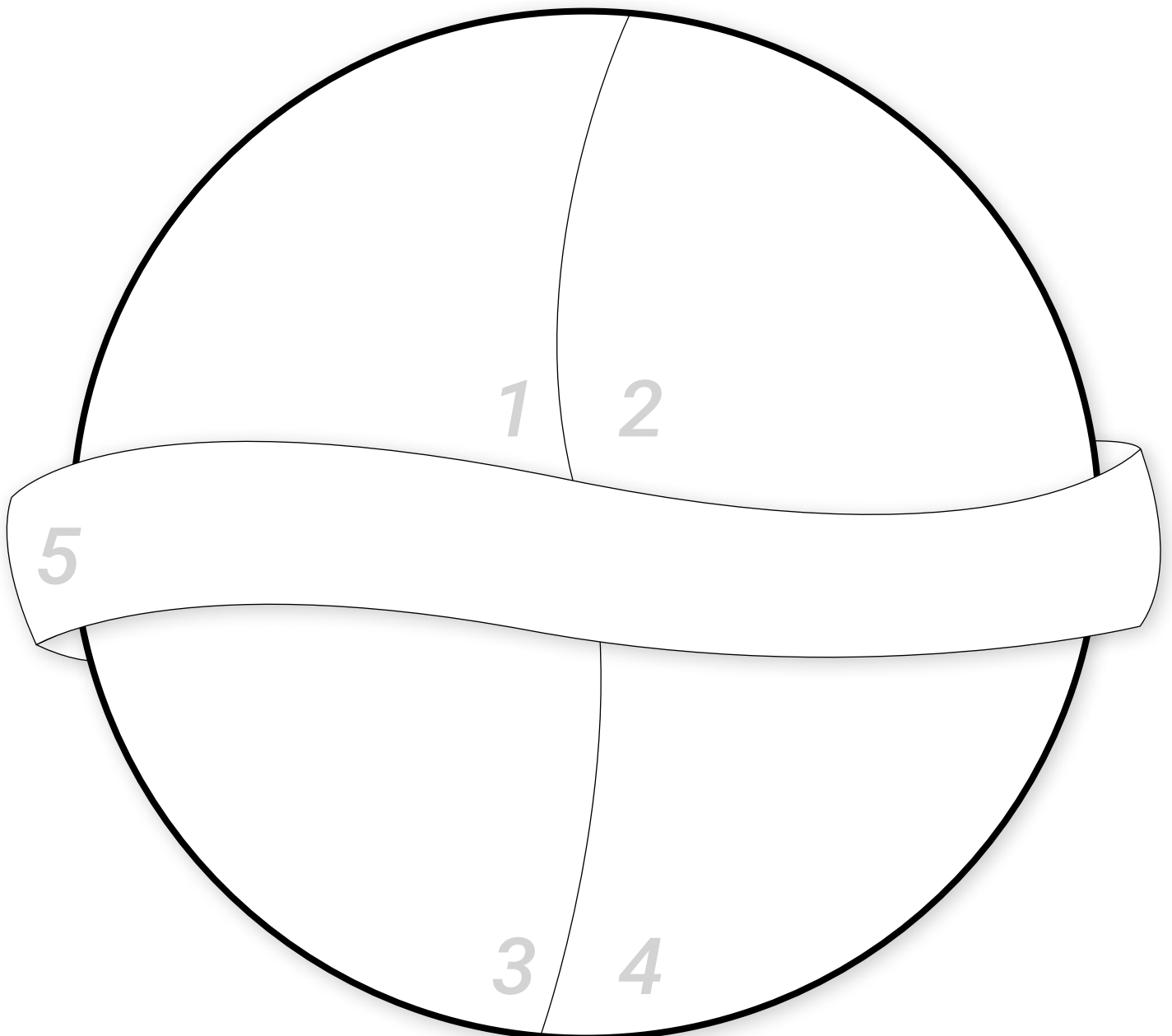
For Mentors:

1. Identify past mentors and give thought to the characteristics each person possessed that has made an impact on your role as a mentor.

2. Create a timeline of people who influenced your life as a teacher. Describe how each one contributed to your learning. What are some of their characteristics?

For Mentors:

3. Create a Mentor Logo.
4. In **Space 1**, draw something that describes the mentor you want to be. In **Space 2**, sketch out something that you are really good at. In **Space 3**, choose one colour in any shade that best describes the mentor that you want to be. In **Space 4**, draw a symbol of how you like to spend your spare time (an interest). In **Space 5**, write one word that describes the mentor you want to be.





