

Mentoring and evaluation for handwork teachers

Both mentoring and evaluation are both invaluable supports for the handwork teacher, ensuring sound pedagogical and subject-specific practices in the classroom. Both mentoring and evaluation may be conducted by in-house or 'outside' colleagues, but it is recommended that evaluation be done by someone who has no close working or personal relationship with the teacher.

A sound and regular sustained program of both mentoring and evaluation will lead to increased success for the students; greater job satisfaction for the teacher, which in turn leads to greater engagement in the life of the faculty and school, eases working relationships with colleagues and parents, and ensures loyalty and longevity within the school and the integral discipline of handwork.

Mentoring is a one-to one confidential support for the teacher. The mentor 'reports to' the teacher, observes, visits, holds conversations with the teacher, and may return at a later point to see the effect of these suggestions. Any communication with the school is in broad terms, such as "we spoke about the rhythm of the class", not "the teacher is not doing well in establishing rhythm" in order to protect the confidential nature of the relationship.

Evaluation is a snapshot, often a one-day visit, observation, and conversation. The evaluator 'reports to' the school, details their observations and suggestions in objective terms, and shares their findings with the teacher.

Best practices for the handwork mentor may include: an established reputation as an experienced and successful handwork teacher in the range of grades they visit and observe; willingness and availability to engage in phone and in-person visits, proven ability to keep confidence; an effective and compassionate communication style.

The mentor should always arrange a mutually agreeable date to visit, hold in person or phone conversations ahead of the visit, inquiring about the lesson plan and any particular questions the teacher may have; find an unobtrusive place in the classroom from which to observe; avoid engaging with the children as much as is reasonable while maintaining a friendly presence; take careful and specific notes. Mentor and teacher should meet and de-brief immediately or very soon after the class(es), and address any questions and suggestions. The mentor then prepares a written report for the teacher outlining the teacher's strengths, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.



The evaluator is directly responsible to the school and bears in mind the evaluation visit can be uncomfortable and anxiety provoking. The evaluator is engaged by the school according to their time-table, and should be transparent about their familiarity with the subject matter (handwork in this case). Regular evaluation for all teachers is recommended to the extent possible, in order not to wait for concerns to arise and single out someone who is “not doing well”. The evaluator should also speak with the teacher in person or on the phone before the lesson, and ask about the plan and goals of the class, and if there are any particular circumstances to be aware of (such as preparing/ returning from a field trip; recent events in the community which may affect the children, etc.). After the lesson, the evaluator will compile a report for the school outlining the teacher’s strengths, challenges, and offer suggestions. It is recommended that the evaluator share his/ her findings with the teacher before presenting the report to the school. A meeting is usually held between evaluator, teacher, and pedagogical group to go over these findings and determine the best path forward.

The mentor and the evaluator have common goals: to support the best possible pedagogical and discipline-specific teaching for the students’ growth and well-being. However, their roles and responsibilities are different, and communication must be carefully considered. The mentor must not break the confidentiality agreement with the teacher and endanger the trusting relationship. At the same time, it will more effectively support the teacher if evaluator and mentor are working along roughly the same lines. For example, a brand new teacher may need help in many areas; the mentor may be aware of these multiple needs, but decides to prioritize one without completely ignoring the others. The evaluator may not be aware of the progress that has been made, and may see only the glass half full.

Mentor, evaluator, school, and teacher must all remember the common goal – to grow and learn in service of the children using the vehicle of teaching handwork.

