

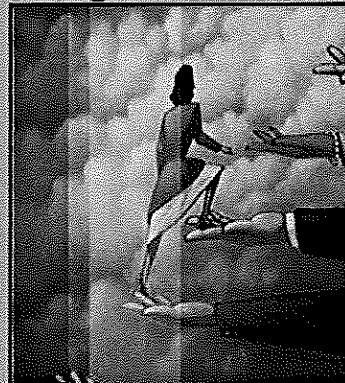
## **SABBATICAL REPORT**

### **MENTORING**

*'Mentoring is about sharing'*

*'Mentoring involves  
development, yours as well  
as others'*

*'Mentoring is a relationship'*



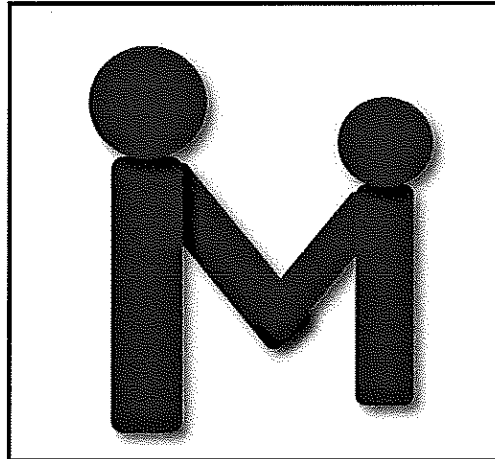
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***Term 4 2009***

## **INTRODUCTION**

Can you name a person who had a positive impact on your professional life- someone worthy of being called your mentor?



*A mentor is responsible for supporting, facilitating and learning with the learner.*

Most of us can remember a colleague who was a beacon of hope and provided the kind of support needed to help us grow into the profession whether it was as a teacher or leader. Mentors make a difference to people's lives.

