

## **The Hoffmeyer Mentoring Activity Checklist: Invitations to Professional Growth**

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*In this article, invitational theory is applied to the process of mentoring. The results of three research studies exploring mentoring of first-year school teachers led to factor analysis research in which 22 specific mentor related activities and behaviors in assisting first-year teachers are identified. These results were compiled to create the Hoffmeyer Mentoring Activity Checklist (HMAC).*

### **Introduction**

Mentoring is a concrete application of invitational theory. In fact, mentoring is a direct application of the statement, “Humans need invitations the way flowers need sunshine” (Purkey & Novak, 1984, p. 10). The present article briefly defines mentoring in the context of some of the related theoretical concepts of invitational theory. Three research studies, comparing different mentoring programs with first-year school teachers in Southwest Texas, formed the basis for the development of a mentoring checklist. The Hoffmeyer Mentoring Activity Checklist (HMAC) identifies 22 specific ways mentors and the supporting school districts can be inviting to first-year teachers.

The original “Mentor” first appeared in Greek mythology. Mentor was the name of a trusted friend and wise advisor to Odysseus. When he later left to fight in the Trojan War, Odysseus entrusted the teaching of his son Telemachus to Mentor. In modern times the word “mentor” is usually used in reference to “...a friend and role model, an able advisor, a person who lends support in many different ways to one pursuing specific goals...sometimes the mentor must be a story teller; at other times an empathetic listener, occasionally it’s a coach’s pep talk that is needed. The art is not knowing what to say but how to say it” (Peddy, 1998, p. 24-25).

Eckstein (2005) notes that:

Whether it is in a total program relationship or in just one single course, mentors have a unique opportunity and a privilege to share personal knowledge, skills, and insights from one’s own experience. Mentors share personal wisdom in an apprentice relationship, but ultimately encourage each learner to go beyond, to stand on their shoulders, and to see and create a better world. (p. 3)

Too often mentors are guilty of what values clarification expert Sid Simon (1995) called “red-pencil mentality.” By that he meant that mentors often think that identifying the mistakes made by one’s protégé is the primary purpose of interventions. Invitational theory as well as the contemporary “positive psychology” movement and even the classic work of Alfred Adler all stress the need to build on strengths and not on weaknesses. It is important that mentors act on the premise of “catching someone doing something right.”

## **Assumptions and Basic Constructs of Invitational Theory**

The concept of Invitational Education was first introduced by Pukey in 1978 and represents a “process by which people are cordially summoned to realize their relatively boundless potential” (Purkey & Novak, 1984, p. 3). This process is a perfect descriptor of the act of mentoring wherein an experienced individual serves in the role of friend and teacher to assist a “newcomer,” in this case a beginning teacher, to develop into a more effective professional.

An inviting relationship "... has the potential to improve both the immediate human condition and the long-term growth and health of people. ... The inviting relationship is as much a therapeutic attitude, an orientation in character, a ‘dispositional quality,’ as it is a methodology. As such, it can be applied to interactions with people in a wide variety of places..." (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987, p. 3).

Professionals who apply the principles of invitational theory and practice adhere to four fundamental beliefs.

1. Everyone wants to be accepted and affirmed as valuable, capable, and responsible, and wants to be treated accordingly.
2. Everyone has the power to create beneficial messages for themselves and others, and because they have this power, they also have the responsibility.
3. Everyone possesses relatively untapped potential in all areas of learning and human development.
4. Human potential is best realized by creating places, programs, policies, and processes intentionally designed to in-

vite optimal development and encourage people to realize this potential in themselves and others (Purkey & Novak, 1996 in Schmidt 2004).

The Adlerian concept of encouragement is quite similar to the process of providing invitations through appropriate people, places, policies, and programs. Schmidt (2004) observes that these elements can be 1) intentionally disinviting, unintentionally disinviting, unintentionally inviting and intentionally inviting. He believes that "...successful relationships are established through the intentional creation of beneficial messages chosen and sent within a caring context that dependably demonstrates optimism, trust, and respect for all persons involved in the process" (p. 43).

What follows is a research oriented example of how an invitational approach has been applied to mentoring first-year teachers.

### **Mentoring and Coaching Research with First-Year Teachers**

Hoffmeyer (1998) researched the role of mentoring and coaching with first-year public school teachers in three separate projects. These all took place in the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District, a large multi-high school district located in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. This district has a high Hispanic student population (95 percent), with a relatively high percentage of Hispanic teachers (81.5 percent).

