Mentoring New Teachers:  
A Comprehensive New Teacher Model that Works

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Mentoring beginning teachers in the United States is on the rise due to the alarming attrition rates of recent decades. There is a greater need to attract/retain teachers in suburban, urban and areas of poverty. First year mentoring programs have aided in retention of quality teachers. The Pathwise Classroom Orientation System consists of four domains. The model is used as a teaching and evaluation tool for pre-service teachers during student teaching and their first year of contract teaching. The four domains consist of planning for a lesson, setting up the environment for the lesson, teaching the lesson, and professionalism.

Introduction

Education has changed drastically in the past several decades and the task of teaching to the standards has added to the work load and stress to not only veteran teachers, yet less new, novice teachers. “As a national sense of urgency builds toward greater student preparedness and achievement in public schools, the need for the recruitment and retention of quality teachers has reached a fevered pitch. Urban, suburban, and even rural districts are marketing themselves to prospective teachers in the hope of bringing promising teachers into their districts and keeping them there (DOCTORAL FORUM, pg. 2).”

Teachers have much to learn their first year of teaching including the written rules and hidden rules of the school. Today, teachers are more likely to leave the profession early in their careers unless they have a grounded support system guiding their professional growth. The Illinois Educators Research Council found that about 32 to 50 percent of first year public school teachers left the profession in less than five years (Kapadia, Coca, YEAR). In a national survey conducted in 2006-07, the National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future estimated that teacher turnover and retention cost approximately $7 billion annually for hiring and training new teachers (Shakrani, S., pg. 10).
In the effort to attract quality teachers and retain them, many programs have been developed and implemented across the United States, focusing on hiring and retaining teachers in high-risk and poverty/need schools (Hoppey, D., Jacobs, J., Fichmandana, N., pg. 26). The new programs are called by many names; however, simply put, they are mentoring programs. They are described as organized programs where there is a shared vision of good teaching, the more skilled, experienced teacher guides the new, novice teacher during the first and sometimes second year of teaching and assessment (Stanulis, R., Ames, K., 2009; Lancu-Haddad, D., Oplatka, I., 2009).

The model for mentoring in the state of Arkansas is called the Pathwise Classroom Orientation System. This system is often referred to as the Pathwise model. After college graduation, in public and private schools, new teachers, (called novice teachers), are inducted into the program of receiving free, Pathwise-trained mentor that have at least three years of full-time teaching experience.

The mentors are paid by the state of Arkansas and the mentees (called, the novice teachers) also receives substantial funding for various classroom supplies and resources. The novice teachers have a deadline of three years to prepare for and take the Praxis III teaching demonstration examination where they are evaluated by a trained Praxis III evaluator. The novice teachers must pass all four domains with a certain cutoff score for each domain. Many Arkansas first year teachers take the Praxis III exam during the spring of their first year of full-time, contracted teaching. However, they have the option to wait until the second year of teaching, without the assistance of a paid mentor.

Pre-service teachers in Arkansas have been introduced to the Pathwise model in multiple sequential university training classes. They are immersed in the model during internship and during their first year of full-time teaching. The Pathwise model is not only beneficial to novice teachers, yet it is beneficial also to mentor teachers. Mentors often re-evaluate their own teaching methods while working with first year novice teachers.

The Pathwise model is a relatively straight-forward and simple model to understand and execute. The model consists of four domains. Students fill out detailed papers/lesson plans in preparation for the Praxis III evaluation. Planning for the lesson is vital and novice teachers are observed several times in the school year with the Pathwise model which later will be used in the Praxis III evaluation. Passing all four domains is required to secure a standard licensure.

The following domains will be presented: Domains A, B, C, and D. Domain A has to do with planning for the lesson. Domain B has to do with setting up the physical environment for learning. Domain C has to do with teaching the lesson. Domain D has to do with professionalism.

The model is an “articulation model.” The Pathwise model is an articulation model. The novice teacher must be able to verbally articulate the information of all domains. The Praxis III teacher will conduct a pre-conference before the lesson and post conference after the lesson. The Praxis III evaluator does not record opinions; the evaluator records evidence for all four domains of the model.
Domain A: Organizing content Knowledge for Student Learning

Domain A is the planning domain. Quality teachers plan for effective instruction. All criteria on this domain are addressed in the lesson plan.

A1: Becoming familiar with relevant aspects of students’ background knowledge and experiences

Domain A1 has to do with the area of diversity. How does the teacher get to know the students in the classroom? He/she must be able to address the following questions: How does the teacher find out about student’s backgrounds knowledge and experiences? Is the teacher able to describe why it is important to become familiar with individual student’s background knowledge and experiences?

A2: Articulating clear learning goals for the lesson that is appropriate to the students.

