

# Mentoring as a Staff Development Tool For New and Veteran Staff

by Robln Eisenberg and Debbie Niederman

The Temple Beth Am Mentoring Program was part of one educator's vision for her school. It was shared with a colleague and nurtured over lunches. The program, implemented through collaboration of the two educators and using resources from the secular and Jewish educational worlds, provided an opportunity for staff development for six staff members from Temple Beth Am in Miami. From this project, a successful model of staff development that should be considered by other schools emerged.

Debbie Niederman, the Educator at Temple Beth Am in Miami, selected three first- or second-year teachers and three veteran teachers to participate in the program. She then hired Robin Eisenberg to create and implement the program.

The goals of the program were:

- ♦ Beginning teachers will become familiar with Temple Beth Am's procedures through their mentors.
- ♦ Mentors will share their knowledge about resources, as well as methods and experience, in the Religious School setting.
- ♦ Mentors will provide moral support for new teachers and act as sounding boards for their ideas.
- ♦ Mentors will help new teachers understand Temple Beth Am philosophy, its students, and the parents of students.
- ♦ Mentors will sharpen their skills while working with their mentee.
- ♦ The mentoring program will provide opportunities for new teachers to have access to other classrooms so they can observe other teachers and be exposed variety of classroom techniques.

During the course of the program, each mentor and mentee was given a copy of Torah Aura's *Let Me Count The Ways*. Three meetings with Robin and the group were spaced throughout the year. These meetings included:


- ♦ Information from secular and Jewish education on mentoring/coaching.
- ♦ Demonstrations of methodologies in presenting materials.
- ♦ Discussion and analysis of Journals.
- ♦ Role-playing situations (both from Journals and potential situations).
- ♦ Review of how Mentoring Program is working.
- ♦ Opportunities to do self-evaluation of classroom teaching experience.

- ♦ Discussion of problems being faced in classrooms.

Journal writing for both veterans and new teachers on the same subjects was an important part of the program. At the beginning of each month, *chavruta* groups met and clarified the month's topic and reviewed the previous month's ideas, concerns, etc. A wide variety of subjects from getting started to school to home communication to classroom management and lesson planning were included. Each mentee selected a child to observe each week and write in his or her journal. The beginning teacher also integrated one activity a week from chapter of the month described in *Let Me Count the Ways*. Journal entries included reports on how this activity impacted the classroom or teacher.

There was regular contact between mentors and mentees in person, on the phone, and via e-mail. Robin Eisenberg also communicated with mentors and mentees via e-mail in between meetings.

One of the articles used in our sessions was from the ASCD Journal and was entitled *A Better Beginning*. It was written by Annette Ehrlich Lakein at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, MD. In the article she says, "Our stated goal is to help each new teacher integrate into our school community quickly and learn how to work with our students and parents. We are facilitators for someone else's success."

Imagine if each of the teachers in our Religious Schools who saw themselves as "facilitators for someone else's success"? It could make a difference in the lives of new teachers and in the lives of the children in our schools. 

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