

The Vital Role of the Principal in Teacher Induction

Ellen Moir, *NTC Executive Director*

As I got ready to write my column for this edition of *Reflections*, my thoughts kept circling around how important a principal is when it comes to the learning that happens at a school. I don't think educators and policy makers have ever fully understood the role of principals or that role's potential as much as we do now.

Traditionally, approaches to the principalship often focus on the operational and the management aspects of the position. But I believe we are coming to embrace a much more powerful role for the "principal teacher" than ever before, and this is nowhere more evident than in the lives of beginning teachers.

We are finding that the principal can trump even in the most potent and well-designed, carefully implemented induction or mentoring effort.



The positive impact of a strong principal, who has created a caring and ambitious school learning community, will serve to retain new teachers and advance their development.

Such principals have strong instructional backgrounds and focus on the learning that is happening in each and every classroom—both the teacher's and the students'. They see themselves as

Chief Promoter of Learning as well as Chief Learner. They model curiosity, tolerance for ambiguity, and a commitment to ongoing professional growth.

Yet, it's more than a vision and a stance. These principals dedicate time and energy to getting into classrooms, learning how to observe, collect data, and analyze a teacher's practice, and then to have collegial conversations that invite

Ellen Moir with
Oak Grove School
District Director of
Personnel Dr. Joel
Ruiz Herrera and his
son, David Herrera,
Principal, Cesar
Chavez Academy,
in Ravenswood City
Elementary School
District, East Palo
Alto, California

teachers to develop a sense of personal agency and take risks for the sake of improved student learning. They create rich feedback loops and engage their staff in thoughtful inquiry.

But I really don't want to frame this as just a principal issue. While it is the principal as "Leader for Learning" who has the responsibility for making this happen for entire staffs, it is the mentor's responsibility to support these professional norms and habits of mind as

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Convergent Coaching

How Interactions Between the Principal, Principal Coach and Teacher Mentor Bridge the Instructional Gap

By Kitty Dixon, *Director, School/District Support and Innovation and Jenny Morgan, CA Regional Director, New Teacher Center*

A fundamental theory of action that drives the New Teacher Center’s initiative in a Bay Area program improvement school district is that intensive mentoring that is job-embedded, site-based, and integrated into ongoing district and school improvement efforts builds teacher and administrator leadership.

Furthermore, when principals, teacher mentors and principal coaches “converge” and regularly interact about current instructional trends and data, the quality of instruction and the access to quality instruction improve.

In many traditional mentoring models, the principal coach interacts almost exclusively with the coachee (principal)—interactions between a principal coach and a teacher mentor are usually informal and often guarded. Although teacher mentors often meet with a principal, the conversations may or may not address broader organizational trends.

A Convergent Coaching model consists of ongoing interactions between the principal, a site-based new teacher mentor and the principal coach. Norms of confidentiality are not breached, and the purpose is to dialogue using multiple data points. Are there trends in the instructional goals and support needed across the caseload of new teachers? What are the current strengths and gaps in teaching and learning? The following table shows sample shared data points (not attached to individual teachers):

Consider the following example:

A principal coach is working with a second-year principal in a K–8 school with a staff that includes 14 new teachers. The principal and her leadership team use summative data to identify writing as an area for improvement. The principal coach and mentor share observation data summaries that support the leadership team’s findings. The principal, coach, and teacher mentor use this data to develop a proposal for the leadership team to implement ongoing

professional development in Writers’ Workshop, and individual coaching and mentoring. After a staff discussion, Writers’ Workshop is built into the School Plan and the Professional Development Calendar. The new teacher mentor attends the professional development sessions with both new and veteran teachers, and is then in a position to strategically coach around implementation issues.

The next steps of the principal, coach and mentor are informed by their continued discussion and analysis of what the practice “on the ground” looks like. In addition to meeting with the principal, the coach and new teacher mentor meet regularly in coaching team forums that include mentors and principal coaches across the district.

