

Mentoring at Kadina Memorial School

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This post looks at the success that **Kadina Memorial School** has achieved in making mentoring a key focus across the whole school.

The significance of mentoring has increased as the focus on teaching standards has grown over the past few years. The key development has been the introduction of the (AITSL) **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers**, including the identification of 4 levels of teaching quality: *graduate, proficient, highly accomplished* and *lead*. Importantly, the development of the standards was driven in large part by the need for national consistency in determining performance for 'beginning' teachers, in both their 'pre service training' and the 'early years' of their professional career. Specifically in terms of the standards, beginning teachers in South Australia are initially given 'provisional' registration and they can only secure (*full*) registration once they have achieved, **amongst other requirements**, the *Proficient level in each of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.

The use of mentoring to assist beginning teachers to reach the standard of *proficient* is recognised as a priority across all systems. Recently, there have been 2 major reports that have called for serious attention in this area. In the 2012 Grattan Institute report, **Catching up: learning from the best school systems in East Asia**, mentoring emerged as a critically important characteristic of the most successful schools. The report distinguished between *induction* - support for beginning teachers - and *mentoring* which was targeted at all teachers. Generically, *mentoring* was described thus:

Mentoring focuses squarely on the basics of student learning and teaching, not just on administrative and emotional support. It concentrates on developing core teaching skills such as diagnosing student learning, subject-specific pedagogy, classroom management and research skills.

In the more recent 2014 ACER publication, **Best Practice Teacher Education Programs and Australia's Own Programs**, the importance of quality mentoring (induction) for pre service teachers was highlighted, but so too were serious shortcomings, at the national level, with current practice. For example, the submission drew on extensive international research to emphasise that the role of mentor teacher was both difficult and highly-skilled, and the incentives to take on the additional responsibility were very limited. Specifically in relation to the Australian experience, the submission noted,

The supervising teacher role in Australia remains largely an untrained role, with little support from universities in developing mentoring skills (Hudson et al., 2013). Processes for selecting supervising teachers are often not explicit and there may be little or no support for supervising teachers to undertake the role (MacDougall, Mtika, Reid, & Weir, 2013).

Overall, while the importance of the role of the mentor teacher, particularly in relation to 'beginning teachers', has increased dramatically in the recent past, there is concern that far more needs to be done, at multiple levels and across all jurisdictions, to lift the quality of mentoring available for all teachers. Against this background, the efforts at Kadina are impressive.

The mentoring program at Kadina Memorial School

At Kadina Memorial School, mentoring is defined as:

“A more experienced person supporting another person to grow and learn in their role. The mentoring process is a two-way dialogue that includes modelling, observation and feedback. The purpose of mentoring at KMS is to enhance the teaching craft of both the mentor and mentee.”

Mentoring: a guide for mentor & mentees. KMS



Mentor Chris Rennie working with 2014 Graduate Shane Moss and Principal Dean Angus

Responsibility for the mentoring program at Kadina lies directly with the principal and this arrangement obviously lifts its profile.

The broad plan is to involve the whole staff and have as many as possible complete specific training. Currently about 75% of staff have been trained.

The school has had long-term involvement with pre service training for student-teachers and because it employs a number of graduates it also has a history of supporting its 'early years' teachers working to achieve full registration. On this point, the school's Site Improvement Plan calls for all graduate teachers to achieve the proficiency standard within 2 years of commencing their professional career at the school.

While the 'induction' of 'beginning teachers' is a focus for the school, mentoring is not restricted to this group and, in fact, it is made available across the entire staff at all levels of teaching. Mentoring is typically provided for teachers who are taking on new subjects or who are new to a learning area, as well as teachers who are taking on a new responsibility.

In addition to its own staff, the school also makes use of external mentors. For example, for a specialist subject area it can bring in a mentor from another local school. It also relies on retired staff, living in the local area, who have undertaken training as mentors.

Importantly, the school maintains a clear line of demarcation between mentoring and managing poor performance.

If you were a teacher at KMS you would know that:

- mentoring is a priority for the school and reflects the school's commitment to quality teaching
- there is an expectation that all staff will be involved in some way: the teaching staff effectively becomes a *professional learning community* built round mentoring
- there is a formal training program in the school for mentors which most staff have completed
- there is a strong focus on the characteristics of an 'effective' mentor, and staff understand that mentoring is a high-level skill to be studied and learned
- there is a clear set of roles and expectations for both mentor and mentee
- a formal program - including a definite timetable of meetings, observation and review - is drawn up for each specific instance of mentoring and records are kept of its progress
- review processes are built into the individual mentoring program to monitor its overall success
- the principal takes an active interest in each specific case of mentoring and reviews progress with the mentor
- the overall mentoring program is reviewed regularly and mentors are given the opportunity to meet as a group
- the school organises release time or its equivalent - via TRT, TOIL, reduced relief loading, NIT etc - to support the mentoring program

In terms of the ongoing review of the mentoring program at KMS, the end of 2014 review highlighted the worth of the program, the need to ensure high quality training for the mentors, the value of providing mentoring to teachers new to a subject area and the importance of maintaining the demarcation between mentoring and performance management via the line manager. The same review identified the 2 areas of student behaviour management and curriculum differentiation as the most common professional gaps for inexperienced teachers and recommended that the school consider developing a "*Classroom Management*" program to be implemented in term one of the school year for teachers in their first two years of teaching.

Training for mentoring

There are obvious constraints on the type and duration of training that any school can provide in this area. Each individual school, like Kadina, will fashion its own training program, bringing in resources and materials from a range of sources.

There are also some substantial formal programs beginning to appear. For example, the Queensland University of Technology program **Mentoring for Effective Teaching** has been developed from this institution's extensive work with 'early career teachers'. It involves some 10 hours of face-to-face instruction. There are many valuable on-line resources with this particular program. Another significant program is the AITSL program, **Supervising Preservice Teachers**. This program is available as an on-line course of 8-10 hours. Everything in it is mapped to the **Australian Performance Standards for Teachers** and while the focus is obviously preservice teaching, the content and materials are suitable for all mentoring. Another key, background resource in this area is the AITSL **Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework**

What stands out at Kadina Memorial School is the way mentoring has been given such a definite focus across the whole (R-12) school. Mentoring, both culturally and structurally, has been woven into the very fabric of the school.

For the principal of the school, Dean Angus, the following have been the strengths of the mentoring program:

- *builds educator capacity from within the school*
- *allows us to ensure all new staff to the school are inducted properly over a period of time and ensures they are aware of, and have a working understanding of school policies and procedures, teaching agreements etc*
- *allows us to work with staff on an individual basis, on specific aspects of their teaching*
- *supports Graduate teachers to move from graduate to proficient*
- *promotes observations as a way of ensuring continuous teacher improvement (if I'm not seen, I'm not corrected)*
- *provides leadership opportunities throughout the school*
- *provides learning opportunities in relation to National Standards and the Continuum*
- *increases confidence and the self-awareness of capabilities of new leaders*
- *supports the transfer of knowledge and experience of long term educators and ensures this is not lost but used to support the quality of the next generation of teachers.*

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