Reflection: Part B

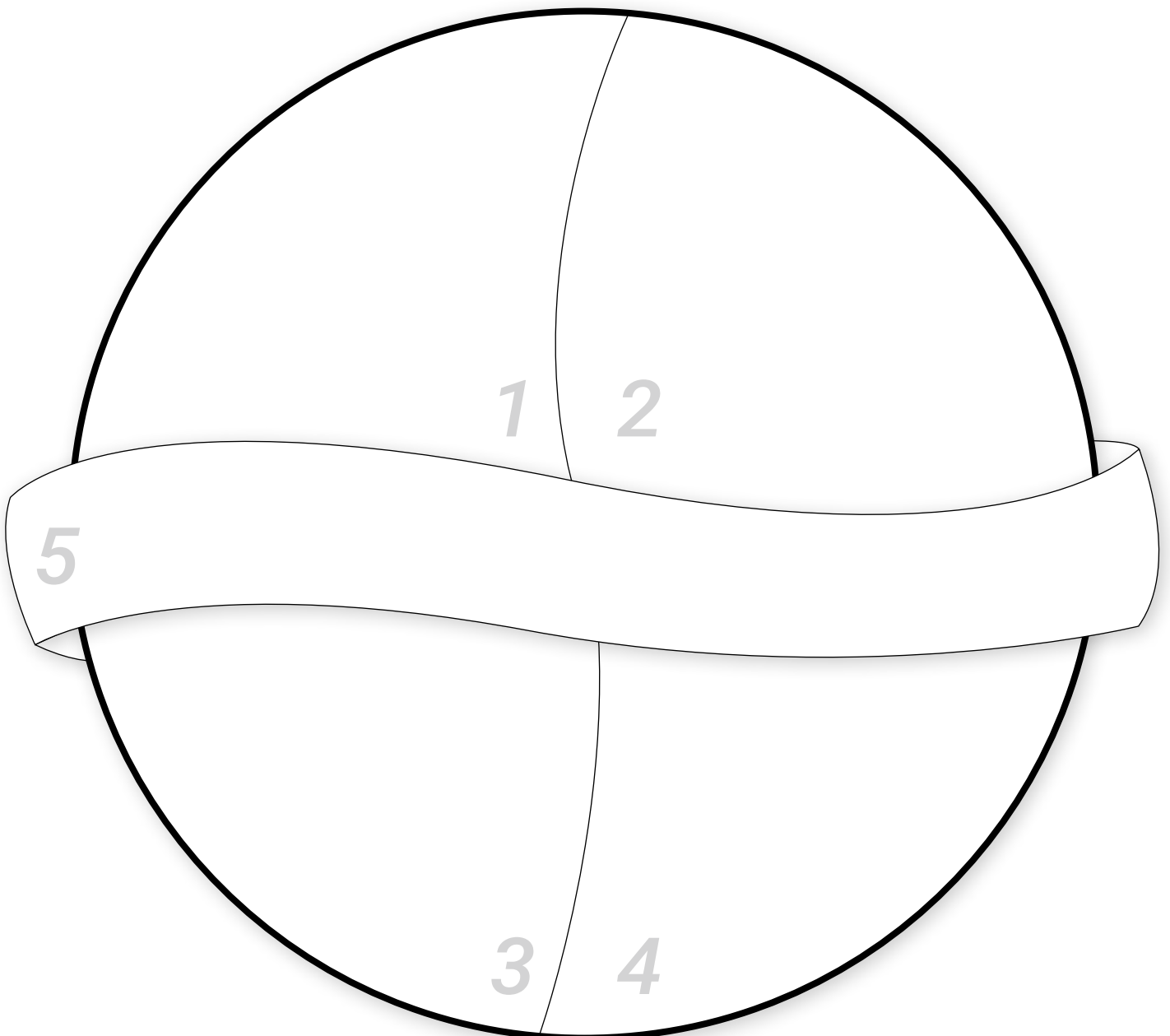
For Mentees:

1. Identify your knowledge and skills gap.

2. Create a timeline of people who have influenced your life. Describe how each one has contributed to your life. What are some of their characteristics?

For Mentees:

3. Create a Mentee Logo.
 - a. In **Space 1**, draw something that characterises a talent you possess. In **Space 2**, sketch out something you are really good at. In **Space 3**, choose one colour in any shade that best describes the mentee that you want to be. In **Space 4**, draw a symbol of how you like to spend your spare time (an interest). In **Space 5**, write something that reflects your personal motto.