In the third of the three projects, two trainers from the central office of the school district helped train the teacher/mentors. The training primarily focused on working with the adult learner and how to be a role model for the first-year teacher. The district sup-

ported project involved all mentors and first-year teachers in the district covering both elementary and secondary campuses. The district project provided a stipend to the mentors (though not to the first-year teachers) for a total of 30 combined hours of training and mentoring time.

While feedback from first-year teachers indicated that their mentor/coaches were at least “adequate,” several suggestions were made by Hoffmeyer for improving the mentoring process based on teacher feedback after the mentoring interventions had ended. Components missing from this project were:

- Provisions for allowing the mentor/mentee dyad to be self-selecting;
- Starting assistance before the mentees classroom teaching begins;
- Helping the first-year teacher apply a decision making model;
- A common release time adequate to accomplish the mentoring program;
- Adequate resources; and
- Evidence of collaboration among a variety of organizations and institutions.

The district project had a strong training model for mentors, but could have more effectively involved the first-year teachers in the process. Suggestions from participants would be to have the project designers reduce the time spent on laws and definitions of mentoring and replace those with more scenarios of problems encountered by the mentors.

Because many of the mentors were on different campuses than their protégées, assistance in assimilating into the culture of the

first-year teacher's campus was not possible. Similarly, assisting with policies and procedures was not evident in many of the interview sessions. The critical elements that were missing from both cycles of this project would have to be proximity and the mentor and mentee not having a common subject or grade level. These two factors impacted efficacy of the model. One specific recommendation in mentoring first-year teachers would be to conduct an ethnographic study to more closely observe the actual culture of being a first-year teacher.

Based on the review of the literature, the critical elements of mentoring were listed. Using a forced analysis technique that took critical component descriptions from the literature review, analyzed these critical components to ascertain the preponderance of similar descriptors on mentoring, the *HMAC* was developed. This instrument was divided into three essential mentoring areas: 1) Section I describes the qualities of mentors that create an invitational relationship with their mentees; 2) Section II describes the specific activities and strategies employed in the mentoring relationship; and 3) Section III details the institutional parameters that serve to support the mentoring process.

## **Summary**

Mentoring is one of the most encouraging ways that first-year and indeed all teachers can feel invited to improve their own classroom effectiveness. The present article identifies 22 specific factors that mentors can use to extend invitations to first-year teachers. The Hoffmeyer Mentoring Activity Checklist (HMAC) can serve to provide both specific administrative guidelines for program development as well as being a checklist for evaluating mentor effectiveness with teachers.

## **The Hoffmeyer Mentoring Activity Checklist (HMAC)**

<b>I. Qualities of Mentors</b>			Rating (Optional)
___	a.	Mentors demonstrate qualities of, and a clear understanding of, effective teacher performance.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	b.	Mentors have the ability to work with teachers – in- training analyzing and critiquing lessons to promote further growth and reflection.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	c.	Mentors are supportive and non-evaluative, with a clear distinction between supervision and evaluation.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	d.	Mentors are flexible enough to deal with individual context specific concerns of the first-year teacher. They also demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of mentor and mentee differences.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	e.	Mentors are experienced teachers.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
<b>II. Activities of Mentors</b>			
___	a.	Mentors provide information about policies and procedures.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	b.	Mentors provide assistance with classroom management/ discipline.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	c.	Mentors assist mentees in understanding individual student differences and how those differences impact student performance and evaluation.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	d.	Mentors provide information concerning interaction with parents.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	e.	Mentors assist the first-year teacher's assimilation into the school/work environment.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	f.	Mentors help the first-year teacher apply a decision making model.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	g.	Mentors provide instructional paradigms – not only how but why.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
___	h.	Mentors provide emotional support for the first-year teacher.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

## HMAC continued

		<b>III. Institutional Parameters</b>	
—	a.	The school district provides a formal training program for mentors.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
—	b.	Timing of the program implementation – program should be modified to start assistance before the mentees classroom teaching begins.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
—	c.	Have the mentor and mentee teach the same content and/or grade level with as close physical proximity as possible.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
—	d.	A common release time adequate to accomplish the mentoring program.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
—	e.	Adequate resources (human and material) available to support the program.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
—	f.	Reasonable teaching assignment for the mentee within the realm of his or her certified competencies.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
—	g.	Administrative emphasis in the importance if the mentor teacher in long-term instructional improvement.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
—	h.	Improved evidence of collaboration among a variety of organizations and institutions (an example could be a mentor/peer/university triad support system) is suggested.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
—	i.	Improved provisions for allowing the mentor/mentee dyad (team) to be self-selecting are recommended.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5



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