The Perceived Effectiveness of Mentoring or Induction Programs of Rural/Suburban Schools in Western New York

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The Perceived Effectiveness of Mentoring or Induction Programs of Rural/Suburban Schools in Western New York

by

Nicole Bae Carpenter

January 1, 2011

A thesis (or project) submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
The Perceived Effectiveness of Mentoring or Induction Programs of Rural/Suburban Schools in Western New York

by

Nicole Bae Carpenter

APPROVED BY:

[Signatures and dates]
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite state mandated teacher certification programs, teachers have one of the highest attrition rates compared to other professions (Heller, 2004). As a result, focus needs to be geared toward retaining teachers. Mentoring and Induction Programs are some major efforts that have been established to support beginning teachers and ultimately help encourage teachers to remain in the field.

Definition of Terms

Formal induction programs are designed to support beginning teachers’ transition from college student to professional educator. The programs can consist of workshops, collaborations, support systems, and seminars (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Formal mentoring is a major component of induction programs. Formal mentoring pairs new teachers with their veteran colleagues, which addresses new teachers’ isolation, frustration, and failure (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Mentoring programs can vary in nature, but in almost all cases, a new teacher is assigned a more experienced mentor to work with. The mentor provides a means of support and encouragement for the new teacher.

The effectiveness of various mentoring programs is the topic of ongoing research. When studying the effectiveness, it is important to define effectiveness when put into this context. Effective means “producing, or capable of producing a result” (Merriam-Webster, 2010). In this case, this study looked to see what other results, besides increased retention that can be used to judge the overall effectiveness of mentoring programs.
Problem Statement

In recent years mentoring programs have become very prevalent around the world, especially in the United States, in which in many states it is even state mandated. Many studies have been done to determine if teachers or schools have, in fact, implemented mentoring programs. Still, "there is little research to document what new teachers experience in [these programs]" (Kardos & Johnson, 2010, p. 24). Additionally the actual statistics and data found on mentoring and induction programs are very skewed and varied, which raises the significant problem of addressing how effective mentoring programs really are. While it is important to see how many schools are actually using mentoring programs, it is just as important to focus in on the schools that do use mentoring programs and assign beginning teachers with a mentor, to see what new teachers experience in the mentoring programs, and how effective they find them to be.

Significance of the Problem

There are a growing number of new teachers being hired in the United States. It was estimated that in public schools 284,000 new teachers were hired in 2006 and the number is projected to increase 26 percent to 357,000 in 2018. This is also true for private schools which hired an estimated 82,000 in 2006 and is projected to increase 7 percent to 88,000 in 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). On the other hand, attrition rates of new teachers have been averaged between 20-30% (AFT, 2001; Anhorn, 2008). With the growing number of new teachers being
hired each year, it is crucial to help retain new teachers, which is why implementing strategies, such as mentoring programs, are so important.

Purpose

I focused this study on mentoring programs and beginning teachers in rural and suburban schools in Western New York. The purpose was to discover what actually goes on in mentoring programs especially regarding interactions between mentors and mentees. The purpose was also to see how effective mentoring programs are at helping to support beginning teachers and how they relate to the teachers’ view on their self-perceived notion regarding retention in the education field.

Rationale

The rationale for this study was that it is important to retain beginning teachers and in order to do that it is crucial to study programs and strategies such as mentoring programs, to establish how effective they are at helping new teachers succeed. New teachers are the present and future in education. It is important that they have the best support and encouragement possible, and a significant way to help support them may be through mentoring programs.

Veteran teachers, administrators, and schools as a whole may be able to benefit from learning about the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of mentoring programs. The results of this study may inform what may or may not work best and how schools can improve their own mentoring programs. Understanding the effectiveness of mentoring programs will benefit schools overall.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In order to retain teachers it is important to address issues that deal with the reasons that so many teachers are choosing to leave teaching early in their careers. It is equally important to acknowledge ways to motivate and support teachers during the first few years of their career, which are the most critical years for decreasing attrition rates. This chapter reviews literature and studies that have been written and done on addressing strategies for beginning teachers, in order to help retain and support them. A large emphasis focused on mentoring or induction programs, and why it is important to have a strong mentor/mentee relationship and support system.

Coverage

The search of the literature was done primarily on the criteria that that articles selected were research based and contained either qualitative or quantitative data. Almost all of the articles selected were qualitative, due to there being a very limited amount of quantitative work done on this particular topic. Many of the articles selected contained studies that were done with interviews or questionnaires that helped give a firsthand account into the thoughts and minds of novice or first year teacher. The articles represent a variety of teachers including both secondary and primary, as the attrition rate pertains to all teachers in general. The articles selected addressed topics such as retention/intentions of new teachers, mentoring/induction programs, the role of the principal, or concerns, issues, or reflections of novice teachers. Articles that were chosen related specifically to those criteria even though
there are a number of strategies that could be used to help beginning teachers. The criteria listed deal primarily with understanding the best strategies and ways to help new teachers and retain them in the classroom and education field.

**Concerns for First Year Teachers**

In order to fully understand why attrition rates are so high for beginning teachers it is important to fully understand concerns that first year teachers are faced with. Some main concerns that most beginning teachers are faced with include:

1) Adjusting to the demands of teaching fulltime
2) Negotiating colleague relationships
3) Understanding classroom, school, and community cultures
4) Coping with self: finding a niche
5) Idealism of the pre-service preparation
6) Lack of planning time
7) Isolation
8) Classroom management

(Ewing & Smith, 2003; Anhorn, 2008)

**History**

Many topics and studies have been done related to mentoring programs and how people perform in their profession and the types of strategies that they use. During the 13th and 14th centuries, there was a strong purpose of “building bridges” and a system of “Bridge-Building Brotherhoods” (Hall, 2008). Master artisans would aid and work with apprentices until they met standards of high quality work. This
idea of master/apprenticeship has further advanced in the field of education (Hall, 2008). This building bridges idea can be seen in formal mentoring programs.

During the 1980s, many countries were starting to focus on implementing formal mentoring programs for beginning teachers in schools (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009). According to Little (as cited in Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009), there had not been very many studies done on the consequences of mentoring support for novice teachers before 1990.

Perhaps due to increasingly high rates of attrition rates on new teachers more research and studies have focused on mentoring programs within the last ten years. “Mentoring and induction programs of various types and various degrees of success around the world have claimed to solve the attrition problem…” (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010, p. 560). Many studies and research in recent years have been done to focus on the implications that they hold, showing that they can be a key strategy for first year teachers to succeed.

According to Cullingford (as cited in Le Maistre and Pare, 2010), “There are many books on how to introduce and practice mentoring, but far fewer which provide a scrutiny of what actually takes place” (p. 560). Because of this, some newer research has focused on understanding what actually happens during mentoring programs and teacher firsthand accounts.

**Common Terms from Mentoring Research:**

Mentoring programs for beginning teachers are found to be one of the most effective and important strategy to help teachers succeed during the first few years of
their careers. Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson (2009) define mentoring programs as the following:

The one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee’s expertise and to facilitate their induction into the culture of the profession (in this case, teaching) and into the specific local context (here, the school or college) (p. 207)

In relation to that definition, one of the most important concepts of mentoring and mentors, according to Weingartner, is that an effective mentor’s most important mission is “to support the protégé’s learning…” (as cited in Hall, 2008, p. 452). The mission of mentoring programs could be to address isolation, frustration, failure issues, and other challenges that many new teachers fear or are faced with in an ever changing school environment (Kardos & Johnson, 2010).

