



Guide on the Side

4 Ways to Bring Mentoring into Your Teaching Practice

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For most teachers, working closely with a student and mentoring them is their favorite part of the job. It is why they became teachers in the first place.

The problem is that it is really hard to find the time to mentor with all the pressures, requirements, and responsibilities teachers face.



In this ebook, we discuss four practical steps to bringing more mentoring into your teaching practice. This shift flips the narrative about teaching and challenges the status-quo, but in the end supports, if not improves, student relationships, learning, and well-being — the reason we are all here.

Everyone needs a guide on the side.

High school should be much more than completing courses, doing well on tests, and getting into college. It is an opportunity, and our responsibility as educators, to guide young people into adulthood and prepare them to succeed in life beyond high school. In order to succeed in post-secondary education and transition into a chosen career, young adults need more than academics. They need a growth mindset, habits, and skills that drive life-long success, including specific self-management, learning, and work skills. And, they need someone by their side rooting for them, guiding them, and pushing them to do their best.

A mentor can positively impact a person for the rest of their lives.

Bringing in more mentoring into your daily life will take time and practice, but there is no better time for change than now.



Change is hard.

We get it. Teaching is hard.
Learning is hard. Change can be even harder.

“We’ve always done it this way.”

“We have high scores, why would we change anything about it?”

“My students are engaged in class because I love my subject and it shows. Why would I change that?”

“Our students all graduate and go to college.”

You might hear similar statements at your school or organization. These are normal reactions, because changing our practice is hard, even on a good day.

Regardless of experience level or subject matter, once teachers find a groove or routine that *seems* to be working, they rarely change or switch it up.



However, great teachers with a growth mindset — mentors — see the need to adapt and often are the ones with the greatest impact.

These mentors are the teachers who use all their academic, professional, and personal skills to meet the students where they are. They are all of the following, and more:

- Learners
- Experience Creators
- Coaches and Advisors
- Facilitators
- Networkers
- Guides
- Friends

They are the ones in your school that strategically deploy each of these roles based on the student. The ones that make an effort to know, accept, and respect the goals and interests of every student. The ones that understand that each student's path looks different from one another. They are good listeners, observers, and problem-solvers. They have not lost a passion for their subject, nor have they lost an understanding of good teaching practices.

They are in every school, and the skills are in everyone of us, it just comes down to a matter of reprioritizing what matters most — the students.



4 Ways to Mentor More

Educators at our schools are trained from the start to be mentors and continue to develop their practice through professional learning. The impact of mentoring on student success has been profound. Here are four ways you can incorporate more mentoring practices.

1. UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR A GROWTH MINDSET AND MODEL IT.

Many of you have seen those “Instead of... Try this...” motivational posters when it comes to a growth mindset. In fact, you might have one in your school or classroom right now.

But putting a poster on a wall and understanding the importance of its words in your practice are two very different things.

During Quest Forward Student and Mentor Orientations, mentors focus on growth mindset in a variety of ways, including how to provide feedback that will foster a growth mindset.

Flora, a student at Quest Forward Academy Santa Rosa, describes growth mindset as:

“the understanding that mistakes are good, questions are important, classes are about learning not just performing, imperfections should be embraced, and challenges are opportunities.”

You have the power to support or inhibit student success simply with your words and actions. So, if you expect your students to take these characteristics on, you should also expect this from yourself and your colleagues.

Start by identifying a few ways you can strengthen your growth mindset and model that for students. Here are a few actions you could take:

- Share your own learning goals, setbacks, and what you are doing to improve.
- Help students identify challenging, yet realistic goals and strategies for reaching those goals. Do not be afraid to help them set goals that go beyond your expertise — like managing anxiety and stress.
- Verbalize positive thinking. Instead of saying, “I’m not good at this,” say something like, “This is really hard for me. I need to keep working on it.” Repeat these thoughts out loud to model positive self-talk.
- Recognize and celebrate effort and hard work, not just success. When giving feedback, focus on skills and learning over grades and points.
- Try new things! Show others you are not afraid of challenges and uncertainties, and that you see them as opportunities to learn.

