

PEARSON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Developing Mentoring and Coaching Relationships in Early Care and Education

*A Reflective Approach*



**Marilyn Chu**



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# Introduction

Mentoring, or guiding, a less-experienced person to greater professional effectiveness, with a responsive, professional relationship-based approach, can help educators to meet higher program and teaching standards to benefit children and families. An old idea with new relevance, the mentoring process today is individualized to meet the needs of both emerging and experienced teachers as they encounter and reflect upon real-world challenges in early childhood classrooms. In a time when many teachers are feeling exhausted, blamed, and under attack because of rising standards and lower levels of support, the relationship-based mentoring process offers a way to nurture teachers toward professional growth with respectful and satisfying ongoing professional relationships.

## The Timeliness of Mentoring

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Change is occurring in the field of early childhood education. It is encouraging to many of us who have spent a lifetime in this profession to observe the increasing recognition of the importance of the role of the early childhood teacher. The growing professional respect for a diverse and multidisciplinary profession that equally values nurturing and teaching is long overdue. Many feel that our profession is at a defining moment in which we are now more valued and understood by the general public and by many policy makers but are still struggling to have our own practices match a professional vision for the highest quality programs for all young children (Goffin & Washington, 2007).

Mentoring is a professional-development strategy designed to bridge the gap between our professional vision and our actual practices. It refocuses us on the traditional early childhood value of relationships at the center of teaching practice (Bellm, Whitebook, & Hnatiuk, 1997a, b). A mentor understands why emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2006) is essential in establishing learning relationships. Acting as a professional ally who focuses first on observed strengths, a mentor allows for safe conversations with the teacher about what is happening, how it is affecting children, and ways to investigate and try out needed changes (Gardenswartz, Cherbosque, & Rowe, 2010). Mentoring has been specifically defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) as follows:

A relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more-experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less-experienced protégé or mentee. Mentoring is intended to increase an individual's personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness (Lutton, 2012, p. 84).

Mentoring as a form of job-embedded professional development (e.g., collaborative sharing of best practices, reflecting together about observed teacher-child interactions, conducting teacher inquiry into questions of interest) is especially suited to help teachers to meet professional standards while differentiating their practices for specific children and partnering with local communities (Schienfeld, Haigh, & Schienfeld, 2008).

Mentoring has also shown promise in helping a diverse group of working teachers who are being mentored in their classrooms to simultaneously receive college credit for courses with practicum experiences (Chu, Martinez-Griego & Cronin, 2010). Coaching is a closely related role that emphasizes all of the relationship-based skills of mentoring but also implies a specific focus, such as implementing literacy goals, and is facilitated by a professional with relevant expertise (Lutton, 2012, p. 85).

We are in an era when educational requirements for early childhood teachers are increasing in most publicly and privately funded early childhood programs. A national dialogue about ways to implement effective early childhood professional-development strategies is occurring. Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) are being developed and strengthened, with incentives for caregivers and teachers to engage in research-based practices (Connors-Tadros & Carlson, 2011, p. 36). Linking teaching practices to research into programs that have resulted in positive outcomes for children will continue to require that teachers engage in professional-development opportunities (Buissee, Wesley, Snyder & Winton, 2006; Hanft, Rush & Sheldon, 2004).

The field of early childhood education has entered a time when a commitment to accountability and assessment means that teachers must understand what children know, and they must also be able to use that information to plan instruction. The priorities of federal legislation such as the *Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant* have tied competitive funding to a state's ability to create quality-rating and improvement systems for childcare providers and efforts to measure children's and program's progress at improving learning outcomes.

These requirements exist within a field that has a firm commitment to the right of children to play and consensus that children learn best through exploration, while being respected and listened to (Smith, 2006; Mardell, Fiore, Boni & Tonachel, 2010). The complexity of our current early learning environment cries out for skilled mentors and coaches to support teachers to resist a "false dichotomy . . . between play and learning." (Zigler, 2009). Instead, supporting playful inquiry-based learning and being able to explain and document reasons why play supports learning requires careful professional reflection and planning. Professional development is needed for teachers who are carrying out investigations of everyday practices in order to examine and improve their teaching and learning (Stremmel, 2012, p. 112). Supporting teacher inquiry into children's learning offers pathways to renewal for teachers, mentors, and everyone involved in our field (Stremmel, 2012, p. 114). Mentoring relationships, together with other learning-community study groups or higher education courses, offer the possibility of increasing the quality of programs while differentiating the adult learning process for every teacher.

Experiences in working with a variety of programs have demonstrated to this author the ways in which teaching practices change when a respected mentor works alongside another adult student or mature teacher. Mentors (who might also wear the hat of college instructor, director, or colleague) who listen to the experiences, dilemmas, and interests of teachers are especially effective when they offer ongoing feedback and encouragement to strive for the highest standards, in ways that respect the cultural, community, and program context of the teacher (Chu et al., 2010; Chang, 2006; Alvarado, 2004).