Current research suggests that our efforts to close the “achievement gap” may be undermined by the term itself, which perpetuates the sense that the gap is inevitable and that it is somehow separate from funding gaps or gaps in access to quality instruction

Mentor Data Points	Principal Coach Data Points	Principal Data Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation data trends across new teacher caseload with specific instructional focus (e.g., writing instruction) • Summary of instructional strengths and challenges from grade level meetings (new and veteran teachers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary data from quick visits • Summary of trends and patterns gleaned from conversations at site and district levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School and district vision and goals • Summary data from quick visits • School-wide standardized test scores

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(Ladson-Billings, 2006; Hamann et al 2008). A priority, then, is to capitalize on ways to expand our unit of change from individual teachers and individual principals to systems within and across a school site. Our experience is telling us that it is this convergence of instructional leadership that has the power to bring multiple data points and feedback into instructional decisions that impact student learning. ■



Jen Bloom, Mentor,
Leila Minnis,
Principal Coach,
and Debbie
Nemecek, Mentor,
discuss the next
steps for using
data from a site
assessment wall.

MOIR continued from page 1

they work with their new teachers.

We are seeing amazing things happen when principals and mentors work together to create the environments in which teachers—new along with their veteran colleagues—thrive. These are schools where all teachers are supported in being learners, in holding the vision that every child can and does learn, where inquiry into one's practice and the use of data are simply facts of everyday professional life, and where teachers participate in professional learning communities that foster public practice

coupled with supports for teacher learning—much like the school community described in Ulli Kummerow and Marina Cook's article on page 7.

Mike Heffner talks about sustaining the 3 C's of communication, collaboration, and coordination in the relationship between the principal and the mentor(s) in his article on page 6, and Kitty Dixon and Jenny Morgan highlight the power of examining data together as a way of creating coaching efforts that converge for increased student learning on page 2.

Rosalie Chako and Joanne Yinger provide more specific insight into what

principals can do to support beginning teachers in their article on page 5, and

Regardless the structures or model, effective, high-quality induction requires the active participation of the principal.

Gary Bloom makes a case on page 4 for strengthening the coaching skills of principals as a powerful

complement to their role as supervisor/evaluator.

Regardless the structures or model, effective, high-quality induction requires the active participation of the principal. Mentors need to learn how to communicate their work without breaching mentor-teacher confidentiality, and principals need to embrace mentors as their compatriots and co-leaders for learning. Together we can make "professional learning communities" and "high-quality teaching" more than just bumper-sticker slogans! ■

A Theory of Action for Coaching-Based Supervision

By Gary Bloom,
NTC Associate Director

Many in the K–12 community believe with great conviction that there must be a brick wall erected between coaching/mentoring and supervising and evaluating.

Teacher mentors are trained to refrain from sharing judgments about their protégées with principals and sometimes with the protégées themselves. Peer Assistance and Review Programs, which have a strong record of building teacher professionalism and quality by engaging teachers in support and gate-keeping roles, are looked upon with ambivalence by many induction and teacher union leaders. Some traditionalists suggest that principals should be confined to evaluating, hiring, firing and managing, and if it happens at all, only those without positional authority should do teacher coaching.

At the heart of this tension is the perception that it is difficult to both nurture and support an individual while making judgments on professional or employment status. Formative and summative feedback are seen as separate. Some believe that protégées are hesitant

to share vulnerabilities and ask for help from a coach who will make a summative assessment.

This tension between coaching and supervision that exists in K–12 professional ranks disappears in the classroom. Every good teacher serves as coach, formatively assessing the

individual performance, determines who gets to play.

There is little substantive research to support either side of this debate. One thing that we can agree on is that effective supervisors both evaluate and coach.

We have developed a theory of action grounded in research and best practice,

effective supervision nested in school and district support systems. At the heart of effective supervision is Blended Coaching; a supervisor/supervisee coaching relationship is both facilitative and instructional. A supervisor serves as a coach and has positional authority and may provide both feedback and direction.