The Pathwise model uses the term goals as what some educators would consider behavior objectives, instructional objectives or learning objectives. Goals must be measurable in order for formal assessment (called in this model, evaluation strategies) to occur. Teachers can only measure behaviors of students. Therefore, it is vital that teachers use measurable verbs (i.e. verbs found on one or more levels of the Bloom’s Taxonomy). In Domain A2, the teacher states specifically and clearly what the students are going to learn. The teacher must state the goal(s) in terms of student outcomes, clearly distinguishing outcomes from activities. The teacher must give a clear rationale for the stated goals.

A3: Demonstrating an understanding of the connections between the content that was learned previously, the current content, and the content that remains to be learned in the future.

Prior knowledge is an important part of connecting to what children already know (Domain A1). In planning for the lesson, the teacher must explain how the content being taught in today’s lesson connects to what the students have previously learned. The novice, first year teacher must also be able to connect the content to the future (the next grade’s curriculum).

A4: Creating or selecting teaching methods, learning activities, and instructional materials or other resources that are appropriate to the students and that are aligned with the goals of the lesson.

Once the teacher has written a measurable objective and understands what student learning outcomes are expected, the teacher can then closely align teaching methods, learning activities and instructional materials to the written objective. The focus of Domain A4 is to align all methods, activities, materials, and resources with the goal(s) of the lesson. The goal of the lesson must also be aligned with Domain A1. If a single activity is used in the lesson, the teacher should be able to provide a sound
explanation of why the chosen single activity is appropriate for all students? The teacher must also recognize diversity in the class and adjust activities accordingly.

A5: Creating or selecting evaluation strategies that are appropriate for the students and that are aligned with the goals of the lesson.

As previously stated, the term evaluation strategies are also synonymous with assessment. The Pathwise Model requires selecting one or more appropriate formal documented assessments. In this assessment domain, the assessment must be aligned to the measurable goal(s) to the lesson. The teacher should be able to describe specifically how he or she will use the results of the assessment in planning for future instruction.

**Domain B: Creating an Environment for Student Learning**

Domain B2 has to do with setting up the environment for student learning. Domain B is the first teaching domain. The Praxis III assessor will look for and record evidence in this domain criterion during the teaching demonstration.

B1: Creating a climate that promotes fairness

This criterion focuses on the teacher’s ability to implement and maintain fair classroom interactions between the teacher and students and among students. Questions to consider are: Is the teacher fair in interactions with students? In what ways does the teacher help students to have equal access to learning? Are there patterns of either exclusion or over-attention in student-teacher interactions? Is the teacher inappropriately negative in remarks to students? Do students treat others fairly?

B2: Establishing and maintaining rapport with students

This criterion is concerned with the teacher’s ability to relate positively to students as people. Traits such as genuine concern, warmth, sincerity, and sometimes humor are demonstrated. One important way of establishing rapport includes demonstrating an interest in students as unique individuals, acknowledging the traditions and customs of students with differing ethnic backgrounds, and taking time to listen to students. Questions to consider are: In a caring way, does the teacher attempt to relate positively to students? Is the rapport appropriate to the grade level? Does the teacher tailor personal interactions according to the individual characteristics of students?

B3: Communicating challenging learning expectations to each student

Effective teachers have challenging expectations, yet reasonable ones. They expect students to actively be engaged and on task. The teacher should communicate explicitly or implicitly a belief that all students are capable of learning. Questions to consider are: How does the teacher show, by words, actions, or attitude, that each student is capable of meaningful achievement? Are the learning expectations for students challenging but within their reach?
**B4: Establishing and maintaining consistent standards of classroom behavior.**

This criterion focuses on the importance of the teacher establishing a positive classroom climate for learning. Both the teacher and students take ownership in establishing appropriate standards for behavior. After implementing classroom procedures and rules, the teacher responds to inappropriate behaviors in a respectful manner. The goal is to make an attempt and not ignore any disruptive behavior. If the teacher ignores a minor misbehavior, the teacher should have a valid reason for doing so. The overall goal is for the teacher to respond to misbehaviors with reasonable success.

**B5: making the physical environment as safe and conducive to learning as possible**

This criterion focuses on the physical setting in which learning takes place. One goal is to make the environment safe. The secondary goal is to make learning occur in the existing environment. The environment may be spacious; the environment may be small. After all risk factors are eliminated, regardless of the environment, the teacher assumes ownership for learner outcomes in whatever environment the teacher has to teach.

**Domain C: Teaching for Student Learning**

Domain B and C both have to do with teaching and learning. During the lesson presentation, the Praxis III assessor records evidence of good teaching in both domains. The assessor is looking for evidence of effective teaching strategies. Domain C further focuses on the pedagogy of teaching.