In contrast, many of us have had the experience of teaching, or taking workshops, at conferences that were "one-shot" experiences. Even though these sessions may be engaging and full of needed information, later observations and self-assessments often reveal that little or no long-term change in teaching practices has occurred as a result of attendance and participation (Guskey, 2000). Individualizing the learning of adults to a focus on analysis of practices, coupled with a knowledgeable guide, is one way to influence teacher learning and, ultimately, have a positive impact on the children they care for and educate (Stichter, Lewis, Richter, Johnson, & Bradley, 2006; American Research Institute, 2001).

When a teacher works with a mentor who supports a focus on the teacher's actual interactions with children and provides assessment tools to increase the teacher's awareness, the subsequent changes in teaching behaviors can affect child outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2007). Although much more research is needed into the effectiveness of mentoring as a strategy to improve teaching practice (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011, p. 7), recent studies suggest that professional development that includes mentoring and coaching leads to more changes in the behaviors of teachers than programs implemented without mentoring (Pianta, Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, & Justice, 2008; Ramey & Ramey, 2008). A recent professional literature review (ACF/OHS/NCQTL, 2012a, b; Snyder, 2012) involving 101 coaching studies about early childhood teachers from 1995 to January 2011 revealed that over three quarters of the studies involved practices also associated with a recent model developed at Vanderbilt University. This model, known as *Practice-Based Coaching*, involves shared teacher-coach goal planning and action steps, focused observation, the use of data to guide reflection, feedback on teaching, and general support provided over time. Positive child outcomes documented in studies using similar practices included "increased participation and engagement, increased social skills and fewer challenging behaviors (and) increased literacy and language" (ACF/OHS/NCQTL, 2012a, pp. 2–4).

## Benefits and Characteristics of Effective Mentoring

Examining the specific features of effective professional development is one way to align the mentoring or coaching process with research-based qualities and characteristics. This growing body of study of effective professional development indicates that professional learning should

- be ongoing, intensive, and practice focused;
- include self-assessment; and
- be associated with specific criteria or expert feedback that is aligned with instructional goals, learning standards, and curriculum materials (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009; Trivette, Dunst, Hamby & O'Herin, 2009).

High-quality mentoring fits all of those criteria and also has been shown to lower staff turnover, decrease the isolation of caregiving (Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2008), and increase the emotionally responsive involvement of teachers' interacting with children (Howes, James, & Ritchie, 2003). The Quality Interventions for Early Care and Education (QUINCE) project's *Partners for Inclusion* model is showing results that ongoing mentoring and consultation increase family childcare teacher effectiveness after 6 months to 1 year of monthly visits, as measured in scores on the *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2007) and the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* (Sylva, Sirai-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2006) literacy measures (Bryant, 2007; QUINCE, 2009). This study and others indicate that the power of a mentoring relationship is influenced by variations in the intensity, continuity, individualization, and focus of the professional development facilitated by a skilled early childhood professional working with a less-skilled or less-experienced teacher (NCCIC, 2009; Weber & Trauten, 2008).

The mentoring process should help teachers to contrast their actions with their desired results through focus and reflection on their daily practices and interactions. This involves a set of mentoring communication, inquiry, and leadership skills and relevant competencies (e.g., adult learning, building relationships, assessment and planning, the change process, professional ethics) that are as essential to fostering professional growth as expertise in specific content areas such as math or early literacy (Minnesota SMART, 2005, 2007). Ways of being that promote dialogue and

reflection, and that foster inquiry into what teachers, families, and communities value, is required in the tool kit of the mentor. Identifying mentors or mentoring teams who understand the communities that they work in because they share common experiences or collaborate with others with the knowledge and perspectives that they lack is essential. Finally, recent research has found that child-centered beliefs and attitudes are significantly associated with higher quality care in home-based settings. Professional development that is effective in engaging—and in some cases, in modifying—family childcare providers’ attitudes is being cited as essential for raising quality (Forry et al., 2012). Individualized mentoring has the potential to support reflection and to change beliefs and caregiving strategies over time.

Mentoring seems uniquely suited to engaging in professional development within and among specific programs, institutions, and early learning systems. The key tools of mentoring are the ones long valued by effective teachers of young children: listening, observing, and responding to the interests, feelings, and thoughts of others, with sensitivity and humility. Deep content knowledge and experience in the field are, of course, also required. Content knowledge, although necessary, is not enough to change teacher practices, without expertise in the process of mentoring.

Teachers usually do not learn and grow in isolation or gain from decontextualized theories that they can’t apply. Instead, skilled mentors know that all learning is situated in a specific context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Understanding the interrelationships and intersections among a school or organization’s teachers, classrooms, and programs is also required for change and learning to take root (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Learning communities or communities of practice facilitated by a mentor who works with a cohorts of teachers to examine their collective beliefs, gather information with a specific focus for inquiry, and put new learning into practice have the possibility of sustaining teacher development (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Zaslow et. al., 2011). Finally, when mentoring or related approaches are used as a part of a quality-improvement initiative, organizational system levels and the needs and involvement of individuals, classrooms, collective groups, and programs must be considered (Tout, Isner, & Zaslow, 2011).