## **BACKGROUND**

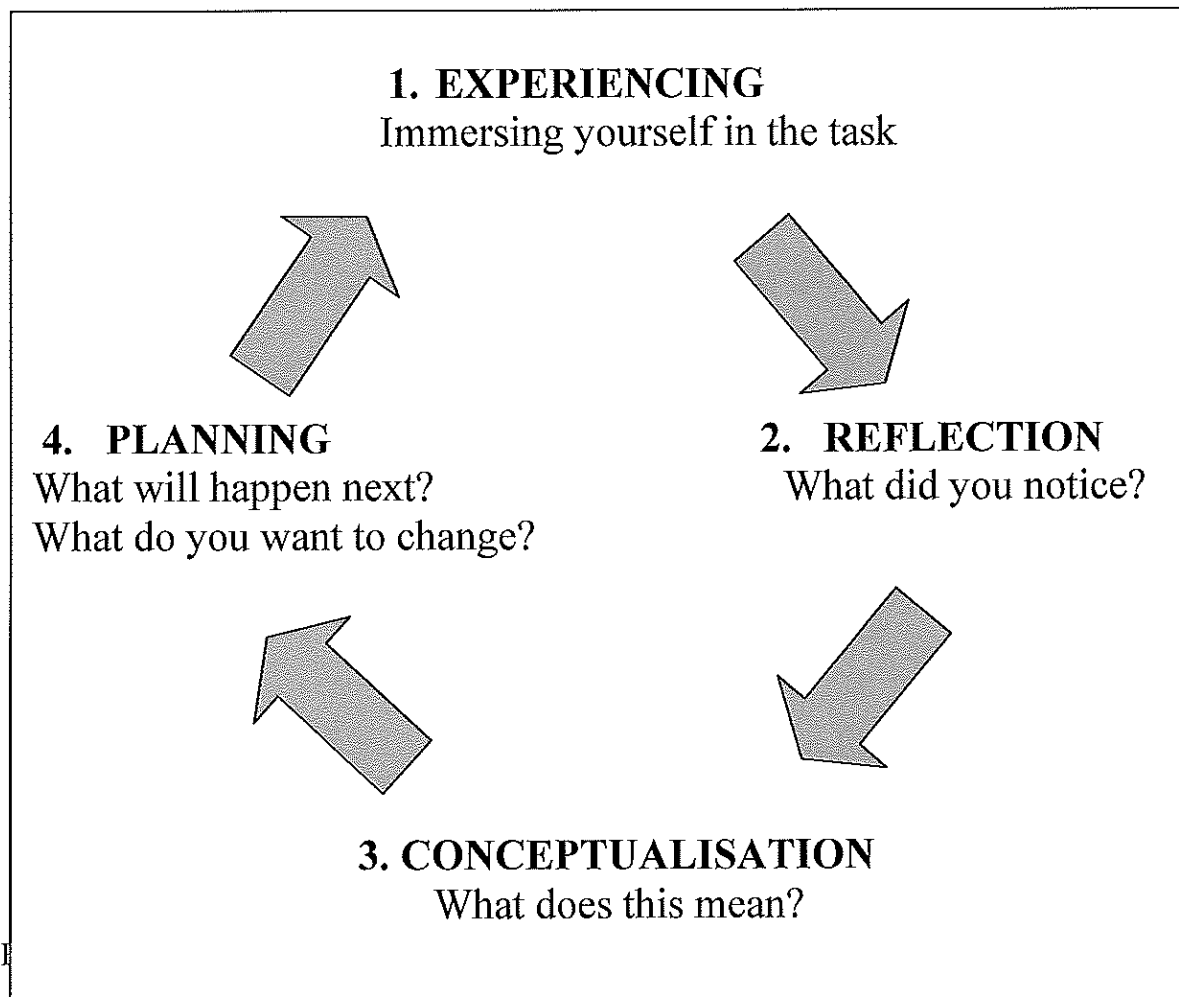
In 2008 I became a mentor for a First Time Principal. Without any training I began the task of implementing a formal, planned mentoring programme as set out in the First Time Principals' Programme. The initial session with the principal, led to the development of an individual learning plan. The plan set out goals and expected outcomes for the first time principal. During each school visit and meeting we identified issues and concerns, brainstormed and discussed possible solutions together. I understood the importance of developing the relational aspect of the role and ensured that the mentee had space and time to think, reflect and make decisions independently. The trust and respect grew between us as we worked together. I was very aware that often the meetings became advice and guidance sessions. To improve my mentoring skills, I knew my questioning would have to improve. I wanted to become more like a facilitator rather than always telling and giving advice. During the 18 months of the programme, the planned goals were achieved. It was a wonderful, learning experience for us both. During 2009 a further two First Time Principals required a mentor and I was appointed to this role. It became apparent to me that additional mentoring training and learning would not only help me to refine my knowledge and skills but also ensure these newly appointed leaders had the best opportunity available to them in a mentoring programme.

Papakura Central School is currently involved in an area wide Schooling Improvement Initiative that is focussing on raising student achievement in literacy, particularly in the first four years at school. One of the three strategic goals for this initiative is to build expertise and in particular, quality leadership that supports quality teaching. Literacy instruction and teacher pedagogical content knowledge is being strengthened through a variety of professional learning opportunities. These have included targeted workshops on aspects of the teaching of reading, teachers analysing and using data to inform their planning, discussion on professional readings, and classroom observations and feedback. An additional feature, next year, will be the inclusion of a mentor who will support lead teachers and teachers. Here was another situation that required me as the professional leader of the school to have an indepth knowledge of mentoring programmes as a professional learning activity.

## **INVESTIGATION**

My sabbatical provided me with the opportunity to complete a professional learning series at Waikato University, read a variety of professional material, reflect and discuss my learning with colleagues.

A major part of this investigation has been reflective practice. I used Kolb's cycle of reflection to guide my thinking. Kolb (1984) was interested in experiential learning. His learning cycle is used in a range of learning or behaviour contexts. Kolb thought of learning as an ongoing process, a continuous series of cycles.