“Induction Program” is a term also closely related to mentoring. Induction programs usually consist of workshops, collaborations, support systems, seminars, and of course mentoring. The programs can also either be a single orientation meeting in the beginning of the school year, or can be more highly structured that includes activities and many meetings over several years (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). According to Fideler & Haselkorn, mentoring programs are the most dominant form of teacher induction (as cited in Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).
Pros and Cons of Mentoring and Induction Programs

Because mentor programs can vary from school to school, it is important to weigh the pros and cons that can come from the structures of them. Pros and cons help understand what lessons can be learned from mentor programs and the good and even bad that can come from them. To start with the good, one of the most important benefits that come from mentoring programs is the emotional and psychological support, which can boost teacher confidence and job satisfaction (Bullough, Johnson, Berg, Donaldson, Lindgren, Marable & Raimondi as cited in Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009).

Another important thing to focus on is the mentoring matching process. While it has been noted that it is important for new teachers to actually be given a mentor to work with, careful consideration should be given to the mentor selection and pairing process. Formal induction programs have failed or did not reach their full potential because participants did not have a choice in the matching process (Long, 2009). In one study, only 44% of teachers had a mentor in the same grade as them, and 48% had a mentor who was in the same subject (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). This could be potentially problematic since findings have shown that if beginning teachers have a same-subject mentor as them, they are less likely to leave teaching after one year (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). While having a same subject mentor or grade level mentor may be an ideal match, it could potentially increase the chances that the mentor and mentee could share students or have similar curricular concerns (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Overall schools should have “a pool of mentors that promotes

8
choice and flexibility for all participants” (Long, 2009, p. 321), even if it is not possible to match teachers based off of the same grade level or subject area. It’s also important, according to Abell et al, “that the mentor and mentee get along both personally and professionally” (as cited in Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009, p. 212).

Additionally, despite the fact that having a mentor and spending time talking to him or her can be beneficial, the time and stress required to maintain a mentoring relationship can be an issue. A majority of mentors are forced to find additional time for mentoring which is often time that was meant for lessoning planning, meetings with students, parents, etc. (Kilburg, 2007). Also, Simpson, et al., found that on top of their own teaching jobs, mentors have experienced unmanageable workloads, as a result of their role in mentoring programs (as cited in Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). Because time is such an issue, successful mentoring programs should find a way to balance time between multiple priorities.

Mentoring Program Methods & Results

Due to evidence claiming that mentoring programs are proven to be effective, mentoring programs are viewed as one of the most important strategies for retaining and helping beginning teachers succeed. Current research efforts employ a mix between quantitative and qualitative studies, to uncover these details.

Quantitative studies focused on whether or not beginning teachers were assigned mentors and/or attrition rates. Studies by Kardos & Johnson (2010) and Smith & Ingersoll (2004) found that most beginning teachers were assigned a mentor.
However, both studies had other different findings. One study found that few teachers had similar grade or subject matches with their mentor. Additionally, low percentages of teachers were observed by their mentor and low percentages of teachers had conversations regarding core aspects of teaching. Part of this was due to “serious inequalities between schools serving different economic communities” (Kardos & Johnson, 2010, p. 40). The other study found that most teachers were matched with similar mentors in similar fields and found their mentors to be helpful (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). However, that study focused on private/public schools as a whole, and not necessarily different economic communities.

Teacher attrition and turnover rates were also focused on in quantitative studies. The Smith & Ingersoll (2004) study found that “there was a strong link between participation in induction programs and reduced rates of turnover” (p. 706) despite 3 in 10 beginning teachers moving to another school or leaving the teaching profession. This finding was similar to another study in which almost the same percent of people thought they would be teachers for more than ten years as the percent of people that would leave within ten years (Ewing & Smith, 2003). Despite having mentoring programs and mentors, teacher attrition rates can still be relatively high, which is why it is important to study exactly what is going on in mentoring programs.

Furthermore, the problem with some of the quantitative studies were that they usually only provided numbers/statistics. Most studies provided little insight into how the mentoring programs directly impacted the teachers or lacked detailed
explanations of the interactions between mentors and mentees. The problem with the Kardos & Johnson (2010) study was that it did not focus on how the mentor experiences (or lack thereof) impacted the teachers (which was mentioned in the discussion).

Many characteristics of mentors and mentoring programs need to be looked into and several qualitative studies studied the importance of mentor/mentee relationships and how effective they can be. Gourneau’s (2009) study found that reflecting on experiences with first year teachers proved to be very beneficial. By the teachers expressing their concerns, talking with someone, and reflecting, they were able to come to better terms with the decisions they were making and what they wanted. Gourneau argues that, “…collaborative reflection is essential to the research process and also to the teaching process” (2009, p. 70). The teachers were able to talk, listen, and make improvements about their teaching through in depth reflections. Dever, Johnson, & Hobb’s (2000) Mentor-Apprentice Collaboration Program study had similar findings to Gourneau’s study due to the fact that teachers gained support and learned from each other. Even though that study was more of a co-teaching study (having two teachers in a single classroom) the participants had still established a mentor/mentee relationship, which may shed some light on the mentor/mentee relationship.
Lessons That Can Be Learned From Mentoring Programs

There are several important lessons that can be learned from mentoring programs. Mentoring programs vary depending on the school so it is important to address some lessons and issues that can be addressed across all mentoring programs.

The main lesson that can be learned has to do with the mentor/mentee relationship. While having a strong relationship between mentor and mentee is critical, the relationships do not always work out perfectly. Obstacles may occur regarding how the mentor/mentee interacts with one another (or lack thereof). Schools need to be aware of these obstacles to help improve the mentoring programs and mentoring relationships. Kilburg’s (2007) study found that providing sufficient time for mentors/mentees to meet, creating mentor training, and learning to provide better emotional support could help mentors/mentees overcome some of those obstacles. From those findings it can be theorized that the “right” mentor/mentee pairing is crucial.

Additionally, mentoring and induction programs should last longer than just one year. According to Breaux & Wong, Professional development and training should be offered over two to three years (as cited in Anhorn, 2008), compared to just one year of mentoring. All teachers should regularly meet together “to pursue and engage purposefully in professional learning, dialogue and action, practitioners, whether novice or experienced... [to] remain focused on the school’s mission and goals that enable the school community to pursue excellence and equity” (Long, 2009, p. 325). This could be helpful, not only on retaining new teachers, but could be
helpful for raising the standards and qualities of all schools and teachers, by providing meaningful support and development.

The Role of the Principal

Due to the high level of teacher attrition rates in schools it is important for the leaders of the school, such as the principal, to understand the needs and concerns of novice teachers and help them feel accepted and supported. The principal is an important person to whom novice teachers turn for support and encouragement (Roberson & Roberson, 2009). According to Moir & Gless, Principals have to face the reality that there is a major challenge in inducting novice teachers with very little or no experience and repertoire to a successful high academic environment that is also usually made up of many veteran teachers (as cited in Roberson & Roberson, 2009).

Brock & Grady suggest having a professional attitude, desiring students to learn, having good management and communication skills, and knowledge of content areas as being some of the criteria for new teachers that principals expect. They also emphasize that beginning teachers have expectations for principals such as feedback, communication, scheduled classroom visits, and meeting times (as cited in Roberson & Roberson, 2009). While these factors are merely expectations, they are not always implemented, which is why it is important to address these issues.