## **Audience for This Text**

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This text may be useful as a resource to support

- the collaborative work and professional development of emerging community-based mentors and coaches;
- educators with early learning content knowledge and experience as teachers of young children who also want to gain the skills of the adult educator;
- mentors in a co-learning pair and/or participants in a professional-learning community interested in supporting peers in inquiry methods of teacher research;
- higher education faculty examining mentoring and leadership as one aspect of a professionalism, administration, or field-based practicum course;
- early-learning program administrators interested in a personal study of their dual roles as supervisors and mentors to their staff; and
- coaches using a specific or prescribed research-based coaching model who need a foundation in relationship-based professional-development knowledge, skills, and strategies.

Groups who are in preparation for creating a mentoring system for early-childhood teachers involved in a QRIS or similar quality-improvement initiative may use this text as a companion to other mentoring protocols when offering foundational professional development in relationship-based mentoring competencies. The last three

chapters also address a planning and leadership-development process needed to sustain the gains made in any mentoring effort. The mentor in this text is viewed as a co-learner and co-investigator with the teacher. Although they may have related but different roles, goals, and purposes, as well as different knowledge and specialized expertise, both teacher and mentor are equally important parts of the mentoring process.

This text will broadly support all who work in roles facilitating the professional development of teachers of young children. Degreed early-childhood teachers also need mentoring. They are often not required to complete student teaching as a prerequisite for completing their degrees, and unlike K–12 teachers, are frequently not afforded an induction period of intensive support by supervisors and peer teachers (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). Instead, due to the low education levels of teachers in the birth-to-5 early education field, a newly degreed teacher may encounter unrealistic expectations from employers. Mentoring is needed to retain new and experienced early-childhood teachers and to help them to explore their roles effectively. Mentors may also wear multiple hats as supervisors, directors, or program managers and may need to clarify and reflect on what roles best support teachers in meeting licensing, accreditation and other quality standards. By working through the text’s reflective exercises and dialogue starters, readers can develop essential skills in the following areas:

## **Relationship-Based Professional-Development Strategies and Approaches**

.....

These strategies and approaches include examining the differences and similarities in values, goals, and roles associated with mentoring, collaborative teacher–researcher partnerships, coaching, consultation, supervision, and evaluation. The stages of teacher and mentor growth and leadership development are reviewed. Chapters specifically support the reader to be able to:

- explain the purpose of mentoring and the qualities of an effective mentor and identify relationship-based professional development strategies and models;
- analyze ways in which the role of the supervisor contrasts with the role of a mentor, coach, or consultant; and
- support emerging mentors and leaders from underrepresented groups by partnering with early-childhood leaders in a local community.

### **Educational Interactions and the Process of Inquiry**

Methods for implementing the process of collaborative inquiry in professional-learning communities are explored through the tools of observation, dialogue, goal setting, implementing a plan, and critical feedback. Readers will learn how to

- identify and use appropriate observation and assessment techniques to gather information for developing teacher, program, or other professional goals;
- demonstrate skills for engaging in a cycle of educational inquiry as a collaborator and guide with an early childhood teacher;
- identify, facilitate, and evaluate effective communication strategies for mentoring and other adult professional-development relationships;
- understand the ongoing, organic, or iterative nature of the mentoring process; and
- apply reflection and evaluation strategies for mentor–teacher partnerships.

## Sustaining a Focus on Valuing Equity, Diversity, and Culturally Relevant Practices

The individual, program, and systems levels are examined through discussions of cultural competency, responsiveness, and ways to value multiple perspectives. In all aspects of the mentoring process, the text notes the importance of recognizing what mentors and teachers know and do not know about the cultural, language, and community contexts. Rejection of practices that assume that the goal of early care and education to promote a monocultural and monolingual society is consistent in the text (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Concepts are explored that support readers to

- identify personal biases interfering with effective teaching and mentoring;
- describe and integrate the principles behind cultural competence, social justice, and anti-bias practices; and
- identify ways to support the development of leadership and mentoring practices that are responsive to the community and cultural context.

## Adult-Learning Theories and Approaches Applied to the Mentoring Relationship

Ways to analyze and explore a variety of methods to gain an understanding of one's own and other's practices in teaching and in the mentoring relationship are described. The developmental process of change in a professional early-childhood teacher-mentoring relationship is reviewed from many perspectives in order to show readers how to

- describe selected theories of adult development and learning and analyze the implications for fostering a responsive teacher-mentor relationship;
- explore reflective critical-thinking practices and use a variety of methods to gain an understanding of one's own and others' practices in teaching and mentoring relationships.
- describe the developmental process of change, resistance to change, conflict, and transformation possible in a professional early-childhood teacher-mentoring relationship.

