

MAKING THE MOST OF MENTOR CONVERSATIONS

By: Julie Andrews

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Promotion opportunities

Many teachers enter the profession with a clear moral purpose, and they dedicate the first few years (graduate years) to developing and consolidating their knowledge and practice in teaching and learning. As teachers become absorbed and comfortable in their school communities, and begin to look outwards from the classroom, they start to see other opportunities in the school environment.

Some of these activities involve facilitating student participation in extracurricular activities – sport, excursions and camps, attending school events, helping at homework club, supporting Student Representative Council meetings, or running lunchtime activities. From lending a helping hand to initiating and running an activity, teachers gain insight into broader student learning opportunities and the skills required to conduct these activities. Not only are these teachers developing skills around building productive and positive relationships with students, they are learning about managing student groups in unfamiliar surroundings, duty of care, medical knowledge and safety, and operational tasks of the activity (logistics and budgeting).

Time spent facilitating extracurricular events can assist a graduate teacher to build the foundations for exploring the opportunities towards leadership and responsibility positions. As a graduate teacher moves to their third year or beyond, the level of contribution to the school, that they believe they can offer, changes. Positions of responsibility (PORs) in student management, learning area coordination, assistant roles, team or program leadership and event management may become desirable to some teachers. Other roles like mentoring or team/teacher leaders will also be available. By this stage, graduate teachers will have watched and heard their mentor, and other leaders and managers, conduct themselves in these roles. Professional integrity, high-level communication, knowledge and careful planning are key aspects for success in these roles.

Embarking on management or leadership roles requires the graduate teacher to demonstrate confidence in their ability, an understanding of the nuances of personalities, and to have the trust of the administration to achieve the outcome. A strong foundation in quality classroom practice is necessary to instil your credibility amongst colleagues that you are ready to move into roles beyond the classroom. Note it is not expected or necessary that the early career teacher (or any teacher) takes steps into leadership. Many teachers are proud of their expertise in teaching and learning unaffected by the plethora of other roles in the school.

Depending on the size of the school, the balance of positions of responsibility with classroom teaching will vary. In some smaller schools, teachers may have to consider taking a number of roles in order to fulfil the operational needs of the school. In larger schools, the Leadership Profile may absorb a number of positions within the Leading Teacher or Assistant Principal roles. If you are interested in developing your teaching career to include leadership roles you will need to be open to the opportunities. If you are considering leadership roles, take advantage of the mentor relationship to explore your readiness to what is on offer at your school. Most schools will have one or more [learning specialists](#). These are teachers who are recognised as being highly skilled and while they continue to spend the majority of their time in the classroom, they are expected to take a leading role in supporting the work of all teachers. You may want to seek out the Learning Specialists in your school to open a professional dialogue and collaborate through peer observations or coaching.

A note on terminology; management is often used to describe task or operational roles while leadership inspires and influences people to contribute. A leader asks the questions “what” and “why”, whereas a manager asks “how” and “when”. Both managers and leaders are required in schools. Some positions incorporate aspects of both management and leadership.

Learn more about leadership through professional learning organisations, professional reading and collegiate dialogue. Leaders learn from every decision and action they make. Experience is a good teacher.