

Supporting factors to effective beginning teacher mentoring

An exploratory study of beginning teacher mentoring practices in Singapore

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Strong support and trust of school leaders are critical for effective beginning teacher (BT) mentoring.
- Timetabled time set aside for scheduled mentoring is necessary and essential.
- Cross-disciplinary mentor-mentee matching has its advantages.

BACKGROUND

The team's earlier projects on student teacher learning and beginning teachers' (BTs) career experiences found that many BTs encountered various challenges such as classroom management, time management, and working with parents, to name a few.

During the critical transition period from pre-service learning to beginning teaching, school support and mentoring were found to be crucial to BTs' socialisation into the school culture, and to their professional growth. Internationally, mentoring has also gained increasing popularity as an important means to help BTs navigate this period with confidence. However, during visits to schools participating in the Instructional Mentoring Programme (IMP), officers from Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) sensed that there existed school variations in the

implementation of BT mentoring. We therefore felt a need to explore the factors that contribute to effective BT mentoring in Singapore.

FOCUS OF STUDY

This study investigates the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of BT mentoring based on the IMP in Singapore. The findings promote better understanding about the patterns of teacher learning and mentoring in Singapore, and contribute to further enhancing the implementation of effective teacher learning and mentoring programmes, both locally and globally.

KEY FINDINGS

Contributing factors to successful and effective BT mentoring include:

- Strong support and trust of school leaders who encourage open communication, sharing and learning among staff and value teachers' continual professional growth, are key to successful and effective implementation of BT mentoring.
- Timetabled time set aside for mentor-mentee scheduled meet-ups, discussions, and lesson observations is necessary and essential.

- A trusting mentor-mentee relationship is critical, as it enables the BTs to freely express themselves without fear or reservations.
- Mentors' rich teaching experience and mentoring skills, coupled with a listening ear and the ability to empathise with the mentees are perceived as very important.
- IMP mentoring tools and materials make the mentoring process more structured, objective, and evidence-based.
- Cross-discipline mentor-mentee matching provides fresh perspectives for the mentor and the mentee, and helps build trust between both parties.
- Not involving the mentors in BTs' assessment reinforces the established trust between them, and helps them to focus more on the BTs' developmental growth.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for practice

- A supportive school leadership is critical for effective mentoring to take place.
- Sufficient timetabled time should be set aside for structured mentoring activities.
- Mentors should not be involved in the assessment of BTs.
- Combining subject-based matching with cross-disciplinary matching is beneficial.

Implications for policy

- A structured mentoring programme (i.e., timetabled time, targeted focus, etc.) can be encouraged and implemented in all schools.

Proposed Follow-up Activities

- School-based structured mentoring programmes can go beyond the mentoring of BTs to experienced teachers.
- Guidelines on how to assess the impact of the mentoring programme and how the growth of the mentors and BTs can be developed.

PARTICIPANTS

Five principals/vice-principals, four coordinating instructional mentors (CIMs), four instructional mentors (IMs), and four BTs from four case study schools, and one officer and three mentor coaches from AST participated in the study. There are also about 1500 survey participants including principals/vice-principals, CIMs, IMs, and BTs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, including interviews, audio recordings of mentor-mentee mentoring conversations, mentoring logs, video recordings of IMP mentoring practices and BTs' classroom practices, and surveys.

About the authors

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