## Professional-Development Leadership and Planning for Mentoring Systems

The connections between facilitating individual teacher curiosity and problem-solving and the broader needs of an overall professional plan for learning and development are examined within a system of professional development. Ways to grow a diversity of early childhood leaders who facilitate a learning-community approach to early education are emphasized. Specifically, when the reader completes a self-study or course by using this text, he or she should have a growing capacity to consider these categories of mentoring skills and knowledge and should

- be able to identify the steps to focusing on specific teacher questions or topics;
- establish bigger goals linked to desired child and/or program outcomes;
- construct with mentee an overall professional-development plan;
- transition to a satisfactory conclusion of a mentoring relationship and bridge to new support networks; and
- engage in leadership for professional-development systems planning.

This text may be used in an early childhood course designed to meet specific National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards and Guidelines for Professional Development (Lutton, 2012). A focus on Standard 6—Becoming a



Professional from the NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs is especially related to the content of the text. Standard 6 indicates that

. . . students [referred to as *teachers* in this text] identify and conduct themselves as members of the early childhood profession. They know and use ethical guidelines and other professional standards related to early childhood practice. They are continuous, collaborative learners who demonstrate knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives on their work, making informed decisions that integrate knowledge from a variety of sources. They are informed advocates for sound educational practices and policies.

- 6a: Identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field
- 6b: Knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other professional guidelines
- 6c: Engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice
- 6d: Integrating knowledgeable, reflective, and critical perspectives on early education
- 6e: Engaging in informed advocacy for children and the profession

(Lutton, 2012, p. 26)

The text addresses the central issues in mentoring of improving program quality and teaching practices, relationships, inquiry, and leadership. This is not a text with one answer for all programs or people. The underlying assumptions are that technical assistance to programs, adult-learning experiences or early childhood college practicum experiences for teachers, and other forms of professional development do not produce long-term transformational change in teacher practices unless a knowledgeable, experienced, and trusted person first listens to the teacher’s concerns and offers empathy, identifying questions to investigate, and encouraging reflection on practices. Adults, like children, learn best when their understanding of teaching and learning is built on ways that make sense in their context and their culture and is embedded in supportive professional-development relationships over time.

## Section I: Relationship-Based Learning

Section I (Chapters 1–4) emphasizes relationship building and an understanding of the cultural and community context, communication skills, and adult-learning strategies needed to support the professional development of an early childhood teacher. Differences and similarities in the approaches and goals associated with mentoring, coaching, consultation, and supervision are examined. When readers have completed Section I, they will be able to

- explain the concept, goals, and possible outcomes of mentoring;
- describe the roles and responsibilities of mentors and participants;
- explain the differences between mentoring and related approaches and supervision;
- describe differing assumptions and adult-learning theories underlying mentoring approaches;
- apply strategies for building professional relationships;
- use effective communication strategies in mentoring;
- identify examples of transformative and culturally responsive mentoring approaches; and
- explain common stages of mentor and teacher development.

## Section II: Mentoring for Inquiry, Reflection, and Leadership

Section II (Chapters 5–8) explores the role of the mentor to join with an early childhood teacher to listen to concerns and discover areas of interest. Strategies shared are

inspired by the schools of Reggio Emilia, where teachers document (photography, videotaping, written notes and transcripts) children's actions, words, and dialogue to make meaning by interpreting their documentation with colleagues and mentors over time. Emphasis is on developing mentoring with teachers and programs to identify needs and interests. These final chapters examine key elements of mentoring for early childhood leadership explored through an examination of reflective supervision and the process of change. When readers have completed Section II, they will be able to

- explain the role of the mentor in facilitating a teacher's cycle of inquiry;
- describe ways to join with an early childhood teacher to explore questions and interests;
- understand and adapt to a teacher's readiness for change;
- explain the differences between observation, critical reflection, and interpretation of information gathered in the early childhood program setting;
- review methods to plan for changes in teaching strategies and program approaches;
- identify ways to transfer skills from teaching to mentoring and leadership;
- identify strategies for creating a system of mentoring that meets the needs of a community and fits the cultural context;
- explain ways to mentor for reflective supervision, decision-making, and program change; and
- provide strategies for facilitating a program for or systems approach to collaborative observation, reflection, and action.

Being a part of a mentoring relationship is rewarding because it holds the possibility of awakening curiosity in both the mentor and the mentee, or protégé. Having feelings of dissatisfaction with the present but no clear pathway to the future is a powerful ally of the mentor. These feelings may change to a sense of increased energy and direction through the spirit of collaborative inquiry at work in a mentoring relationship. The potential of this relationship cannot be achieved without attention and consideration of the skills, knowledge, and investigations required. This text hopes to help you in your preparation for that professional journey.

