

Preface

For decades, schools and school districts in the United States took few meaningful steps to provide systematic support structures and processes to help beginning teachers enter the profession. This was a problem. The solution, which I fully support, has been the effort over the past 20 years to ensure that beginning teachers receive such support, often in the form of formally assigned and trained mentor teachers. Clearly, this is a step in the right direction when compared to the highly informal, hit-or-miss approach of the past, in which some beginners found excellent support, whereas many others found none. The new problem, clearly a better one to have, is essentially the problem of ensuring that beginning teachers are assigned the mentors they deserve. This problem—or challenge if you will—provides the central focus of this book, the specific purpose of which is to engage mentors in a thoughtful analysis of their own practice as mentor teachers, with the hope that such reflective thought will lead to renewed commitment, openness to new mentoring behaviors, and perhaps a new way of conceptualizing the very nature of their work.

This book is the third step in the evolutionary process of my efforts to define and communicate the qualities of the high-performing mentor teacher. The process began with the publication of an article simply titled “The Good Mentor” (Rowley, 1999). In that article, I argued that the good mentor could be defined by six essential characteristics that are grounded in the theoretical and research-based literature. One year later, Corwin Press published *High-Performance Mentoring: A*

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Multimedia Program for Training Mentor Teachers (Rowley & Hart, 2000). This training program, which is anchored to those six essential qualities, provides school districts and mentor trainers with a comprehensive training protocol and resource package for preparing mentor teachers. The responses to the initial article and to the training program have been personally gratifying. This book is my response to the many requests I have received for a fuller articulation of the ideas presented in the two earlier works.

WHY YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED

It is my sincere hope that this book will be helpful to anyone dedicated to ensuring that beginning teachers receive the caring and committed support that they both need and deserve. First and foremost, this is a book for mentor teachers. Whether you are a new mentor in training, or an experienced mentor reflecting on your work with beginning teachers, you should find ideas to guide your future practice or prompt thoughtful self-analysis. Many of the key insights are based on my personal experiences in training and supporting mentor teachers, and in working with beginning teachers in the context of their entry-year programs. This book should also be of interest to individuals responsible for providing leadership for mentor-based, entry-year programs. Lead mentors, mentor trainers, and staff developers should find it to be a helpful resource for thinking about the critical issues that challenge mentor teachers in their important work. Building principals committed to supporting the mentor teachers at work in their buildings should find it a useful tool for helping them to communicate more effectively with both mentors and beginning teachers.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

This book consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1, *Introduction*, provides the historical backdrop for my conception of the

high-performance mentor, including an explanation of the unique challenges of serving as an assigned mentor in a formal school- or district-based, entry-year program. In addition, it lays the foundation for thinking about mentor performance as occurring on a continuum that ranges from *low-performing* to *high-performing*.

Chapter 2, *Mentoring*, presents four vignettes that help bring the mentor performance continuum to life. Each vignette is based on a different beginning teacher and the experience each had with his or her respective mentor teacher. In addition, mentor teachers are encouraged to employ two analogs to help focus their work. The two analogs presented and discussed are good mentoring as good teaching, and quality mentoring as quality conversation. The chapter also includes a discussion of mentoring as a potential pathway for the personal and professional growth of veteran teachers. Like each of the chapters that follow, Chapter 2 concludes with a collection of questions that are tied to the chapter content and specifically designed to stimulate mentor reflection and action.

Chapter 3, *Committing*, describes the critical role that commitment plays in a mentoring relationship, as well as the diverse factors that can cause mentor and beginning teachers to weaken or lose their commitment to one another. The primary purpose of the chapter is to provide mentor teachers with systematic methods of reflecting on their own commitment to mentoring in the context of a specific relationship with a beginning teacher.

Chapter 4, *Accepting*, discusses how acceptance is foundational to establishing a truly helping relationship. Because one's understanding of another person is related to acceptance, several alternate ways of thinking about first-year teachers are presented and discussed. In addition, mentors are encouraged to develop personal strategies for monitoring and managing their judgments of the beginning teachers they are seeking to help.

Chapter 5, *Communicating*, provides mentor teachers with a conceptual framework for thinking about the developmental

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nature of mentoring, and how high-performance mentors adjust or adapt their communication behaviors and strategies to meet the needs of their beginning teachers. Mentors gain personal insight into their preferred approaches to mentoring by taking and self-scoring the Mentor Teacher Beliefs Inventory.

Chapter 6, *Coaching*, discusses instructional coaching as one of the basic functions of the high-performance mentor. Obstacles that can impede or derail the coaching process are described, as well as alternate ways of thinking about and carrying out the coaching process. The goal of the chapter is to help mentors become committed coaches as well as caring mentors.

Chapter 7, *Learning*, advances the conception of the mentor teacher as a co-learner and self-actualizing person. In doing so, it provides mentor teachers with specific strategies for modeling their own personal and professional growth in the context of the mentoring relationship. Mentor teachers are encouraged to value and share their personal stories for the benefit of the beginning teachers they are endeavoring to support.

Chapter 8, *Inspiring*, concludes this book with a look at the role that mentor teachers can play in providing beginning teachers with hope and optimism for the future. Mentoring is discussed not only as a vehicle for sharing technical advice and professional guidance, but also as a way of helping a novice teacher to develop a deeper and more satisfying understanding of what it means to live the teaching life.