Studies found that beginning teachers’ level of involvement with the principal was low (Ewing & Smith, 2003) and teachers expressed their disappointment in their principal’s role (Anhorn, 2008). The principal’s role is to be accountable for success or failure of teachers and students (Roberson & Roberson, 2009), but according to
many of the new teachers, they did not feel supported. When asked to talk about the
type of support (or lack of) from his or her administrator, one teacher quoted “I can’t
go to her anymore; I feel like she’s looking down on me. It’s waste of time” (Anhorn,
2008). Another teacher went on further to say, “The lack of support from the
administration is probably the reason I am leaving this school and teaching
altogether” (Anhorn, 2008). These types of concerns raise issues in addressing the
role of what the principal should be doing, versus the reality of what he or she is
actually doing. Watkins states that, “Retaining and developing quality teachers much
become a principal’s priority” (2005, p. 83). In order to do this, principals must be
aware of strategies that can help support and guide new teachers to succeed.

Implications and Gaps

Overall, mentor and induction programs are a beneficial way to help new
teachers succeed; however, they do have their limitations and gaps. A big issue to
bring to attention, according to Fideler & Haselkorn, is that there are large variations
of induction and mentoring programs in different school districts (as cited in Smith &
Ingersoll, 2004). They vary in purpose, intensity, structure, pairing and selection of
teachers, cost, etc. (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Because of that, the wide umbrella of
mentoring programs includes programs that might not be very effective.

Additionally while some data was found on comparing low income schools
with high income schools (Kardos & Johnson, 2010), it would be useful for studies to
focus specifically on the reasoning for comparative differences, especially for
beginning teachers in urban, rural, and suburban districts. Also, most studies use
surveys or interviews to elicit data (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009) while few studies compare data from participants or non-participants in the actual mentoring programs (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Therefore, more case studies looking at actual observations of teacher interactions with their mentors and principals would be beneficial.

Another important implication to address is that beginning teachers need a very strong support system in order to succeed, especially since isolation and lack of support are main reasons why many teachers leave the profession (AFT, 2001; Heller, 2004). This should include not only a mentor, but also fellow teachers and administrators (Anhorn, 2008). So often new teachers are unsupported and are left feeling isolated from the rest of the staff or school. They need support, not only from a mentor, but from all teachers and staff as well. “All educators need to ‘stop eating our young’ in order for them to be successful in their early classroom endeavors” (Anhorn, 2008, p. 21). To help both veteran teachers and beginning teachers build support from one another, study groups could be formed to provide support to one another. They might study a lesson, difficult concept, or how students master a skill (Watkins, 2005).

The principal should also be included in the mentoring process and training of the teachers (Watkins, 2005). Principals should listen to what new teachers have to say and their concerns, while providing them with meaningful feedback (Roberson & Roberson, 2009). They should be involved in all aspects of all teachers’ development including staff development and study groups (Watkins, 2005).
Overall, because mentoring and induction programs and strategies vary depending on the individual beginning teacher and school district, more qualitative, and quantitative research needs to continue to be done. The more research that is done, the more that gaps will close, which can be helped by using bigger sample sizes and conducting more individual case studies, observation, and interviews. The characteristics and best practices of mentoring or induction programs, along with overall concerns and support for beginning teachers can best be understood when studying and researching the overarching effects of them on retaining new teachers and decreasing attrition rates. In conclusion, more research and data must be collected so better mentoring, induction, collaboration, and support can be done to help not only beginning teachers succeed the most, but also entire staff and schools.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Formal mentoring is a strategy aimed at addressing new teachers’ concerns and while, common practices in many schools, there is little research that shows what actually takes place in the programs (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). My position on mentoring programs is that, as a future beginning teacher, I want to know what is going on in mentoring programs and to help assess if they are actually supportive in helping the teachers obtain success and overcome challenges. As a future beginning teacher I am aware of what mentoring programs are and some characteristics of them, but I have had no current experience in dealing directly with mentoring programs or with mentors/mentees.

The purpose of this particular study is to interview beginning teachers to see how effective they perceive mentoring programs to be in helping them obtain success, while also seeing what actually takes place in the programs. The study saw how the teachers learned to overcome challenges, gain support from staff, and become more confident through the beginning years of their teaching careers. Other goals focused on finding out what the mentor and mentee talk about or do during their mentoring sessions as well as how those sessions impacted the beginning teachers’ concerns. The study emphasized how the teachers think mentoring programs have impacted their beginning experiences teaching and how influential, if at all, it was on them remaining in the teaching profession.
Sites & Participants

This study drew data from three rural/suburban public school districts in Western New York. The reason that urban districts were not used in this study, as well as the implications of this exclusion, will be discussed in the limitations. Each participating district has implemented mentoring program pairing between novice and veteran teachers. All three schools vary in average school size, student population, etc. Basic statistics on the schools were summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Statistics Summary of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% of Racially Diverse</th>
<th>% Qualify for Free and Reduced Lunches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percent of racially diverse population refers to non-Caucasian population; Statistics have been rounded or approximated to protect confidentiality of the schools. Adapted from the 2008-2009 “New York State Report Card Database” by The New York State Department of Education, 2008-2009, https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/.

The sample of ten teachers was originally intended to be only first-year, second-year, or third-year full time beginning (non-tenured) PreK-12 public school teachers. Due to there being a limited amount of beginning teachers, the sample was expanded to include fourth or fifth year teachers as well (which included tenured...
teachers). The participants all taught at either one of the three different school districts that participated in the study.

Each individual school provided me with a list of beginning teachers and an equal number of the listed elementary, middle, and high school teachers were invited via email to participate. Each participant had to willingly agree to participate in the study by signing a consent form, allowing them to be interviewed and audio taped. A participant could also sign the consent form allowing him or her to be interviewed, but not audio taped, understanding that the interview would still take place. Table 2 below summarizes the teachers who participated from in all three school districts.
Table 2

Summary of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Taught</th>
<th>Years in Current Grade/Area</th>
<th>Years in Current District</th>
<th>Years in Current Mentoring Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Math A.I.S.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>H.S. Special Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1st grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. A.I.S. = Academic Intervention Services; H.S= High School; * = Participant has completed the mentoring program.

Procedures of Study

Over a course of several weeks during the 2010-2011 school year, I individually interviewed the beginning teachers at least one time. Some interviews were more formal than others, depending on the individual teacher, and their
experience with and opinion of their district’s mentoring program. During each interview, I took brief notes and direct quotes from teachers on the conversations that took place. Each interview was also audiotaped so that I could go back later and review what was said for the analysis portion of this study. The main intent of the interviews was to get first-hand, in-depth descriptions of participants’ experiences with mentoring programs. After the interviews had been conducted, I reviewed the scripted notes and audiotapes to analyze, describe, and find meaning in the interviews to establish results of the study.

A negative case analysis was completed to ensure trustworthiness of this study. To do this I looked for patterns that may not support my original data analysis. For example, I looked for interview responses that may not have correlated with other responses I had received. I also searched out responses that did not meet my expectations such as statements that mentoring programs have had no effect on teachers’ perception of success.

**Instrument for Study**

The instrument used in this study was an interview protocol (which is included in the appendices). The protocol contained various open ended questions related to the beginning teacher’s interactions with his or her mentor as well as experiences directly related to the overall mentoring program experiences. Questions were geared at understanding what actually takes place during mentoring programs and through those questions and responses, determining how effective mentoring programs are perceived to be.
The protocol was divided up into four categories: characteristics of the mentoring program, interactions between the mentor and mentee, the effectiveness of the mentoring program, and closing remarks/questions. I posed each general question in each category to each participant and checked off boxes for subsequent questions if the participant answered them without further prompting. A "P" was placed in each check box if the participant had to be prompted or asked directly a certain question that was listed under the main category question. The main reasoning for setting up the protocol this way was to see what kinds of things each participant immediately decided to share (without any promoting), which could later be analyzed to compare and contrast patterns.