## Reflection

- What characteristics of mentoring for professional development and learning do you feel are important to support your learning or the development of other staff, teachers, or colleagues?
- With what national, state, or local trends in early childhood education program accountability are you involved in or aware of? What purpose might mentoring for personal and professional development serve in the current educational context or in your setting?
- After reviewing the topics in this text, select several that are interesting to you to further your learning. Identify topics with which you are familiar or those that you have experience in applying in work with other early childhood teachers, children, and families.

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# Relationship-Based Professional Learning

The chapter supports your growing capacity to

- experience the power of reflection;
- define the terms and purposes of relationship-based (RB) professional development (PD);
- identify the roles and functions of a mentor and mentee, or protégé;
- compare the differences and similarities between mentoring and supervising;
- choose ground rules or agreements to structure a learning relationship;
- describe qualities and characteristics of mentoring;
- analyze what matters in relationship-based PD competencies; and
- plan to demonstrate relationship-based PD competencies.

**W**hat does it take to have a successful professional-mentoring relationship? How does mentoring fit into professional development that strengthens early childhood teaching and program practices? This chapter examines these questions and the terms, goals, benefits, roles, and responsibilities associated with a collaborative mentoring relationship. Mentoring is also explored as a process occurring in learning pairs of mentor–teacher (i.e., as protégé or mentee), small groups that may contain mentoring teams, and in collegial, colearning relationships. The ways that supervision differs from and is similar to mentoring are examined. Mentor competencies identified in this chapter reflect the knowledge and skills needed to understand teachers in their unique role as learners.

*“By allowing time with a mentor before class, (childcare) providers were able to share ideas and network with each other. With a focus on building relationships and learning, teachers were more willing to share some of the more difficult aspects of their work. Learners commented on their growth and how their perspectives on child guidance were changing.”*

Laurie Cornelius, Clark College, Vancouver, Washington,  
reflecting on the *Bridges to Higher Education* mentoring component  
of child-guidance professional-development college courses, 2007–2008.

## Learning About the Learner



A mentor to early childhood teachers must be a respected, knowledgeable, and experienced person who is skilled in supporting and nurturing the growth of someone who is less experienced. Promoting professional and personal growth

involves a collaborative, culturally responsive, and respectful professional relationship. A mentoring relationship begins with listening. Shelly Macy, early childhood teacher–educator from the Northwest Indian College in Bellingham, Washington, notes, “Only after being listened to are practitioners likely to be able to listen to an outside resource. . . . They already have tons of information from their work, and a listener who is interested as they share is invaluable. Listening, listening, listening . . . is especially important where there are cultural differences between mentor and teacher” (Chu, 2008). When the mentor is skilled at observing and listening, the teacher (as protégé, or mentee) tends to feel acknowledged and understood. Then can begin the task of promoting the teacher–researcher skills of analyzing practices and engaging in the ongoing inquiry into the daily work with children and families. A blossoming mentoring relationship begins with learning about the learner.

The power of mentoring lies in individualizing a learning relationship to solve relevant problems in the work or college practicum setting. Mentors, who are open to the point of view of the teacher, (a) alter their strategies to fit the situation, and (b) see themselves as serving others (Rush, Sheldon, & Hanft, 2003). Qualities that are needed to accomplish these two very ambitious tasks and that must be recognized by the mentee teacher are competence (“I can learn from you”), flexibility (“I need to talk to you about something not on the plan”), ethicality (“I know you are confidential”), honesty (“I never realized I was doing that”), and most of all, caring (“I like talking to you, too!”).

Mentors must have the disposition to learn how to use their influence or professional power *for* the mentee through facilitation of shared learning. Using power *over* a mentee, as when a supervisor directs change to occur, must be clearly differentiated from a process of mentoring involving learner choice. Using power *over* a person may feel to that person more like an oppressive external force (Sullivan, 2010, p. 9) than support for learning.

Finally, *delivering content* without knowing a teacher, a program, a school, or the cultural and community context is the opposite of relationship-based learning. Valuing the accumulated knowledge of children, teachers, programs, and communities is at the heart of a relationship-based mentoring process. When teachers feel that a mentor understands and values their knowledge and skills, they are often more ready to join with the mentor to move toward an imagined future that adds research-based evidence to their resources. To be an effective mentor is to recognize that learning is influenced by and embedded in the lives, values, cultures, and working conditions of the teacher (Opfer & Pedder, 2011, p. 376; Nabobo-Baba & Tiko, 2009).

## Experiencing the Power of Reflection

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Throughout the chapters, reflective writing and discussion starters are integrated into the text to stimulate you to think about your interests, views, and contributions to the mentoring relationship. The opening questions will help you to identify your current needs and your understanding of the concept of mentoring. Begin now to practice the idea of *parallel process*, or acting in the same way that you want the adult students, colleagues, or teachers whom you supervise or mentor to be treated and to treat others (Scott Heller & Gilkerson, 2009, pp. 11–12). First, reflect and consider the topic of mentoring by responding to the reflection questions throughout each chapter. Here, the concept of *reflection* is used to mean a method of encouraging the



process of actively thinking about the knowledge, skills, and practices that a teacher uses. A mentor or coach employs reflection for the purpose of supporting an early childhood teacher's development. Pausing to reflect as you read will prepare you for future mentoring relationships that will require the same sort of process—making visible or discussing often unwritten and unspoken questions and assumptions. In this way, you will practice reflecting on and posing questions before making plans and finding solutions. Identifying your intense interests now will also allow you to move around in the book and find sections that you want to read, based on your current needs.

