Foreword

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Michelle Wilk was excited. Having just graduated from a traditional teaching preparation program at a local college, Michelle was fortunate to have secured a position on her first application to a school in the neighborhood in which she lived. One of the better teacher candidates in her program, she earned Student Teacher of the Year honors as an "exemplary educator who knows how to differentiate instruction and treat each child with developmentally appropriate instruction." According to the education chair, "Ms. Wilk is a caring, sensitive, and competent special education teacher."

Impressed with Ms. Wilk, Dr. Esposito, the building principal, assigned her to a CTT (collaborative team teaching) position with Dorothy Davis, the regular education specialist. Although Michelle felt very prepared, she realized after a few short weeks that serving as a real teacher was markedly different from her student teaching experience. She had many questions about school regulations, curricular materials, and instructional policies. She also seemed to have trouble pacing her lessons and multitasking during the rapid pace not uncommon in a CTT classroom.

Ms. Davis wasn't much help because she, too, was relatively new to the school. Dr. Esposito was cordial but, quite honestly, very busy with her duties as principal, especially at the start of the new school year. Michelle was nearly at her wits' end. With no one to go to for assistance, she visited a professor and lamented the fact that she was being "left to sink or swim."

For those of us who entered teaching in the past century (and I mean "long ago" in the past century), learning to teach by the "sink or swim" method is not surprising. Most of us did . . . or didn't. Schools today, however, are significantly more complex for a variety of reasons, as you, the reader, certainly know. Given the crisis of teacher attrition, mentoring—as the authors of this highly readable volume note—is more important than ever. In the words of Diane Yendol-Hoppey and Nancy Fichtman Dana, "Effective mentoring is an essential answer to the daunting attrition rate problem. We need strong mentor teachers, and we need them fast!"

Much of my own research and writing has focused on the critically important responsibility to support teachers, at all levels of development, by engaging them in meaningful, ongoing, structured, and unstructured conversations about teaching practices that promote student learning for all students. Susan Sullivan and I (2006) think that such instructional dialogue is crucial and too often eschewed, for a variety of reasons, by many instructional supervisors and school administrators. Instructional leaders, mentors among them, must remain steadfast and committed to supporting teachers in many ways, and be capable and ready to work with teachers on ways of best promoting student achievement.

These supervisors (be they called assistant principals, principals, staff developers, coaches, peers, or mentors) are specially trained in models of supervision, instructional strategies, curriculum development, observation techniques, support mechanisms for beginning teachers, technological applications that promote teaching and learning, and assessment strategies, among other areas.

A problem I have encountered in working with schools through the years is that such approaches to supervision are taken too lightly and are not performed by individuals with the necessary supervisory skills. Being a successful teacher by itself does not make one, for instance, a good mentor. What is most refreshing about the book you are about to read is that the authors, Yendol-Hoppey and Dana, remain committed to meaningful supervision by specially trained mentors who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions to serve as strong supports for beginning teachers and who are well versed in many of the supervisory areas noted above.

Mentoring is a process that facilitates instructional improvement wherein an experienced and specially prepared educator works with a

novice or less experienced teacher collaboratively and nonjudgmentally to study and deliberate on ways instruction in the classroom may be improved. Mentors are not judges or critics, but facilitators of instructional improvement.

The Reflective Educator's Guide to Mentoring adds significantly to the literature in the field by advocating for such an approach to mentoring. The text is user friendly and interspersed with appropriate anecdotes or stories that catch the reader's attention and make for a very enjoyable and quick read. The volume is well grounded in theory but also is very practical in that the main chapters of the volume offer "glimpses of seven effective mentor teachers." These vignettes are presented in rich detail, providing mentors with concrete suggestions for working with beginning teachers. The greatest value of this volume is, in fact, these case studies or vignettes that inform through real-life examples rather than merely providing a list of dos and don'ts, as some volumes do.

Each chapter is followed by very useful exercises for discussion and exploration that serve to strengthen or deepen reader knowledge of the material. This book is invaluable because it shares the stories of teachers who have really deeply engaged in understanding the nature of their mentoring work with all its intricacies. It honors what we know about teacher supervision. Above all, the book cultivates a mentoring pedagogy that is sound, cutting edge, and, quite simply, makes sense.