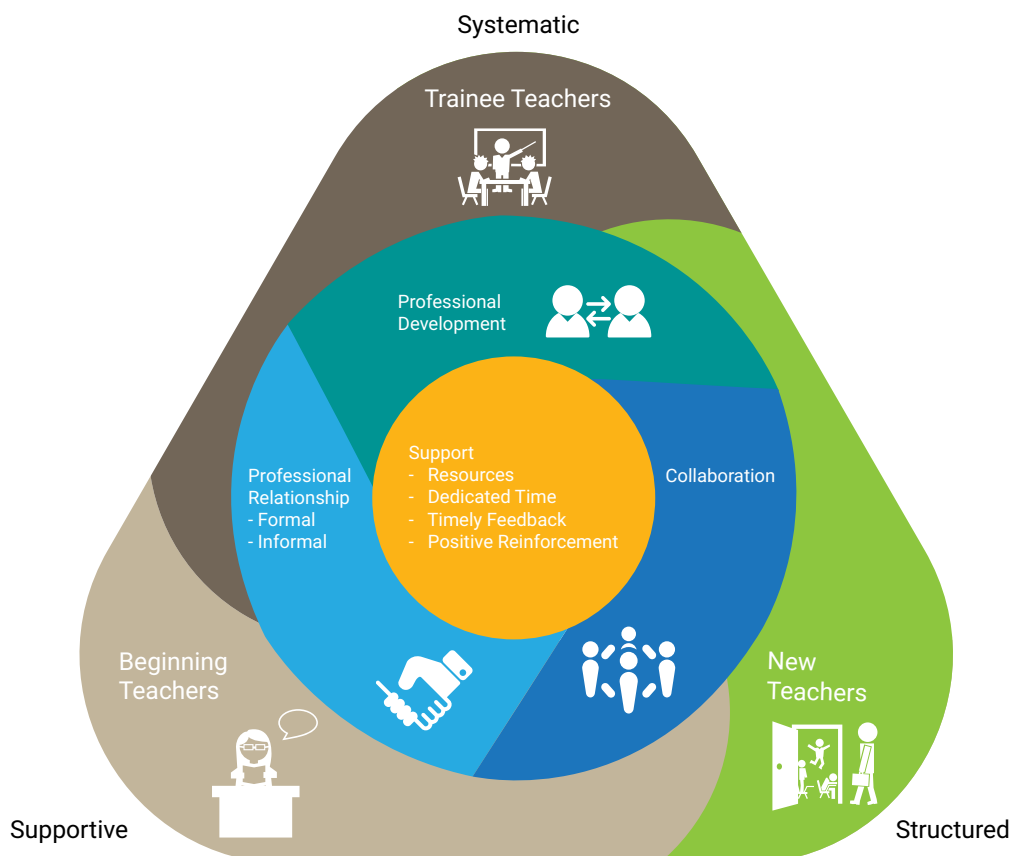


CHAPTER 2

Developing a Structured Centre-based Mentoring Programme

A structured centre-based mentoring programme guides Centre Leaders and mentors in supporting the developmental needs of staff. Such a programme is anchored in three key characteristics:

- **Supportive** - through a focus on professional development and high level of collaboration.
- **Structured** - anchored in support that is systematically built up from the first day of a new/beginning teacher's professional life at the centre. This includes relationship establishment, both formal and informal, as well as tangible resource support in terms of materials and dedicated time and intangible support in terms of timely feedback and encouragement.
- **Systematic** - Centre Leaders playing a critical role in nurturing a culture that values collaboration and encourages reflection, dialogue and professional development amongst staff.



Supportive Programme

A structured mentoring programme begins with the centre having in place a strong support system which would create and facilitate mentoring and learning opportunities within the centre. The support rendered should extend beyond the mentors to include the Centre Leader, Senior Teachers and colleagues.

For a start, putting together a Centre Handbook as part of an induction programme would be most useful. This Handbook would detail the centre's vision, mission and values as well as standard operating procedures and routine practices. This would help new teachers understand the environment of which they are a member and appreciate the centre's expectations with regard to its day-to-day operations.

In addition to the above, a supportive mentoring programme would establish safety nets to avoid or overcome potential challenges. Safety nets provide just-in-time support that enables mentees to address their challenges and frustrations. Centres that are proactive in anticipating challenges are more likely to establish resilient and responsive mentoring safety nets to better meet the needs of mentees.

Typically, stronger mentoring support is needed in the first two years of trained service and will lessen as the teacher gains confidence and independence.

Case Study – “Encounters of a Beginning Teacher”

Miss Elisa had graduated with a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education. She found her first job as a teacher of Nursery 2 children at ABC Childcare Centre. She was excited, yet nervous about starting her new job even though she had been through a few practicum sessions.

On her first day of work, her Centre Leader was out for a meeting, but Miss Jo, a Senior Teacher teaching another Nursery 2 class, was there to welcome her. Miss Elisa was given a copy of the Centre Handbook and brought around the centre to be introduced to the other teachers. Miss Jo brought Miss Elisa through some of the key policies of the centre and explained why certain procedures were in place.

Over the year, Miss Jo was able to build a strong rapport and relationship with Miss Elisa. The Centre Leader decided to appoint Miss Jo to be Miss Elisa's mentor and made efforts for both teachers to have some dedicated time. As such, Miss Elisa was able to have regular opportunities to seek advice from Miss Jo regarding issues she faced in the classroom and with parents. These sessions allowed Miss Elisa to reflect on her professional practice and were a safe space for Miss Jo to provide assistance. On an ad-hoc basis, Miss Jo also provided feedback on Miss Elisa's teaching and learning practices.

- *What structures were in place for the mentoring relationship to flourish?*
- *What other measures can be taken to enhance the mentoring relationship?*

Putting in place a Systematic Support Structure

A

Appropriate Selection & Identification of Mentors

Ideally, each beginning teacher or new teacher should be supported by one mentor; in the event that this is not possible, a mentor may be assigned up to a maximum of two mentees.

An effective mentor is respected by peers and colleagues and serves as a source of inspiration to his/her mentee. In selecting mentors, consider an experienced teacher who has the knowledge, skills and dispositions as outlined in Chapter 3: Effective Mentors and Responsible Mentees (page 22)

B

Sufficient Time and Space for Mentoring

Commitment to providing dedicated time for the mentee to develop a deeper understanding of the difficulties at hand and the problem solving process, as well as for the mentor to provide the appropriate guidance, are imperative. Concerted efforts to minimise the impact of time-associated constraints, such as those listed below, would go a long way to ensure that new teachers are well inducted and mentored into the school culture and environment.

Time-associated constraints:

- Lack of time for mentoring
- Limited dedicated time for mentor-mentee classroom observation, conferencing and dialogues
- High workload for mentors
- Heavy responsibilities for new and beginning teachers in their first year of work

Some possible arrangements to alleviate such constraints:

- Coordinating dedicated time
- Collaborative planning of teaching units
- Sharing resources within teams
- Ensuring clarity of roles
- Team teaching with beginning teachers

In addition, there is a need to see to the provision of an environment conducive for the mentor and mentee to engage in extended discussions such as with pre- and post-lesson observation conferences. This would support the culture of respect, where confidentiality is observed, and both mentors and mentees are encouraged to share more openly with each other.



C

Structured Training for Centre Mentors

The mentoring process starts with the selection of the 'right' mentor. There is a common misunderstanding that any experienced teacher makes a good mentor. There is also the assumption that a good, effective classroom teacher may naturally be a good mentor, and they will need little instruction to assume the role of a mentor even though their charge is now an adult and not a child.