Limitations

This study was limited in the fact that it only sampled from a small number of beginning teachers in only three districts, while only focusing on teachers in rural/suburban school districts. The reason that urban districts were not used in this study was because urban districts have many complex factors and characteristics that go beyond the scope of this investigation. By just focusing on rural and suburban schools, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of each teacher’s mentoring situation.

The study was also limited because beginning teachers were the only ones interviewed in the study. Mentoring programs involve mentors and veteran teachers, as well as principals or administrations which were not interviewed or included in this study.

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Chapter 4: Results

As I conducted the interviews I used the same original protocol that I had intended. I consistently asked the same questions to all of the participants. I also realized as I conducted the interviews that the original check boxes and prompts (P’s) used in the protocol did not seem to serve any purpose since I ended up asking the entire protocol questions anyway. The only purpose that I found in relation to the check boxes was asking the general overview questions in each category because they served as starting points for people to begin talking about each category.

The general overview questions were also designed to keep the interviews within their allotted time. In actuality, the interviews did not end up to be very long. They were designed to last up to forty-five minutes, but all of the interviews were conducted within a half hour, with a few of them even being within fifteen minutes.

Analysis of Data

The collecting and analyzing of the data from the interviews was an ongoing process of constantly reviewing the notes and audio to formulate results. To analyze the results I carefully studied and listened to the protocol questions and answers that were given and received to each participant. Every teacher interviewed had his or her own unique experiences and not one interview was exactly the same, but I was able to look for patterns and differences among how each teacher perceived mentoring programs (in relation to success, confidence, etc.). I also looked for direct quotes from teachers to make connections and to back up what my data supported (or did not support) in relation to how teachers perceived mentoring programs.
Based off of my interview protocol and data I was able to separate my data into various categories that will be discussed in this chapter.

**Basic Characteristics of Mentoring Programs**

All three mentoring programs shared certain characteristics that will be discussed throughout the results section, but none of the programs were set up the exact same way. For example, two out of the three school districts had implemented three year programs. What was required from the new teachers changed or diminished as they progressed (each year) through the program. The other district limited their mentoring program to only one year, however there were no major discrepancies (based off of protocol questions) between teachers who were in the three year program or teachers who were in the one year program. Each teacher had a unique mentoring experience regardless of the duration of their mentoring program.

**Mentor/Mentee Connection**

Out of all three school districts, two of the three districts matched mentees with mentors from their content area/grade level. In this study, out of all ten participants, only two were not matched with a person in a similar content area. One of the participants, a math teacher, had a special education mentor. The other participant, who was an elementary teacher, had a current mentor who was a speech pathology teacher (although she had had elementary and special education mentors in the past).
Interactions

All three districts allowed several release days throughout the year during which novice teachers could request a substitute teacher for their classes and meet with their mentor (either in school or off campus someplace). In some cases it would be a half day or in other cases the entire school day. This policy was revealed in response to the interview question asked which was, “How often do you meet with your mentor and for how long?” These answers varied even between teachers who worked at the same district and with how teachers perceived and used the release days.

The number of release days that teachers could utilize tended to lessen as they progressed throughout the mentoring program (for those districts that had three year mentoring programs). Overall the teachers generally liked the release time to meet with their mentor, especially when they were given the choice to meet outside of the school building. Participant D stated that she liked being given the whole day off because “It help[ed] me get to know her [mentor] better.” She discussed that she liked being able to go to lunch with her mentor and talk about other things, which she felt was really important too.

Other new teachers tended to not utilize their release days as often because they did not need to. For example, Participants E and I shared a classroom with their mentors during their first year of mentoring and were always in constant communication with them. That constant mentee/mentor communication was mentioned by most of the other participants as well, even if they did not share a room.
For example, Participant G’s mentor was her team leader and their rooms were right next to each other so they talked every morning.

Even if it was not a formally arranged meeting with their mentor, overall, the participants utilized some form of communication with their mentors such as talking, e-mail, or phone (which was done to ensure that open communication). Participant C mentioned that she would just “pop in” to see her mentor even if it was just for a “five minute thing” and her mentor would also leave her little notes with “words of encouragement.” Even if the participants were not able to communicate with their mentors on a daily basis, they mentioned having some form of communication with them at least every other day or at least once every two weeks. In most cases their mentors were there for them whenever they needed them or could be available to talk or answer a question (whether it was for five minutes or forty-five minutes).

Only one of the participants mentioned not meeting with their mentor very often at first because, he said, “[he] didn’t know him.” However, this person went on to say that he met with his mentor a lot during his first year of mentoring to talk about the curriculum. He also went on to say during his interview (in answer of how to ensure open communication), that he and his mentor were the same type of person so it just “kind of came naturally.”

**Relationships**

In every single case, all of the participants had positive things to say about their mentor.

The following quotes were mentioned that described the mentees’ perception of their mentor.
and/or interactions with them:

1) “Very nice, I can go to her about anything.”

2) “Great relationship; excellent resource to go to when I had any questions or wanted to share ideas.”

3) “Good, I feel comfortable going to her with any issues.”

4) “Very friendly, very open, very direct, good relationship.”

5) “Awesome! Out of this world with help for anything.”

6) “Phenomenal—we had a great interaction.”

7) “Positive, productive. Go to guy (if I want to do something and not sure if I’m allowed to).”

8) “Great—we would bounce ideas off each other. If I had a concern about something she was always there.”

9) “Open communication. Always there for me anytime I needed someone.”

10) “Very good. I still go to her now for help. We had a good relationship.”

**Topics & Concerns**

The answers tended to vary related to what topics or concerns that the teachers said they talked about with their mentors, but some topics were common across several participants, regardless of the content area or grade level that they taught.

Table 3 below outlines the most popular topics or concerns that the teachers addressed talking about with their mentors.
Table 3

*Topics & Concerns That Mentees Discussed With Their Mentors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Concern</th>
<th>Number That Discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior (specific students, issues, etc.)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Issues</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Management and behavior are often closely related and based off of almost all of the teachers interviewed; those were the most popular topics that the mentees discussed with their mentors. Grading was also discussed among several of the teachers. Participant C specifically mentioned discussing grading regent examinations and completing student evaluations with her mentor.

Some of the topics that teachers discussed with their mentors were specific to the content that the teachers taught. For example, Participant I (a science teacher) and his mentor discussed labs and how to run the lessons. A topic that Participant E discussed with his mentor was how to create a safe atmosphere for physical education. Two of the participants discussed things related to Individualized Education Planning (IEP) whether it was updating the plans or using specialized software to manage them. These topics were unique to those particular teachers as one was a special education teacher herself, and the other participant had a mentor who was a special education teacher.
Other topics teachers mentioned discussing with their mentors during the interviews included lesson planning and teacher techniques, units/objectives, putting together the substitute teacher binder, technology, and parent interaction.