2. LEVERAGE YOUR STRENGTHS.

Everyone wants to feel like their contributions impact the success of individuals and an organization.

In some cases, mentors are experts in a particular field or with a particular skill or craft. In other cases, they are teachers, professionals, parents, and community members. In all cases, good mentors are able to use those life experiences and wisdom, as well as expertise, to facilitate the student experience. We all bring value and skills to the table, as well as the understanding that none of us come with all the skills and wisdom.

It is important when starting your mentoring journey that you identify your expertise, skills, and passions. Is your specialization communication and debate? What about working through physics hypotheses? Do you enjoy sharing your world travels and connecting with others?

Figure it out, write it down, and do not lose track of it throughout your mentoring journey.

“Through the personal connections we can all develop with our mentors, I’ve basically decided what I want to do with my life.”

– MONTANA, STUDENT
QUEST FORWARD ACADEMY SANTA ROSA



3. UNLEARN AND RELEARN.

Quest Forward Learning is based on mentoring. We use digital resources to encourage student-directed learning, but that requires good mentoring for it to work.

Jordan Bulger, a teacher and senior mentor at one of our Quest Forward Academies, explains the power of both students and teachers unlearning (leaving behind old, outdated notions of teaching and school) and relearning (embracing a new mindset as a mentor and learner):

“My biggest challenges have been how to show students that education can be delivered in a way that is joyful, engaging, and worth their while. Dealing with first-year students who have been in the system, [their] education has calcified in a way that they hate. If things aren’t working, what are some ways that we can get you to the point where you love coming to school? Getting through a quest changes [your] teaching style. I can go step by step, incrementally, with them, and offer timely feedback. The format allows for individual choice and expression. I can sit shoulder-to-shoulder and see how they blossom in real time.”

Jordan adds that Quest Forward mentors are in a unique position to “be constantly learning and match the amazingness of the students.”



What are some of the ways you could benefit from “unlearning” and “relearning?” What are some practices that are outdated or carried over from your own educational experiences that do not benefit students and their skill development? What can you do to make learning more joyful and engaging? Write them down and make it a goal to check your assumptions and stretch your own idea of what school should be.

4. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

Nobody has ever gotten better at anything by only doing it once. Mentors are learners, along with students. The switch will not happen overnight or even over a week or month's time. As is anything else in life that is good and worthwhile, it takes time.

However, once you embrace your strengths, skills, and goals, you are ready to lean on your community and network to provide feedback in your professional growth. There may be some learning curves or setbacks, but it is all part of the process. The same process we watch our students go through. The same experience that will make us better educators, mentors, and life-long learners.



“I try harder now. I know my mentors are there to support me, and that makes me not afraid to try new things, ask for help, and to push myself.”

– MCKINLEY, STUDENT
QUEST FORWARD ACADEMY OMAHA



Ready to mentor?

You might be thinking, “Wow, mentors do it all” and good mentors do! But, they do not do it all at once. It takes time to develop these mentoring superpowers.

Being a mentor adds a layer of personal development and requires one to take a holistic approach to teaching and learning. Mentors provide a valuable service to students and can change the direction of a young person’s life for the better.

If you are ready to bring more mentoring into your teaching, identify a goal and practice.

If you are interested to see how Quest Forward Learning can support these transformations at your school, please contact us at: www.opportunityeducation.org/meet.

Learn More

To learn more about Quest Forward Learning, and to apply to use it in your school, visit:

www.opportunityeducation.org/transform



Opportunity Education is a charitable foundation dedicated to developing and supporting life-changing learning programs for young adults worldwide.

Since 2005, we have supported over 1 million students in 11 countries with educational materials and programs.

Quest Forward Learning is our offering for high schools, helping them transform their curriculum, instructional model and assessment methods within one year.

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