**C1: Making learning goals and instructional procedures clear to students.**

There is no hidden agenda in teaching. Clear learning goals are communicated to students. Students know what they are expected to learn. Questions to consider are: Does the teacher communicate learning goals to the students, either explicitly or implicitly? Are the directions to students for instructional procedures clear? How does the teacher help students of different backgrounds understand the learning goals of the lesson? Are the students able to carry out the instructional procedures of the lesson?

**C2: Making content comprehensible to students**

This criterion focuses on how the teacher’s understanding and organization of content connects back with Domain A where content connects to prior content and future content. In order for content to be comprehensible, the material must be meaningful to students. Effective teachers connect the lesson with prior knowledge. In addition, the content must be accurate. The content must appear to be comprehensible to students and as a whole, have a coherent and organized sequential structure.

**C3: Encouraging students to extend their thinking**

At times, Domain C2 and C3 can be confusing to novice teachers. However, there is a difference in making content comprehensible and extending students’ thinking. This criterion focuses on the teacher purposefully using strategies and methods to get students to
think on their own. The teacher is able to use the current content appropriately as a springboard to get students to think either independently, creatively, or critically. The teacher specifically structures learning activities that encourage students to extend their thinking. Students are actively engaged and seeking new knowledge.

**Domain C4:** Monitoring students’ understanding of content through a variety of means, providing feedback to students to assist learning, and adjusting learning activities as the situation demands

This criterion is simply, *monitoring and adjusting instruction*. This criterion is not to be confused with formal assessment. Monitoring and adjusting is *during the teaching stage*. All good teachers check for understanding during their lessons and back up and re-teach some concepts when necessary. Effective teachers provide substantive feedback to students. Perceptive teachers adjust the learning activities as necessary.

**C5: Using instructional time effectively**

Effective teachers use instructional time effectively. They waste little time with non-instructional activities. This criterion refers to the teacher’s skill in using time effectively during the lesson. Time effectiveness must occur during the lesson. The teacher provides students with activities of instructional value for the entire instructional time and paces the lesson appropriately. Any necessary non-instructional procedures are performed quickly and efficiently.

**Domain D: Teacher Professionalism**

Domain D has to do with teacher professionalism. The domain has to do with dispositions of teachers and a willingness to reflect on their teaching strategies, collaboration with other professionals, and establishing two-way parent partnerships. These reflections will be conducted with the Praxis III assessor after the lesson has been taught and evaluated.

**D1: Reflecting on the extent which the learning goals were met**

D1 directly relates back to A2 where the teacher has to clearly articulate the extent of learner outcomes. Based on the assessment and/or multiple assessments, did the students learn? Qualitatively or quantitatively, how much did student learn? The teacher will speak to formal assessment(s) and show the Praxis III assessor physical evidence of documented assessment. The assessment is evidence of student learner outcomes. The teacher accurately analyzes the data and describes the strengths of the lesson in relation to the learning goals and describes in general how to use the results of the assessment in future instruction assessment).

**D2: Demonstrating a sense of efficacy**

In essence, the teacher answers the following question: In my teaching, did I make a difference? The novice teacher makes no excuses for lack of learning because of what kind of home environments children come from. The teacher takes responsibility for learner
outcomes or lack thereof. The teacher also attempts to find ways to address the specific learning needs of students and suggests practical, appropriate ways that he/she has tried and could use in the future. With this in mind, the teacher must address one action that has been taken and one action that will be taken for one high achieving student and one low achieving student.

**D3: Building professional relationships with colleagues to share teaching insights with colleagues and coordinate learning activities for students**

This criteria focuses on two distinct, though related, aspects of a teacher’s professional relationships with colleagues. The first of these is seeking collaboration from other professionals on areas related to instruction or to other concerns related to teaching. For example, the novice teacher should attempt to get acquainted with other professional in the school to coordinate lessons for the classroom. These professionals may also include the librarian and technology expert.

**D4: Communicating with parents or guardians about student learning.**

This criterion focuses on the teacher’s two-way contacts with the parents or guardians of students. In this domain, the novice teacher must show two pieces of documented evidence of two-way communication with parents. This communication can come in many different forms (i.e. parent newsletters, phone calls, notes home and emails to parents, etc.). This documentation must show that parents had an opportunity to respond to the teacher.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, during the last decade, the Arkansas state Department of Education has been proactive in providing mentoring programs for first year novice teachers in both public and private school districts at all age levels. There are many state certified Pathwise trainers training hundreds of new mentors every year.

Certified mentors continue to stay updated with Pathwise recalibration training sessions every two years. Pre-service teachers becoming interns enter classrooms where supervising teachers are Pathwise-trained. Arkansas university training programs incorporate Pathwise training in the pre-service programs.

Those students preparing for initial and standard licensure have exposure and training to the Pathwise model that promotes best practices in planning, teaching, and professionalism. The model is one important and vital aspect in preparing quality teachers that hopefully will teach many years in Arkansas schools, especially targeting high-need/risk schools.
References


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