## **COMMENTARY AND FINDINGS**

Mentoring is not a new activity. The derivation of the word 'mentor' comes from Homer's epic poem, The Odyssey. When the hero, Odysseus, sets out for the siege of Troy, he expects a long absence from home and seeks a trusted friend Mentor to care for his household. During the time he is away, however, his house is overrun by his wife's unwanted suitors, and the goddess Athena asks Zeus if she can intervene. With Zeus's approval, Athena assumes the shape of Mentor and whispers sound advice to young Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. Mentor has since been known as a wise counsellor.

### ***How do we define mentoring?***

Everyone has a definition of what mentoring means to them. Words like guide, counsellor, peer support, adviser and trainer come to mind. Mahony and Matthews (2004) state a mentor is person focused, a coach is job focused and a supervisor results focused.

### **What exactly is mentoring?**

- A more experienced colleague facilitates the professional development of a person new to a particular stage in a career
- A collaborative exercise that allows the individual to be actively engaged and self directing the process
- '...a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional development.' (Owen 2004 Alberta Teachers' Association)
- 'Mentoring is a powerfree, two way, mutually beneficial learning situation where the mentor provides advice, shares knowledge and experiences and teaches using a low pressure self discovery approach.' (Mahoney & Matthews, 2004)

### **Then what is coaching?**

- '...collaborative, solution focused, results orientated, systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work/life performance, self directed learning and personal growth of other individuals.' (Constable, 2003)
- 'Coaching is a special, sometimes reciprocal relationship between (at least) two people, who work together to set professional goals and achieve them...' (Robertson, 2004)

### ***How do mentoring and coaching differ?***

Coaching is usually:

- skill based to improve specific and identified areas of job performance
- short term and focused in nature

The characteristics embedded in the coaching role suggest it is a valuable component of the mentoring process. Perhaps then, coaching fits into the mentoring process as a tool to develop a specific skill.

## ***What are the benefits of mentoring?***

Mentoring brings value to everybody involved: mentor, mentee and the organisation for which they work.

### Benefits for the mentor include:

- opportunity to invest themselves in someone who seeks what they can offer
- opportunities to develop and refine interpersonal skills
- personal contribution to a teacher, leader and school
- builds theory out of practice
- increases skills in working with adults
- encourages professional sharing
- renews enthusiasm

### Benefits for the mentee include:

- provides support in the transition to a new role
- increased knowledge and skills about the role
- sounding board for testing ideas
- speed development of effective practice
- shape attitudes
- encourages reflective practice
- provides professional affirmation
- reduces isolation
- increases job satisfaction

### Benefits for the schools:

- strengthens the professionals
- encourages collaboration
- responds to problems
- supports professional development



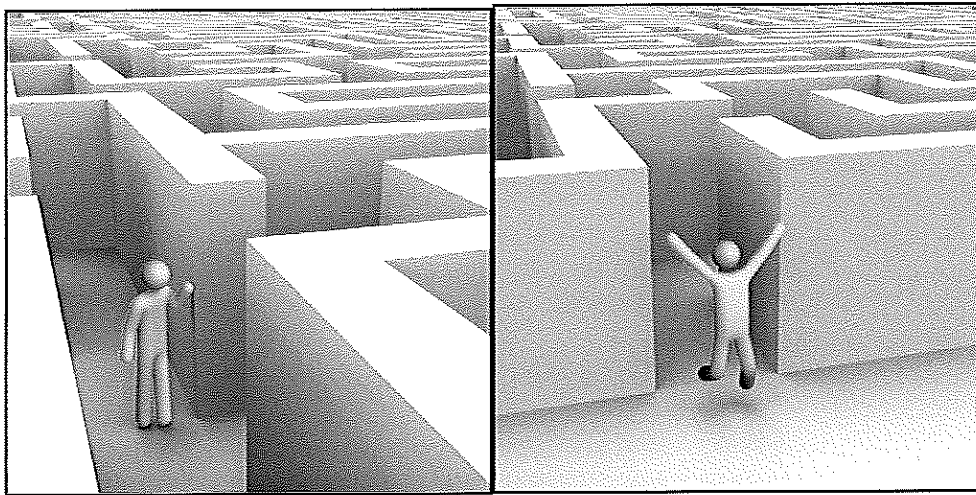
*The relationship should enable the mentee to decide and act on their decisions.*