## REFLECTION

Reflecting on the questions that follow will provide you with insight into your own learning needs. *Keep a reflective journal* or write directing in the “reflection” areas as you use this text to explore how mentoring fits into your professional role. Experiencing the power of reflection yourself will support you as you mentor other teachers.

Begin by brainstorming what comes to mind, and supply multiple endings to these sentences.

1. Mentoring is . . . . [or] Mentoring includes . . . .
  
2. Mentoring is not . . . . [or] Mentoring should not emphasize . . . .
  
3. Next, compare your brainstormed lists with Table 1.1, and consider the following questions: What did you write that should be included in the table? Do you disagree with anything in the table? Why? What are the areas that you excel in? What do others notice about you that would support the role of mentor? Which ideas in Table 1.1 could you use more information about or more practice in doing?

Understanding the importance of the items in the left-hand column of Table 1.1 (“Mentoring is or should include:”) will help mentors to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to grow professional learning relationships with teachers. Likewise, recognizing the pitfalls inherent in the thinking and actions delineated in the column on the right-hand side of Table 1.1 (“Mentoring is not or should not emphasize:”) reminds mentors to monitor their practices for an overuse of choices that often break trust and collaboration. Teachers who are seeking to learn and grow as professionals need mentors willing to do the same.

**Table 1.1** What Is Mentoring?

<b>Mentoring is or should include:</b>	<b>Mentoring is not or should not emphasize:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A dynamic process of both challenge and support</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> <li>• Personal and professional growth</li> <li>• Formal or informal partnerships</li> <li>• Connecting research-based skills and knowledge to new practices</li> <li>• Culturally responsive practices that respect the accumulated knowledge of cultural groups</li> <li>• Assisting to develop strategies</li> <li>• Observation, reflection, and self-direction</li> <li>• Setting goals and clarifying expectations</li> <li>• Accountability and agreement on process by mentor and teacher</li> <li>• Understanding the complexities of a teacher's context</li> <li>• Understanding the prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of the teacher</li> <li>• Periods of disequilibrium</li> <li>• Searching for practices to fit goals</li> <li>• Reflecting on dilemmas over time, with frequent feedback</li> <li>• Negotiating the frequency, duration, and other aspects of the professional-development process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation</li> <li>• Punitive outcomes</li> <li>• A high-stakes test</li> <li>• Direction by others</li> <li>• Excessive information, without time for reflection and discussion</li> <li>• No input from the teacher</li> <li>• Only one point of view</li> <li>• Views in conflict with the values of the cultural and community context</li> <li>• Technical information without discussion of how to adapt it or apply it</li> <li>• Harsh or critical communication style</li> <li>• Simple solutions or only one perspective about complex situations</li> <li>• One-size-fits-all approach to delivering discrete skills and knowledge</li> <li>• Agreement and harmony all the time</li> <li>• One-time event without follow-up or application to a work setting</li> <li>• Inducing feelings of being overwhelmed, misunderstood, or alone</li> <li>• Prescriptive protocols without explanation or individualization to fit the context of a specific teacher</li> </ul>

## REFLECTION

Think about someone who mentored you. Reflect on or discuss the following questions:

1. What did he or she do that you appreciated?
  
2. What characteristics did he or she have?
  
3. Was the mentor assigned to you or chosen by you?

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### Connections

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Revisit the list of topics at the beginning of this chapter. Consider the following questions:

1. What do you hope to learn? What is it about the topic of mentoring and coaching development that interests you?
  2. How do you see a mentoring relationship as a part of your current or future work with teachers of young children and families?
  3. What are you wondering about?
- 

Now, reflect on what you want to discover in the remainder of the chapter. Review the book's table of contents, and check to see whether your interests are explored in other parts of the book.

## Definitions, Purposes, and Terms Used in Relationship-Based Professional Development

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A common characteristic of professional-development methods and roles examined in this book is that they are all *relationship based*. A professional relationship-based approach facilitates program quality improvement by focusing on learning processes that support a teacher's construction of understanding rather than by focusing only on evaluation of skills or on compliance with technical information. In many ways, the approach is similar to working with children, in which case teachers focus on developing children's construction of knowledge rather than focusing only on meeting discrete instructional goals.