To be an effective mentor, structured training grounded in research and student learning is necessary. Research has shown that a well-conceptualised mentor curriculum is one that can develop new mentors to guide new teachers through 'educative mentoring', and is premised on inter-personal and communication skills. This process engages new teachers in reflective practice through critically reviewing their practice and developing strategies to continually improve and refine their practice.

An effective mentor training provides opportunities for role-play, modelling and collaborative problem-solving, and equips mentors with action research and inquiry skills to guide reflections and material adaptation to suit the different needs of the learners. It is important, however, to exercise flexibility and adapt mentoring programmes according to the observed needs and specific mentor-mentee concerns. Hence, it is necessary that mentors are suitably trained, skilled and equipped to carry out their mentoring role effectively.

D

Structured Continuing Professional Development for Beginning Teachers, New Teachers and Mentors

A supportive mentoring programme is one that focuses on professional development. This refers to the holistic development of both the mentor and the mentee, with the process of mentoring seen as part of the continuum of professional learning. By working out a structured continuing professional development plan for both the beginning teachers and mentors, there would be opportunities for both to reach out to the broader educational community. Over time, networked learning communities can be established, where cooperation and collaboration are most valued.



CHAPTER 3

Effective Mentors and Responsible Mentees

“As a mentee, I recall having the burning passion and eagerness as I stepped into this profession. However, at the same time I needed someone whom I could express my fears and concerns to. Thankfully, I was able to go through my journey as a young and fresh educator under the hands of three different mentors whom I am still in contact with today. They were significant in shaping my early perspectives of early childhood education.”

- Nur Liyana Bte A. Wahid

Senior Teacher, PCF Sparkletots Tampines Changkat



Who is an Effective Mentor?

An effective mentor is a model of competence, is well-respected and has spheres of influence with relevant stakeholders. She is an experienced teacher/leader who has reached a level of proficiency and confidence in her practice. Her role is to help her mentee progress successfully from one stage to the next - it could be from a beginning teacher to an experienced teacher or from an experienced teacher to a leader.

A mentor assumes different roles as the needs of her mentee change. While the broad roles of a mentor are to instruct and support her mentee in developing capability, there are specific roles commonly undertaken by a mentor:

- Being a role model,
- Encouraging reflection and self-assessment,
- Providing advice on direction and goal-setting,
- Providing instructional support, including selection of teaching strategies and relevant resources,
- Supporting mentee in implementing plans in order to realise goals,
- Strengthening collegiality and the mentee's sense of belonging to the organisation, and
- Providing emotional support.

The following segment outlines the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions for a mentor to carry out her roles effectively.

Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions of an Effective Mentor

An effective mentor has:

- A. An in-depth understanding of the Early Childhood landscape and teaching & learning approaches
- B. A clear understanding of mentoring
- C. Effective communication skills
- D. The ability to meet the professional learning needs of her mentee
- E. A professional and approachable disposition

A

In-depth understanding of the Early Childhood Landscape and Teaching & Learning Approaches

A mentor with an in-depth understanding of the Early Childhood landscape and teaching & learning approaches is competent in the following areas:

- Utilising understanding of the developmental stages of children aged 0-8 to inform practice
- Aligning the centre's curriculum to the Early Years Development Framework (EYDF), Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) and Mother Tongue Language (MTL) curriculum frameworks and deploying appropriate teaching and learning strategies, techniques as well as observation tools to guide the holistic development of the individual child
- Analysing and adapting strategies to enhance quality learning for young children
- Keeping abreast with developments in early childhood education and development



B Clear understanding of Mentoring

A mentor with a clear understanding of mentoring is competent in the following areas:

- Role modelling the values and philosophy of the centre/organisation and communicating these to her mentee
- Understanding the mentoring process as well as the roles and responsibilities of both mentors and mentees
- Setting expectations and goals with her mentee, and engaging her mentee in working towards realising these agreed upon outcomes

C Effective Communication Skills

A mentor with strong communication skills is competent in the following areas:

- Utilising appropriate questioning techniques to extend her mentee's thinking and support her problem solving skills
- Providing constructive and reflective feedback
- Empathising and listening actively

D**Ability to meet the Professional Learning Needs of the Mentee**

A mentor with the ability to meaningfully address the professional learning needs of the mentee is competent in the following areas:

- Understanding the career paths available within her centre/organisation and sector in order to meaningfully address the career aspirations of her mentee
- Understanding professional development and the various professional development modalities
- Relating to all categories of mentees, e.g. trainee-teachers, beginning teachers, new teachers to the centre, and experienced teachers
- Displaying sensitivity to the developmental needs of her mentee
- Understanding her mentee's strengths and areas for improvement and developing with her clear, concise and focused action plans to develop her mentee's competencies

E**Professional and Approachable Disposition**

A mentor with a professional and approachable disposition displays the following characteristics:

- Maintains integrity and confidentiality
- Is committed to making the mentoring relationship work, including ensuring time and space necessary to lay the foundation for positive mentoring relationships

An effective mentor is able to scaffold the learning needs of her mentee. She is also able to engage in mutually supportive and collegial working relationships, manage conflicts, serve as a catalyst for change and enlist the support of colleagues, management, and pertinent stakeholders to work towards achieving a common goal.

The mentor deploys a range of mentoring approaches that would enable her to be responsive to her mentee's needs and to extend her mentee's existing knowledge. In providing her mentee with opportunities to reflect, problem-solve and make informed choices, the mentor builds her mentee's confidence and sense of success. Through taking on the role of a confidant or a coach, the mentor is able to support the mentee in clarifying doubts, developing capabilities and refining skills.