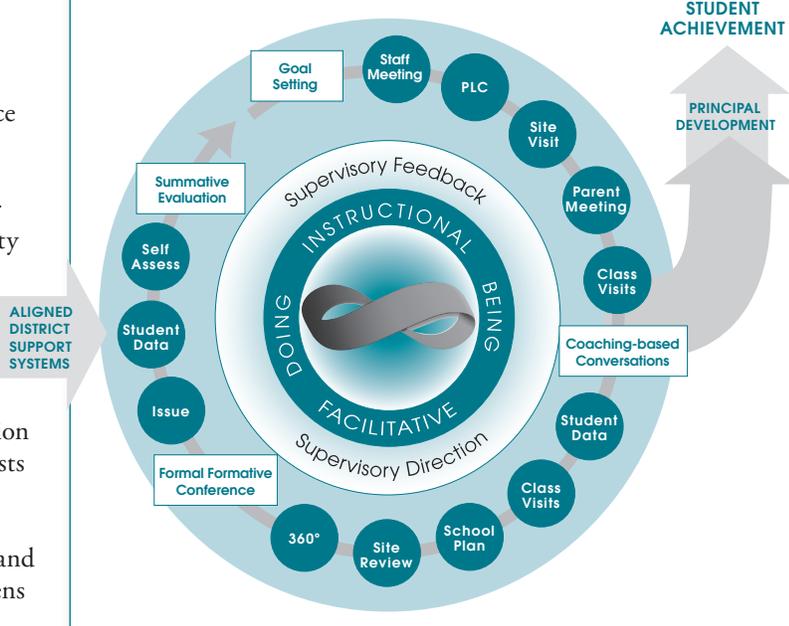
Strong coaching-based supervision processes are

- A primary responsibility and priority of the supervisor
- Informed by formative and summative data from a variety of sources
- Collaborative, iterative, and ongoing
- Have as their primary goal professional and institutional growth
- Situated in a culture of professional learning communities

The graphic to the left illustrates this theory of action.

Our schools depend upon our ability to grow effective teachers and principals. And our ability to do this successfully depends upon our willingness to invest in supervision that nurtures professional development and insures high performance. Effective supervision integrates facilitative and instructional coaching with supervisory direction and feedback. ■

A Theory of Action for the Supervision of Principals



students, and as supervisor, making judgments and offering summative assessment. The same teacher who develops a student’s mastery of calculus through daily teaching and support, gives a final grade and may write a letter of recommendation for college. The basketball coach, who helps a player improve his

which integrates coaching (formative) and supervising (summative) assessment for both principal and central office supervisor professional training.

This theory of action assumes that student achievement depends on teacher and principal quality, which grow with

Mentors and Principals

In Partnership for New Teacher Growth

By Rosalie Chako, *SVNTP Coordinator of Professional Development for Mentors*, and Joanne Yinger, *SVNTP Coordinator of Professional Development for Participating Teachers*

“My principal often walked through my classroom and always left a note on my desk or in my box about something I was doing well.”

—New teacher

New teachers talk with their mentor about administrator interactions, offering testimonials of the administrator’s influence on their development as confident, skilled teachers.

Mentors are committed to meet with site administrators every 4–6 weeks to ensure a better understanding of program components such as the links between district evaluation and the induction goal-setting process, the NTC Formative Assessment System (FAS), the new teacher’s professional development, and the confidentiality that is the mainstay of the mentor/new teacher relationship. New Teacher Center Induction programs encourage frequent collaboration among the teacher, mentor and administrator to cultivate a shared partnership in support of the new teacher.



Silicon Valley educators
Rosalie Chako,
Jireh Lee and
Joanne Yinger

Mentors report that when administrators support the induction program’s components and promote professional “habits of mind,” the entire system is influenced and program elements become standard practice for all teachers at their sites. These administrative behaviors are cited as contributing factors:

- Protects new teachers from adjunct duties
- Visits classrooms regularly
- Teaches in classrooms so new teachers can observe colleagues at work
- Encourages new teachers’ involvement in the site’s learning community
- Values time with mentor

Mentors understand that administrators are short on time. In September, meetings for the year are calendared, emphasizing their importance. If the first meeting is challenging to schedule, mentors talk with the administrator in the corridor or on the playground; these short

meetings build trust. To ensure efficient and productive meetings, mentors use their Mentor/Administrator Log to record plans. In turn, mentors gain a better understanding of the school’s context. They may ask about ways to support the administrator in moving the teacher’s practice forward, and if the administrator indicates a concern, suggest that the administrator initiate a follow-up meeting to include the teacher.