Many professions have a period of professional induction or apprenticeship to support the application of foundational knowledge, abilities, and dispositions to the work setting. Examples include an internship at a law firm or a hospital residency in a medical program. In early childhood education, experienced caregivers, teachers, and administrators benefit from an educational approach that incorporates individualized support to encourage observation, critical reflection, multiple perspectives, and new ways of thinking about working with children and families. Bridging practices from course content to implementing these ideas in daily practice usually requires the support of someone with greater knowledge and experience than the teachers possess. Despite a considerable investment of federal, state, and foundation funds in early childhood professional-development activities, most of such activities are still short term and are found to be of limited value (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009). Mentors who model, coplan, and provide feedback—with repeated opportunities to practice strategies—are engaging in practices associated with better retention of new teachers (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005, p. 409; Goe, 2007) and are key to the implementation of curricula reform (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2007).



Researchers and educators have noted a lack of consensus in the field of early childhood education regarding characteristics and definitions of professional-development approaches such as mentoring, coaching, and consultation (Ramey & Ramey, 2005). A lack of common language in the literature has caused confusion about what the purpose and processes are as indicated by various terms. The *mentoring*, *coaching*, and *consultation* definitions examined in this chapter are based on the glossary of professional development terms (Lutton, 2012, pp. 84–86) developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA). Their work was informed by feedback from early childhood professional-development leaders from 44 states, as well as from prominent research and education organizations and agencies.

However, these terms likely will continue to evolve because different disciplines (e.g., mental health, higher education, workforce development traditions) and program approaches may favor one term over another, even when practitioners are discussing the same strategies for professional development. If we are to value professional and personal diversity and early childhood education’s multidisciplinary heritage, then we probably will have to remain comfortable specifically explaining our approaches and philosophy beyond just identifying the terms we use. Documenting mentoring and coaching methods—including their sequence, scope, frequency, duration, and timing—is important for those in our field to be able to evaluate the relative power of each adult instructional choice. Many research studies, however, do not clearly identify what specific mentoring and coaching methods are used with teachers (ACF/OHS/NCQTL, 2012).

This book uses the term *teacher* to refer to all certified teachers, childcare providers, aides, assistants, and other staff who work in early care and education settings. Young children view all adults in their programs as teachers, and this text will share their point of view. The terms *mentee* and *protégé* are used interchangeably. However, this book most often will refer to the *mentor–teacher relationship* as an intentional way of avoiding any association with a subservient or hierarchical mentoring relationship. In the author’s experience, many teachers dislike the terms *protégé* and *mentee* and prefer to be thought of as a professional (teacher) joining with another professional (mentor) who is supporting their growth.

Definitions of relationship-based professional development terms used in this book follow.

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**Mentor: A respected, experienced person who supports and nurtures the growth of someone who is less experienced.**

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This general term implies a relationship that is longer range, ongoing, and mutually agreeable. Mentoring is “. . . a relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles with a more-experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills . . . providing guidance and example to the less-experienced protégé or mentee . . . [that] is intended to increase an individual’s personal and professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness” (Lutton, 2012, p. 84). The mentoring process should involve a mentor–teacher match that is based on a mutual respect for professional, personal, and cultural values and goals. Since 1988, the California Early Childhood Mentor program has trained experienced, qualified early childhood teachers to supervise student teachers who are assigned to the mentors’ birth-to-age-five and before- and after-school program classrooms. Selection is based on professional qualifications and a quality review of the mentor’s classroom. This book will use the term *mentor* to focus on common strategies

that should be foundational to any relationship-based professional-development approach.

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**Coach: A person with specific expertise or skill who helps identify and develop skill in another.**

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Although, in general, the term *mentor* is used very broadly, the term *coach* is often employed to identify “a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s) . . . to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and [who] is focused on goal setting and achievement for an individual or group” (Lutton, 2012, p. 85). The term *coach* is used in the field of sports and in public school educational settings. Many primary schools have a tradition of teachers’ supporting their peers by serving part-time as literacy or math coaches. These teachers usually are recognized by their peers as having expertise and educational qualifications in an area in which other teachers are requesting professional development.

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**Consultant: A person who facilitates the resolution of specific work-related issues involving people or programs.**

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The term *consultation* is often used in reference to a “collaborative, problem-solving process between an external consultant with specific expertise and adult learning knowledge and skills and an individual or group from one program or organization” (Lutton, 2012, p. 86). Consultation is common also in the areas of physical and mental health and facilitates the “resolution of an issue-specific concern . . . or addresses a specific topic” (p. 86). In Washington State, for example, local county public-health-department nurse consultants are contracted by childcare centers to support infant and toddler teachers to establish and maintain a healthy and safe environment and meet the special health needs of enrolled children. Consultation may be short term to resolve a specific problem or may involve longer term relationships in order to advise a program quality-improvement process. Consultants are often brought into a program during a time of crisis. The author acted as a childcare consultant at a childcare center after a toddler was accidentally scalded by coffee from a teacher’s cup. A review of program policies and practices led the center to meet licensing and insurance requirements designed to prevent any further harm to children.