Activity for mentor

What professional development have you undertaken that would enable you to serve as an effective mentor?

Core Skill	Type of Professional Development (e.g. Conference, Course, Workshop, Sharing Session, Professional Reading)	Additional Information (e.g. Course Title & Training Provider)	Dates Attended	Duration	What was helpful? What would you like more of?
In-depth understanding of the Early Childhood Landscape and Teaching and Learning Approaches					
Clear Understanding of the Mentoring Process					
Effective Communication Skills					
Ability to meet the Professional Learning Needs of the Mentee					
Others:					

By documenting and reflecting on the professional development undertaken, you will be able to ascertain the knowledge and skills that you would need to further hone and develop.

Case Study – “Paying it Forward”

Shortly after her promotion to Senior Teacher, Ms Firoza learnt the hard way what it meant to be an ineffective mentor. Eager to display her seniority, Ms Firoza did not manage to earn the trust of her mentee as she constantly asked for updates on what the new teacher was teaching in class. Ms Firoza also frequently rejected new ideas expressed by her mentee as she found them “untested” and “impractical”.

Determined to improve, Ms Firoza approached her Centre Leader, Ms Juliana, to take her as a mentee who was learning to be a mentor. Having a warm and welcoming disposition, Ms Juliana was a good role model for Ms Firoza, who found her approachable and willing to understand the challenges her teachers were facing. Because Ms Juliana was sometimes busy with centre operations, Ms Firoza also learnt the importance of being a good mentee in a mentoring relationship by being proactive in setting up meetings with Ms Juliana, and constantly sought out her colleagues to engage in professional dialogues on how to improve their craft.

Even though Ms Firoza is now experienced as a mentor, she continues to maintain her relationship with Ms Juliana whom she trusts to offer her professional advice. Paying it forward, Ms Firoza is now mentoring potential mentors in the centre to build a mentoring culture where both mentors and mentees reciprocate in the relationship.

It takes two hands to clap; can you think of other ways a mentor and mentee can make the mentoring experience a pleasant one?



Who is a Responsible Mentee?

Although the mentoring process appears to hinge largely on the commitment, expertise and disposition of the mentor, it is important to understand that an equally significant commitment from the mentee is pivotal to a successful mentoring relationship. The mentee must look upon the mentoring process as an opportunity for professional growth and development, and understand that being in a mentoring relationship is a privilege and not an entitlement.

Contrary to common assumptions, it is the mentee, and not the mentor, who drives the learning in a mentoring relationship and ensures that she benefits from the relationship. A mentee with a strong desire to learn and grow will benefit most from mentoring.

The following segment outlines the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions for a mentee to benefit from the relationship.

Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions of a Mentee

A responsible mentee has:

- A. The motivation to deepen her understanding of the Early Childhood landscape and teaching & learning approaches
- B. An understanding of the mentoring process
- C. Good communication skills
- D. A self-motivated and receptive disposition

A

Motivation to deepen understanding of the Early Childhood Landscape and Teaching & Learning Approaches

A mentee who is motivated to deepen her understanding of the Early Childhood landscape and teaching & learning approaches has the following characteristics:

- Displays ability to identify the knowledge and skills that she would like to deepen and develop and works towards meeting (and exceeding) these competencies
- Takes time to intentionally and critically reflect on her teaching practice, and interactions with children, families and peers
- Takes time to understand the centre's curriculum, teaching and learning strategies, techniques and observation tools to guide the individual child,
- Takes time to deepen her understanding of the Early Childhood landscape, and strives to keep abreast with developments in the sector

B

Clear understanding of the Mentoring Process

A mentee with a clear understanding of the mentoring process displays the following characteristics:

- Is serious about understanding and committing to the values and philosophy of the centre/organisation
- Is committed to the mentoring process and relationship
- Is motivated to work with her mentor to realise agreed upon outcomes

C

Good Communication Skills

A mentee with good communication skills is competent in the following areas:

- Is keen to heighten awareness of self and others
- Open to feedback and constructive criticism
- Displays ability to practise active listening
- Engages in reflective dialogue and professional conversations with colleagues, peers and other professionals
- Displays ability to document and monitor her own progress in meeting desired goals/outcomes



D

Self-motivated and Receptive Disposition

A mentee with a self-motivated and receptive disposition would display the following characteristics:

- Is self-motivated and willing to learn new knowledge and skills
- Takes on responsibility for decisions made and actions taken, and is willing to take on new challenges.
- Is pro-active and seeks assistance, input and guidance, accepts advice and responds to tasks
- Takes advantage of the learning and development opportunities made available to her

Above all, a responsible mentee is able to see mentoring as a way of raising her self-awareness and professionalism as an early childhood educator. She is willing and able to deepen her knowledge, enhance skills and competencies by being a proactive and active participant, and to do so by tapping on the expertise, experience and wisdom of her mentor.

All teachers, whether beginning or experienced, would need some form of support to further refine their teaching practice and professional growth. Some teachers may have specific areas which need improvement, such as implementing new teaching practices, communicating with parents more effectively, or time management. Other teachers may find themselves needing support when moving to teach a different age group with different developmental and learning needs. In addition, teachers taking on new roles may also need guidance in meeting the needs and expectations of the role.

A responsible mentee facilitates her professional growth by being active and responsive. She is pro-active, grounded by the need and willingness to learn new ideas, deepen knowledge as well as hone skills and competencies. A responsible mentee will have much to gain from the experience and wisdom of her mentor through the process of critical inquiry and reflection.



