Why do we need to mentor beginning teachers?

Given that quality teaching is consistently cited as the most significant factor influencing student outcomes, supporting beginning teachers at the earliest point in their career, to reflect upon their teaching and question their practice, is critical. Mentors play a key role in supporting beginning teachers to become active agents in analysing and improving their own practice and in doing so develop their identity as teachers.

Mentoring is a reciprocal professional relationship which not only helps to improve the professional practice of new teachers, but also provides opportunities for more experienced teachers to gain fresh perspectives and learn about current educational approaches.

What is the Teacher Mentor Support Program?

The Teacher Mentor Support Program is a joint initiative run in partnership between DEECD and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).

The program is a two day program which enables participants to develop a deep understanding of the skills needed to mentor teachers new to the profession. Activities allow participants, in their role as mentors, to explore how they can support beginning teachers to improve their teaching practice.

A natural outcome of effective mentoring for the beginning teacher is improved teaching practice and the attainment of full VIT registration.

Who should take part in the Teacher Mentor Support Program?

Teachers who have not yet attended the program and who are eager to share their expertise in classroom practice and passion for teaching participate. Leadership team members are also welcome to attend.

What assistance is provided to attend the program?

The Teacher Mentor Support Program is provided at no cost to schools or participants. DEECD provides funding for CRT replacement for attending participants.
When and where does the two day program take place?

Day 1 of the program will be offered between Monday 13 February and Thursday 8 March 2012, and Day 2 between Monday 30 April and Thursday 31 May.

Program dates are available on the Department’s website at: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/proflearning/teacher/mentorprog.htm

Teachers who register must be in a position to attend both days. Registration is conducted via the VIT website www.vit.vic.edu.au through the Teacher Support tab.

Is mentoring the same as induction?

Mentoring is not induction. Induction is one of the earliest stages within the continuum of teacher professional learning and is focused on supporting new staff to become a part of a community of learners. Mentoring is a central feature of successful teacher induction and offers more structured individualised support to beginning teachers.

What do beginning teachers need?

Beginning teachers need:

- to feel that they are supported and embraced within a professional learning community
- to be matched with a mentor who can support their development of classroom practice and provide constructive feedback that supports professional reflective dialogue
- common time to formally meet and work with a mentor
- opportunities to share teaching practice through peer observation of self and others and through professional conversations
- regular and effective communication with and support from the principal.

Do new teachers who have had a previous career need a mentor?

All teachers new to the profession require a mentor regardless of their previous work experiences. Although previous career experience allows for the development of different skills, individuals still need to be supported to develop their professional practice as teachers in the same way as those with no previous career experience.

Who do I contact for more information?

For more information about the Teacher Mentor Support Program or the Induction and Mentoring for Beginning Teachers Initiative, please contact Shavaun Thomson, Senior Project Officer, School Improvement Division on 9637 3716.

Tips for Effective Mentoring

1. Mentors need a good understanding of what mentoring is. Programs such as the Teacher Mentor Support Program are necessary in order to develop this understanding.
2. Begin the mentoring relationship with a dedicated session clarifying the roles and purpose of the mentoring relationship.
3. The mentoring pair should set up the parameters or ‘ground rules’ of the relationship together from the outset. Ensure there are clear and shared standards and goals.
4. Make sure there are agreed meeting times scheduled on a regular basis.
5. The choice of mentor should take into account the same year level or subject area, physical proximity and competency.
6. The focus of the mentoring relationship should be teacher practice in response to student needs. Use the e² Instructional Model to deepen understanding about teacher practice.
7. Provide opportunities to team-teach, shadow and observe, learn from and with others. The opportunity to build reflective practice is invaluable.
8. Keep discussions confidential. This is essential for developing mutual trust and will ensure that beginning teachers are comfortable sharing their ideas or concerns.
9. Resist the urge to jump in and act or make decisions for the beginning teacher. Stop, listen and ask probing questions.
10. Share your professional network. Introduce your beginning teacher to other individuals who may be valuable resources or future collaborators and facilitate conversations with other beginning teachers.