### **What Category of Professional Development Is This? It Depends on Whom You Ask!**

Higher education instructors tend to refer to education that may include seminars combined with field experiences in early childhood programs to describe the category of teaching and learning programs—for both preservice and in-service teachers—that they facilitate. Educational courses leading to college credit often also include research- and evidence-based practices and the underlying history, theory, and philosophy of a subject area that give participants a depth and breadth of understanding. College courses complying with NAEYC’s 2- and 4-year degree requirements should be both knowledge oriented and practice focused. This means that a focus on the “application or use of knowledge and skills related to the

(NAEYC) standard” are “best learned, practiced, and assessed in field experiences” (NAEYC, 2012, p. 14). Courses with an explicit focus on practice have been found to have direct positive influences on teachers’ use of effective practices (Hamre, et al., 2012).

Instructors from a *training* background (e.g., Child Care Resource and Referral Agency trainers, program specialists in Head Start) usually work with groups of teachers because these groups have specific technical and content knowledge that address an identified need. Trainers tend to use the term *technical assistance* when referring to helping teachers put theory into practice. NAEYC and NACCRRRA use *technical assistance* as an overarching term to describe the category of professional development that includes mentoring, coaching, and consultation (Lutton, 2012, p. 83). This book will focus primarily on the skills, knowledge, and related dispositions and competencies needed in a mentoring or coaching professional-development relationship. The term *mentor* will be used when discussing common competencies needed in relationship-based professional learning.

### Focus First on the Teaching–Learning Relationship

Mentoring may be only one small part of the many professional responsibilities of experienced teachers, directors, college professors, and others in the field of early childhood education. However, increasing awareness of the power of mentoring in the areas of professional “collaborative problem-solving and change” (Buisse & Wesley, 2005, p. 5) has expanded opportunities for part- and full-time mentoring positions as state and other systems organize around program quality improvement (National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, 2010). Mentoring tends to be least successful when the mentor and/or the teacher do not understand the purpose, role, and goals of relationship-based professional development. Regardless of nuances of the professional-development role as defined by NAEYC and NACCRRRA (Lutton, 2012), it is the author’s experience that the underlying assumptions about how adults learn affect any approach to a teaching–learning relationship.

## Identifying the Roles and Functions of a Mentor and Teacher (as Mentee or Protégé)

Confusion, vagueness, and uncertainty about the roles of mentor and teacher (as mentee or protégé) will cause this form of relationship-based professional development to be less successful. Clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each role is essential. Consider the following:

### A mentee, or protégé, (referred to as *teacher* in this text) is

- usually less experienced in some professional areas than the mentor is. In other areas, the protégé may be more experienced or knowledgeable.
- a colearner and co-investigator with the mentor.
- responsible for agreeing to work with a mentor.
- interested in sharing his or her learning needs and shaping the process of mentoring.
- willing to participate in professional dialogue or professional development sessions about his or her practices.
- responsible for keeping appointments and commitments with the mentor.
- willing to tell the mentor concerns, frustrations, or questions about the mentoring process.

- willing to detail and negotiate other specifics, as needed.
- interested in joining with another professional whom he or she feels has valuable professional perspectives that support, guide, teach, or facilitate learning.
- committed to improving teaching practices.

This list of mentee, or protégé, characteristics hints at the pitfalls of the mentoring process that can arise when these characteristics and conditions for learning are not present. Learners who have no choice in who mentors them, how they will learn, what topics are explored, or the times and places of the mentor–teacher meetings may not persist in this form of professional development.

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### Connections

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1. Identify ways to share mentoring characteristics with a teacher seeking mentoring for professional development. One way is to embed these characteristics into a mentoring contract that specifies action items for which the mentor and the mentee are responsible. Jot down ideas for communicating mentee expectations.
2. Consider how shared choice and power can be supported even in a strict research-based mentoring protocol. Replicating with fidelity an early-literacy protocol, for example, usually still allows for flexibility in scheduling mentoring meetings. When mentors demonstrate respect for a teacher's basic needs and his or her point of view by listening to concerns and questions, more opportunities for learning about effective practices may arise. How do you think mentee choice might be supported?

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## Differences and Similarities Between Mentoring and Supervising

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The need to foster a safe learning environment requires the mentor and supervisor to be explicit and clear about their unique roles. If the same person is performing both roles (e.g., evaluation of job performance and providing support for learning), it is especially important to identify the function being performed at any one time. In other words, always identify the differences between a suggestion, a choice, and a requirement. Mentors need to be able to answer the questions “Is this a brainstorming session, or am I evaluating you? Is this confidential, or will your response be reported to someone?” Learning and growth are hampered when adults do not feel safe to explore ideas and new practices with a trusted guide.

Mentoring is usually designed as a function very separate from supervision and evaluation in order to allow a teacher to feel comfortable sharing his or her struggles and challenges. However, the reality of many early childhood settings today is that one person may be asked or required to fill both roles. Supervisors acting in the role of mentor and mentors asked to share observations of a teacher's performance should carefully examine potential ethical dilemmas resulting from their acting in the two roles at the same time.