Activity for mentee

These are some knowledge and skills that a mentee could develop. Take the time to reflect if you have undertaken professional development in the following areas:

Core Skill	Type of Professional Development (e.g. Conference, Course, Workshop, Sharing Session, Professional Reading)	Additional Information (e.g. Course Title & Training Provider)	Dates Attended	Duration	What was helpful? What would you like more of?
Motivation to deepen understanding of the Early Childhood Landscape and Teaching & Learning Approaches					
Clear understanding of the Mentoring process					
Effective Communication Skills					
Self-motivated and Receptive Disposition					
Others:					

By documenting and reflecting on professional development undertaken, you will be able to ascertain the knowledge and skills that you would need to further hone and develop.



CHAPTER 4

Establishing the Mentoring Relationship

*“Trust is the highest form of human motivation.
It brings out the very best in people”*

- Stephen Covey

Mentoring is both a relationship and a process that is based on trust and rapport. This relationship will be strengthened over time and through distinct phases.

The mentoring relationship begins with both mentor and mentee taking time to get to know each other. After that, both would reach common understandings through the setting of and agreement on goals, as well as development of action plans. The relationship then moves into the next phase, where deliberate effort is taken to achieve the goals set. This phase would require sustained effort from both the mentor and mentee. From here, they would take time to evaluate the progress made over the mentoring relationship and decide whether the relationship is to continue for the enhancement of the mentee’s professional growth, or if it will shift into a collegial relationship with both providing peer support.

In the following pages, each phase of the mentoring relationship is further outlined. It is crucial to note that these steps are meant to be a guide and thus would need to be customised based on the individual mentoring relationship.



Phase 1**Getting to Know One Another**

This is a crucial phase for initiation and rapport-building that could make a significant difference to the mentoring relationship. The first meeting sets the tone and climate of the mentoring relationship ahead, and should thus focus primarily on building a purposeful and meaningful mentor-mentee relationship. It takes time to build any relationship, and as trust is built between the mentor and mentee, this relationship will be strengthened. At this first meeting, it is also important to agree on some ground rules that would lend greater clarity to expectations and guide decision making. This would facilitate the realisation of goals and also strengthen the relationship. The key ingredients to a successful first meeting include laying the foundations for building trust and mutual respect for each other.

Resources for Phase 1

- Mentor: Annex A, B, C
- Mentee: Annex B, C

Phase 2**Goal Setting and Action Planning**

After the first meeting, both mentor and mentee should take time to reflect on the aims and expectations of the relationship, including establishing ground rules and opting out if the relationship is not working for either party. In this phase, there should also be a focus on goal-setting, a powerful technique for a mentee to develop a solid foundation for planning and organisation. Well-defined goals help the mentee to remain focused and determine the specific action plans that both mentor and mentee can work on together. In addition, setting goals together strengthens commitment to the outcomes of the relationship.

Resources for Phase 2

- Mentor: Annex D
- Mentee: Annex D

Phase 3**Developing Professional Skills and Tracking Progress**

This phase is the core of the mentoring relationship where most of the time, energy and effort is expended. As such, keeping track of progress through regular meetings and review of action plans is important. In addition, support from the centre and/or organisation is crucial to ensure that both mentor and mentee make progress towards realising goals set. The mentor has to guide and support the mentee in areas agreed upon, while the mentee has to commit to the agreed upon goals, action plans and/or personal changes.

Within this phase, both mentor and mentee must take steps to follow through with the action plan (Annex D). This may be achieved through purposeful activities such as joint planning of lessons, lesson demonstrations by the mentor, lesson observations by both mentor and mentee, and the identifying and sharing of resources. In addition, the conversations between mentor and mentee should also aid the mentee in exploring his/her beliefs and how these beliefs are applied in practice.

Both mentor and mentee should continually track the progress through reflective dialogues and documentation. As the relationship develops, the goals might shift, become more specific, or expand into other areas.

Resources for Phase 3

- Mentor: Annex E

Phase 4**Evaluating Progress and Outcomes**

When the action plans have been completed, both mentor and mentee would have to evaluate the extent to which goals set have been achieved. With Annex C and D as reference points, the mentor and mentee should review whether the goals have been met. This highlights the importance of having clear, well-defined goals, as it would provide a guide when evaluating progress. This process of evaluation should be an ongoing activity to aid the refinement of goals and to support the mentoring relationship.



Phase 5**Moving Forward**

Finally, having a clear understanding of the status of the mentoring relationship– either moving on to a renewed mentoring cycle, termination or redefinition of the relationship – helps both mentor and mentee to plan towards a positive and amicable closure. Where there is good rapport between the mentor and mentee, the mentee’s needs should be reviewed and both mentor and mentee should set new goals and action plans. In this manner, the mentoring cycle continues. One of the key ingredients of a good centre-based mentoring programme is building a framework to support the mentoring culture.

Resources for Phase 5

- Mentor: Annex F

The scaffolding of the relationship through the different phases of the mentoring relationship will allow the mentee to move from being just *intuitive* to more *intentional* in her practices. A mentoring process that focuses on the mentee’s needs has the potential to ignite the mentee’s sense of curiosity, persistence, and wonder, and nurture the mentee as a professional early childhood educator who will one day develop into an effective mentor.



Case Study: "Communication is Key"

Annie is a Senior Teacher with a diploma and more than 10 years of teaching experience. She has had good mentoring experiences and relationships with junior teachers. Wilma has a degree and impressive credentials including an overseas stint prior to joining this new centre. Wilma was assigned by her centre leader to be mentored by Annie.