### ***What purposes can mentoring be used for?***

It is only recently that mentoring has become a more accepted personal and professional learning activity. Mentoring can be used to serve different purposes including:

- induction and orientation
- improving teaching and learning
- developing a community of learners

The well known programmes, that we are familiar with, include the First Time Principals' Mentoring Programme and the Provisionally Registered Teacher Advice & Guidance Programme. Mentoring has become a common induction strategy for both first time principals and new teachers. For first time principals mentoring provides immediate support as they 'learn the ropes' of their new role. Mentoring reduces isolation, encourages professional sharing and reflective practice. For beginning teachers, it supports the transfer of training into the classroom, facilitates regular positive feedback and support of classroom practice. If it is done poorly, it can have the opposite effect to which is intended and may perpetuate undesirable norms and practices rather than promote high quality leading and teaching.



*Mentoring supports a voyage of self discovery.*

*What are the elements of effective mentoring?*

**MENTORING  
ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS**

Growth oriented that has a focus on improvement and life long learning

Both prepared to invest self into the relationship through co-operation and collaboration

Knowledge and current experience as a principal and /or teacher

Flexible but structured and purposeful

Personal and professional growth

Caring and safe relationship based on respect and trust

Listening and questioning in a supportive but also challenging way

Contact should be regular and planned with key notes kept for future

Open mindedness, critical thinking and reflection

Doesn't follow a recipe and allows for individual's needs

### ***What makes mentoring work?***

The main focus in any mentoring relationship rests on the quality of the relationship developed between the mentor and the mentee. Mentoring is one to one, up close and personal. The relationship must be built on a trusting interpersonal bond.

## **KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS**

- ✓ Both parties being prepared and having a desire to learn
- ✓ Purposeful and appropriate content
- ✓ Value and celebrate the relationship
- ✓ Commitment to participant and the process
- ✓ Trust and mutual respect
- ✓ Knowledge and experience
- ✓ Understanding of goals and roles
- ✓ Being approachable
- ✓ Open dialogue and difficult conversations
- ✓ Active and deep listening
- ✓ Maintain confidentiality
- ✓ Welcome and respect difference
- ✓ Feedback and feed forward
- ✓ Acknowledge human dimensions of change
- ✓ Mutual agreement on time and place



**What type of questions does a mentor ask to encourage reflection and critical thinking?**

Mentoring is a two way process. It is characterised by the use of questions that allow the mentee and mentor to arrive at their own understandings. The focus is on the mentee talking as opposed to the mentor. Asking effective questions is a critical aspect of the mentor's role and as Dewey said, "...to think is to question". Questions that encourage reflection and promote critical thinking of alternative solutions take thought and practice. Many people will be familiar with the question sequences from Six Thinking Hats and Pohl's adaptation of Blooms Taxonomy. Some different models include:

- The 'Art of Asking Great Questions' describes solution oriented as questions (Clarke and Demkowski, 2006)

Solution-Oriented Questions –imply competence	
How did you do that?	Presupposes agency-that a client had an influence on the outcome
How did you know to do that?	Presupposes knowledge
How did that make a difference?	Presupposes awareness and observational skills
What did you learn from that?	Presupposes reflection
What helped?	Presupposes something was helpful
What else?	Presupposes that the respondent could say more
What might you do differently next time?	Presupposes choice and decision making ability