**Goals/Objectives**

A lot of the goals or objectives that the teachers hoped to meet when working and talking with their mentor involved fitting in/becoming familiar with the school district and gaining support from the school. Participant F discussed her mentor’s support and knowing that she (the participant) was doing the right thing. She also wanted to make sure she was meeting all of the requirements. Some of Participant B’s goals were similar in the fact that she wanted to get a positive repertoire in the school and become positive in herself. Participant C also wanted to get accustomed to procedures in the school and both she and one of Participant B’s goals were to get to know the curriculum. A goal of Participant J was to fit into the district, which was a similar goal to Participant E, who desired to become more familiar with the school district. He also wanted to improve and utilize his mentor by “Improving [himself] as an educator” and “Be[ing] a sponge”-by taking in what [his mentor] had to offer.

Some other goals that several of the participants had in common were solving problems or dealing with other issues related to their teaching or students. Participant D’s goal/objective was that, “If there’s a problem I’m having, by the end of the meeting it will be resolved.” Participant A also hoped to “make things better” and just “Hash out what happens at [this] school.” Participant G’s goals revolved around her
desire to make sure she was “meeting the needs of all students.” Specifically, her goals had to do with differentiating and enriching students.

Although some of the male participants utilized their mentors in relation to their goals and objectives, some of their goals specifically related to specifically to themselves or others (and consequently did not always have to do with their individual mentor). For example, Participant I stated that he and his mentor had no specific long term goals. Things would just come up and his mentor would give him an answer or advice. More specifically the participant stated that his own long term goals for himself had to do with pacing and questioning techniques. Instead of relying on himself, Participant J expressed how he met more of his goals in the large group seminar meetings that he had to attend during his mentoring program. For example a topic for the week may be differentiation and everyone would share in on that topic.

Collaboration

Both the mentors and mentees brought different strengths to the collaboration. Table 4 shows what strengths each of the participants said they brought to the collaboration and what strengths they thought their mentors brought.
Table 4

Strengths That Mentors & Mentees Brought to the Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Mentee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>New Ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Enthusiasm, New technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>“Not knowing-Refresh her on things that she may be rusty on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Wisdom, Experience</td>
<td>Modern updates/techniques, Youth &amp; energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Experience, Knows what works</td>
<td>Newer Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>New Ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost all of the participants thought that their mentors brought experience and expertise. In most cases their mentors were veteran teachers who had years of teaching experience. Since all of the mentees had only been teaching about five years or less, compared to their mentors, they felt they brought newer ideas.

In several cases the participants approached the interview question in a slightly different way. They felt their mentors shared similar strengths to their own. For example, Participant B felt that her strength was that she had two kids of her own.
(being a parent) and that her mentor had good management, but she also felt that a strength of both of theirs was that they were organized. Participant H thought that her mentor’s strengths were her different techniques and that her own techniques were fresh and updated, but she felt they were both creative. Participant I generalized that he and his mentor’s strengths were that they were both open and honest.

Research Questions Responses

Perceived Effectiveness of Mentoring Program

The main purpose of this study was to determine how effective the participants perceived their mentoring program to be. Overall, every single one of the participants thought that their mentoring program was effective to some degree. In many of the cases, a lot of credit was given to the participants’ mentors. The following quotes express the overall effectiveness and positive attitudes that the participants had towards their (current) mentoring programs:

1) “I think that it’s effective… Very successful… Having someone to constantly communicate and bounce ideas off of is essential.”

2) “Very good, excellent. A lot of that is due to working closely with my mentor… Working closely with someone everyday makes a much better mentor program.”

3) “Awesome. It put your mind at easing knowing that you had someone to talk to because that person was there for you… It’s a great program. I absolutely love it.”
4) Good, it’s important to know someone in the building.. Important to ask someone like that instead of administration (elaborate).

5) “Highly effective. I’ve been through three mentoring programs and [insert district name] really prepared me for what their objectives were… and understand what the district goal is.”

6) “Highly effective. It calmed a lot of my nerves” (referring to seminar meetings).

7) “I think it was absolutely great… It was a wonderful three years. I learned a lot. It’s a great program.”

8) I think it’s great… It instills that Big Brother/Big Sister in the school when you’re lost.”

9) “100 times more effective than my other school.” (More will be discussed on this throughout the results section).

10) “It’s good to know you have the support of someone else because sometimes you feel like you’re all alone… It’s nice to know other teachers are in the same boat…”

Perceived Effectiveness of Individual Mentors

The participants were also asked how effective they thought their individual mentors were. Responses were very similar to how they perceived the overall effectiveness of the mentoring program. All of the participants felt that their mentors were effective or at least had positive things to say about them. The following
quotes express how effective the participants felt that their mentors were and their positive attitudes toward them:

1. “Very key to helping me succeed.”
2. “Very effective, extremely effective. Whatever the top score you want to give.”
3. “Extremely. She communicated with me well. Made sure we met our objectives, our deadlines.”
4. “Very helpful. She was always there for me when I needed it.”
5. “Phenomenal. He’s got great relationships with students... He’s allowed me to become a successful educator today.”
6. “Highly effective. It’s difficult to measure success, but I’m glad he’s my mentor and not someone else.”
7. “When she starts taking things that I do and she does it, it helps me gain a little more respect for myself and know that I am doing a good job. We still have great communication and a work atmosphere.”
8. “She’s been great. She helps me with everything.”
10. “Pretty good. She’s been there whenever I need her and always responds quickly...”

**Overcoming Challenges**

The mentoring programs had helped all ten participants overcome challenges; however there were not a lot of specific patterns between the types of challenges
that the participants felt that their mentoring program helped them overcome.

Everyone had overcome different challenges. There were several small patterns found between at least two teachers, but there was no one major challenge that a majority of the teachers said they overcame based on their mentoring program.

Both Participants D and J said that their mentoring programs had helped them overcome discipline problems. Participant J even elaborated by explaining how he did not know anything about classroom discipline when he had first started teaching. He had not taken any college class about it. The strategies they talked about at seminar meetings had really helped him. Another other small pattern was that Participants A and H both said that their mentoring program helped them overcome challenges with parent interaction. Participant A also said that her mentoring program helped her overcome challenges with management skills.

A big challenge that Participants B and I's mentoring programs helped them overcome was with the school district itself. Participant B said, “It helped me understand how the building ran.” Participant I also discussed how his mentor gave him information about the school. He said, “Coming in as an outsider it’s kind of hard to get used to not just the environment, but the students and the other teachers… It helps to go to a mentor… he would give me a lot of basic background information that gets me up to date information about what’s going on.”

Some other challenges that the participants said their mentoring program helped them overcome included organization, outlining the curriculum, and struggling with team members (and strategies to deal with them). Participant G
mentioned that her mentoring program provided her with support, guidance, and encouragement. She said, “Without these things, I don’t think I would have had as successful year as I did.” Participant E also added that his mentoring program helped him overcome challenges just with “the everyday teaching grind.”

**Support from Staff**

Most of the participants said that they felt their mentoring program helped them gain support from staff. I forgot to directly ask this question to Participants D and J so, therefore I cannot say they all definitely gained support from staff, but based on their positive remarks from previous questions, assumptions can be made that they most likely did gain support.

The participants gained support from various types of staff members. For example, Participant H discussed how she had gained respect from administration and staff. She explained how they still come to her for ideas and that she is not afraid to ask them for help either. Participant E, on the other hand, discussed how his mentoring program helped him gain support from other staff members during the new teacher seminar meetings. He also discussed being able to interact with other new teacher and observing other classrooms and colleagues.