Besides being busy with other duties, Annie also assumed that Wilma did not need as much help as she was a graduate and had overseas experience. Wilma, on the other hand, felt confident that she could handle her work, and would have no problems in coming up with suggestions and ideas.

Though Wilma was knowledgeable and experienced enough to handle the day to day situations in her classroom, she was not equipped to handle two children who were displaying difficult behaviours. Wilma requested of Annie that she should either be given an assistant, or one or both the children be removed from her class. After Wilma suggested some possible strategies, Annie said that she would consider them.

The next day, the Centre Leader entered Wilma's classroom and started to intervene in the situation. Wilma was unhappy and felt slightly betrayed by how Annie had handled the information that she had shared. Instead of recognising her initiative to suggest possible solutions, and discussing what could be done, Annie had referred the matter to the Centre Leader. Annie, on the other hand, felt that Wilma was being bossy and not receptive to all the suggestions she had made. She had decided that it was best to let the Centre Leader manage her instead.

- *Which key aspect of the 5 phases was missing from their mentoring relationship? What could have been done differently?*
- *How could both of them have communicated better with each other?*
- *How could each have handled the situation differently?*
- *How could the Centre Leader have handled the situation differently as well?*



CHAPTER 5

Sustaining the Mentoring Culture

Programme vs. Culture

A mentoring programme goes beyond instruction manual and workshops; it is a social relationship and thus should be treated as such. Both the mentor and mentee are equal participants in the programme, bringing along their unique experiences for the same purpose of improving their professional practice.

While a mentoring programme may be driven by centre leadership, it must ultimately be replaced by a mentoring culture that permeates through each centre and eventually, the sector. A culture of mentoring is self-sustaining when educators believe in the benefits that it yields and embody that culture through their actions.

One of the strengths of a mentoring culture lies in its adaptability to different cultural contexts. This should be supported by a mentoring programme that is sensitive to the situation, social patterns, and organisational culture, through an understanding of the cultural background in which a programme is implemented against. For example, in a centre where the teachers' autonomy to plan and implement lessons suited for specific dynamics of different classes is strongly emphasised, mentors in this centre should help mentees discover innovative ways to cater to the needs and interests of their children, rather than implement "one size fits all" lesson plans.

Leadership-enabled Mentoring Culture

Leadership is crucial during the initial phase of a mentoring culture and can determine whether or not the culture flourishes. Clear leadership direction determines the attitudes of mentors and mentees embarking on the programme. Since mentoring requires dedicated resources, such as man-hours and coordination of schedules for observations and dialogues, leaders who believe in the value of mentoring will ensure provision of dedicated time and space for mentors and mentees.

Leadership that is fervent about mentoring will influence fellow educators to find meaning in the value of mentoring and its process; to believe in and experience the benefits that mentoring yields, thereby leading to a self-sustaining culture of mentoring within the centre.

Conclusion

This mentoring toolkit aims to provide guidelines for good practice, taking into consideration the cultural context in which the programme takes place. Leaders are encouraged to establish a mentoring culture through implementing a structured programme and creating a conducive environment where educators are nurtured and developed.



Reflection

1. How 'optimal' are the current conditions within your centre to support a mentoring culture? What else can be done to better support such a culture?

2. Given your current role, how can you play a part in sustaining a mentoring culture within your centre?



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ANNEX A

The First Meeting

What is the first meeting for?

The first meeting is all about getting your relationship off to a good start. It takes time to build any relationship and it will get easier as you journey through the mentoring process because you will build trust and better understand each other. This is also the best time to agree on some ground rules, about what you hope to achieve, and your expectations of one another.

Key Pointers

- Ensure the environment is safe and comfortable. Sometimes you could just “pop by” for 5 minutes to introduce yourself first prior to the first meeting.
- Get to know one another, personally and professionally. Remove any preconceived ideas you may have and remain objective and professional.
- Talk about your mentee’s hopes, aspirations, achievements, priorities in work and in life.
- Explore if there is any particular issue your mentee is facing and areas that she would like to work on.

Building Trust

- For a mentor, your mentee’s trust in you will depend on your ability to show that you genuinely care, you are competent (even if you are younger) and you value professional and personal integrity.
- For a mentee, your mentor’s trust in you is dependent on your ability to show that you are receptive and committed to personal and professional change.
- While some personal information may be shared to “break the ice”, it should be treated with respect and confidentiality.
- Share the understanding that mentoring is developmental and not meant to be judgemental, or for the assessment of the mentee.

Additional Guiding Pointers to Consider

- Frequency and length of future meetings
- Location of future meetings
- Ways of keeping in touch (by e-mail, telephone, etc)
- Preferred methods of working together
- Ways of recording progress for further development
- Confidentiality & mutual responsibility



ANNEX B

KWHLAQ Chart

It is crucial to evaluate one's strengths, weaknesses and areas for development in order to assess one's trajectory of growth. The KWHLAQ¹ chart is useful for both mentor and mentee to assess where one is at currently and where one intends to go in order to remain focused and on track in the mentoring journey. It is also useful in determining what actions have been taken, what new learning has been gathered, and whether new needs may arise. It can be used in the beginning of the mentoring journey and updated towards the end of each phase.

K	W	H	L	A	Q
What do I know?	What do I want to know?	How do I find out more?	What have I learnt?	What action will I take?	What new questions do I have?

