

The Roots of Empathy Mentor

The origins of the word spring from Homer's classic The Odyssey. When Odysseus went off to war, he chose "Mentor" to protect and advise his son Telemachus; this has translated to the modern day meaning of Mentor as an "experienced and trusted adviser" (Oxford Dictionary).

The Role of the Roots of Empathy Mentor

The role of the Mentor in Roots of Empathy is based on relationship just as is every other aspect of the program. In Roots of Empathy, the Mentor is seen as a coach who has responsibilities for the performance of the team members. Our overall goal is excellence of instruction for the children. The Mentor has been or is currently a Roots of Empathy Instructor. This experience plus Mentor training, helps the Mentor to support and guide the delivery of programs while coaching the skill development, self-awareness and confidence in the Instructor.

Mentoring with Empathy

In order to best support Instructors, Mentors need to be empathic. We all perform best in situations of trust and understanding. When the Mentor is able to demonstrate that he/she understands the Instructor's point of view and feelings on an issue, the path is clear to help build best practice. Trust will grow out of understanding and respect. Just as we learn from children in the Roots of Empathy classroom, the Mentor will learn from the Instructor and the Instructor will learn from the Mentor. To teach is to learn and to learn is to teach.

Working Together

The Mentor has clear responsibilities to encourage, and coach the best performance possible. Even though this role is related to the Instructor's certification, and therefore might feel like a power imbalance, it is our intent to jump hurdles *with* the Instructor rather than disqualify them for any missteps.

Mentor Classroom Visits

During the classroom visit, building a relationship with the Instructor requires honesty and directness in addressing your observations, in a kind but clear manner, using the Classroom Visit Worksheet provided. The fact that the Instructor, prior to the visit, has completed the Instructor Self Reflection Questionnaire (which the Mentor Classroom Visit Worksheets are based on) removes any element of him/her feeling unprepared. This is not about catching an Instructor off-guard or putting them on the spot; it is about helping them feel unguarded and open to making mistakes that will be respectfully, gently and clearly addressed. An Instructor Growth Plan needs to be established, with steps to deal with the issues that the Mentor and the Instructor identify. The plan needs to be respected, followed and progress noted and celebrated.

Mentoring through Questions

Roots of Empathy believes that there is never one right way to do anything and, as such, we support the Instructor in finding their best way of delivering programs while honouring and sticking to the aims and lesson plans of the curriculum. We give out no prescriptions but approach problems with questions, in the same manner that we would in the Roots of Empathy classroom. For example, "What have you tried?" is a good way to acknowledge the Instructor's efforts to deal with a challenge in the program. This approach allows you to

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build on their efforts rather than dismiss or fail to acknowledge that they have tried to solve the problem. Other recommended openers to addressing an issue are, "Have you thought about..." or "What do you think might happen if..." The idea of this approach is that we all hold within us the ability to solve our own problems if some trusted person helps us to formulate the right question. Constructive dialogue is more likely when it starts from the perspective and expertise of the Instructor. Simply asking the question, "How do you think that went?" often opens an avalanche of conversation. Once trust is established, the Instructor asks the Mentor for suggestions and this is an appropriate use of the Mentor's expertise.

Quality Assurance in Program Delivery

In Roots of Empathy, we are working towards the professional growth of the Instructor that is intrinsically motivated and not externally driven. The same principle of intrinsic motivation, which we consider to be a core value in the Roots of Empathy classroom, is also a core value in the Mentor-Instructor relationship. However, if an Instructor's performance, for whatever reason, is poor, fails to improve and the Instructor is not responsive to a Mentor's coaching, the Mentor must go to the Senior Mentor for support in knowing how to proceed. The Mentor is a vital role in the Roots of Empathy family as he/she is front-line in the quality assurance of our programming.

Staying on Track

Mentors need to be vigilant to ensure that Instructors don't introduce unrelated materials into their Roots of Empathy instruction. Mentors should also be alert to any research or evaluation that appears to be taking place in the classroom. We do have an agreement with the University of British Columbia about research and evaluation and the Mentor would be informed if there was a research project on-going. Sometimes, with the best of intentions, schools embark on their own small research initiatives without clearing them through our research committee. In those situations, the Mentor can be helpful in bringing this to our attention so that we can properly connect the research. If this happens, please contact your Senior Mentor.

Mentors as Sherpas

Mentors can be likened to the Himalayan Sherpas whose job it is to assist and protect mountain climbers. They check in advance for possible dangers, climb alongside the mountain climber and put the safety of the climber ahead of their own. The Roots of Empathy Mentor walks the mile with the Instructor and through his/her experience is aware of the tough spots and is prepared to support should there be an avalanche. It can be a lonely job instructing in the ROE classroom without constructive feedback from a trusted and more experienced colleague. The Roots of Empathy way is to support all team members to ensure their growth and satisfaction with optimal outcomes for children as our beacon.