Common responses between many of the participants had to do with the actual support of their staff and members of the departments they worked in. Participant I mentioned that, “All the teachers are very helpful.” Specifically he referred to various people in the science department and how they helped him. Participant C also mentioned how her mentor helped her become a part of the math department.
Participant B stated that she got to know staff through her mentor. Her mentor showed her the “ins and outs.” She showed her “underground stuff” such as what to do and get what you need for example, “Secretaries are your best friend.”

Participant F’s support from staff came from helping her “see both sides of a situation.”

Confidence

The mentoring programs helped the participants gain confidence. They all gained confidence, but in different ways. Some of the participants discussed gaining confidence in specific areas. Participant J discussed how his mentoring program helped him control his students and get his pedagogy where he wanted it to be. He stated, “It really makes you feel like you belong in this school.” Participant B talked about how she was already pretty confident from the long term teaching position she had, but her mentoring program helped her become confident in the math curriculum.

The mentoring programs helped reinforce several of the participants’ confidence in relation to how they taught and in essence, boost their general confidence level. One example was when Participant E mentioned that his mentoring program helped him become confident in decisions that he made, knowing he had support from the district from knowing what the district philosophy was. Participant H gained confidence by going through the trainings and seminars. She stated that they reinforced that “[She was] doing the right thing.” Similarly, Participant G stated, “Getting positive praise and constructive criticism gave me something to work toward” which helped increase her confidence.
A few of the participants' mentioned their individual mentors as helping them increase their confidence. Participant I discussed being able to ask his mentor quick questions and receiving answers right away instead of waiting, which could beat on his confidence if he had to think about the questions all day, without receiving answers. Participant A said that, “Watching your mentor model teaching helps out.”

**Decision to Remain in Teaching Profession**

During the interviews, none of the participants mentioned that they want to drop out of the teaching profession. Eight out of the ten participants said that their mentoring program has had an effect on them remaining in the teaching profession. Several of the participants stressed the importance of mentoring programs during the teacher retention portion of the interview. For example, Participant D discussed how she had not had good experiences with her previous mentoring program in the first school she taught at and stated, “Yes, not having the proper mentoring program made me seriously consider if this was what I wanted to do.” She continued by saying that “If you don’t get the support those first years, it’s so difficult.” Participant E also stressed that “Without a mentoring system, you don’t know what direction to go or how to react. It allows you to make confident decisions.” Participant I also agreed how confidence and reassurance of things that you’re doing right was definitely a big help.

Some of the participants discussed how their mentoring program helped them get through challenging or tough times. Participant F talked about how she had gone crying to her mentor in the past and how her mentor was there to be her support and
keep her focused. She said that her mentor helped her “understand that [she is] a good teacher and this is where [she] belongs.” Participant G specifically mentioned that she wanted to remain in the teaching profession and the role that her mentoring program played in that decision, was the encouragement. She discussed how there would be good years and more challenging years and her mentoring program helped her by knowing that, “It’s not just me, it’s part of the job.” Participant H also mentioned that her mentoring program gave her a positive outlook on teaching. She talked about conflicts and how there would always be a resource to go to in any situation. Participant B added that her mentoring program helped take away worry and concern.

Participant J said that his mentoring program has affected his decision to remain in the teaching profession and the role that his mentoring program played was that it “fostered connection with the school.” He specifically mentioned that he did not know any teachers who had left the profession early on, but that it “might be vindictive of the program [they] have” at his school. He said that a lot of people choose to stay at the district because of the staff. He personally said, “I enjoy it- I see no reason to leave.”

Two participants had other reasons for wanting to stay in the teaching profession and their mentoring program was irrelevant or played little role in that decision. Participant A mentioned that working with the kids and seeing if they grasped the knowledge was her reasoning for remaining in the teaching profession. She said that if the kids aren’t grasping the knowledge then “maybe I’m not cut out
for this.” Participant C also mentioned that her mentoring program did not influence her decision to remain in the teaching profession. She thought the program was a good way to transition her into the school, but stated how she was already “pretty passionate about teaching.”

**Role of Principal & Administration**

The participants had mixed feelings regarding the involvement of the principal or administration being involved in the mentoring programs and their responses regarding administration varied, even among participants within the same school districts. Responses from the same participants also varied in how they viewed the involvement of administration. For example, in one district the principal had to sign off on a checklist of things that the mentee and mentor had to do together (so administration was involved), but other than that one of the participants did not think administration really played a role in the mentoring program. She said it was more of a relationship between her and her mentor, rather than between “administrator, mentor, and myself.” However, she did mention that her principal was available when she needed help. In most cases, however, administration was perceived as being either “hands-off” or “hands-on.”

In “hands-off” incidents, several of the participants felt that the principal did not really play a significant role at all, however one of the participants did not really think that was a big deal because her mentor had helped her out so much. She just thought it would be nice if she could hear feedback from her principal more to help make corrections in her teaching. Additionally, it was mentioned that administration
did not have a direct role in the mentoring programs. For example, one of the participants felt that the role of the principal or administration was mostly just to oversee and support everybody. They would meet with the mentor if there was a real issue and make sure they’re on the same page. Also, one of the participants was also not sure if the principal played a direct role in the mentoring program or if he would even directly impact it, but he did discuss how the principal would observe him sometimes informally or by “poking his head in the room”. He talked about how there were union laws and restrictions on what advice the principal could give to him so for the most part there were few observations done unless they were formal.

In other cases, administration was very “hands-on.” Participants mentioned that administration were very active in the mentoring program. For example, one of the participants mentioned getting observed by administration which would be done both announced and unannounced as to when they would be coming in to observe. They would give both positive and negative feedback. One participant’s lead administrator for his building was very involved. He met with new teachers at orientation and his administrator went “above and beyond” making people feeling comfortable within the district, including having a new teacher luncheon. Also, one administrator introduced the participant to her mentor and that she (the mentee) would check in with her vice principal about once a month. He had contacted her and said it was something he liked to do for first year teachers.

Some of the participants also mentioned the leader of their mentoring program as being actively involved in the mentoring program. They would meet with that
person and it was just another person they could go to for help or if there was a problem.

Negative Concerns About Mentoring Programs

The majority of the comments and discussions about mentoring programs were positive, but I also received negative feedback and concerns, especially when I asked the participants to talk about the potential downfalls of their mentoring program.

Potential Downfalls

A few of the negative comments had to do with the seminar group meetings that the participants had to attend as part of their mentoring program. The participants felt that some of the meetings and things they learned were not relevant to their needs as teachers. One of the participants mentioned that the “meetings were not always based on things you need to know or get help with.” They would get packets or watch a DVD that they may have already seen. The seminars did not seem to be directed to the actual mentees. Another participant felt that the program was “not quite there yet.” The participant felt that the people in charge were very knowledgeable, but they just didn’t know what topics they wanted to cover. She felt that small bits of information were given about a lot of things instead of going into great detail about a few things. For example, they would not pick an entire day just to go over one thing like behavior management.

One of the participants mentioned that sometimes at the meetings a lot of negative stories were heard about the students. For example, if someone mentioned
taking students on a field trip somewhere someone else might say “Oh no, I did that one time…” It would “kill your ideas.”

Another downfall that several of the participants mentioned was the amount of work that went into the mentoring programs. One of the participants mentioned that the work load could get heavy. Another participant stated that it could be an “added stress.” They would have chapters to read or summaries to write up for seminar meetings. If the seminar group was large it would take time for people to all share things and “the meetings might not be as productive as they could.” Sometime the meetings would also take away from planning time.