¹ Barrell, J.F. (2007). *Why are school buses always yellow: Teaching for inquiry, pre-K – 5*. Corwin Press: Thousand Oaks, California.

ANNEX C

Learning Log

A learning log is an informal yet important tool to help both the mentor and mentee take relevant notes and document reflections. This may include projects, activities, training events or even areas/events that have not gone well, as all of these can be valuable sources of learning.

A learning log does not need to be in any particular format – it is up to your own personal preference on how you record your learning. You may find it useful to use the sample templates provided and re-format them to your own needs. The logs should be accessible and friendly for you to note down reflections soon after the meetings and/or the experiences. Your learning log will help you stay updated and keep track of your learning goals, and also review your development and growth.

These are some questions you might ask as you pen down your reflections:

Mentor:

- How did the session go?
- Did you find your mentee receptive? In what areas?
- What were some key ideas you took away from the session?
- What were some challenges faced by your mentee that you feel need to be worked on?
- What were some strengths of your mentee you would like to build upon in future sessions?
- What have you discovered about yourself and your mentee?
- Do you feel that you have made a positive difference to your mentee? In what ways have you made a positive difference? Please give some examples

Mentee:

- How did the session go?
- Did you find your mentor supportive? In what areas?
- What were some key ideas you have taken away from the session? How would you plan to use or implement these ideas?
- What have you discovered about yourself and your mentor?
- Have you discovered something new, different, or some areas to think about? Please give some examples



Mentor Learning Log

Name of Mentee: _____ Name of Mentor: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Topics Discussed / Agenda:

Focus Area(s)/Next Steps:

My Reflections:

Next Meeting:



Mentee Learning Log

Name of Mentee: _____ Name of Mentor: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Topics Discussed/Agenda:

Focus Area(s)/Next Steps:

My Reflections:

Next Meeting:



ANNEX D

Setting Goals

Setting clear, well-defined goals is a crucial step in establishing common understandings within the mentoring relationship. Well-defined and well-written goals help determine the specific action plans that both mentor and mentee can work on together. One strategy to aid in writing clear goals is to utilise the acronym, SMART².



²Doran, G. T. (1981). There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives. *Management Review*, 70(11), pp. 35-36.

ANNEX E

Lesson Observations

One important role of a mentor is to support the mentee in her teaching and learning practice. In order to do this well, it is important to be steeped in content knowledge and pedagogical skills, equipped with lesson observation skills, and updated on current research and key trends in curriculum and pedagogy.

Observation of teaching practice should be bi-directional; mentors observe mentees and vice versa. It is also valuable for mentees to observe other centre educators, especially if these educators are specialists or skilled in certain areas. For lesson observations to be impactful, the mentor will engage the mentee for a pre-observation discussion to determine the area(s) of focus, followed by the lesson observation and post-observation feedback and reflections.

The questions to guide the conversations should be open-ended and non-threatening, and be asked in a manner to elicit a reflective response from the mentee. The mentee should be encouraged to find her own wisdom in determining the next steps of her journey, together with her mentor. Some questions to guide the conversations are listed below.

Pre-observation:

- How can I be of help to you?
- What specifically do you wish me to look for?
- What specifically do you wish me to know?
- Is there a particular child you would like me to observe?
- What are your objectives and expectations for the lesson?
- For how long would you like me to observe?

Post-observation:

- How do you think the lesson went?
- Can you recall what the children were doing that made you feel this way?
- What do you remember about what you did or the strategies you used?
- How does this compare with what you expected would happen?
- What could be some reasons it happened this way?

Lesson Observation Techniques:

- Anecdotal and Running Records
- Time and Event Sampling
- Checklists
- Observing while participating in an experience with children

ANNEX F

Exiting the Mentoring Relationship

When mentors and mentees come to a place where outcomes have been realised, when there is a mismatch between mentor and mentee (e.g. conflicting personalities), or when one party is moving on to another centre, the mentoring relationship may have to cease. Therefore, it is important to establish the procedures for an exit which may take place at any point during the mentoring process. This would help ensure that proper wrap-up takes place.

When the mentee has achieved the goals and outcomes, and/or outgrown the mentoring relationship with the mentor, it is good to initiate a process for the mentee's "graduation" from the mentoring relationship. To ensure this, it is important for the mentee to be able to put what they have learned into practice. If the mentee has displayed the appropriate dispositions and developed the requisite competencies, it may also be timely to recommend her to consider taking on the role of a mentor and embark on the relevant training to equip her with the knowledge and skills.

Tips to end your mentoring relationship successfully:

- **Schedule a suitable date for the final meeting:** Decide on a date with your mentee and remind each other that this is the final meeting. The aim is to reflect on the processes and outcomes, and tie up any loose ends. It may also be ideal to do it in a more relaxed atmosphere away from the classroom or the office.
- **Find other ways to support each other (if needed):** If the termination is collegial, look at ways on how you can continue to support your mentee's learning. Both of you could develop a professional friendship and may support each other through informal means.
- **Celebrate the little achievements:** Based on your logs, KWHLAQ chart or other forms of documentation, consider what you have both achieved during the process – even if it is a small milestone. Celebrate the progress and achievement! Consider giving each other a treat or a pat on the back!
- **Say thank you and goodbye:** End the session on a positive note. You could talk about what you most enjoyed, what you will remember most or the most important things you have both learned and appreciated about each other. Thank each other for the experiences and mutual support.





Early Childhood Development Agency
51 Cuppage Road, #08-01, Singapore 229469
Email: contact@ecda.gov.sg
www.ecda.gov.sg