

# Guides Support Mentors, Coaches of New Teachers

Are you considering becoming a mentor or coach to a new science teacher? To help you transition to these new roles and succeed, the Exploratorium, San Francisco's interactive museum of science, art, and human perception, has published guides for mentoring and coaching, available online "free to anybody," says Linda Shore, director of the Exploratorium Teacher Institute (TI).

For more than 20 years, the TI has helped middle level and high school teachers strengthen their science concept knowledge and enhance their teaching with hands-on, inquiry-oriented activities.

Since 1998, the TI has included a Teacher Induction Program consisting of a two-year Beginning Teacher

Program and a two-year Leadership Program for training experienced teachers to mentor and coach new teachers. Past participants from both programs contributed content to the guides, says Shore.

"Over the last 10 years, we've learned a lot about beginning science teachers," she contends. "We take what we learned and spread the wealth." The guides, she says, provide "our tricks of the trade" to help other programs support novice science teachers and train and support mentors and coaches. Although the guides were originally developed for the Exploratorium's program, they can be easily modified for use in other programs.

One reason they were developed,

she explains, is because "a lot of knowledge about helping beginning teachers is generic and focused on the challenges faced by all teachers," but not much geared "specifically for the needs and challenges faced by high school and middle school science teachers." Mentors and coaches at the upper-elementary level could also benefit from the guides, she adds.

Another reason for publishing them, says Shore, is "veteran teachers want a way to 'give back' to the teaching profession and pass their knowledge and experience to the next generation of science teachers. These guides are designed to give veteran teachers the tools and strategies for doing that most effectively."

Providing resources like the guides,

Shore adds, is part of the Exploratorium's mission "to develop strategies for making life easier for teachers" and to provide them with lifelong, "cradle to grave" support. The National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Carnegie Corporation of New York provided funding for developing the guides. Both agencies are interested in disseminating the Exploratorium's "knowledge of the recruitment and improvement of young teachers."

## Mentoring, Coaching Defined

Acknowledging the Exploratorium's definitions of who mentors and coaches are and what they do may differ from those of other educators and organizations, Shore says the *Coaching Guide* is for educators not currently

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The Exploratorium's Coaching Guide offers coaches suggestions for successful interactions with novice science teachers when visiting their classrooms.

teaching, whether retired or on sabbatical. These veterans coach new teachers in the classroom during the school day.

The *Coaching Guide* contains tips for a variety of situations, including preparing to meet new teachers, establishing a rapport with them, learning how

to meet their needs, advising them on equipment and materials, and setting up a classroom visitation schedule. It informs coaches about what to expect during the first visit and how to "accent the positive" and "build bridges, not walls," when interacting with a nervous novice. Coaches are also urged to be aware of not only their own

limits, but also those of the teacher, his or her students, and the school. Rounding out the *Coaching Guide* are suggestions for following up with the new teacher after the first visit, setting coaching goals for the first year, and revisiting the classroom.

The *Mentoring Guide* is aimed at experienced classroom teachers who still work full time. They provide after-school and weekend help to new teachers by holding support groups and co-leading workshops outside the classroom.

The guide details how to establish and run support groups that "provide a safe place for asking questions and revealing doubts" and "encourage collegiality and group problem solving." It provides ideas for meeting topics, such as time management and resources for students and families, and activities, such as field trips, shopping trips, and visits to members' classrooms.

One positive outcome of a support group, according to the guide, "is that the new teachers will build relationships with each other, and the mentors can eventually fade into the background."

**Accessing the Guides**

To read and download the guides in PDF format, visit the Exploratorium's TI Teacher Induction web page at [www.exploratorium.edu/ti/induction.html](http://www.exploratorium.edu/ti/induction.html).

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