Mentor Conflicts

None of the participants had anything negative to say about their current mentor, so instead several of the participants commented on potential downfalls that could exist. A downfall that was discussed would be if the mentor and mentee did not get along. One of the participants stated that downfalls could be if the mentor did not keep on top of things or had a problem saying something (to the mentee). One of the participants said that a mentoring program could “go sour from personality conflict.” There would need to be an understanding from both people on what their positions are. He mentioned that he “didn’t see where a mentoring program could ever go sour” unless you downplayed who you were in the interview when getting hired and then did not have the same philosophy as the district. Another participant mentioned that a downfall could be if a mentor was not available or approachable.
Even though one of the participants discussed that her relationship with her mentor came about naturally, she talked about how that might not be that way for everyone. She thought that there should be more of a “push from the district to foster relationships.” She thought that the district could possibly set up a luncheon for people to meet with their mentor. She emphasized the importance of “facilitating relationships in the beginning.”

One of the participants mentioned difficulties she had with her previous mentoring program and mentor in the first district she taught at. There was only one mentor for all of the beginning teachers and she mentioned that she rarely saw her mentor. It was not personable and she did not feel comfortable going to her for help. She did not feel her first mentoring program helped her at all. She thought it was a terrible mentoring program.

**Changes in Education System**

One of the questions that the participants were asked was how the education system needed to change to better support collaboration between mentors and beginning teachers. Almost all of the participants agreed that allowing more mutual planning time to meet was a change that needed to be made. Additionally, a major consensus among the participants was having more time built in, without interrupting the school day. One of the participants mentioned how she did not like to be out of the classroom and that you are out so much for mentoring, so a change might be to be able to “meet outside of the normal school and maybe be reimbursed for that.”
Other changes were discussed as well. One participant felt that there needed to be “one or more people readily available to answer all questions…” She felt the “conversation piece” was important in having people to “take time and stop in and chat.”

Some participants discussed changes among collaboration among the school as a whole, not just between mentors and mentees. For example, it was stated that one district did a good job of planning activities and doing things outside the school district to create relationships with other colleagues. The participant, however, felt that if there was not a lot of collaboration it was because people did not know each other so there can always be more room and improvement for collaboration among teachers. That idea related to another participant’s response that there needed to be more collaboration among grade levels and a possible representative from each grade.

Only one of the participants felt that changes did not need to be made to better support among collaboration. She said that, “If you have a good mentor you can make it work. The layout of classes and timing shouldn’t really matter.”

**Advice to New Mentors and Novice Teachers**

One of the last things that the participants were asked during the interviews was to give advice to new mentors and mentees. The following quotes express the advice that the participants gave:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Mentee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a) “Keep your lesson book so mentee has an idea of pacing.”</td>
<td>1b) Have them (mentor) observe you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a) “Be willing to work hard.”</td>
<td>2b) “Ask lots of questions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a) “Stay in contact, make it a priority.”</td>
<td>3b) “Be willing to try and change things and be open to new suggestions-don’t take it personal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a) “If you have any questions, or need anything just come ask me.”</td>
<td>4b) “Ask direct questions, what you really want to know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a) “Stay positive, build relationship with mentee...”</td>
<td>5b) “Build relationship with mentor and go to that person when you need support and even when you don’t.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a) “Stay open-minded.”</td>
<td>6b) “Understand the purpose of the mentoring program. You are there to learn.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a) “Constant communication.”</td>
<td>7b) “Don’t be afraid to talk to your mentor about anything...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a) “Take as many notes, observe as many classrooms, and talk to as many teachers you possibly can...”</td>
<td>8b) “Stick with it. When you get negative feedback don’t take it personal, it will help you in the long run.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a) “Check in with your person...”</td>
<td>9b) “Don’t be afraid to not only go to...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Give notes/words of encouragement to let them know you are thinking of them.

10a) "Be available and be understanding."

10b) "Become comfortable with your mentor to avoid getting in trouble or making a mistake in the future."

Overall, the biggest piece of advice for both the mentor and mentee had to do with communication and keeping in touch with one another. The biggest piece of advice had to do with building the relationship between mentor and mentee so that both people felt comfortable enough to ask questions, give advice, and/or give constructive criticism.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The study was designed to create an in-depth understanding of what actually takes place in mentoring programs and to assess the perceived effectiveness it has on beginning teachers in relation to their success, confidence, support from staff, and their decision to retain in the teaching profession. My study provided insights into the interactions between mentors and mentees.

Most Effective Parts of a Mentoring Program

Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Based on the results from this study, the mentor and mentee relationship seemed to be the most crucial part of the mentoring program. It is important for beginning teachers to have at least one person they know will be there to support them and help answer any questions they may have. Many relationships have failed in mentoring programs because mentees did not have a choice in the matching process (Long, 2010). Even though all of the participants in this study were automatically assigned a mentor and did not necessarily have a voice in the matching process, in most cases they were assigned a mentor in a similar content area. This could have been a major reason why many of the participants in this study had such successful relationships with their mentors.

If it is impossible to always have matches in similar content or grade level, careful consideration should still be made to the pairing between mentor and mentee. The pairing should be between teachers that work closely with one another. In the
study, many of the participants worked in close proximity with their mentor. One of the participants had shared a classroom with his mentor his first year and to him the interactions became “natural, just like [he was] talking to a buddy... it didn’t even feel like a mentoring program.” It makes mentoring much easier when the mentor and mentee have constant (every day) interactions between one another due to room assignment, content/grade level, similar personalities or beliefs. Those things can often foster relationships and even friendships between mentors and mentees (as was the cases with many of the participants in the study).

The mentor should also be someone that the beginning teacher feels comfortable with and be available. Not having that comfort level was the downfall of one of the participant’s experiences with a mentor she had during her first year of teaching. She did not feel comfortable going to her mentor for help and support. Thus, it did not help her confidence and she had a terrible experience. Her current mentoring program was much better because she felt comfortable.

**Opportunities for Growth and Development**

Even though having a mentor and mentee relationship is crucial in a mentoring program, it is not the only necessary component. The mentoring program must be one component in a broader teacher induction program including workshops, collaborations, orientation seminars, etc. (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Fortunately all the participants in this study had those opportunities, and more. In many cases teachers were required to be observed as well as observing other classrooms and teachers as well. This proved to be very beneficial.
Other Involvement

Principal and Administration

The research literature claims that principals and administration play an important role in the mentoring process (Watkins, 2005; Roberson & Roberson, 2009). The results of this study only partially support this recommendation. Based on the information provided by the participants, I do see a need for the principal and administration to be involved and to know what is going on in the mentoring program, but I do not see a need for the principals to play a separate, direct, active role in mentoring, especially since most mentoring programs already have their own mentor leaders. The principal and administrators should be actively involved in helping beginning teachers adapt to the school and help them feel comfortable and supported. Their work is to create a positive school atmosphere so the school will feel like a family. The more beginning teachers feel comfortable in the school and feel like they belong, the greater chance they will stay after their first year (Heller, 2004).

School & Staff

It is crucial for beginning teachers to also have the support of other staff members, and the school, which supported earlier data provided in the literature section that “isolation is a primary reason that new teachers leave” the profession (Heller, 2004, p. 6). As mentioned in the results section, many of the teachers felt very comfortable going to other staff members for support, especially other people in the same department. For example, Participant A stated,
“[Insert school name] staff is great. They’ll help anyone out.” Participant I also added that everyone at her school is “open-door policy.” She said, “I feel comfortable walking into any classroom in this building for ideas.”