- Robertson's three level guide from the reflective interview. (Robertson, 2005, pp 121)

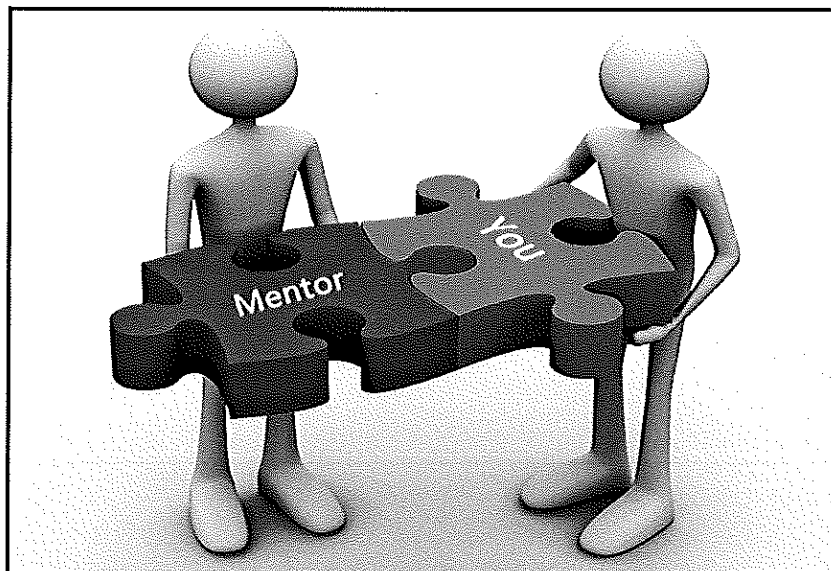
	Problem solving phase	Action	Typical Questions
Level 1	Describing	Clarify thinking about event, situations, actions & feelings	Tell me...? What...? When...? If...?
	Gathering information	Ensure observer has all necessary information about observation, incident described	Tell me how often...? How many...?
Level 2	Purpose	Probe purpose, reasons and intended consequences	What is the purpose...? What do you hope to develop...?
Level 3	Solution	Explore the basis or outcomes of actions	So what will happen next..? So what might you do differently...?

### ***How does a mentor discuss what matters most, challenging conversations?***

As principals we encounter many challenges in our day to day work. Most often an issue is raised because a need for change is observed in another. It is important not to press on, but take time and plan a conversation. To raise an issue means thinking it through clearly, making considered choice about how, when and why to raise it.

Easy to follow steps were outlined by Morrison and Ferrier-Kerr 2009 during the professional learning series.

Holding the conversation	
Step 1	Invite rather than impose the time for the conversation
Step 2	Describe your purpose for inviting them in to the conversation Your goal is to understand their perspective and talk about where to from here.
Step 3	Opening lines are critical. Don't attack – 'You can be ...' Think like a mediator – be the third party that helps to identify and develop solutions to a problem
Step 4	Make it a joint task Make them your partner in figuring it out Remember to listen – really listen
Step 5	Be persistent Together establish the future goals



*A mentor acts as a catalyst for learning rather than as a 'teacher'. The purpose of mentoring is to assist the mentee to learn and develop through insight, awareness and discoveries prompted by questions and discussion.*

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- I acknowledge the Ministry of Education for making sabbatical leave available to principals. The opportunity to be able to take time out, carry out study, to look at an aspect of our practice, indulge in uninterrupted reflection and to have a period of refreshment is invaluable.

Peter Gronn (2003) from Australia writes, "Time is a principal's greatest enemy- there isn't enough of it. Gronn calls it a greedy occupation where workaholism is an acceptable norm for the 'new work order'. A sabbatical gives a principal time to do that in depth looking at their schools and programmes."

- To my Deputy Principal who carried out the role as Acting Principal and Assistant Principal who fulfilled the additional responsibilities.
- To the First Time Principals who inspired me to learn more about this role.
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