

Mentor Newsletter

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University of Illinois
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Newsletter Features

- Phases of Learning Teaching
- Research Corner
- Literacy Artifacts Come Alive through Mentoring

Important Dates

- **April 4, 2006:** Field Advisory, Rooms 2417 and 2435, 4:00-4:50.
- **May 10, 2006:** Transition to Teaching Special Education seminar, Monarch Center Conference Room, 4:00-6:00.
- **September 12, 2006:** Partner Professional Development, 4:00-6:00
- **September 26, 2006:** Partner Connection, 4:00-6:00

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STEP=UP

Special Teachers and Exceptional Pupils = Urban Promise



Phases of Learning Teaching

Working with persons new to teaching and experienced general education teachers new to special education means we are collaborating with teachers at varied parts in their careers as well as different phases of their university preparation program. What do we see and hear at the beginning and nearing the end of their program with respect to students' beliefs and practices?

Through partners' communication with students, we found some commonalities amongst students at the beginning of the program:

- a) how to gain confidence to see oneself doing the many activities of teaching;
- b) how does one begin to think about ways to modify curriculum for so many different abilities at once;
- c) how does one handle the negative energy and bureaucratic realities of schools? As students near student teaching, they concern themselves with the central tasks of special education teaching, namely, lesson planning and IEP delivery.

Certified teachers becoming special educators instead seem to deepen their

understanding through investigation of fine-grained connections between planning, curriculum, and individual students' development. In the program, that culminates in a course where students conduct an inquiry in their classroom, offer an inservice, and write a report.

Sara Tyska, a STEP=UP graduate, shed additional light on the notion of preparation for people at different points in their careers. Prepared first as a general education elementary teacher, she commented on the large number of new terms quite unique to special education. One enters IEP meetings or negotiations with other teachers, she recalled from her beginning teaching, and at times it feels like you are not even speaking the same language. In courses, students learn a great deal about the characteristics of disabilities. But how to move from understanding characteristics of learners to planning which strategies for comprehension might work for one student, and which for another, is overwhelming. How we translate that into choices of strategies and activities for particular students, she said, is a huge leap.

What does this all mean for STEP=UP Partners as they gently assist students during their program?

- a) **Think hard about how we reason about our choices of a strategy, skill or activity to use.** As experienced teachers, we do that based on a repertoire of what we know and what worked – pretty automatic thinking now. What can we show and say that helps new special educators know what makes us choose a particular activity for that particular student?
- b) **Talk about how we design an activity.** For example, Timothy Poulemanos brought in a study guide. What he chose to include, how to design the page, how to help students decipher it; that was all new to people preparing to teach special education. Hearing how another person thinks is key to the translation of ideas to classroom practice.
- c) **Classroom talk.** Many of our students need to hear that, to hear how kids can reason through a math problem using varied language or talk about a book or interact in functional skills cooking classes. Tape recording a few minutes of talk and showing that could help our students “see” the classroom.

Research Corner

Mentoring Induction Principles and Guidelines, a publication from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), highlights the benefits the mentoring process offers those in the role. These include improving mentors' skills of a) observation, b) conflict resolution, and c) communication. Teaching people how to teach – the work of mentoring – involves fine-grained observation of students' learning, of one's own teaching, of the interaction of that with the content to be learned. Talking about that, knowing what to share and how, involves careful choice amongst resources to be shown and how to engulf novices in a discussion. When working with a novice in the same classroom, where different viewpoints might surface for dealing with students and their learning, mentors need to know ahead of time how to "put things on the table" and be honest and clear. The novice has less power, and can easily be both unclear and quick to make judgments. The mentor needs to be open about how s/he reasons and makes decisions.

In the guidelines, we see a theme of the importance of encouragement and feedback to beginning teachers. Yet we also know that novices are anxious about what they might not know. New learners also find it difficult to articulate what they might not even imagine let alone fully understand. Given that, mentors' work also includes helping new teachers in special education to do things such as talk about how special education differs from general education, how to scaffold or break down ideas for students depending on their abilities, and how to differentiate instruction.

The Mentoring Induction Principles and Guidelines can be found at http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProfessionalStandards/mip_g_manual_11pt.pdf

Watch for the *Transition to Special Education Teaching Module* in Fall 2006. This online multimedia module will be another resource for collaborative work.

Literacy Artifacts Come Alive through Mentoring

"Unlike other jobs, the expectations for new teachers are the same as, or higher than, the expectations for experienced teachers, especially in terms of student achievement" (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004, p. 322). We look to mentoring as one way to ease the complicated nature of being a new teacher. In STEP=UP, we use the vehicle of literacy artifacts and the model of teacher as collaborator. Given those conditions, what can be shared to help novices visualize their entry into teaching?

- 1) Your enthusiasm for teaching, even when the paperwork and demands can be overwhelming. What keeps your commitment and passion going? How do you handle that overwhelm? What gets you through?
- 2) Talk about the varied methods and activities you considered for teaching the literacy components of the lesson/learning/project you demonstrate through your artifact.
- 3) Consider carefully your own experiences, and what you did and why. Interpret your own teaching, and talk about your insights as well as second-guesses you made.
- 4) Ask the novices questions and make statements, e.g., What would you do if a student could not read this selection or book? What strategies come to mind to present? What are ways we might break down this content so more students could grasp part of the ideas?

Ultimately, doing such things will move us from seeing mentoring as "hierarchical dispensations of wisdom to shared inquiries into practice" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000, p. 55). Such discussions will induct novices a vision of teaching as connection, not loneliness.

Fletcher, S.H. & Barrett, A. (2004). Developing effective beginning teachers through mentor-based induction. Mentoring and Tutoring, 12(3), 321-333.

Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M. (2000). Mentoring in the new millennium. Theory into Practice, 39(1), 50-56.