The development of this relationship and respect for the administrator’s complicated context are frequent topics at mentor forums; mentors use facilitative and mediational language to coach each other toward building that critical relationship. Mentor/teacher confidentiality is a common challenge. To ensure confidentiality is not compromised, mentor responses and body language remain nonjudgmental. Nodding

one’s head in agreement to an administrator’s positive or negative comment about a teacher breaches confidentiality. “She is a great teacher” is not a comment to be made to an administrator, nor is sharing Collaborative Log information appropriate. Conversely, presenting facts about the class profile, content standards, teacher attendance at an IEP meeting honors discretion. In addition, respect for the differing roles of administrator and mentor, as well as their interdependence, are critical. Some projects have developed an administrator handbook to serve as a guide for ongoing administrator conversations.

Many new administrators have “come up through the chairs” of new teacher, mentor, and district coordinator. At these schools, an ongoing cycle of inquiry, case study focus and teacher collaboration are standard practice. The mentor/administrator/teacher partnership ultimately leads to greater success for students, the beneficiaries of professional collaboration. ■

The Principal: A Key to Beginning Teacher Success

By Mike Heffner, *NTC Outreach Coordinator*

The principal has a key role in teacher induction. To close the achievement gap, it must be a top priority to create an environment where novice teachers are welcomed and nurtured to become successful. The New Teacher Center School Leadership Development Team works with administrators to create conditions that support teaching and learning.

Supporting the success of beginning teachers may be the most significant contribution the principal makes—both for the present and future. New hires are part of the principal’s legacy, shaping the school’s culture and realizing the principal’s vision. Schools with policies that address beginning teacher needs are

key to both student growth and teacher retention.

Principals have many opportunities to implement policies to support novice teachers. In placing teachers, principals must consider student needs first. Assigning beginning teachers to the most challenging classrooms (too often the case) causes frustration, self-doubt and burnout, thus perpetuating the revolving door. Placing the most talented teachers with the most challenging classes sends a clear message that in this school, learning is top priority.

Principals must be sure that the beginning teacher has as optimal a teaching environment as possible. For example, a principal who sees to it that a new high school teacher has a single room and few preps, and

does everything possible to surround that teacher with nurturing and supportive colleagues, is investing in that teacher’s success.

Ongoing induction meetings provide beginning teachers with a peer network while acclimating them to the school. A faculty handbook that is user friendly, up to date, and prioritizes key information can be invaluable.

The principal is responsible for creating an inclusive and supportive culture, one that fosters inquiry and allows opportunity for learning and mutual support. Collaborative cultures where all members share, support, and problem-solve with each other build this kind of environment. In schools where novice teachers are respected for their knowledge of new teaching strategies and research

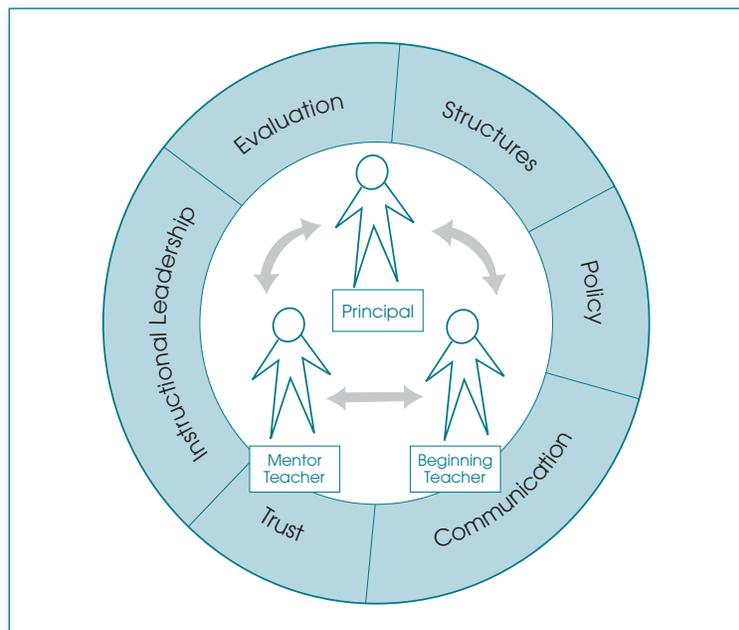
findings, everyone benefits. Experienced teachers reaffirm themselves as lifelong learners, while new teachers feel valued.

