

Intensive Mentoring in Jewish Day Schools

by Mark S. Silk

Consider the not-too-fictional Sarah, a new seventh-grade teacher at the Rodeph Mazal Day School. She is hired to teach *Torah* and Prophets a week before school is to begin. There is no curriculum, teacher's guide, or workbook. Her colleague with two years of experience is asked by the principal to "help her out." As the new hire, Sarah is given all the classes no one else wanted. Too frequently, this is how we have inducted new teachers into our Jewish day schools and *yeshivot*. We can do a better job. The Jewish New Teacher Project provides a substantive alternative to the status quo.

Program Background

The Jewish New Teacher Project (JNTP), founded in 2003 as a project of New Teacher Center at the University of California – Santa Cruz and generously funded by the AVI CHAI Foundation, has developed an interactive and authentic model of teacher support in order to recruit and retain quality teachers in Jewish day schools. JNTP began as a pilot program with eight schools in metropolitan New York and New Jersey. JNTP has benefited enormously from the combined mentoring experience (20 years) of the New Teacher Center (NTC) and its predecessor, the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project (SCNTP). In its third year (2005 – 2006), JNTP provided mentors for 54 new teachers in 18 schools in metropolitan New York and New Jersey.

Schools Served by the Jewish New Teacher Project in 2005 - 2006

Northern New Jersey

Ben Porat Yosef
Ma'ayanot
Schechter Regional High School
Solomon Schechter Day School
of Bergen County
Yavneh Academy
Yeshivat Noam

Riverdale

SAR Academy
SAR High School

Manhattan

MTA
RAMAZ Lower School
RAMAZ Upper School
Solomon Schechter of Manhattan

Central New Jersey

Ilan High School
Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy
Solomon Schechter Day School
of Essex & Union

Brooklyn

Magen David Yeshiva High School
Yeshivah of Flatbush High School

Long Island

HALB

Program Goals

The primary goal of JNTP is to provide a program of support and reflection in which the advancement of skills and knowledge is continuous during the first two years of teaching and beyond. This goal is achieved through

- Developing teacher capacity as defined in the *Professional Teaching Standards for Jewish Educators*.
- Directing support toward improving student achievement.
- Using a formative assessment system to guide teacher practice.
- Documenting professional growth over time.
- Modeling and encouraging ongoing self-assessment and reflection.
- Fostering collaboration and leadership among teachers.

Key Components

New Teacher Mentor

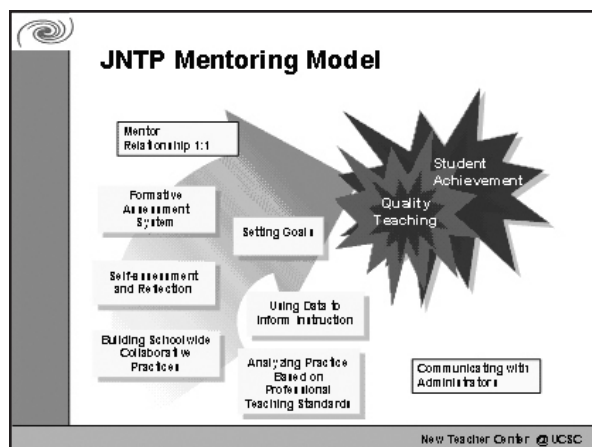
A strong, supportive relationship between the mentor and beginning teacher is fundamental to the success of all support strategies. In addition to providing emotional

The Jewish New Teacher Project has developed an interactive and authentic model of teacher support in order to recruit and retain quality teachers in Jewish day schools. The author offers information on the project's goals, components, mentor models, and program results.

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support, JNTP mentors observe and coach the new teacher, assist with short- and long-term planning, design classroom management strategies, teach demonstration lessons, provide curriculum resources, and facilitate communication with the principal. New teachers have weekly ninety-minute on-site contact with their mentors.

The criteria by which mentors are selected are rigorous and comprehensive. Mentors participate in a training program and receive ongoing coaching support as they perform their mentoring responsibilities. .



Formative Assessment System

Using the Formative Assessment System (FAS) developed by the New Teacher Center and modified for JNTP, mentors and new teachers work collaboratively to advance beginning teacher practice. FAS provides structures and resources that help experienced and new teachers share their knowledge, reflect on their practice and develop goals.

One example of a FAS tool is the Collaborative Assessment Log (CAL). The CAL sets the tone of mentor/new teacher meetings by starting the conversation with a look at "what's working." To reinforce the language of professional teaching standards, a summary of the six standards and their elements is listed on the bottom of each log. To promote mutual accountability, the log includes space for the next steps of both the new teacher and the mentor.

JNTP Mentor Models

To meet the shifting needs of Jewish day schools, JNTP offers three mentor models:

- ♦ In-house Mentor.
- ♦ Visiting Mentor.
- ♦ Half-release Mentor.

In-house Mentors work with new teachers in their own schools. Two advantages of the in-house mentor model are availability and school culture. These mentors are more accessible for informal contact outside the scheduled mentoring time and are experts in their school culture. On the other hand, in-house mentors may find it more difficult to refrain from sharing confidential information about new teachers with their administrators.

Visiting mentors are hired and trained by JNTP to work as outside consultants in schools. Visiting mentors are valued as outside experts. Some new teachers are reassured that

The image shows a sample Collaborative Assessment Log (CAL) form. It is titled "Formative Assessment Tool: Collaborative Assessment Log". The form includes fields for "Name" and "Mentor". Below these are checkboxes for "Grade Level/Subject Area" and "Date". The main body of the form is divided into sections: "What's Working?", "Current Focus—Challenges—Concerns:", "Teacher's Next Steps:", and "Mentor's Next Steps:". At the bottom, there is a "Next Meeting Date:" field and a table with "Focus" and "Notes" columns. The form is branded with the "New Teacher Center @ UCSC" logo.

confidentiality will be maintained by a mentor who is not employed directly by the school. In addition, visiting mentors provide school administrators with maximum flexibility to meet shifting needs within a school. Schools are reluctant to train too many in-house mentors who may not have anyone to mentor the following year.

Finally, the Half-release Mentor is a full-time employee of the school. Rather than working with one to three new teachers, fully half of this mentor's position is devoted to mentoring.

Program Results

Research shows¹ that with this type of intensive support, new teachers demonstrate higher levels of professional competence and greater success in student achievement. In addition, studies report increased job satisfaction and retention. NTC studies indicate that less than five percent of SCNTP beginning teachers left the profession after five years. This contrasts with a nationwide attrition rate of nearly fifty percent.

After only three years, JNTP has impacted the way schools view new teacher induction and has provided a framework and tools for schools to deepen school-wide professional development. As one JNTP new teacher stated: "A lot of teachers study 'teaching' in theory before they become teachers, but a mentor helps you ... learn to be a 'learning teacher.'"

Conclusion and Next Steps

The JNTP model of integrated support and formative assessment creates an atmosphere that encourages teachers to develop norms and standards of professional collegiality, inquiry, reflection, and assessment. This process of formative, ongoing assessment within a community of practice is an essential component of teacher development. JNTP soon plans to expand beyond the metropolitan New York and New Jersey area.

Endnotes

1. ----, *NTC Research Abstracts*. Santa Cruz, CA: New Teacher Center, January 2006.

Additional Resources

Achinstein, Betty and Steven Z. Athanases, eds., *Mentors in the Making*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2006.