I would have written this foreword if just for the reasons I articulated above. But this book has much more to offer because it is aligned to a pedagogic approach, if you will, that frames my own thinking, writing, and practice. The belief in and commitment to constructivism and reflective practice makes this volume all the more worthy. It addresses these ideas not in an overt way but subtly in its approach, format, and philosophy.

Fosnot (1989) writes, "An empowered teacher is a reflective decision maker who finds joy in learning and in investigating the teaching/learning process—one who views learning as construction and teaching as a facilitating process to enhance and enrich development" (p. xi). Fosnet's comments are true for mentors as well. Although not quoting Piaget, Vygotsky, Kohler, Bruner, or Dewey, this volume is true to the values of these great thinkers and their social constructivist orientation. Vygotsky (2002) argued that since knowledge is constructed in a sociocultural context, social interaction, cultural tools, and activity shape individual development and learning. Yendol-Hoppey

and Dana know this to be true for the mentor-mentee relationship in teaching. It's reflected in each of the main chapters, as the reader "reads between the lines." It's part and parcel of the very fabric of the approach to mentorship taken by the authors.

Intimately connected to constructivist thought is a most essential pedagogical instrument or process that serves as the catalyst or grounding to actualize constructivism. Reflective practice is at the heart of constructivist theory. Reflection serves to deepen individual experience. Reflective practice permits the individual to construct self-knowledge that may facilitate instructional improvement. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) summarize best how learning through reflective practice draws from constructivism and experiential learning:

- Learning is an active process requiring involvement of the learner. Knowledge cannot simply be transmitted. For learning to take place, professionals must be motivated to learn and have an active role in determining the direction and progress of learning. Meaningful problems engage people in learning.
- Learning must acknowledge and build on prior experiences and knowledge. Accordingly, professionals need opportunities to explore, articulate, and represent their own ideas and knowledge.
- Learners construct knowledge through experience. Opportunities to observe and assess actions and to develop and test new ideas facilitate behavioral change.
- Learning is more effective when it takes place as a collaborative rather than an isolated activity and in a context relevant to the learner (p. 16).

Perusal of Chapters 3 through 9 in this book shows us reflective practice in operation. Mentors encourage beginning teachers to identify problems, observe, analyze, reconceptualize, and then take action. They do so in each of the cases, in one way or another. The first case sets the tone when Darby and Esteban engage in mutual "caring reflection and dialogue."

I began this foreword with a vignette, so let me end with a story, and thus remain true to the style used by Yendol-Hoppey and Dana. It's a story about Harvard Law School in which 175 eager, albeit anxious, first-year law students await their first professor in their first course.

> *A middle-aged, scholarly-looking gentleman dressed in a dapper suit enters the huge auditorium through one of the doors adjacent to the stage. As the professor approaches the podium, he peers out at his students and selects his victim.*
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> *"You," pointing to a male student in the rear of the auditorium, "state the facts in the case before you." Nervously and hurriedly, the 175 students read the case. The student selected by the professor offers no response. Once again, the professor repeats his request. The student again freezes. Again the request is made. "State the facts in the case before you." The student gives an inadequate answer.*
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> *The professor nonchalantly reaches into his pocket and takes out a dime and says, "Take this dime, call your mother* [it's an old story!], *and tell her to pick you up because you'll never become a lawyer." Shocked, yet thankful they weren't called upon, the 174 other students anxiously await the student's reaction. No response.*
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> *"You heard what I said. Take this dime and tell your mother to pick you up." The student rises and walks slowly towards the stage. Hushed silence pervades the auditorium. Suddenly the student stops, looks up, and shouts, "Sir, you are a bastard!" Without batting an eyelash, the professor looks up and says, "Go back to your seat; you're beginning to think like a lawyer."*

The Reflective Educator's Guide to Mentoring is an invaluable resource because it helps readers begin to *think and act* as mentors. It adds much to the literature on mentorship and supervision.

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