In California, and increasingly around the country, beginning teachers are working with induction mentors who support and expedite the beginning teacher’s development. A principal has a powerful opportunity to influence that work. The principal’s clear understanding and articulation of the value of the mentor’s role in induction is important. Sanctioned time for mentors and beginning teachers to meet is crucial. While the mentor teacher relationship is confidential, it is essential that the principal is part of the team. Brief monthly principal and mentor meetings sustain the three Cs—communication, collaboration and

coordination. Principals can share school-wide goals and focus while the mentor can share formative assessment structures and tools. And appropriate meetings that include the beginning teacher offer opportunities to build the relationship between the principal and the beginning teacher.

We know that it takes a community to grow and sustain high-quality teachers, and as the school leader, the principal can be a true instructional leader to play a key part in the induction of the newest members of a school. ■

This graphic illustrates six components of the inter-dependent relationship between the beginning teacher, mentor, and principal. It emphasizes its integrated and complex nature. An important role of the principal is to establish a school culture that welcomes, supports, and retains novice teachers.



A Culture of Collaboration

By Ulli Kummerow, *Principal, Radcliff Elementary School* and Marina Cook, *Santa Cruz New Teacher Project Advisor*

As principal, I have been incredibly fortunate to be working at a site with a large number of beginning teachers.

Most of these professionals have been working with full release mentors who help them with their daily classroom practice and also help them to clear their credentials. The induction program in which our teachers participate is completely aligned with my personal vision—that a school can only move forward if we focus on professional dialogue, analysis of student work and collaboration around best practice.

The collaboration of new teachers with veteran teachers is strengthened by the fact that we have had mentoring for all teachers, not only those starting out their careers. The few veterans we have on the staff have come to understand that new teachers have much to offer when it comes to looking at data, sharing strategies, and looking at next steps.

Many of the newer teachers are better versed in understanding the standards, the curriculum, and the needs of those students



learning English. They understand issues of equity and equal access. Veterans who may not be used to collaborating are working alongside those who hunger for working and learning collectively from what all participants can bring to the table.

The evaluation and supervision process in our district is completely aligned with the tools and processes used by the mentors with the beginning teachers. When we conduct our formal observations, the teachers are familiar with the tools, so there are no surprises. They have also had the opportunity to give us, the evaluators, input as to what they would like feedback on. The process is collaborative and teachers understand the standards for the teaching profession they are being evaluated on.

Marina Cook, mentor, NTP, Amy Eggleston, new teacher, and Ulli Kummerow, principal at Radcliff Elementary

I cannot imagine working at a site where we did not have this culture of collaboration, trust, and respect for teaching and learning. In the ideal, this collaborative model between new teachers, veteran teachers, administrators and mentors puts student learning at the forefront of everything we do. It moves students onto a greater stage where an entire grade level of teachers and support personnel is taking responsibility for all students, not just those on their particular class roster. ■

New at NTC

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Powerful Partnerships by Gary Bloom

Effective Teacher Induction and Mentoring: Assessing the Evidence by Michael Strong

Media

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Mentor Assessment for Growth and Accountability: Tools and Processes for Mentors and Program Leaders

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About The New Teacher Center

The New Teacher Center (NTC) was established in 1998 as a national resource focused on teacher and administrator induction. NTC implements and promotes induction best practices through a variety of innovative professional development opportunities and materials that assist educators and policy makers in supporting the next generation of education professionals. Using an integrated, collaborative approach, NTC strives to support essential research, well-informed policy, and thoughtful practice that encourage teacher development from pre-service throughout the career of a teacher.

New Teacher Center

Improving Teaching and Learning in America's Schools



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