Mentoring programs need to continue to foster relationships between both beginning teachers, veteran teachers, and the entire staff as a whole. They can both learn from each other. One of the participants even mentioned that in her mentoring program the beginning teachers were teaching other (older) staff members things they did not know or had not learned, from things they had been taught that were part of the mentoring program.

The Advantages of Mentoring Compared to Other Induction Programs

Even though all of the participants in the study described positive experiences in their current mentoring placements, there was still room for improvement. The biggest issue regarding mentoring programs in general, based off of this study, are being able to find a common balance between a mentoring program that is too detailed-oriented versus one that is not-enough detailed oriented. Finding the common balance was especially hard to do in the large seminars. The biggest issue with being too detailed-oriented revealed in this study a heavy workload that some of the mentoring programs (seminars) required and the extra-added stress (on top of teaching). Additionally, some of the seminar meetings that the teachers were required to attend could be irrelevant by either not meeting the mentees’ individual needs, or not having enough information on a topic (or having too much information). The meetings also needed to be made more applicable to what was actually going on.
After analyzing the responses I received from all of the mentoring programs it seemed apparent that very detailed-oriented mentoring programs would be much more effective than one that is not so in my opinion, if school districts would take away some of the tasks that beginning teachers currently have just to alleviate stress, it would decrease the overall effectiveness of the mentoring programs. Instead, it would be useful for mentoring programs (if they do not already), to give the mentees surveys or ask them what improvements they would like to see in their mentoring program, especially involving the seminar meetings or workshops they have to attend. It would be hard to meet the needs of everyone, especially since one of the participants described mentors/mentees as, “coming in all shapes, sizes, and colors, and how you design the meeting to everyone is difficult.” However, if teachers were asked what they would like to learn more about, maybe several different seminar workshops could be set up and teachers could choose which ones they would like to go to, or choose between two. That might help to meet more needs of individual teachers, however, the nature of teachers’ challenges is very individualized and not all of these challenges can be addressed in large seminars or meetings. Mentoring in itself is very individualized and, therefore well suited to help beginning teachers meet their individual struggles.

**Improvement for Mentoring**

One major improvement that needs to be made in mentoring programs would address the mutual planning time and meeting between mentor and mentee. Meeting consistently with a mentor is essential to a mentoring program, but it does take away
time out of an already hectic school day. Teachers would have to miss schools days or part of the school day to meet with their mentor and this would require them to create substitute plans since they would not be teaching. The participants felt that meeting consistently was an important issue, but they did not really discuss a solution that could be made to help with taking away from a hectic school day. I think that addressing better ways to deal with mutual planning time is something that the education system as a whole and administrators should address and look into for the future.

Limitations & Gaps

This study was limited in the fact that a strong emphasis was placed upon understanding the relationships and effectiveness of the interactions between mentors and mentees. Seminar meetings, readings, professional development activities, etc., can all be part of a mentoring program and while they are important and were discussed throughout the interviews, more emphasis could have been placed upon them to understand mentoring programs as a whole.

Additionally, this study only focused on the mentees or beginning teachers. Mentors or veteran teachers and even administration are the other component to mentoring programs and they were not interviewed in this study. Their feedback and comments could provide many different insights into mentoring programs and their perceived effectiveness than beginning teachers’ insights.

Because of the variation of types of schools and teachers, it would also be valuable to have more research and studies be conducted that focus on specific types
of beginning teachers and mentors. For example, there are limited comparative studies done on teaching and mentoring strategies on elementary beginning teachers versus secondary beginning teachers. It would be useful to see if there are different strategies that work better for one type of teacher versus another.

**Future Implications**

Mentoring programs are essential to helping beginning teachers succeed. They are perceived to be, overall, very effective when beginning teachers have a strong, open, and available support system. This does not just include a veteran mentor, but the whole school system as a whole.

The comments from those I interviewed demonstrate that there needs to be school wide collaboration. Mentoring techniques and programs should not be limited to beginning teachers. Rather, mentoring techniques and programs should be implemented throughout the entire school community. It should be a “vehicle for change and renewal as it is integrated into the school’s wider professional learning networks rather than delivered as a stand-alone program…” (Long, 2009, p. 323). Teaching is a learning process and mentoring can be seen as a form of professional development. All teachers can learn skills from one and other and gain support from each other, which is a big part of what mentoring entails. Therefore those ideas must be something that should be implemented throughout whole school districts.

In conclusion, mentoring programs are essential and more schools should continue to implement, update, and improve them. One of the schools in the study was working on updating their mentoring program for the following year, which
shows that there is always room for improvement. While failed or unhelpful mentoring programs may not always be the main reason that every teacher chooses to leave the teaching profession, a successful mentoring program and strong support system can only help to reiterate their reasoning for wanting to remain in the profession.
References


Appendix: Sample Interview Protocol

Name: _______________  Date: ________

Start Time: ___________  End Time: ________

Introductions:

I will begin with introductions and again explaining briefly the purpose of my study (the teacher should already have a clear idea of what the study is about from having signed the consent form)

There are four categories of questions. I will begin by asking the general overall question for each category and checking off in the boxes if teachers answer each question. If not I will prompt/ask the question directly, marking a P in the box for prompt.

How many years have you been teaching? ___________
How many years in this district? ___________
What years did you receive mentoring? ___________

Potential Questions Related to Characteristics of Individual Mentoring Program

-What can you tell me about the mentoring program in your school?
  • □ In one or two sentences how would you describe the mentoring program in your school?
  • □ How are mentors and mentees matched/paired?
  • □ How often do you meet with your mentor and for how long?
  • □ Other than mentoring is there an induction program set up to help you as a beginning teacher? Are any other strategies used to help you? Explain.

Potential Mentoring Interaction Questions

-What can you tell me about the interaction between you and your mentor?
  • □ How would you describe your relationship with your mentor?
  • □ What are some topics/concerns that you and your mentor talk about?
  • □ What are some general goals/objectives you hope to meet when working/talking with your mentor?
• What are some general goals/objectives you hope to meet when working/talking with your mentor?
• *What do you do to ensure open communication between you and your mentor?
• *What are the different strengths each of you bring to the collaboration?
• *Think of a time when there was miscommunication with your mentor. Describe the situation. What did you do to correct it?

Potential Questions Related to Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs

-How would you describe the effectiveness of the mentoring program for you and other beginning teachers?

• Overall, how effective would you say your mentoring program is in helping new teachers succeed? Explain why.
• How effective has your individual mentor been in helping you succeed?
• Has your mentoring program helped you overcome any challenges? If so please explain.
• Has your mentoring program helped you gain support from staff and if so how? If not please explain.
• Has your mentoring program helped you become more confident in the beginning years of your teaching career and how?
• What potential downfalls do you see in your current mentoring program and why?
• Do you think your mentoring program has had any effect on your decision to retain in the teaching profession? Explain. If not what experiences have or have not had on your decision to retain or want to get out of the teaching profession?
• What role has the principal or administration played in your mentoring program and how do you think he/she relates to the overall effectiveness of the program?
• *How does the system (structure of the school day, pay scales, etc.) need to change to support better collaboration between mentors and novice teachers?

Closing Questions

-Can you give any closing remarks about your school’s mentoring program or mentoring programs in general?

• *What qualities do you think are most important in a mentor/mentoring program?
• *If there was one piece of advice you could give to a new mentor, what would it be?
• *If there was one piece of advice you could give to a novice teacher who is just beginning to work with a mentor, what would it be?
• Overall what do you think are the most effective parts of a mentoring program and how could they be better?

*Questions created from: