

An analysis of teacher mentor programs and the perceptions of the ways in which
mentor programs informed the experiences of first year teachers

by

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ABSTRACT

New teacher mentor programs are in place in many school districts nationwide, and support first year teachers, teachers new to a campus, district or grade level. Because of everything teachers and school districts face, (i.e state standardized testing, stricter accountability, budget cuts, curriculum issues, state involvement, etc.) the need for quality and meaningful mentor programs to help new teachers get acquainted with the daily responsibilities are especially important (Strong, 2006). In a day and age where many districts are faced with high attrition rates, financial woes, and demands for greater student achievement, many researchers have found that mentoring programs aimed at new teachers will show vast benefits to the district, the new teachers, the mentor teachers, and most importantly the students.

Participants in this grounded theory study include two first-year teachers, their principals and one teacher mentor. The nine month data collection period involved gleaning insights from a researcher's reflexive journal, two first year teacher journals, and two interviews with the two first year teachers, the mentor teacher, and the two administrators that participated in this study. Analysis was conducted through open coding.

The main purpose of this qualitative study was to understand first year teachers' perceptions of how mentor programs influence them in terms of how they teach, what they teach, and how they interact with students. This study also looked at the roles that administrators on each campus play in mentoring novice teacher. This

study is framed around three major research questions: 1.) What are novice teachers' perceptions of some of the ways in which involvement in a mentoring program influenced their first year of teaching? 2.) What are novice teachers' perceptions of the ways in which principals influence campus mentoring programs? 3.) What are principals' perceptions of the ways in which mentoring programs influence the success of novice teachers?

This study found that the novice teachers perceived there were several benefits as a result of participating in the mentor program. This study also found that novice teachers perceived having a trained mentor who was a classroom teacher was more effective than having a mentor who was not a classroom teacher and worked at central office. Finally, this study found that novice teachers perceived principal involvement in the mentor program was the most important aspect of the program.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a grounded theory study involving two first year teachers and their perceptions about their participation in the mentoring program for first year teachers in their district. This study looked at how their perceptions of their district mentoring program informed their experiences; specifically in terms of how they teach, what they teach, and how they feel about their profession. This study also looked at the involvement of two administrators and the one mentor teacher who are involved with two first-year teachers.

Background Information

According to Hewitt (2009), induction programs were introduced into the American school systems in the 1980's and 1990's in an attempt to help novice teachers' transition from teacher preparation programs to their first year of teaching. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) stated that most mentor programs in America have the goals of: "Improving teaching performance; increasing the retention of promising beginning teachers; promoting the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers; satisfying mandated requirements for induction and/or licensure; and transmitting the culture of the system to beginning teachers" (p. 3). Ganser (2002) agreed with Stansbury and Zimmerman and stated, "They are designed to meet a variety of goals, including retaining good teachers, providing them with psychological support and instructional

assistance, introducing them to the cultures of the school and the district, and meeting state licensing requirements” (p. 8). Blair-Larsen (1998) also stated that mentoring programs are designed to support new teachers in their first year of teaching. He continued to state that,

They enter the profession at different stages of development: some returning after a number of year’s absence; some beginning a second career at mid- life; and others starting their first job. A mentoring program can begin at any one of these points. (p. 602)

Mentoring programs are designed for teachers who are at any point in their career whether it be their first year or a transition year for them.

Hewitt (2009) described several different types of induction/mentoring models. These models begin with the most basic model and go all the way through a more in depth model. These models include: basic orientation model, instructional practice model, and school transformational model.

The first and most basic model according to Hewitt (2009) is the basic orientation model. Hewitt (2009) stated,

Many school districts use the simple version of the basic orientation model. This program introduces new teachers to school procedures and district policies, which enables the new teachers to learn their responsibilities in the district and their responsibility for basic classroom management. (p. 13)

In this very basic approach, teachers are merely “shown the ropes”, and they are given an introduction to their responsibilities and what is expected from them both at the campus

level and at the district level. For example, a school district might have a three day induction orientation prior to school starting. During this orientation, teachers review the curriculum, district policies, and anything else the district deems important for the new teacher to know.

The second model, instructional practice model, goes a little more in depth than the basic orientation model. Hewitt (2009) stated this model discusses classroom management issues, policies and procedures and novice teachers. Hewitt (2009) continued to state, “The instructional practice model links the induction model to state and local standards for high quality teaching with well-trained and skilled mentors helping to bridge the gap between theory and practice” (p. 13). With this program, districts take induction practices a step further by providing new teachers with a mentor that can help them along the way during their first year journey.

The final model described by Hewitt (2009) is the school transformation model. Hewitt (2009) stated that this model is rarely used for a new teacher induction program because of the complexity and time requirements that are involved. Hewitt (2009) stated, “This model incorporates the attributes of both orientation and instructional practice models and connects the two to systematic school-wide renewal efforts to promote continuous learning for new teachers” (p. 13). With this model, schools use research and data to drive practices and meet the needs of the teachers they are serving. It is also notable that this model focuses on the teacher being a part of a learning community that allows all faculty members, not just new ones, to join in the learning process.

When looking at mentoring programs and the types that exist, there are best practices that all have in common. Flynn and Nolan (2008) stated that best practices among teacher mentor/induction programs include training mentees on classroom management, how to work with parents, school operations/district policies, differentiated instruction, and assessment. They continue to state that teachers need to be provided with a time where they can discuss common issues with their peers.

Contextualized Biography

As a fairly new teacher of only seven years, I have often reflected on my first year teacher experience. At the time, my school district had a mentor program that followed the instructional practice model. While I had a mentor and participated in the program, I did not quite grasp the need for such a program. The mentor my principal assigned to me was on the same fourth grade team as myself. She was provided a stipend from the district. In October of this same year, my mentor went on medical leave. Because of this, she was out of school the remainder of the year and a substitute, also a recent graduate with a degree in education, took her place. The rest of my team was comprised of another first year teacher and a second year teacher. I often felt like I was the leader on the team because the other three teachers often came to me when they wanted advice or had questions. Because of this, I had little support and didn't know who to go to when I needed help. At the end of the year, it was clear to me and my principal, that while I had appeared to be successful and had minimal problems throughout the year, I was really struggling with curriculum decisions, teaching strategies, intervention plans, and student

achievement. My principal did not offer any assistance or another mentor who could help me through my problems. Instead, I was moved to a different position within the school that many teachers, including myself, deemed insignificant. Because of this, it took several years for me to find my way in the profession and to feel more successful as a teacher. I often look back on this experience and the mentor program in general and think about the challenges new teachers coming into the profession today must face.

As a teacher who struggled through the first year, I relate to the participants in this study. At the beginning of this study, both teachers felt a little apprehensive talking to me as a researcher; however, as time passed both teachers felt safe voicing their concerns to me. I felt as if I acted as a sounding board for both novice teachers and gave them an opportunity to express concerns that they would not have felt comfortable relaying to anyone else.

Statement of the problem

New teacher mentor programs are in place in school districts nationwide and support first year teachers, as well as teachers new to the campus, district and grade level. Because of everything teachers and school districts face, (i.e. state standardized testing, stricter accountability, budget cuts, curriculum issues, state involvement, etc.) the need for quality and meaningful mentor programs to help new teachers get acquainted with the daily responsibilities of being a teacher is especially important. Strong (2006) noted,

It is widely recognized in most states that new teachers need and benefit from support during their induction period. Support during the new teachers first year

or two may be just as important to their effectiveness as their pre-service training, their state certification, and their subject matter skills. (p. 1)

Mentor programs are provided to teachers at a multitude of levels throughout their career, and can be critical to their success in the profession.

One problem that many districts face is high attrition. Teacher turnover refers to major changes in a teacher's assignment from one school year to the next. Turnovers can include leaving teaching employment (commonly referred to as attrition) or moving to a different school or district (commonly referred to as a school transfer or as teacher migration). There are a multitude of reasons why teachers leave the profession or opt to move to another school or district. Often when teachers enter the profession, they are not prepared for the task without guidance. According to Veenman (1984), discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students work, relationships with parents, organization of class work, insufficient materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students were all perceived as problems of classroom teachers. Being unprepared to deal with these problems and other common teacher duties can lead to many end results, but more often than not, teachers end up leaving the profession. Evidence of this can be seen when Hewitt (2009) noted,

Many teachers leave based on a very high level of job frustration. They had a vision of an extremely high level of success in their first year, and when things don't go as well as they expected they become frustrated and leave. (p. 13)

Because teachers enter the profession expecting their first year to go a certain way, they are especially frustrated when things don't go exactly as they planned. As a result, many teachers end up leaving the profession early in their careers.

While discussing attrition, Dove (2004) stated that 9.3 percent of teachers leave the profession prior to completing their first year of teaching, twenty percent leave the profession within the first three years, and approximately thirty percent leave the profession within the first five years of teaching. Some research shows this number to be nearly fifty percent in high poverty schools.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) also provided similar numbers in reference to teacher attrition. They stated, "Approximately fourteen percent of new teachers leave teaching by the end of the first year, thirty three percent leave within three years, and almost fifty percent leave in five years" (p. 1). This can have a negative impact on student achievement due to the fact that they are likely to get another teacher who is unprepared or under qualified for the position. Over several years, students potentially end up receiving subpar instruction and fall further and further behind. Strong (2006) stated,

We have learned from many research studies, many students who are taught by effective teachers (defined by Sanders, 2000 as those whose students consistently post gains in student achievement scores) for several years in a row will experience the benefits throughout the rest of their school careers and beyond. After three years with the most effective teachers students show achievement

gains significantly higher than those of students with the least effective teachers.

(p. 1)

With this in mind, it is apparent that students who have experienced teachers will benefit and be more successful in their studies than those students who have the least effective teachers for several years in a row.

Because of high attrition rates, some school districts are faced with a smaller applicant pool which leads to a high demand for highly qualified teachers. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003), a highly qualified teacher is one who,

Possess a deep understanding of the subjects they teach, evidence a firm understanding of how students learn, demonstrate the teaching skills necessary to help all students achieve high standards, create a positive learning environment, use a variety of assessment strategies to diagnose and respond to individual learning needs, demonstrate and integrate modern technology into the school curriculum to support student learning, collaborate with colleagues, parents, community members, and other educators to improve student learning, reflect on their practice to improve future teaching and student achievement, pursue professional growth in both content and pedagogy, and instill a passion for learning in their students. (p. 5)

The American federal government makes the definition of a highly qualified teacher more specific. According to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a highly qualified teacher is one who holds a teaching certificate appropriate for the state they teach in and

have completed a teacher education program either at the university level or at an alternative educator certification program. When there is a high need for teachers, districts are often forced to hire teachers that do not meet highly qualified standards in hopes that they will gain the credentials they need at a later time. They may also find someone who meets the highly qualified standards in accordance with No Child Left Behind (2001) but find that they are not prepared for the demands of teaching or for the content area and/or grade level they are hired to teach.

In this study, I looked at the Barrington Independent School District, specifically two schools and their use of a new teacher mentor program by following two teachers within the district on their first year journeys. I looked at the perceived impact of the program through the lens of two first year teachers, the campus level administrators, and a mentor. I also looked at the two first year teachers' perceptions of how mentor programs informed their experiences, particularly in terms of how they teach, what they teach, and how they feel about their profession.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand first year teachers' perceptions of how mentor programs informed their experiences in terms of how they teach, what they teach, and how they feel about their profession. This study will also look at the role the administrator on each campus plays in mentoring the novice teacher and the impact that they have on the teachers' role in her classroom and at the campus level.

Research Questions

This study is framed around three major research questions:

1. What are novice teachers' perceptions of some of the ways in which involvement in a mentoring program influenced their first year of teaching?
2. What are novice teachers' perceptions of the ways in which principals influence campus mentoring programs?
3. What are principals' perceptions of the ways in which mentoring programs influence the success of novice teachers?

Significance of the Study

The mentoring and grooming of teachers is very important. Ganser (1999) stated, "Getting beginning teachers off to a good start is just as important as getting students off to a good start" (p. 8). Research (Ganser, 1999; Strong, 2006; Monsour, 2000; Smith and Ingersol, 2004) shows there are many reasons why the mentoring and grooming of teachers is important including retention rates of teachers, saving the district the cost of hiring and retraining new teachers, and having teachers become more successful at what they are doing sooner; however, no reason is more important than the impact that teachers have on the students they teach. As Strong (2006) noted,

We have learned from many research studies, particularly those of William Sanders and his colleagues in Tennessee, that students who are taught by effective teachers for several years in a row will experience the benefits throughout the rest

of their school careers and beyond. After three years with the most effective teachers, students show achievement gains significantly higher than those with the least effective teachers. (p. 1)

Strong continued to state that teachers with experience generally exceed the effectiveness of teachers who are new to the profession or new to the content area. This leads to the idea of teachers needing and benefiting from support during their first years of practice.

Flynn and Nolen (2008) also discussed positive outcomes of effective teacher mentor programs. These include helping teachers make the transition from preparation to practice, helping teachers become more successful early on in their careers, helping reduce teacher attrition, and helping increase teacher job satisfaction. It is important for district and school administrators to design and implement a program in their district and on their campuses that will not only be beneficial for themselves as leaders, for the incoming teachers they will serve, but also for the students who are in the care of the novice teachers every year.

Assumptions

Going into this study, the main assumption I had is that effective teacher mentor programs can help teachers new to the profession, school, district, content area, etc, adapt to the work environment and the tasks and demands of the profession. During my first year, I greatly struggled with curriculum decisions, student achievement, and intervention plans for students who were in special education or who were performing well below

grade level. Because of this, my students scored some of the lowest scores in the district on their end of the year state assessment. I have always felt if I only would have had more guidance from another teacher in my building or from my administrator, I would have been able to implement better strategies and my students would have learned more and been more successful as a result.

Flynn and Nolan (2008) stated that there are several positive outcomes to having mentor programs which include: helping teachers transition into the profession, reducing attrition rates, helping teachers become more effective and increasing job satisfaction. With this in mind, I believe this will lead to greater job satisfaction, a prolonged career, and more meaningful instruction that will have a positive impact on student learning.

Limitations

This study has temporal limitations to it. This study was conducted during the 2010-2011 school year. The data that was collected during this time may vary if it were to be collected during a different period of time. While sufficient for this study, my research would have increased trustworthiness and credibility if it could have been conducted over several cohorts of teachers. For example, look at multiple teachers every school year for several school years.

Also, the pool of applicants for this study was very limited. Due to budget cuts, the school district I looked at was cutting positions through attrition and moving current employees to different positions where needed. Because of this, this particular school district was not hiring as many new teachers as they normally would in any given school

year. While I found a sufficient amount of participants for this study, my research would have increased trustworthiness and credibility if there would have been more first year teachers involved in the study.

Definition of Terms

Mentor- A mentor is an experienced teacher who accepts the responsibility and aids the professional growth and support of a new teacher.

Induction year- The initial year of teaching for a novice teacher: - “One definition of teacher induction is the period of transition from student to professional” (Blair-Larsen, 98, 602).

Beginning teacher/novice teacher- A beginning or novice teacher is a teacher who has recently finished certification requirements and is in their first year of teaching.

Mentor Program-(also referred to as induction program) A program designed to help first year teachers transition from university and certification programs to their first year of teaching. During this program, novice teachers are paired with a more experienced teacher whose role is to help guide them through the challenges of teaching.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview and general description of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study. The following chapters will provide you a review of the literature, an explanation of the methodology used, an analysis of the findings, and a discussion of the findings and implications.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand two first year teachers' perceptions of how mentor programs informed their experience, in terms of not only how they teach and what they teach, but how they feel about their profession. This study also looked at two principals and a mentor that joined the two novice teachers on their first year journey. This literature review examines several avenues of this study: history of mentor programs, teacher shortages and attrition, items included in mentor programs, and first year teacher issues and concerns. This literature review also explores effective mentor qualities, the impact on novice teachers, the principals' role in the mentor program, benefits to principals, the impact on mentor teachers, and increasing government awareness of the need for teacher mentoring.

History of Mentor Programs

According to Hewitt (2009) induction programs were introduced into the school system in the 1980's and 1990's in an attempt to help novice teachers' transition from teacher preparation programs to their first year of teaching. Most mentor programs in the American school system have the goals of improving teaching, promoting teacher retention, and increasing the personal well-being and satisfaction of teachers (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Ganser (2002) agreed with Stansbury and Zimmerman and stated that mentor programs are designed to meet several goals including retaining teachers,

providing psychological support, and introducing teachers to the school culture. Blair-Larsen (1998) also stated that mentoring programs are designed to support new teachers in their first year of teaching. He continued,

They enter the profession at different stages of development: some returning after a number of years absence; some beginning a second career at mid- life; and others starting their first job. A mentoring program can begin at any one of these points. (p. 602)

Mentoring programs are designed to assist new teachers, while helping them acclimate to the profession, regardless of what life stage they are in when they enter the profession.

Most of the literature available (Blair-Larsen, 1998; Moir, 2009; Hewitt, 2009; Ganser, 2002) on the subject stated how critical it is for districts to have a plan for their mentoring program that is reflective of the needs of first year teachers. Moir (2009) stated,

New teacher induction isn't a 'plug and play' solution. Before induction begins, a review of district demographics, capabilities, and learning strategies will ensure the induction program is aligned with other initiatives focused on teacher learning. (p. 14)

Moir (2009) continued to state that mentoring programs are most effective when all stakeholders are involved in the program. It is crucial for school districts to have a vision of what their mentor program will look like, how they will include all stakeholders, and how the program will help teachers with a common goal of improving student learning.

Teacher Shortages and Attrition

School districts, across the nation, deal with teacher shortage issues every year in their effort to hire highly qualified teachers to fill positions. Dove (2004) stated, “Teacher attrition is the largest single factor determining the shortage of qualified teachers in the United States and in developed and less developed countries throughout the world” (p. 8). Because of this growing problem, mentor programs have come to the forefront for districts and states as they endeavor to keep their teachers.

Monsour (2000) also discussed teacher shortages and the impact mentor programs have on retaining novice teachers. Monsour (2000) noted,

Teacher shortages loom in many places, subjects, and grade levels, and leaders in education and principals in particular are looking hard at every possible method to develop and retain new teachers. Mentoring programs that pair experienced teachers with first-time teachers have gained new prominence as ways to meet the challenge of supporting, developing, and retaining new teachers. (p. 62)

Because retaining teachers is a top priority for districts and administrators alike, mentor programs are well-known and used to potentially support and ultimately retain novice teachers.

In a study conducted by Smith and Ingersol (2004) results showed several reasons why teachers leave the profession. The study found that teachers whose initial assignment was in the special education field were more likely to move or leave teaching, while

teachers in the ESL or bilingual education field were less likely to leave the profession. The study also found males were slightly less likely to leave the profession as opposed to females, while minority teachers were more likely to leave than Caucasian teachers. School poverty was also one of the strongest predictors of the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession. Finally, the study found that beginning teachers who taught at a charter, Catholic or private school were more likely to leave the profession than a beginning public school teacher.

Walker (2009) discussed several ways to encourage and keep new teachers in the profession: staff development, technology, administrative support, and an effective induction program. She described the induction program as follows:

This should be comprehensive over at least a 3-year period and include having a grade or content specific mentor at the new teacher's school; observing peers' classes, being observed by mentors and one or two peers, and having follow-up conferences shortly afterward; having time to meet and plan with mentors, other new teachers, and/or additional professional as appropriate. (p. 73)

Many teachers who have just graduated from a university or an education preparation program and hold their teaching certification, often times have a skewed vision of what their first teaching career might be like. When they begin their first year of teaching, they don't know what to expect, what the school expectations will be, or how to work with the student population they will have. Fox (2006) stated,

Many have not learned what constitutes as an effective lesson plan, or trained to create daily or unit plans. We expect them to create tests and assessments, but

they have no background in test preparation. In addition to the basics of designing curriculum and running a classroom, there are the ever-changing philosophies within their own fields of expertise that they will need to monitor to be effective in preparing students for college. While we know that the eager, bright, and humorous teacher sitting across from us at the interview table has no background in any of these crucial areas, we hire her anyway because we know the students will take to her, that she will make a good colleague, and that with application of her sharp mind, she will eventually learn it all through experience. (p. 44)

While their professors in college have given them a wealth of information, they can only do so much to prepare pre-service teachers for what their experience in the classroom will be like.

With everything that is expected of teachers, many novice teachers get frustrated with their lack of knowledge and their daily duties. This unfortunately may lead to novice teachers leaving the profession. Hewitt (2009) stated,

Many new teachers leave based on a very high level of job frustration. They have a vision of an extremely high level of success in their first year, and when things don't go as well as they expected they become frustrated and leave. (p. 13)

When novice teachers enter the profession they picture their first year being a certain way. When things don't go according to plan, and they are unable to make the necessary changes needed in order to feel successful, many novice teachers leave the profession.

Some scholars advocate the implementation of effective mentor programs to help novice teachers get settled into the profession. Monsour (2000) stated,

They (principals) know that no matter how effective teacher education and student teaching have been, the first solo year can leave a new teacher feeling isolated and unequipped to handle the many unexpected issues that arise inside and outside the classroom. (p 62)

Teachers need some sort of support system to help them navigate through their first year of teaching. Even if they did not have any problems during their student teaching and other pre-service activities, teachers still need some guidance.

Menchaca (2003) also discussed the need for mentor and induction programs for novice teachers as a replacement for ‘band-aid’ strategies. Menchaca (2003) stated,

It may take a novice teacher two to three years to make the transition.

Unfortunately, band-aid strategies are often used by principals during this transition period, which may precipitate novice teachers becoming disillusioned and discouraged, and eventually quitting the profession. (p. 25)

While it may initially be easier and cheaper to utilize a “band-aid” strategy when assisting new teachers, in the long run, the consequences may overshadow the instant benefits.

Hewitt (2009) reported that through the use of mentor and induction programs, some districts have reported teacher retention rates as high as 70 percent. In addition to this, he found that through the use of teacher tracking, districts found that some of the teachers who left merely switched to another school district. Hewitt (2009) also found that, “New teachers are less likely to leave a school where they have developed friendships and feel accepted and supported” (p. 14). The connections teachers make are

critical, especially when they first start in the profession. These connections can help teachers feel supported, and they can help the new teacher learn and grow.

Money is also a great benefit of teacher mentor programs that are effective in retaining new teachers to the district. Moir (2009) states that teacher turnover has caused an increase in recruiting and training costs. While induction programs can save districts money in the long run, they can be much more than a money saving tactic. Moir states, “Induction programs accelerate the effectiveness of teachers, fast-tracking their progress to exemplary teachers with the ability to positively impact student achievement” (p. 15). When districts implement mentoring programs, not only can they save money they can have a positive effect on teachers and students.

Items Included in Mentor Programs

The literature on mentor programs showed that there are several categories that mentor and induction programs should include. A study conducted by Wildeman, Niles, Magliaro, and McLaughlin (1989), found there were five categories that mentors assisted new teachers with on a regular basis. They stated, “Mentors helped beginners to learn about teaching, feel good about teaching, manage their work loads, and become a part of the school community. In addition, mentors often were good friends who offered a wide range of personal support” (p.490). While conducting their study on new teacher mentor programs, the authors found these were areas mentors focused on in order to help new teachers throughout the year.

Littleton and Littleton (1988) found that in the first six weeks of the school year, it is very important that a mentor do several key things. These include: touch base with their new teacher daily, answer any questions the new teacher may have, model for the beginning teacher what should be done or how something should be done, observe the novice teacher at least once, and encourage, praise and reassure the new teacher often. Littleton and Littleton state that the first six weeks is where new teachers will experience the most frustration. By providing this needed support in the beginning of the year, mentors will help new teachers become and feel more successful during this initial period.

Maroney (1964) also found there are several components that need to be included in mentor programs such as planning for the first day of school, curriculum issues, parent communication tips, and suggestions on how to meet the learning needs of all students. Maroney (1964) stated,

In the group conferences and discussions with beginning teachers the following items should find a place for consideration: Study of student records; planning for the first days of school; issues in curriculum and program planning; guidance and counseling facilities in the school and the teacher's role in the program; how to work with and report progress to parents; grouping and management of groups; meeting schedules; learning how to meet the needs of one's groups; and countless other topics which the particular group of beginning teachers feel the need to cover. (p. 363)

In addition to this, Maroney (1964) stated that there are several topics that should be discussed prior to the beginning of the year: difficulties in handling disciplinary problems, motivating students, and gaining professional competence.

Watkins (2005) also discussed several activities that all mentor programs should include. He stated that all induction programs should assign a strong mentor who can grow as much as they guide or influence. He also stated that the mentor program should support and extend innovative practice that comes from active research. Finally, Watkins (2005) stated that an induction program should encourage collegial discussion and learning among experienced staff, new staff, and the principal.

Jarmin and Mackiel (1993) found that proximity and time are two important issues to consider when starting a mentor program. Results from their study showed that a substantial number of mentees had very little contact with their mentors. “This finding indicates that time constraints on teachers and the physical proximity of the mentor and the beginning teacher must be a priority issues for school districts initiating mentor programs” (p. 47). Because communication between the mentor and the novice teacher is crucial, it is important for districts to assign mentors that are in close proximity to novice teachers. It is also equally important to allow the participants time to meet and discuss curriculum, planning, classroom management or any other issues that may arise.

In addition to time and proximity, Jones and Lowe (1990) found several other key components that must be present in the effective professional development of teachers. These include having ongoing professional development, which includes research on important concepts teachers discuss, requires the practice of new techniques, recognizes

teachers who are doing a good job, and involves teachers in the setting of and working toward individual goals.

First Year Teacher Issues and Concerns

The first year of a teacher's career can be crucial and it can either make or break a new teacher's career just based solely on her experiences. Romano (2008) stated,

The initial year of teaching has been documented as a critical growth period for teacher development, as novices become acquainted with their teaching responsibilities and the expectations of their school while translating their teacher education experiences and knowledge into actual teaching practices with teachers.
(p. 63)

When a teacher enters the profession, her first year is a critical time for her to learn, grow, and start to move from preparation to practice. The experiences that a novice teacher has during this first year can set the tone for her entire career.

Some research involves an examination of novice teachers and the problems and concerns they have upon entering the profession and throughout their first year of teaching. Elias, Fisher, and Simon (1980) found the major concern of new teachers was discipline and classroom management (Elias, Fisher, & Simon, 1980; Veenman, 1984). Ryan et al. (1980) identified personal life adjustment and the teaching assignment itself as two key areas of difficulty for beginning teachers. Veenman (1984) cited other perceived problems of beginning teachers including motivating students, planning lessons, and dealing with individual differences. Elias, Fisher, and Simon (1980) also

reported problems in finding and using appropriate materials. It seems that the more problems beginning teachers encounter, the more likely they will leave profession.

(Veenman, 1984)

Romano (2008) conducted a study on six first year teachers and identified nine categories of successes and struggles for first year teachers: classroom management, content/pedagogy/materials issues, external policy issues, personal issues, parents, report cards and grading, student learning, special needs students, and evaluations. When the research was conducted, it was concluded that teachers communicated more struggles than they did successes. It was also noted that there were many similarities between participants. Romano (2008) stated, “Results from the most recent study of beginning teachers confirmed that similarities exist in the types of successes and struggles experienced during the first year of practice, regardless of grade level or subject taught” (p. 70). Romano (2008) discussed several ways to help combat these issues in the first year. First, introducing the types of struggles found in the study to colleges and preparation programs so that pre-service teachers are more prepared for the task at hand when they get their first teaching job.

Romano (2008) also mentioned teacher induction programs as a means to help teachers learn and evolve by helping them be more prepared for their daily tasks.

Romano (2008) stated,

The categories of successes and struggles described by these beginning teachers could be introduced into teacher education programs to raise awareness of the complexities of practice that prospective teachers will face during their first year.

Teacher induction programs also can focus on these issues and determine additional types of support that may be provided at appropriate times during the critical first year of teaching. (p. 71)

New teachers have several concerns upon entering the profession and have additional concerns thereafter. Ideally, mentoring programs are meant to assist new teachers and help them tackle these concerns. Clearly due to problems that novice teachers still have, more attention to novice teachers' perceptions is needed.

Effective Mentor Qualities

Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, and McLaulin (1989) discussed qualities that principals should look for when choosing mentors from their teacher pool. They stated, "Mentors must thus be excellent professional role models and possess qualities such as openness, non-judgmental attitude, flexibility, honesty and willingness to be available to a new teacher" (p. 489). They also added that only one half of the workforce would possess all of those qualities. Because of this, it is critical that principals evaluate any teacher they plan on asking to be a mentor to ensure they would be qualified to help new teachers learn and grow.

In addition to having specific qualities, mentors need to be capable of providing novice teachers with a specific-type of feedback in order to help novice teachers grow. Watkins (2005) stated that this feedback should include: "offering non-judgmental accepting responses; presenting specific data as bases for discussion; and be able to include guidelines for growth" (p. 84). Watkins (2005) continued to state that the

mentors' role and feedback may take on different forms based on the campus administrator and what their expectations are of them.

In addition to providing novice teachers with appropriate feedback, Jarmin and Mackiel (1993) found that mentors must be willing to initiate conversations with novice teachers in the beginning of their school year. Jarmin and Mackiel (1993) noted,

Our study indicates that mentors need to be willing to initiate most of the contacts with their beginning teachers at the beginning of year and then develop more mutually responsibility for the relationship as the year progresses. (p. 47)

By initiating contact with novice teachers, mentors build a relationship between them. This will help the first year teacher feel more willing and able to go to the mentor when he or she has a problem or when he or she needs advice.

Ganser (1995) suggested that districts have a pool of mentors already in place rather than looking for a mentor when there is a need. This will prevent teachers feeling obligated to be a mentor. Ganser (1995) also added that mentors should possess certain qualities such as having eight to fifteen years of teaching experience. In order to select mentors Ganser (1995) suggested school officials use things such as letters of recommendation, written belief statements about teaching and mentoring, resumes, videotapes of teaching, and interviews. Ganser (1995) said that while this is time consuming, it not only ensures that only quality mentors are chosen for the program, it sends a strong message that the mentoring program is important and should be taken seriously.

In addition to having specific qualities, mentors need to have training and support in order to successfully help and train new teachers. Giebelhaus and Bowman (2002) found that teachers who have been trained and have specific guidelines to follow have a more positive impact on new teacher development than those with no training.

Impact on Novice Teachers

Effective teacher mentor programs can help teachers new to the profession, school, district, content area, etc, adapt to the work environment and the tasks and demands of the profession. This will lead to more meaningful instruction that will have a positive impact on student learning. Flynn and Nolan (2008) stated that there are several positive outcomes to having mentor programs which include: helping teachers transition into the profession, reduction of attrition rates, helping teachers become more effective and increasing job satisfaction.

While recruiting and maintaining new teachers is critical for school districts, student learning and achievement is at the top of educators' agendas. Moir (2009) stated, By focusing on new teachers, we begin to address the student achievement gap. New teachers are traditionally assigned to the most challenging classrooms in the hardest-to staff schools. When districts and schools organize to accelerate new teacher development, they break the cycle of inequity and provide children who are most in need of a high-quality education with teachers capable of helping them. (p. 14)

Teacher mentor programs can potentially have a huge impact on teachers. This impact is not only beneficial for novice teachers, but for the students they work with as well.

The Principal's Role in the Mentoring Program

Another important aspect presented in the literature is the principal's role in the mentoring program. Mechaca (2003) said, "Principals play an important part in the overall success of induction programs on their campuses. It is vital for principals to welcome induction programs and be willing to assist mentors and novices in any way possible" (p. 26). Hope (1999) also agreed and said that principals must not leave the mentoring of new teachers to the veteran teachers. Principals must also assume the role of mentor and help new teachers become successful. Hope (1999) stated, "In most cases, a veteran teacher will likely be assigned as a mentor; principals, however, must be willing to assume the role of a master teacher and commit time to assisting new teachers" (p. 54). Because principals play such an integral part of the mentoring program, it is key that they invest in time with their novice teachers.

Weiss and Weiss (1999) also concluded that administrators often provide little support for their novice teachers putting them in quite a predicament. Weiss and Weiss (1999) stated, "First year teachers are frequently left in a 'sink or swim' situation with little support from principals or other teachers and with few opportunities for professional development" (p. 5). It can be inferred from the literature that support from the campus and district administrators is crucial to the success of the mentor program, and the benefits that novice teacher reap from such a program must not be left to chance.

Hope (1999) stated that mentoring programs go beyond reviewing policy or conducting walk-throughs of a new teacher's classroom. It involves principals being actively engaged with the new teachers on their campuses and assisting them with their professional growth. Hope (1999) noted,

Orienting new teachers to the school and to the principals' expectations entails more than reviewing policy and procedures in a handbook, more than a thirty minute getting to know you meeting in the office, more than a walk around campus to point out important locations such as the media center, cafeteria, and teachers' workrooms. It involves systematic contact with the intention of assisting in the new teacher's professional growth and development and of engaging in collegial conversations about the work of teaching. (p. 54)

Principal involvement in the mentoring program goes far beyond a simple orientation at the beginning of the year. Administrators must commit to engaging their novice teachers in conversations about teaching strategies, curriculum issues, and other important topics that will assist the novice teacher in their own professional growth.

Principals must also make themselves available to first year teachers. Often times, new teachers do not want to bother principals because they feel the principals have more important matters to be involved with than the new teachers' concerns or needs. Hope (1999) stated, "Principals need to seek out first year teachers and initiate conversation about instructional matters until the new teachers develop a level of comfort to initiate contact on their own" (p. 55). Principals seeking out first year teachers will help alleviate some anxiety a first year teacher may have.

While principal involvement is crucial to the success and learning of first year teachers, the feedback they receive has also shown to be useful to first year teachers. Hope (1999) stated, “Constructive feedback on the teaching and learning process unfolding in new teachers’ classrooms is also essential for their growth and development and their sense of efficacy” (p. 54). Teachers need constructive feedback in order to continue their development as well as become and feel more successful with what they do in the classroom.

Benefits to Principals

Some studies showed that principals who are involved in mentor programs also saw benefits. A principal’s efforts toward a mentor program can have an impact on their recruitment budget. For example, principals can save money when they retain new teachers. It is also a benefit to the entire faculty, including the principal, if the school has a stable staff from year to year. Principals who stay involved in the mentor program and help new teachers also ensure that the new teachers are learning about new practices and they are trained in the methods the principal prefers to be used. If a principal does not help and communicate with the new teacher, that teacher could potentially seek help from another teacher who doesn’t demonstrate best practices (Hope, 1999).

According to Hope (1999), there are several benefits to mentor programs for principals who participate fully in the program. Hope (1999) stated that principals who participate in the mentor program have seen several benefits to them, their campus and the profession. These benefits include:

- positive benefit to the budget,
- stable staff/ teacher retention, and
- positive impact on new teachers, rather than teachers learning bad habits from their cohorts.

The first benefit of a successful program is a positive impact on the school's recruitment budget. It is also a benefit to the entire school if the staff at that school is stable (less turn over). Principals would also have a more positive and direct impact on teachers.

However, if they don't provide teachers with the support they need, teachers may seek that out from someone who doesn't demonstrate best practices. Hope (1999) stated,

Even though principals are busy and expanding the orientation and induction process adds one more thing to what they already do- the amount of time and the quality of attention they invest in assisting first year teachers to grow and develop in the profession may, in the long run, change the dreadful statistics on new teachers leaving teaching. (p. 56)

While principals are busy running a school, supporting and being involved with new teachers and the mentor program will prove to be very beneficial and a good investment of their time in the long run.

Impact on Mentor Teachers

Some of the literature suggests that mentoring programs are not just meaningful and beneficial to the novice teacher, but that they can also benefit the mentor/veteran teacher as well. While many district administrators are not willing to require their veteran

teachers to assist and mentor new teachers, studies have shown that the experience can also be meaningful for the mentor. Moir (2009) stated,

Teachers gain a fresh perspective on their districts by working in various classrooms and schools, and they build a repertoire of instructional strategies.

Through the process of coaching others, mentors learn to codify and value their own experience and skills. (p. 15)

Mentors, who have the opportunity work with novice teachers in a multitude of settings, get the opportunity to see the big picture on their campus or at several campuses. This can help them multiple ways in their own classroom.

Ganser (2008) stated, “Veteran teachers frequently characterize working closely with beginning teachers as a source of fresh ideas about curriculum and instruction that are immediately useful to them” (p. 8). Ganser (2008) continued with, “A comprehensive vision of mentoring recognizes that being a mentor is a unique professional role for veteran teachers that can enhance their own professional development and career” (p. 8). Because novice teachers come straight from university and certification programs, they have minds full of fresh techniques, activities, and ideas. Veteran teachers, who have been in the classroom many years, may not have that information. So, by mentoring novice teachers, they get the opportunity to stay current on the latest ideas for teaching.

A study, conducted by Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, and McLaughlin (1989) found mentors saw several benefits when they participated in their districts’ mentoring programs. As mentors were able to work with and talk to other educators, they gained knowledge about the profession that they wouldn’t have received otherwise. They also

found that the mentors in their study were able to reflect on their own practices. This allowed the mentors to make changes to practices that might not have been working, or further refine methods that had shown success. Finally, they found that mentors got to participate in the first year teacher's progress. This gave mentors the satisfaction of knowing they were helping another teacher grow, this in turn had a positive impact on how they felt about teaching.

A study conducted by Yost (2002) found that mentors who participated in the mentor program became more aware of their teaching and their students. Yost stated, "Looking at classroom learning through the eyes of another often resulted in new realizations about how teacher practice could directly affect learning" (p. 196). This can be very beneficial to mentors as they get a fresh perspective on the teaching and learning that is occurring in their own classroom and can make changes and improvements where they are needed.

Increasing Government Awareness of the Need for Teacher Mentoring.

Many states require that school districts provide first year teachers with some sort of induction phase, whether it is a full blown program or just a smaller version of it. Also, states that require mentoring or induction programs do not provide any resources for school districts to implement productive programs that stand a chance to be effective. Moir (2009) stated,

At last count more than thirty states require some sort of mentored induction experience for new teachers. While we're glad to see the attention paid to

induction, unfunded mandates that require that districts assign mentors new teachers without regard to program quality won't improve teacher programs set their sights to low and overlook opportunities to influence the next generation of their teachers. (p. 15)

For mentor programs to be beneficial to school districts and first year teachers, they must have funding to invest in the future of novice teachers.

The Texas Center for Educational Research estimated in 2000 that the attrition rate for teachers during their first three years of teaching would cost the state approximately \$329 million a year. They stated,

When teachers leave the profession or change school districts, additional expenses are incurred. The expense associated with teacher turnover represents a cost to public education beyond the typical expenses associated with operating schools. These turnover costs result in a loss of resources to the education system that could otherwise be used to improve the effectiveness of instruction. In addition, turnover has a human cost for teachers who have invested significant time and resources to become teachers. (p. 1)

It is essential that those in the field of education research come to understand what novice teachers need, not only to aid their effectiveness and professional growth, but to also solve retention and financial problems.

Summary

In this chapter, research about the history of mentor programs, teacher shortages and attrition, items included in mentor programs, and first year teacher issues and concerns was included. This literature review also explored effective mentor qualities, the impact on novice teachers, the principals' role in the mentor program, benefits to principals, the impact on mentor teachers, and increasing government awareness of the need for teacher mentoring.

According to the literature, mentor programs require that all major stakeholders be involved in the mentoring process. Mentors are not the only point of contact a novice teacher has. Ideally, principals should have just as much impact on novice teachers as their mentors do.

As shown through existing literature there are many perceived benefits of implementing a successful mentor program at the district and/or campus level. There are some perceived benefits to all participants in the program including administrators, mentors, and novice teachers. The questions become, then, are mentor programs producing more confident, competent and successful teachers early on in their careers, and are mentor programs helping retain qualified and successful teachers?

In the next chapter, the rationale for the research design is described. In addition to this, the research methods used to collect data will be discussed. Finally, the methods that were used to analyze the data will be presented.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research design is described along with the research methods used to collect and analyze the data.

Rationale

In order to understand the ways in which new teacher mentor program influence the success and experience of novice (first year) teachers, a qualitative study using grounded theory methodology was used. According to Strauss and Corbin (1999), “Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273). Rather than collecting data and analyzing everything at one, data is analyzed and compared to other data continuously throughout the study.

In this study, I generated theory while doing social research. According to Glaser (1978) the two go hand in hand. Grounded theory involves “generating theory and doing social research as two parts of the same process” (p. 2). Because of this, I constantly generated theory as I conducted the research by using the constant comparison method. Charmaz (2005) stated, “Grounded theory is a comparative method in which the researcher compares data with data, data with categories and category with category” (p.

517). Through the use of a researcher's reflexive journal (my own field notes), interviews, and both novice teachers' reflexive journals, data was constantly collected and compared among various data sources to determine any common themes. Because it is important to constantly reevaluate the data and my own theory in this current study, grounded theory was a perfect fit.

This study was framed around three major research questions:

1. What are novice teachers' perceptions of the ways in which involvement in a mentoring program influenced their first year of teaching?
2. What are novice teachers' perceptions of the ways in which principals influence campus mentoring programs?
3. What are principals' perceptions of the ways in which mentoring programs influence the success of novice teachers?

The School District

This study occurred on two different campuses located in an urban school district, Barrington Independent School District, located within a city of approximately 200,000. The district serves approximately 29,000 students divided between 41 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, and four high schools. The ethnicity of the district, according to their website, is approximately 49.7% Hispanic, 35.4% Anglo/Other, and 14.9% African-American.

Barrington Independent School District has a very specific mentor program provided for teachers that are either new to the profession or new to the district. Tammy, the district's New Teacher Academy coordinator, stated that the program is designed to be a four year program; however, teachers may exit the program at any point they feel necessary. During the first year, new teachers are assigned a district level mentor. This mentor is often a curriculum coach or a demonstration teacher who is not a full-time classroom teacher. The first year teacher and his or her mentor all attend monthly meetings that consist of two components. Tammy explained that the meetings are broken into two parts:

During the first hour of the meeting, the group of district level mentors present information on 'hot topics' around the district like formative assessment, value added, Response to Intervention (RTI), etc. During the second hour, mentors split into groups with their first year teachers. This is an opportunity for teachers and mentors to talk about problems that might be occurring. It is also a time for mentors to answer any specific questions the first year teachers might have.

(Interview 1, p. 1)

Tammy also noted that mentors were assigned groups of ten to fifteen teachers based on grade level and subject. The size of each group varied based on how many new teachers were hired for that year. The second and third year of the program is designed the same way; however, meetings are not scheduled as frequently. The topics discussed are similar to those in the first year teachers' meetings. Because of this, the meetings serve as a

reminder to teachers of the best practices and offer the ability to discuss any problems they are having in the classroom.

Tammy, the district's New Teacher Academy coordinator, also stated that the purpose of the mentor program is to help teachers new to the profession that are struggling become successful teachers who stay in the profession long term. She noted, "The program is designed to help teachers that are struggling become successful long term teachers" (Interview 1, p. 1). While the programs main goal is to assist struggling teachers through their four years of teaching, the program also has a goal of assisting all teachers new the profession or district.

The program is also aimed at building a strong core of teacher leaders who can turn around and assist teachers new to the district. By the fourth year of the program, it is expected that teachers will have gained enough knowledge and practice that they can turn around and become mentors to other first year teachers in the district. Tammy stated,

It (the mentor program) is a four year program with the goal of building teacher leadership by the fourth year. We hope the current group of new teachers will be able to assist and train new teachers coming into the district later on in their careers. (Interview 1, p. 1)

While the ultimate goal of the mentor program is train new teachers to be successful in their classrooms, the program also has a goal of training teacher leaders who will be able to assist new teachers in the future.

The Barrington Independent School District has a blueprint for the mentor program and the plan for teachers each year they participate. This blueprint highlights the

specific topics and activities that teachers participate in a particular year of the program.

Topics and activities discussed include: organization, classroom management, instruction, assessment, value added data, response to intervention (RTI), professional learning communities, communication, professional growth, becoming a teacher leader, and serving as a mentor. Each year teachers have their own prescribed plan of topics that will be discussed, and this varies year to year for teachers. For example, a teacher in their first, second and third years of the program will discuss classroom; however, only teachers in their fourth year serve as mentors. Figure 1, below, shows the district’s blueprint for the mentor program.

Figure 1: New Teacher Academy Scope and Sequence

| | First Year <i>Introduction</i> | Second Year <i>Practical Application</i> | Third Year <i>Advanced Implementation</i> | Fourth Year <i>Leadership</i> | New to the District |
|---|--|--|---|---|----------------------------|
| Organization <i>Classroom Set Up</i> | X | X | X | | |
| Classroom Management <i>PBIS and CHAMPS</i> | X | X | X | | X |
| Instruction <i>C-SCOPE/Content Knowledge/TEKS/Planning Instruction/Best Practices</i> | X | X | X | | X |
| Assessment | X | X | X | | X |

| | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <i>Formative/Summative</i> | | | | | |
| Value Added Data <i>Progress vs. Achievement Interpreting Data</i> | X | X | X | | X |
| RTI <i>Remediation and Intervention</i> | X | X | X | | X |
| Professional Learning Communities <i>Department/Campus collaboration to improve student performance</i> | X | X | X | | X |
| Communication <i>Campus/District Levels Parents/Students</i> | X | X | X | | |
| Professional Growth <i>Exposure to new strategies</i> | | | | X | X |
| Becoming a Teacher Leader <i>Committee Work and Capacity Building</i> | | | X | X | X |
| Serving as a Mentor <i>New Teachers become leaders by serving as mentors</i> | | | | X | |

Through this program The Barrington Independent School District has a very specific mentoring program that provides support to novice teachers in years one through four of their teaching career. The district's mentor program follows the instructional practice model, as it provides teachers with an induction to the district, a mentor, and professional learning opportunities.

Setting

The first school, Ashville Elementary, is centrally located within the city and is a pre-k through fifth grade campus, which is perceived to be a low socio-economic, Title I campus. Ashville serves approximately four hundred students and has a faculty and support staff of approximately sixty people. The student ethnicity for the school is approximately seventy percent Hispanic, nineteen percent African-American, and eleven percent Anglo-Americans. At this school, ninety five percent of the student population receives free or reduced lunches. I am a third grade teacher at this campus; therefore, I had full access to the site, the first year teacher, and the administrator.

The second campus, Fullbright Elementary, is located in the southwest region of the city and is a pre-K through fifth grade campus, which is perceived to be a middle to high socio-economic campus. Fullbright serves approximately seven hundred students and has approximately eighty faculty and support staff members. The student ethnicity for the school is approximately seventy five percent Anglo-Americans, twenty percent Hispanic, and five percent other. Here, approximately thirty percent of the student

population receives free or reduced lunches. Because I am not a faculty member on this campus, my access was limited to after school hours.

Study Participants

As a teacher in the Barrington Independent School District, I had access to several campuses throughout the district. At the beginning of the school year, I spoke with several principals about staffing. I found a few principals who had hired a first year teacher. After acquiring this information I spoke with the administrators, the first year teachers, and their mentors about their willingness to be involved in the study. I chose two novice teachers based on the fact that they were first year teachers and because of their willingness to participate in this study. This is referred to as purposeful sampling. According to Stake (2003), “For qualitative fieldwork, we draw a purposive sample, building in a variety and acknowledging opportunities for intensive study” (p. 451). After choosing the participants, I had further discussions with them about the study, the purpose of the study, and what would be involved as a participant in the study. After several communications, I obtained permission from all participants. I also gained permission from the Barrington Independent School District by submitting a proposal.

First Year Classroom Teachers

The key participants include two first year teachers. The first participant, Amelia, teaches third-grade math and science at Ashville Elementary. She is 23 years old, and grew up in a small town with a population of less than 10,000. She became a teacher because her parents were both educators in the school district in which she grew up.

Because education was all she knew growing up, she felt becoming an educator was an appropriate step for her take.

Prior to accepting the position at Ashville Elementary, Amelia did a long term substitute position at another local elementary school and also taught intervention (as a substitute) for another year. In order to provide a purposive sample, Amelia was chosen because while she has some teaching experiences in the school district, she has yet to be in charge of her own classroom. It is also important to note that Amelia is a very timid person who mostly keeps to herself. She is a people pleaser and does not like to cause any problems. She is also not a risk taker.

The second key participant, Shonda, teaches-fifth grade English Language Arts/Reading and social studies at Fullbright Elementary. Shonda is 24, and grew up in a large metropolitan city. She became a teacher because she came from a long line of educators. She felt like it was necessary to follow in their footsteps. Prior to accepting the position at Fullbright, Shonda had no other educational experiences other than her student teaching which she did in the same district where she is now currently employed. In order to provide a purposive sample, Shonda, like Amelia, was chosen to be a part of this study because of her limited teaching experiences. It is also important to note that Shonda tends to keep to herself. While she doesn't appear to mind interacting with the other teachers around her, she keeps her thoughts to herself. She also does not always ask questions when she needs help.

In addition to both first year teachers that participated in the study, there were also two administrators and one mentor. The first principal, Alexis, is the principal at Ashville

Elementary. This was Alexis' first year as an administrator and her first year on this particular campus. Prior to becoming a principal, Alexis was a first year teacher, a reading coach and an assistant principal, all within the Barrington Independent School District.

The second principal, Ann, is the principal at Fullbright Elementary. She has been a principal for eight years. Prior to becoming a principal, Ann was a fourth and fifth grade teacher and an assistant principal, all within the Barrington Independent School District.

Also at Fullbright is Shonda's mentor, Johanna. Johanna has been teaching in the Barrington Independent School District for 25 years. She has taught in several grade levels and content areas; however, she has been teaching fifth grade math for the past five years.

Amelia, the novice teacher at Ashville, was assigned a mentor from the district. Her mentor was a demonstration teacher who specialized in curriculum and had an office at central office. At the end of the first semester, Amelia's mentor retired. While Amelia was assigned a new mentor for the purpose of the program, she was not involved with Amelia and did not participate in this study.

Both first year teachers followed a different mentoring program, and they experienced different changes throughout the course of the year. To better understand the journey each first year teacher took during their first year, a timeline is provided to show specific events throughout the course of their first year. Figure 2, below, shows this

timeline and begins from the beginning of their first year and goes half way through their second year of teaching.

Figure 2: First Year Teacher Timeline

| Amelia- First year teacher at Ashville | | Shonda- First year teacher at Fullbright | |
|---|---|---|---|
| August 11-13, 2010 | New Teacher Induction- Received a mentor from the district | August 17, 2010 | Received a mentor from her principal |
| September, 2010 | Initially approached by the researcher about the study | September 2010 | Initially approached by the researcher about the study |
| September 2, 2010 | Attended the New Teacher Academy meeting (hosted by the district) | December, 2010 | Researcher checked in made sure everything was going okay and gave an update on the progress of the study |
| October 7, 2010 | Attended the New Teacher Academy meeting (hosted by the district) | February 7, 2011 | Informal meeting with researcher, signed consent form to be included in the study |
| November 4, 2010 | Attended the New Teacher Academy meeting (hosted by the district) | February 24, 2011 | Initial Interview with the researcher |
| December, 2010 | Researcher checked in made sure everything was going okay and gave an update on the progress of the study | May 20, 2011 | Collected first year teacher journal |
| December 2, 2010 | Attended the New Teacher Academy meeting (hosted by | Throughout the entire 2010-2011 school year | Met with mentor (who had a classroom next door to her) on a |

| | | | |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| | the district) | | regular basis |
| January 6, 2011 | Attended the New Teacher Academy meeting (hosted by the district) | | August 22, 2011 First day of second year of teaching |
| January, 2011 | Mentor retired | | September 13, 2012 Follow-up interview with the Researcher |
| February 3, 2011 | Attended the New Teacher Academy meeting (hosted by the district) | | January 2012 Resigned from her position as a teacher |
| February 6, 2011 | Informal meeting with researcher, signed consent form to be included in the study | | |
| February 23, 2011 | Initial Interview with researcher | | |
| March, 2011 | District assigned a new mentor | | |
| March 3, 2011 | Attended the New Teacher Academy meeting (hosted by the district) | | |
| May 20, 2011 | Collected first year teacher journal | | |
| August 22, 2011 | First day of second year of teaching | | |
| September 12, 2011 | Follow-up interview with the Researcher | | |
| January 2012 | Resigned from her position as a teacher | | |

Data collection Methods

Data collected for this study included: Researcher’s reflexive journal, the first year teachers’ journal, interviews with both first year teachers, mentor teacher, and administrator, and emails between the researcher and the first year teachers and the

administrators. I triangulated these data sources as a means of arriving at my interpretations of the data.

Researcher's Reflexive Journal

The reflexive journal was used to record my tentative findings and thoughts throughout the data collection process. It was also used to record any ideas, feelings, observations, and any other field notes that I had when I met with teachers, mentors, administrators, or anyone else that was involved in the mentoring program throughout the district. I also used the reflexive journal to make connections between my observations and the literature that is available on the teacher mentor program. By doing this throughout the study, I was able to keep track of what was occurring within my study and compare it to literature that was already available.

First Year Teacher Journal

At the beginning of the study, both first year teachers were asked to keep an open ended reflexive journal where they discussed their feelings, concerns, and successes regarding their experiences as a first year classroom teacher. It was also a place for them to reflect on meetings with their mentors and their monthly first year teacher mentor meetings at the district level. When asked to keep a record of their thoughts in a journal format, there were no limitations on what they could write about or how often they needed to write. The first year teachers were also not given any prompts to guide their entries. This journal provided me with more information at times when I was not available to ask questions.

Interviews

Individual interviews with the first year teacher, the mentor teacher and the administrators were conducted at the beginning of the study in February and at the end of the study in September. The final interview that was conducted in September took place at the beginning of the teacher's second year. All interviews lasted thirty to forty five minutes, and they took place in the participant's classroom or office.

First Year Teacher Interviews

Interviews with the first year teachers were set up at the convenience of the teacher at the beginning of the study in February. Interviews were conducted at the teachers' school and in her classroom. Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes. During this interview, each teacher was asked a set list of questions (See Appendix B and E). These questions were initially developed to start a conversation with the novice teacher and make them feel more comfortable in the interview. The interview questions for both interviews were also developed around the research questions for this study. During the interview, other questions were formed as teachers mentioned something or if something needed further explanation. I recorded the interviews so that they could be transcribed for further use. In addition to the recording, I wrote notes in my journal about their responses. This helped guide any additional questions that I had in order to gather more information from the first year teachers.

Mentor Teacher Interviews

After meeting with the first year teachers, I met with Johanna. Johanna was Shonda's mentor teacher. I met at her school and conducted the interview in her

classroom. The interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. During this interview Johanna was asked a set list of questions (See Appendix C). These questions were developed around the research questions for this study. The initial questions for the mentor were also developed with idea of getting to know the mentor better in terms of her role in the school district as an employee and her role in the mentoring program. During the interview, other questions were formed as Johanna mentioned something or if something needed further explanation. I recorded the interview so that it could be transcribed for further use. In addition to the recording, I wrote notes in my journal about her responses. This helped guide any additional questions that I had in order to gather more information from the perspective of the mentor.

Amelia was assigned a mentor from the district, but she retired in the middle of the school year. Because of this, she was not used for the purposes of this study. Amelia was later assigned another mentor teacher from the district; however, she was only a name on a paper, and not Amelia's true mentor. Because of this, she did not participate in this study either.

Administrator Interviews

The final interview I conducted was with the administrators on each campus involved in the study. Each interview was conducted at each administrator's campus in their office. Both interviews lasted approximately forty five minutes each. During this interview both administrators were asked a set list of questions (See Appendix D and F). The interview questions for both interviews were developed around the research questions for this study. The initial questions for the administrators were also developed

with idea of getting to know each administrator better in terms of her role as an administrator and what involvement they had in the mentoring program. I recorded each interview so that it could be transcribed for further use. In addition to the recording, I wrote notes in my journal about their responses. Because both administrators answered each question with such breadth and depth, additional questions were not asked.

Data Analysis

Review of Initial Interviews

My first step was to transcribe and examine the initial interviews from all study participants including: two administrators, two first year teachers, and one teacher mentor. In order to organize all of the information I gathered, I created a table using chart paper (see Appendix G). I divided the chart paper into three sections: first year teacher, mentor teacher, administrators. I also color coded each section: first year teacher- pink; mentor teacher: purple; Administrators- orange. I used a color coding method for my chart to keep information organized and easier to read and to aid in locating specific information. I then reviewed each interview and wrote on the chart big themes, concepts, or ideas that came out of each specific interview under each corresponding category. I put reference marks on the chart so I could easily correlate it back to the interview.

Once all of the data was collected and transcribed on the chart, I was able to identify themes. I wrote codes next to each idea for the theme it correlated it with. The codes used include: I/F- principal involvement and feedback; PC- parent connection; PI- program inconsistency; B- teacher benefits; MB- mentor benefits; CB-campus based

mentor; R- retention; TC- teacher concerns; and MT- what was discussed between the mentor and the novice teacher. Next, I took the common themes and placed them on their corresponding colored note card that correlated with their theme.

Review of Reflexive Journal

After reviewing the initial interviews, I reread my reflexive journal that I had kept during the study. In this journal, I had recorded notes about the first year teachers, their feelings towards teaching, their mentor, and the mentoring program. I also recorded interactions between mentors and first year teachers, as well as administrators and first year teachers. As I reread my notes, I started to formulate a list of themes. I placed the themes on different colored note cards (each theme received its own specific color). After I created note cards for each emerging theme, I reread my notes again and pulled out specific information, quotes, etc and placed them on a colored note card that corresponded with the perspective theme.

Review of First Year Teacher Journal

After reviewing my own notes, I reviewed the thoughts and notes of my two first year teachers that they scribed for me in their own reflexive journal. I used the constant comparison model while reading through their journals. I compared their thoughts to the information I wrote in my own journal. From this, I added themes that emerged onto more colored note cards. After adding additional themes, I reread through both journals and pulled out specific quotes that went along with the themes that I had extracted. I then placed those quotes on the corresponding colored note card.

Review of Follow-up Interviews

Once I reviewed all of my initial interview transcripts, compared and coded themes, I looked at my follow up interviews with both the first year teachers and the administrators. In order to organize all of the information from the follow-up interviews, I used the same chart that I used for the initial interviews. I reviewed each interview and pulled out big themes, concepts, or ideas that came out of each specific interview and placed them under each corresponding category. Again, I coded each idea according to the themes and placed them on their corresponding colored note card.

Triangulation of Themes

Throughout the study, I used the constant comparison method. When I obtained new information from my sources of data (new teacher journal, researcher's reflexive journal, initial interviews, and follow-up interview), I compared it to the other sources of data that I had previously acquired. This allowed me to discover themes among the data. As I discovered these themes, I made note cards and color coded the themes. By constantly analyzing the data as it was collected, I was able to guide my data collection experiences based on information that had already been obtained.

Throughout this study, I have created an audit trail that consists of raw data, analysis of products (coded and categorized data), and both the researcher's reflexive journal and the first year teacher's reflexive journals. As I acquired information, I analyzed the data and compared it with other data that had previously been coded using colored note cards. I would then code the new information by placing appropriate quotes

or pieces of information on the specific colored note card that for the theme it corresponded with. After the data was coded, it was placed in either my reflexive journal (if it was not already there) or in my mentor teacher study research binder. In addition to saving all of my data and findings, I have described step by step the process I have taken to collect and code data.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the rationale for the research design and described the methods that were used to collect and analyze data. The purpose of collecting data for this study was to understand the ways in which a new teacher mentor program influences the success and experience of novice (first year) teachers. The resources used for obtaining data included interviews, researcher's reflexive journal, and the first year teacher's journal. Through the use of the constant comparison method, I was able to analyze data and identify common themes that emerged. In the next chapter, the findings are discussed.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to understand how mentoring programs informed the experiences of two first year teachers, in terms of their self-perceptions regarding how they teach, what they teach, and how they experience their profession. The qualitative design of this study allowed me to analyze each teacher's professed thoughts and feelings through my analysis of their reflexive journals, my own reflexive journal, my field notes and my interview transcripts. In order to gain a more trustworthy perspective of the possible ways, in which the two teacher participants were impacted (or not) by their involvement with their district's mentoring, a mentor teacher and two campus administrators were also interviewed regarding their perceptions of their district mentoring programs' designs and possible effectiveness. Through an analysis of conceptual categories derived from data and the triangulation of those findings, five themes emerged: 1) Beliefs and understandings regarding what district mentorship programs required and offered were inconsistent; 2) Benefits for both first year teachers and the mentor were evident; 3) The amount of principal involvement with the mentor program and the novice teachers on each campus; 4) The idea of having a campus based classroom teacher as the mentor; and 5) The impact on teacher retention. However, before examining these five thematic findings, it is important to provide background information about the two settings and the participants involved in my study.

The key participants include two first year teachers. The first participant, Amelia, teaches third-grade math and science at Ashville Elementary. She is 23 years old, and grew up in a small town with a population of less than 10,000. She became a teacher because her parents were both educators in the school district in which she grew up. Because education was all she knew growing up, she felt becoming an educator was an appropriate step for her take.

Prior to accepting the position at Ashville Elementary, Amelia did a long term substitute position at another local elementary school and also taught intervention (as a substitute) for another year. In order to provide a purposive sample, Amelia was chosen because while she has some teaching experiences in the school district, she has yet to be in charge of her own classroom. It is also important to note that Amelia is a very timid person who mostly keeps to herself. She is a people pleaser and does not like to cause any problems. She is also not a risk taker.

The principal at Ashville is Alexis. This is Alexis' first year as an administrator and her first year on this particular campus. Prior to becoming a principal, Alexis was a first grade teacher, a reading coach and an assistant principal, all within the Barrington Independent School District. Alexis has had previous involvement in the mentor program prior to becoming an administrator. She was a mentor teacher and was very involved in the development of the program, the professional development piece that went with the mentor program, and with new teachers who entered the profession.

The second key participant, Shonda, teaches-fifth grade English Language Arts/Reading and social studies at Fullbright Elementary. Shonda is 24, and grew up in a large

metropolitan city. She became a teacher because she came from a long line of educators. She felt like it was necessary to follow in their footsteps. Prior to accepting the position at Fullbright, Shonda had no other educational experiences other than her student teaching which she did in the same district where she is now currently employed. In order to provide a purposive sample, Shonda, like Amelia, was chosen to be a part of this study because of her limited teaching experiences. It is also important to note that Shonda tends to keep to herself. While she doesn't appear to mind interacting with the other teachers around her, she keeps her thoughts to herself. She also does not always ask questions when she needs help.

The principal at Fullbright is Ann. She has been a principal for eight years. Prior to becoming a principal, Ann was a fourth and fifth grade teacher and assistant principal, all within the Barrington Independent School District. Ann does not have any previous involvement in the mentor program as a teacher mentor.

Also, at Fullbright is Shonda's mentor. Johanna has been teaching in the Barrington Independent School District for twenty-five years. She has taught in several grade levels and content areas; however, she has been teaching fifth grade math for the past five years.

Program Inconsistency

One of the themes maintained throughout this study was that among Alexis, Ann, Johanna, Shonda, and Amelia, the beliefs about what constituted district mentoring programs were inconsistent. Despite the fact that the Barrington Independent School

District had a specific mentor program, both of the teachers I studied, professionals who had supposedly been a part of the same program, reported very different opportunities and experienced very different programs.

Both Amelia and Shonda participated in the mentor program, but neither had the same experience as what Tammy, the New Teacher Academy coordinator, described. Inconsistencies are best seen by looking at the contradictory reports of the two first year teachers, the two principals, the mentor, and the program coordinator.

Shonda's descriptions of her experiences at Fullbright Elementary depicted a mentoring program drastically different from that of the district program described by Tammy, the district's mentor program coordinator. Shonda, a first year fifth grade social studies teacher, stated that she received a mentor that was on her grade level. There were no specific guidelines for what they would do together and they only meet when Shonda initiated it, unless it was a team meeting. She also stated that she was unaware of a district level program and did not know district level meetings were held specifically for first year teachers. Shonda stated,

I have a mentor who is on the same team as me. I meet whenever I need something. I was not aware that the district had a mentor program until recently, and I have not been invited to nor have I attended any meetings hosted by the district. (Field notes, p. 11)

Because Shonda was not aware of the district sponsored mentor program, she was not able to attend any of the meetings that were presented by the district and she did not have a mentor from the district either.

During a discussion with Tammy, the district's New Teacher Academy coordinator, she was unsure how Shonda did not receive a mentor from the district level. She was also unsure how Shonda did not know about the monthly meetings. As Tammy explained,

We constantly check our names with payroll and human resources to make sure we have every new teacher in the district. I send them reminder emails every month. I also email their principals to let them know they are not attending. Hopefully, the principal can remind them and encourage them to attend the meetings. (Field notes, p. 89-90)

Based upon Tammy's explanation, there were only two possible explanations for this apparent miscommunication with Shonda. Either she was left off the new teacher list that had been generated, or Shonda didn't realize it was a requirement to attend the meetings. However, it is also possible that Shonda did not attend because she didn't realize or understand the purpose of the meetings.

An experienced teacher with in the Barrington Independent School District, Johanna, Shonda's mentor, was also asked about the mentor program on her campus (Fullbright) and her role in the program. While initially willing to act as a mentor, she expressed confusion regarding the parameters of her role. Johanna explained,

I was asked a couple weeks after school started if I would be a mentor for Shonda. When I asked what all that involved, I wasn't really given a straight answer: Meet with her during PLC's (Professional Learning Communities) with the rest of the team, answer questions if she came to me, stuff like that. It didn't

seem like a big deal so I said I would. But I am not sure what I am supposed to do or how to provide support for Shonda. When I ask her if she needs anything, she says she is fine. Some training or support from my principal would be nice. (Field notes, p. 3)

Due to a lack of training and her administrator not providing any information to her, Johanna did not fully understand what it meant to be a mentor or how to help Shonda.

Inconsistent perceptions of what the district program entailed was again evident when the principal at Fullbright described a program different from that of both the mentor and the first year teacher. Ann stated,

We do have a teacher induction at the beginning of the year; it's above and beyond what a new teacher would have coming to our district. It is just for first year teachers. I have not been to the first year teacher induction so I cannot give you a whole lot of details on that, but from what I understand they do focus on the content area as well as classroom management strategies. It is curriculum focused. They go through the ins and outs of how to access it, who to ask if you need anything, and who people are within the district. (Interview 2, P. 1)

Ann is able to describe the new teacher induction program that occurs prior to the beginning of the school year, but mistakes this part of the mentor program for the entire mentor program.

The induction program to which Ann referred to is the three day academy all teachers new to the profession and new to the district are required to attend at the beginning of the year, prior to teachers reporting back to duty. While this is a part of the

mentor program within the district, it is designed to be only one component of what is offered for first year teachers.

The experiences of new teachers at Ashville Elementary demonstrated that an unrecognized “disconnect” existed between novice teachers’ actual professional needs and the ways in which mentor teachers were assigned to support novice teachers. For example, Amelia stated that she was assigned a mentor from the district, the third grade demonstration teacher, who had an office at central office. She was not a classroom teacher, and her primary function in the district was to deal with curriculum issues and assist teachers in implementing the curriculum.

Amelia discussed the mentor program on her campus and stated that she did not have a mentor assigned to her at her at the campus level. While she received support from her team, she did not have a specific support person there to assist her. Amelia explained, “I feel like my team supported me in the role a mentor would even though it wasn’t their official title. They were who I always went to when I needed something. I didn’t call my official mentor” (Interview 1, p. 2). Because her mentor was not an instant point of contact, Amelia frequently asked her team member’s questions or asked for advice. This point implies that she would have utilized her mentor more had they been a campus based teacher or employee.

Inconsistencies within the mentoring programs also appeared to be generated by the reality that individual school administrators were uncertain of what district mentoring programs are currently required to provide. Alexis, the principal at Ashville, seemed unsure about what the current mentor program at the district level included. In previous

years, she was very involved in the mentor program, but when the program started to dismantle, her involvement with the program slowly dissipated. When the program started forming again, her involvement with the program did not continue. Alexis stated,

I can really talk about what's been done in the past. I've been a part of it where we have a group of teachers assigned to a mentor. Like when I taught first grade and I was a mentor to a group of teachers. We met often throughout the year, like once a month. There's not been much going on this year, I don't think. I know this year they are trying to do something similar. I don't know how often they are going to meet, like every six weeks. I am not exactly sure how often they are meeting. (Interview 1, p. 1)

Alexis' knowledge of and involvement in the district's mentoring plan was according to her "non-existent." Therefore, she did not act as an information resource for her classroom teachers. She felt it was definitely going to be a priority going forward, but at the moment she did not have anything in place for new teachers.

One reason that inconsistencies were prevalent among the participants in my study, was likely because the mentoring program is a new program and still somewhat in flux. During this study, the program was only in its second year for elementary campuses, and in its first year for secondary campuses. Tammy, the district's New Teacher Academy director, stated she and her staff were working to resolve issues that were being found and making changes to the program constantly, so that it could be effective for new teachers, especially for those that are truly struggling (field notes, p. 87). Because the

program was so new and changes were being made on a regular basis, not all stakeholders were aware of the components of the New Teacher Academy.

Benefits for First Year Teachers and Mentor Teachers

Another theme within my findings was that involvement with district mentoring programs can provide important benefits to novice teachers, their mentors and to campus administrators. In fact, all of my participants reported this perception and were able to provide specific examples of how their mentoring experiences were helpful.

First Year Teacher Benefits

The novice teachers that I studied stated that they experienced professional benefits from their involvement with the mentoring program. In spite of the confusion and inconsistencies they reported, the novice teachers managed to gain both affective support and professional guidance from their mentors.

Shonda reported that her transition to practice was eased by having a mentor. For example, Shonda stated that her mentor helped her with classroom management. “I think mostly with like classroom management. I see how she deals with her class and how the other teachers deal with their classes and I base mine (classroom management) on that” (Interview 1, p. 1). Shonda also stated that she felt that having a mentor helped reassure her that she wasn’t alone in dealing with school problems. This reassurance gave her the confidence to continue dealing with parents and discipline issues with students. Shonda stated “Just having reassurance that I’m not the first one that it is happened to, other people have had problems with classroom management, have dealt with parents, or had a

kid you couldn't get through to" (Interview 1, p. 1). Shonda added that without a mentor she would have been more confused and less confident in what she was doing. Shonda stated, "I would have been a lot more confused, I wouldn't have been near as confident. I wouldn't say I was extremely confident all year, but it did give quite a bit of confidence just knowing that if I didn't know what to do, I knew who to call" (Interview , p. 2). Because of the assistance provided by her mentor, Shonda had more confidence and was able to utilize some of the strategies and ideas she discussed with her mentor.

Another first year teacher, Amelia, noted that having a mentor benefited her as well. Her mentor was able to bring her many materials and resources to use in the classroom. In addition to this, her mentor helped plan with her and taught for a day in her classroom so that she could observe. Amelia noted,

My mentor provided a lot of materials and a lot of resources and things. She also helped me with lesson plans, and when I needed it, she was pretty good about getting to my school. She even came and taught for me for a day. (Interview 1, p. 1)

The help and resources that Amelia received helped her be more successful in her classroom. This gave her confidence which had an even larger effect on her as a teacher.

Principals also noted several benefits to first year teachers. One benefit that was found to be beneficial is the idea that new teachers who have a mentor have a built-in support system. They have someone they can always go to ask advice of or to vent problems. This support allowed teachers to feel better about what they are doing and also gave them confidence. Evidence of this can be seen when Alexis stated,

I think it's really good because it does give them a sounding board, and a shoulder to lean on. The support not only gives them somebody they can go to and say this happened in my class how would you handle it or this is how I handled it what do you think I should have done. A lot of times the mentor has gone through most of what they are going through and they can sympathize with them or give them ideas and get them on the path they need to go so I think it's very beneficial.

(Interview 1, p. 4)

It is important for novice teachers to have that extra support from someone who can listen to them, give them advice and just be there on a day to day basis.

The principal at Fullbright agreed that support is one of the most beneficial aspects of the program. She found that teachers constantly are wondering if they did something right or how they should handle certain situations. By having a mentor, they have someone they know they can go to, that is experienced, and will be able to help them. Evidence for this can be seen when Ann commented,

I think the most important aspect is the support that it is providing the new teachers, because I know there are a lot of things that pop up. You just have somebody there that you can go to and say, 'Oh my goodness this just happened' ... Should I have done this, should I not have done this, how would you handle it?

I just think the support and the expertise from that person helps. (Interview 1, p. 3)

Because questions arise frequently for first year teachers, they do not have to wonder or guess their way through their first year. They have, in most cases, an instant point of contact that they can go to for assistance when they have questions or need help.

First year teacher benefits were again evident when Johanna, a mentor, discussed several benefits she perceived Shonda, her mentee, had throughout the year. She thought it was important for first year teachers to realize that they are not alone in some of the problems they face. She felt that by working with a mentor, first year teachers can realize this much sooner in their career and be more successful because of it. This was evident when Johanna noted,

Well it always helps to know that other people have the same problems you do. I feel this is beneficial because the first year teacher does not feel alone in problems that they face on a day to day basis. This type of knowledge helps them be more successful when working through problems, which eventually helps them later on in their career. When the same problems arise, they will know what has worked in the past. (Interview 1, p. 4)

By having extra support, novice teachers get an extra boost that helps them be more successful at problem solving. This could potentially have a huge impact later in their career.

There are many perceived benefits to the first year teachers involved in this study which include: support from mentors, lesson modeling, gaining valuable materials and resources, as well as just knowing you are not alone in the day to day tasks and problems

a first year teacher faces. All of these benefits gave both first year teachers more confidence to face the daily tasks of being a teacher.

Mentor Benefits

In addition to finding several benefits to the first year teacher, I also found that there were several benefits to the mentors as well. In 2010, Hansen conducted a study on the benefits mentors receive by mentoring first year teachers. He reported,

By the second or third year of mentoring most mentors have worked with a variety of administrators and teachers and have led workshops or teacher learning communities. Such experiences bring mentors enough confidence to broaden their vision of what they can do personally to help improve teaching and learning at their schools. (p. 5)

Much like the participants in Hansen's study, Johanna, Shonda's mentor, reported several benefits she perceived to have by being a mentor. Johanna states that she learned a lot about technology through Shonda. She was able to take her new found knowledge and help create a PowerPoint for the end of year awards ceremony. Johanna stated, "She of course helped with technology. She was more adept than I am. She is helping me with our slideshow for the end of school recognition" (Interview 1, p. 3). Johanna also noted that an important aspect of mentoring a first year teacher is the feeling you get by helping another colleague who is in need of assistance. She felt that this really impacted her as teacher and the results were noticeable in her own classroom.

Ann, the principal at Fullbright, also believed that mentors who participate in the mentor program are the beneficiaries of rewards, also. For example, Ann thought mentors get fresh ideas from their protégés. Ann noted,

I definitely think it's a two way street. The mentor gains just as much as the person they are mentoring. You know brand new teachers are coming directly out of college. They are typically more adept at technology, and with things like SmartBoards, document cameras and things that maybe someone in the field for a long time hasn't had an opportunity to play with or experience. So I definitely think they bring something to the table. There are people who have been doing it for a while and don't know how to utilize this in their classroom or the best way to do it, whereas someone who has been using it in their classroom all along does.

(Interview 1, p. 2-3)

Novice teachers come into the profession with new strategies, ideas, and knowledge that a veteran teacher may not have. By working with a novice teacher, the veteran teacher gets exposure to new things they may not have had otherwise.

Alexis, principal at Ashville, has also seen many benefits to mentors through her own experience with the mentor program and as an administrator. She agreed that new teachers definitely bring in the knowledge of technology and are able to share that knowledge with their mentors and their colleagues. In addition to technology, Alexis stated that many new first year teachers bring a passion into the equation that might be lacking in a mentor teacher that has been teaching for many years. She also noted that

they have a lot of new ideas, strategies, etc. that they recently learned in college that they share with their mentors. As Alexis explained:

I think it kind of stretches them because sometimes even the mentors are the people being mentored. The new teachers come in with excitement and fire, and they come in with new ideas. A lot of times they can share those new ideas and bring back some of the excitement from whenever the mentors first started and remind teachers that are mentoring why they got into the profession. It just brings that passion back to teaching and the new ideas. (Interview 1, p. 4)

Again we see that novice teachers are able to mentor their mentors in ways that the mentors would not have thought could happen. This newly acquired knowledge and excitement can definitely be beneficial.

Mentors who participate in the mentor program appear to receive many notable benefits. Johanna gained new knowledge in terms of academic strategies, technology, and better attitude towards the profession. All of these things had a huge impact in her classroom; which in turn, had a positive impact on the students Johanna taught.

Campus-Based Classroom Teacher Mentors

Throughout the course of this study, it became apparent that both first year teachers and both principals felt it was more beneficial to the first year teacher if the mentor was a classroom teacher who taught at the same school as the first year teacher. While Shonda had a mentor who taught at the same school as she did, Amelia did not.

Amelia made it clear that she thought she would have gained more from the program if she had an instant point of contact.

With this in mind, there are several forms of mentor programs that districts use. According to Meckel et al. (2000) there are three models: Classroom teacher model, Full-Time release model, and variation model (part-time release and full-time teacher). Among these models, the classroom teacher model is the most common model in use. The mentoring program used in the Barrington Independent School District is the full time release model to provide new teachers support. The district provided all new teachers a mentor at the district level. Initially, new teachers did not receive a teacher mentor from their campus; however, they received a mentor from someone at Central Office. This mentor was most likely a demonstration teacher, but could have also included anyone involved with curriculum and professional development. Once teachers had this mentor, it was each campus's decision to assign the new teacher a mentor on their campus. In order to receive a mentor from the district, all new teachers had to attend a meeting at the beginning of the year. Shonda did not attend this meeting, so she did not receive a district level mentor, but her principal assigned her a campus-based teacher as her mentor. Amelia did attend this meeting and was assigned a district level mentor. Her principal did not assign her a campus-based mentor.

Amelia, who did not have a campus based mentor, spoke about her experiences with her mentor from the district. While she saw some benefits from her time with her mentor, she stated that she would have rather had a mentor on the campus that she could talk to, ask questions of, and get to implement ideas or suggestions quicker. Amelia

stated, “It would be beneficial because I would be able to actually implement whatever it was that I enjoyed or watched. It would also be easier in terms of sharing information, resources and to ask questions” (Interview 1, p. 3). Amelia noted that when she needed help or had a question she didn’t call her mentor; she asked someone in her grade level or on her campus. She did this because her mentor had an office in a building that was located several miles away from her school and she wanted an answer instantly. When she had a question for her mentor, she would have to email or call her mentor and wait hours and sometimes days for a response. The proximity of her mentor played a large role in their relationship and how often Amelia utilized her mentor.

Shonda had a mentor who had a classroom right next to her classroom. Because of this, Shonda and Johanna were able to talk every day. The proximity of her mentor helped Shonda get assistance at any point of the day when she needed. This had a huge impact on their relationship and the level of assistance she was able to receive.

Ann, principal at Fullbright Elementary, also felt that campus-based mentor teachers were also an important and necessary aspect of the mentoring program. She believed that making connections with the teachers around you is an integral part of the mentor program and provides huge benefit to first year teachers. Ann stated,

I also think it’s the friendships; having that connection with somebody else. If new people don’t come in and get connected, it’s not necessarily an easy profession. If you’re not connected to somebody, I think you probably tend to see people leave a lot quicker than they would have beforehand. (Interview 1, p. 3)

As noted, the connections novice teachers make with their mentors and the teachers around them can potentially have a large impact on their careers in terms of staying in the profession. When mentors are at another campus or at central office, it makes it difficult for novice teachers to make connections.

In addition to the importance of making connections between staff members, Ann thought it was also beneficial for first year teachers to have a point of contact at the campus level that they could talk with and to be able to ask questions without feeling intimidated. Ann stated,

I think that there are just a lot of maybe questions that aren't answered on curricular issues, even if they were theoretically answered before the school year starts. Once again, it's one of those things where they are listening, but they may not be internalizing everything because they get so much information that first week. To revisit some of those things I think would be good because until you're in there, have actually been teaching in the classroom, and you've had to write lesson plans or find your IFD or your assessment, you don't really know exactly what you need to know. (Interview 1, p. 6)

By having a mentor at the same campus, novice teachers not only have an instant point of contact but they have someone who is doing the same thing as them and is able help them. Novice teachers are usually more willing to talk to someone doing the same thing as them rather than someone who is not on their campus or who appears to me more of a supervisor from central office.

Ann also noted that it isn't always the support that teachers get from the district level that is helping first year teachers being successful, it is the campus-based support they get from the teachers that are around them. Ann noted,

I think probably if you ask most first year teachers it wasn't necessarily the district support that they got that was the biggest support. It was who taught next door to them, they ate lunch with, or who they became friends with within the building. I have one new teacher this year, who you are working with. She is a fifth grade teacher and they are departmentalized. The disadvantage to that is not having anybody on the same grade level that teaches the same content as she teaches. That does maybe limit them in the way they can help her; however, they can help with discipline, classroom management, newsletters that go home weekly, anything they do as a team they can certainly help her with. (Interview 1, p. 1-2)

As noted, it is often not the support from the district that most benefits novice teachers; it is the support from the teachers that are around them. Novice teachers may feel uncomfortable or unwilling to seek the help of a central office staff member for a number of reasons. Because of this, novice teachers benefit more from the teachers and or mentors that are around them.

Alexis, principal at Ashville, also agreed that campus based classroom teacher mentors are beneficial to first year teachers because they have an instant point of contact. In addition to this, new teachers would be more open to asking questions without feeling embarrassed. Alexis stated,

I think if you personalized and assigned mentors to smaller groups of teachers, they could meet in smaller groups. I think sometimes they may be embarrassed to ask questions or they may be overwhelmed. I think they are more likely to open up and share some of these things and have more heart to heart and honest discussions. (Interview 1, p. 5)

All too often, novice teachers are nervous or embarrassed to ask for help from their administrators, demonstration teacher, or curriculum leaders. By having a mentor that is a classroom teacher on their own campus, novice teachers may feel more comfortable opening up and being honest about what their needs are.

Alexis continued to talk about the changes she would like to see in the mentor program. She perceived the importance of having classroom based teacher mentors that were housed on the same campus as the first year teacher as being most beneficial change the district could make in having a successful mentor program. Alexis stated,

I would like to see it include more classroom teachers because to me that's giving them something that's real world Somebody that's there in the trenches right now, not someone who used to be in the trenches and is now at central office looking down. Maybe they will be more willing to ask questions. Right now they don't want to feel stupid. (Interview 1, p. 6)

She also added that she felt teachers just tell the mentors from central office what they want to hear. Despite the fact that many first year teachers struggle with one thing or another, they want to look like they understand what is going on and that they are doing a good job.

Principal Involvement

Administrators are a key component of the mentoring program. They provide support to not only the first year teachers, but the mentors as well, and their involvement in the program can make the program successful or it can make it mediocre. Despite this, neither principal had much involvement in the program.

The principal at Fullbright, Ann, did not have much involvement in the mentor program. Both Johanna and Shonda stated that Ann had indicated she was there if they had problems. They also stated that she supported them in terms of parent complaints or major issues that arouse; however, they stated that she was not regularly involved in the mentor program on the campus with either Johanna or Shonda.

Ann also did not provide support to the Johanna in terms of getting her training, or informing her of what she needed to do in her new role as a mentor. During an informal meeting with Johanna, she stated at times, she didn't know how to provide support for Shonda or what she needed to do in terms of going about being a mentor, nor was her role made clear by Ann her principal. Evidence of Johanna's perplexity was evident when she confessed,

As far as my role as a mentor, I am not too sure what I am supposed to do or how to provide support for Shonda. When I ask her if she needs anything, she says she is fine. Some training or support from my principal would be nice. (Field notes, p. 3)

Johanna felt she needed more guidance from her Ann before she could fully help her mentor. At the beginning of the year, Johanna asked Ann, what she needed to do as a

mentor, but she did not receive much guidance (field notes, p. 3). This type of feedback and involvement from Ann could have potentially made a huge difference between the relationship between Johanna and Shonda and the type of support she was able to offer.

Shonda also noted that she did not receive much support from Ann; however, she stated that if she had questions, she felt comfortable going to her and most of the time her issues were resolved by going to Ann. Shonda explained,

She was there for me when I needed her and always understanding of my situations. She always had my back if I was having problems with parents or with a student. I would not say she was real involved in the mentor program, but she was there if I needed something. (Interview 2, p. 1)

Shonda continued to talk about how Ann did not have much influence on the success of her first year as a teacher. Shonda stated, “I don’t know that she had a huge impact on me as a first year teacher. While she supported me in terms of problems with parents, there was no actual support to help me be a better teacher” (Interview 2, p. 1). With this, it appears as if part Shonda’s dissatisfaction with Ann’s lack of involvement stemmed from the idea that she didn’t always pursue Ann when she needed help. While it is understandable that she may have felt intimidated by Ann or uncomfortable asking Ann for assistance, it is important to note Ann’s involvement level may have changed had Shonda asked for assistance or let Ann know she needed help.

Amelia, first year teacher at Ashville, also did not receive much support from her administrator. Alexis, Ashville principal, was also not very involved in the mentor

program. She did not attend any meetings between Amelia and her mentor, nor was she regularly involved in the mentor program on the campus. Amelia stated,

My principal was always available to answer any questions I may have had. She allowed me take a day off and go observe another third grade veteran teacher. She was supportive when I went to her with questions or problems, but she rarely came to me. (Interview 2, p. 1)

Amelia continued to talk about how Alexis did not have much influence on the success of her first year as a teacher. Amelia continued, “I do not think that her involvement had any real effect on my success. Occasionally, the advice she would give would be implemented successfully in the classroom, but this advice was rare” (Interview 2, p. 1). Again, we see that Amelia, like Shonda, rarely sought advice or asked for assistance from her administrator.

Evidence of a lack of principal involvement in the program showed that Amelia and Shonda’s principal had little to no impact on the success of their first year as a teacher. It also showed that a lack of principal involvement hindered one mentor from fully being able to help her first year teacher be and feel more successful in the classroom.

Feedback

In addition to principal involvement being an important aspect in the success of a mentor program, participants frequently discussed the importance of the feedback a principal provides to a first year teacher and how beneficial it’s to their success in the profession. What these participants shared is reminiscent of Hope (1999), who stated,

“Constructive feedback on the teaching and learning process unfolding in a new teacher’s classroom is also essential for their growth and development and their sense of efficacy” (p. 54). Throughout the course of this study both participants regularly talked about not receiving feedback from their principals. Both Amelia and Shonda felt that feedback was vital to their success as a first year teacher, but feedback was rarely given.

In Shonda’s journal, Shonda often wrote about her experience with feedback and wanting to know how she was doing as a teacher. Shonda wrote:

Today I received a walk through evaluation form. This form had some boxes checked and some boxes not checked. I had no idea what any of this meant. I wondered if it meant I was doing a good job or if it meant I was doing a poor job. I really wish my principal would meet with me and explain the form and her thoughts on what she saw in my classroom so I can make changes if I need to.

This type of feedback would help me grow as a teacher. (Journal Entry, p. 1)

Novice teachers often struggle to understand what their evaluations mean and what they need to do if specific feedback is not offered. As a result, Shonda had no idea what her evaluation meant to her as a teacher or for her classroom, and instead of asking, she disregarded it.

In addition to writing about how she wanted to know what her evaluations meant, she also expressed wanting some feedback in terms of how to deal with students. She wrote about that this type of feedback was also not provided to her. Shonda stated,

I spoke with my principal today about an issue that I was having with a student in my classroom. The student will not behave in my classroom. I am constantly

redirecting the student and he consistently continues to disrupt my classroom. My administrator told me to ask the other teachers on my team what they are doing with this student that was working. When I informed her that I had already talked to them and tried those things, she told me to talk to his teacher from last year. I went to her because I had talked to my team and needed help dealing with this student so that I wouldn't waste any more class time dealing with discipline problems. (Journal Entry, p. 4)

While Shonda didn't always approach Ann for help or assistance, it appeared when she did, she did not receive the help she thought she should get. This only made Shonda feel more upset about her performance and the help she received.

As the semester continues, you can sense a frustration in her writing as she continues to write about feedback. Shonda wrote,

I received another walk through evaluation form today. It just included a generic form with some boxes checked and some boxes not checked. There was no feedback on the form and none was provided by my principal in person or through email. It's hard to know what any of it means without her talking to me about it. It doesn't seem to be too important to my principal, so I'm not going to bother her about it. (Journal Entry, p. 5)

Shonda again reflects on her evaluations and not understanding what they mean. Because neither Ann nor Shonda approach each other about the topic, both parties leave it alone. As a result, Shonda misses out on a valuable learning experience.

Toward the end of Shonda's journal, she discussed her final evaluation and the feedback she received on it. Shonda wrote,

Today I had my summative evaluation conference with my principal. We went over my evaluation and each domain that I was scored in. I wasn't given any specific advice on how to improve in each domain. It was more here is how you did for the year: proficient, exceeds expectations, and below expectations. I had checks in each category. I want to improve as a teacher and I want the respect of my co-workers, but I don't know how to do that if no one will tell me how to improve. (Journal Entry, p. 6)

The summative evaluation conference, which occurs at the end of every year, allows each teacher to discuss their performance, progress, and areas they need to improve. This is a great opportunity for teachers, especially novice teachers, to get feedback from their administrator. During this meeting, Shonda did not receive any specific feedback that would help her make improvements. It appears that she knows she needs help and wants to improve, but she is not receiving the help she thinks she should be getting.

In addition to writing about feedback in her personal journal, she verbalized some of the same concerns, about feedback both from her mentor and her administrator. Shonda felt that one of the most important things that needed to be changed about the mentoring program is the feedback that beginning teachers receive. Evidence for this can be seen when Shonda commented,

I don't know if it is the mentor's job or the administrator's job, but I would change the feedback aspect of the program, in terms of how as a first year teacher

you are doing and what needs to be done. I guess maybe some tough love would be helpful. (Interview 1, p. 3)

Shonda also stated that she believed receiving more feedback would give teachers more confidence early on in their careers. She also felt it was important to know how your mentor and administrator felt, in terms of how you are doing throughout the year. She believed that this would also help first year teachers feel more confident in what they were doing. This confidence would, in turn, produce better teaching and better performance in other teacher duties outside of the classroom. Shonda stated,

I think it would give confidence earlier in the year. If the mentor or the principal doesn't want you sitting at your desk and they tell you that specifically, then it wouldn't be something you think is okay to do. If you haven't been told, then you're probably going to keep doing it. I just think this would give first year teachers confidence earlier in the year, knowing how your mentor or your principal felt about you. I think as a first year teacher, you question all year how you are doing. Having more specific feedback would help this. (Interview 1, p. 3)

When teachers enter the profession, there is a whole set of skills and knowledge that are unknown to them. During their first year, mentors, fellow teachers, and administrators usually help novice teachers learn the ins and the outs of the profession; however, if feedback and professional learning do not occur, novice teachers are left wondering what the expectations are and what needs to be done. In Shonda's case, she knew she needed help, but she never asked for it and no one came to offer it to her. As a result, she felt as if she was unsuccessful towards the end of her first year.

At the beginning of Shonda's second year of teaching, she reflected on her first year. Shonda felt that having specific feedback last year would have helped her make changes earlier in her career. Because she didn't have that feedback, she felt its lack slowed her down and prevented her from making necessary changes. Evidence of this can be seen when Shonda stated,

Looking back now, I realize I was not doing as great as I thought I was. I just did not know anything different. I thought all classes acted that way and I let them get away with a lot more than I should have. I also was not very good at grading. I didn't really consider what I was grading. I just graded something to say I had a certain number of grades. I realize now how you really need to be careful about what you choose to put in the grade book. By having feedback from my principal or my mentor, I think I would have been able to make some of those changes last year, instead of figuring it out on my own this year. (Interview 2, p. 1)

While Shonda understood that she was struggling, she didn't fully comprehend what changes needed to be made or how to make those changes. After having time to reflect, she knew some changes that needed to be made; however, she felt this would have occurred much sooner had she had feedback and support from her administrator and/or mentor.

It is important to note that while Shonda described frustration about not receiving any feedback from her administrator, she rarely sought out this feedback or assistance. Shonda was at times confused by what her evaluations meant to her, but she didn't go ask what they meant or what she could do to improve. It appears that she felt it was the

administrators' sole responsibility to provide constant feedback to her, and when that didn't occur, she gave up caring. This idea definitely played a role in her interactions with her principal and the frustration she experienced throughout her first year.

Amelia also wrote about her frustration with not receiving feedback from her administrator and the impact this had on her professionally. Often times, she would go to her principal to ask for help and was often times redirected to ask someone else. Amelia wrote,

As it gets closer to the TAKS test, I am trying to get together my modifications and accommodations for my special ed students. I have been struggling with this all year, and wanted to make sure that I had everything in order so that my students would have access to everything they needed to use on the day of the Math TAKS. When I asked my principal a question regarding this she sent me to the special education teacher. This would have been great but she was absent today, and I was really hoping to get everything done today. (Journal Entry, p. 3)

While sending Amelia to another teacher or professional within the building was an easy fix for the administrator, it only served to frustrate Amelia even more than she already was. This frustration put a strain on how she felt about how she was doing as a first year teacher, and how she felt about the profession in general.

In addition, to seeing this frustration through her journal, you could also hear it in her interviews. At one point, Amelia discussed what changes needed to occur in order to make the mentor program more successful from her viewpoint. She stated that it would be helpful to receive more feedback from the administrator. Amelia continued to write, "I

also think it would have been beneficial to receive feedback from my principal about how I was doing in the classroom, and what specific ways I could improve what I wasn't doing so great with" (Interview 1, p. 3). She also expressed this same sentiment as she reflected on her experience, at the beginning of her second year of teaching, and added that she at times was very discouraged because she didn't have anyone helping her to become a better teacher. Amelia stated,

I am by nature a people pleaser, so if any advice was given I tried my best to successfully implement it. However, no feedback was given on a regular basis, so day to day I do not feel that it influenced my classroom. I did not feel confident in the job I was doing and I often felt very frustrated that I had no guidance.

(Interview 2, p. 1)

Amelia did not feel confident in her teaching ability and really needed assistance. When she asked her principal, sometimes she received feedback, but often she was referred to someone else. Instead of letting the principal know she had already spoken with that person, her timidity got in the way and she dropped the issue. This caused a huge amount of frustration for Amelia, and it left her feeling unsuccessful and unfit to be a teacher.

When both principals were asked about providing novice teachers with feedback they both felt it was important, but took a different stance on it. Ann, principal at Fullbright Elementary, discussed feedback in terms of mentors providing first year teachers feedback through observations that they might be able to do. She thought this was very difficult to achieve however due to time restraints and budget. Ann stated, "New teachers need regular feedback about their instruction. Unfortunately, most

mentors are current classroom teachers and observing and providing feedback would require them to miss instructional time as well” (Interview 2, p. 1). Ann continued to discuss the important role the university plays in developing new teacher skills and believes that universities are looking at changing the length of student teaching from one semester to one year. She felt that this would provide novice teachers the feedback they need so that they will be better prepared during their first year.

Alexis also agreed that feedback is a very important aspect of the mentoring program and was essential for all teachers, especially first year teachers; however, she felt that sometimes new teachers were unwilling to listen to the feedback they were getting. Alexis commented,

I think feedback is very important. The key is how new teachers respond to the feedback. Do they take the information and make adjustments, or ignore it and get the same results? They have to be willing to listen first. Sometimes new teachers come in with the ‘I already know everything attitude’ and it makes conversations very difficult because they are not willing to learn, grow, or try something new.

(Interview 2, p. 1)

When talking to her you could hear the frustration in her tone of voice, in regards to giving feedback to teachers. Alexis perceived that she was providing feedback to new teachers; however, she felt that teachers were not listening or not implementing the advice and feedback that she gave them. With this, it appears that the relationship between the principal and the novice teacher is very important. Because feedback is so

important to the novice teacher, it is critical that it not only be given to the teacher but received by the teacher as well.

It is clear that all participants believe feedback is crucial to the success of a first year teacher; however, their viewpoint on feedback given throughout the year is contradictory. Both first year teachers felt that they needed that feedback so they would not be so lost in their classrooms. They expressed feelings of frustration and confusion, and oftentimes sought the advice of the administrators, but felt like they rarely received it. Both administrators agreed that feedback was crucial to the success of the first year teacher, but also felt frustrated with feedback: one because she felt like it was the mentor's responsibility but they didn't have time, and the other because she felt like first year teachers didn't respond appropriately to feedback.

It also important to note that while administrators didn't always provide the feedback the first year teachers felt they needed, the first year teachers rarely sought out help from their principals either. There were several opportunities throughout the year, where both first year teachers could have asked for help but didn't. I think their personalities and their role of being a new teacher played into this. Both novice teachers really kept to themselves throughout the year. Amelia was very timid and often didn't ask questions as a result. Shonda, like Amelia, mostly kept to herself and rarely asked questioned when she needed help or was confused about her evaluations. These personality traits played a role in the lack of communication that occurred between both first year teachers and their administrators.

Teacher Retention

One reason many school districts have mentor programs in place to help first year teachers is to help them adjust to the day to day tasks of being a teacher. When teachers first enter the profession, they have preconceived expectations, and when those expectations aren't met, many new teachers leave the profession. Mentor programs are in place to help new teachers make the necessary adjustments so that they can feel successful in their profession. The hope is this will help with teacher attrition.

While reflecting on the program and the experiences she has had with teachers leaving, Alexis discussed why she believed many new teachers leave the profession early on in their careers. She credited not being fully informed of what being a teacher really means, in terms of what a teacher does, how many hours they work and how hard it is to sometimes control a full class of students. Alexis stated,

I believe most new teachers leave the profession because it was more work than they thought, they have trouble with classroom management and found out it truly is not an 8-3, Monday through Friday job. Teaching is a very hard profession and it takes a lot of time to plan prepare. If they did not have a strong supervising teacher, then they have not truly been prepared for the teaching profession.

(Interview 2, p. 1)

Alexis felt that many teachers who enter the profession are not prepared for what it means to be a teacher. During their first year, teachers are responsible for making their own plans, dealing with classroom management, attending meetings, communicating with parents and teachers, and a whole list of other duties. She felt many teachers

entering the profession were either not well equip to handle the duties of being a teacher or had an unrealistic picture of what teaching would be like.

Ann, principal at Fullbright also believed there were several factors that contribute to teachers leaving the profession early. She agreed with Alexis that many teachers are not prepared to be classroom teachers and/or do not have the full picture of what being a teacher actually involves. She also added that many teachers leave because of the pay in proportion to hours worked and actual responsibility. Ann stated,

I think beginning teachers are leaving for two reasons. The pay is not competitive with other jobs requiring the same level of responsibility. I also think teachers are not prepared or don't have realistic expectations of the job. (Interview 2, p. 1)

Like Alexis, Ann believed teachers were leaving because they didn't have clear understanding of what being a teacher entailed. This also goes hand in hand with the novice teachers feeling unsuccessful or frustrated in their possession. Because many new teachers come into the profession picturing how successful they will be in the classroom, they get discouraged very quickly when it doesn't go as they thought it would originally. Both Alexis and Ann attribute new teachers leaving the profession to this very idea.

In addition to talking about why teachers leave the profession, Ann and Alexis both commented on the effectiveness of the current mentor program in retaining new teachers. Alexis felt as if it were too hard to tell if the program was effective in retaining new teachers, simply because it is a new program that the district is using. She also felt that with time, the program would be effective in helping first year teachers and also retaining them in the profession. Evidence for this can be seen when Ann commented,

It is hard to tell if it is helping retain new teachers. This program was in effect several years ago; it was stopped, and now is starting back up. I think it will take some time to really make it effective. I do feel that you need to have a master teacher mentoring the new teacher to make it successful. (Interview 2, p. 1)

Ann also agreed that the mentor was the key to the success of the program. She stated that if a new teacher has an experienced mentor teacher, with whom they have a good relationship, they will be positively impacted by the program. If they do not have this relationship with their mentor though, it could potentially have a negative effect on how they feel about teaching and staying in the profession (Interview 2, p. 1).

Both principals believed the success of the mentor program within the Barrington Independent School District depended on each specific situation. Both felt if first year teachers had a great mentor with whom they were comfortable meeting and talking, that teachers would be successful. If they did not have an awesome mentor, or had a lousy relationship with their mentor, they would have a much harder time being successful. Alexis stated,

I think having an effective mentor is most beneficial to a new teacher. New teachers may not always know what is right or how to correctly do something. The master teacher would be there to show them the correct way to complete tasks, turn in data, etc. They have someone to learn from, observe and possibly plan with. They feel comfortable talking with this person and sharing concerns and plans. (Interview 2, p. 1)

Because retaining novice teachers in the profession is so critical, having an effective mentor is extremely beneficial to the new teacher. Alexis feels this is a point of contact in which they have a good relationship and can learn from without being uncomfortable or intimidated.

Both first year teachers expressed similar sentiments in terms of mentors playing a large role in the success of their first year and how they felt about staying in the profession; however, both also expressed the need for support from their administrator in addition to the support their mentor was providing. When asked if they felt the mentor program helped them want to stay in profession, both first year teachers responded no.

Amelia articulated frustration and not feeling successful as her reason for not wanting to continue in the profession. Amelia stated,

I will not be a long term teacher, I do not feel that I am successful in this field and the little mentoring, both from my mentor and my administrator, I did actually receive, did not prove to be helpful in improving my confidence in my teaching abilities. (Interview 2, p. 1)

Because of feeling frustrated and not being successful, Amelia turned in her resignation half way through her second year of teaching.

Shonda expressed similar feelings about the mentor program and how unsuccessful it has been in helping her. Shonda commented, "I'm sure that some mentor programs would, but not my first year mentor program. I do not feel I was ever really helped that much" (Interview 2, p. 1). Shonda continued to discuss her future in the profession. She believed she would have already left the profession after her first year,

but came back because of the little support that she had received. Shonda stated, “As of right now, I do not see me being a teacher for much longer. If I hadn’t have had the little support that I did last year, I would not have come back this year” (Interview 2, p. 1). Like Amelia, Shonda also turned in her resignation half way through her second year of teaching.

Summary

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that while this mentor program showed benefits to both first year teachers and mentors, it was unsuccessful in providing first year teachers the support they needed to consider teaching as a long term career. Both first year teachers, talked often about feedback and support they received from their principal. They both perceived this as the most important aspect of the mentor program, simply because the support from the principal gives first year teacher an understanding of what they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Despite the fact that both teachers had mentors who were available to help them; these teachers looked to their principal for the majority of their support. Because feedback and support from the principal were lacking, both teachers felt frustration and confusion as they went through the year.

This study also found that classroom based teachers, versus district level staff, are better suited to be mentors because they have the most interaction with new teachers on a day to day basis. It was also found that campus based teachers know what the first year teacher is dealing with and are better suited to help them with problems they are having.

In the following chapter, I will discuss some of the ways, in which my analysis answered the questions guiding this study. In addition, I will outline implications for possible school district-level policy. Recommendations for future research will also be given.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

During the course of this study, I followed two first year teachers while they embarked on their first year of teaching. Throughout the study, both first year teachers had a myriad of learning opportunities that took place either with their mentor, their administrator or New Teacher Academy meetings that were hosted by Barrington Independent School District. As the year progressed, I expected to see both new teachers utilize the tools they had acquired and become more confident in their teaching abilities; however, this did not occur with either teacher. Both first year teachers reached a point of frustration that continued to build throughout the course of the year- to a point where neither teacher felt successful and didn't view themselves as long term teachers.

During the course of this study, I have followed the two first year teachers, their mentors, and their administrators using a qualitative research design based on grounded theory methodology. Through this, I acquired field notes, both first year teacher journals, and interviews of first year teachers, mentors, and administrators.

The questions that guided my inquiry included:

1. What are novice teachers' perceptions of some of the ways in which involvement in a mentoring program informed the experiences of their first year of teaching?
2. What are novice teachers' perceptions of the ways in which principals influence campus mentoring programs?

3. What are principals' perceptions of the ways in which mentoring programs influence the success of novice teachers?

In this chapter, conclusions to these questions based on findings from the study and ideas for future research are given, and implications for future mentor programs are presented.

Discussion

Through the voices of my participants and my interpretations of associated research data presented in Chapter IV, my goal was to portray the perceptions that two first year teachers, their principals, and an acting mentor shared and exhibited throughout the course of this study. In the discussion that follows, my goal is to present my interpretations of the meanings of these findings which came from my discussions with each participant.

Teacher Perceptions of the Influence of the Program

The participants' perceptions of what the district's mentoring program entailed were inconsistent. Both teachers relayed a different version of the program. Shonda was completely unaware of what the program was and that there was additional support for her in the district until the end of her first year; however, Amelia was able to describe the mentoring meetings and her time with her district level mentor. Because of the inconsistencies in the program, Shonda felt she didn't have as much support as she should have had and said that if she had known about the district level program, it may have had more influence on her during her first year. At the conclusion of the study Shonda stated,

I had some help at my school with my mentor, but I don't think she was always there for me to answer questions that I might have had. I think having additional support from the district, like other first year teachers had might have provided me the additional support I needed to feel successful. (Interview 2, p.1)

While neither Shonda nor I know if being a full part of Barrington Independent School District's New Teacher Academy would have helped her perceive herself as a more successful teacher, Shonda felt that it possibly could have.

Perceived Benefits by the First Year Teachers

In spite of the differences in quality among various mentoring models (Jones and Lowe, 1990; Jarmin and Mackiel, 1993; Watkins, 2005) and the problems existing within the program I studied, mentoring programs are well worth the efforts associated with researching and implementing them. Reflecting the research of Flynn (2008) the novice teachers that I studied stated that they experienced professional benefits from their involvement with mentoring. In spite of the confusion and inconsistencies they reported, the novice teachers managed to gain both affective support and professional guidance from their mentors. Having a mentor and meeting with them regularly has shown to have a several key benefits to the first year teachers. According to Flynn et al (2008), there are several benefits to being involved in the mentor program. These include: mentor programs provide teachers with an easier transition from preparation to practice; mentor programs help reduce teacher attrition; mentor programs help teachers become more effective earlier; and mentor programs help increase job satisfaction. Evidence of this is

seen throughout the course of this study; the two first year teachers both discussed perceived benefits both to the mentor and the teacher.

One benefit that appears to be quite valuable to new teachers is the opportunity to receive instructional interventions. Amelia found it helpful for her mentor to come model lessons for her. She stated this was especially helpful for intervention. Amelia was not as familiar with what type of activities or plans she needed to make for her daily intervention groups. She started out doing some things but found they weren't effective. She went to her mentor for help, and her mentor quickly brought out some materials, helped her plan some intervention lessons, and even taught an intervention lesson for her so she could see what it looked like. Amelia said it was also beneficial to know that if she had problems she had someone she could ask.

In addition to the instructional interventions that mentoring can provide, new teachers also benefit from simple encouragement. Shonda also talked about some benefits she saw throughout the mentor program. She felt it was extremely helpful to know she was not alone. Her mentor stressed to her several times that all teachers have some of the same problems that she was having, and they all faced the same day to day tasks. This helped reassure her that she was doing a good job, even though sometimes she questioned herself. While both teachers shared struggles, frustration, and confusion throughout their first year, these benefits gave both first year teachers more confidence earlier on in their careers.

The Importance of Onsite Mentors

This study found that novice teachers and administrators perceived having a mentor who was a classroom teacher was more effective than having a mentor who was housed out of central office. Both principals felt that having a mentor who was on the same campus was beneficial to first year teachers because it was an instant point of contact. This was a person that teachers could easily access and who would have more informed answers because they are dealing with the same issues as the first year teacher. Alexis stated this was also more beneficial because she has found over the years that teachers, who have central office staff as mentors, don't feel comfortable talking to them about their problems. Central office personnel are viewed by teachers as outsiders who aren't always there to help. By nature, teachers feel more comfortable with another classroom teacher. Because of this, teachers will be more open about the problems they are facing. This allows teachers to receive more feedback from mentors, which broadens the learning of the first year teacher.

Amelia, the first year teacher whose mentor was not a teacher and had an office at central office, stated several times that she didn't always reach out to her mentor when she needed help. She felt it was always easier to ask the teachers around her. In an informal meeting with Amelia, she stated that she wished she would have been assigned a mentor that was a classroom teacher teaching the same content area as she was. She felt this point of contact with another teacher doing the same thing as she would have had more of an impact on what she actually did in her classroom. At one point in the year, her principal sent her to another campus to observe and to talk to another third grade math

teacher. Amelia spoke of how much more helpful this was to her. Amelia stated, “I’ve had so much observation (in college) and going one day to watch the other teacher did more than anything I did in college because it was so pertinent to me at the time” (Interview 1, P. 3). During this observation and talk session with another 3rd grade math teacher, Amelia said she walked away with specific activities and materials that covered topics she was teaching in class at that point in time. She was able to take everything she learned and received and apply it or use it in her classroom the very next day. Amelia also stated this single event had more impact on her as a first year teacher than any other event she attended for the mentor program.

Mentor Training

While this study found that novice teachers and administrators perceived that classroom campus-based teacher mentors (versus non campus-based mentors) to first year teachers, it also found that mentors perceived they need training in order to be successful. Johanna stated several times throughout the course of the year that she had no idea what she was supposed to do with Shonda. She really wanted to help her and provide her with resources that would be beneficial for her, but she didn’t know where to begin.

Hanson (2010) found that by providing mentor teachers with broad professional development training, mentors were able to gain new knowledge and skills that they could use to facilitate learning for first year teachers. Hansen also found that by attending professional development with other mentors they were provided a time where they could problem solve and develop leadership. Hanson (2010) stated,

This collaborative community helps mentors apply their learning, problem solve together on dilemmas encountered while mentoring, share evidence of their work, analyze data on beginning teacher practice, and develop leadership. (p. 78)

Hansen (2010) discovered that this type of development and talk among fellow mentors helped mentors to fully assist their first year teachers. In addition to this being highly beneficial to mentors, this caused the mentor program to have even more of an impact on first year teachers.

In addition to being trained on how to help their first year teachers be successful, it is important to note that mentors need some training on what it is like to be a mentee. When mentors don't know what to do, they revert back to their own first years and the mentoring they received. This may not be effective mentoring and might not help the first year teacher. By being trained on what on what it is like to be a first year teacher they will have a different perspective that can help them relate better to the first year teacher they are trying to help.

While this does not directly answer the question: What are novice teachers' perceptions of some of the ways in which involvement in a mentoring program informed the experiences of their first year of teaching?; It does relate to it in that having an experienced and trained mentor would have more of an impact on first year teachers than one who has no experience and no training, like we saw in this study.

Principal Influence on First Year Teachers

A lack of principal involvement in the program was evident throughout the course of this study. The lack of principal involvement on both campuses led to frustration for both first year teachers. It also hindered one mentor from fully being able to help her first year teacher feel more successful in the classroom.

This study found that first year teachers perceived that principal involvement in the mentor program was the most important aspect of the program; however, both teachers felt their involvement in the program was lacking. Reflecting the research of Jones and Pauley (2008), principal involvement and the amount of feedback and discussion the principal gave to the novice teachers was a key aspect of the mentoring program in Barrington Independent School District that was lacking. Jones et al. stated (2008),

From an administrative standpoint, it is important to see potential benefit of teacher mentoring relationships and to fully support such endeavors within the school. Administrators can promote mentoring within the curriculum schedule for the mentor and the mentee to work together, lobbying for funding of programs (including stipends for mentors), and promoting a school environment that fosters collaboration and reflective practice. (p. 24)

Administrators are the ones that provide support to not only the first year teachers, but the mentors as well, and their involvement in the program is a key component.

Despite this, both teachers wrote in their journals about instances where they went to their principal for help and did not get the help they were looking for. They also both

wrote about the desire to receive more feedback and guidance from their principals in terms of what they were doing in their classrooms, i.e. teaching methods, classroom management, etc. Neither teacher felt successful in terms of what they were doing and often expressed frustration and confusion.

In order for first year teachers to improve their teaching strategies and their classroom management, it is essential for administrators to provide them with constructive feedback. Hope (1999) found, “Constructive feedback on the teaching and learning processes unfolding in new teachers’ classroom is also essential for their growth and development and their sense of efficacy” (p. 54). Without feedback, novice teachers have a difficult time understanding what they need to change or do in their classroom.

In addition to this, Hope (1999) also found mentor programs go far beyond orienting new teachers to the school, the district, and the expectations set forth by the principal. Hope (1999) stated,

Orienting new teachers to the school and to the principal’s expectations entails more than reviewing policy and procedures in a handbook, more than a thirty minute getting to know you meeting in the office, more than a walk around campus to point out important locations such as the media center, cafeteria and teachers workrooms. It involves systematic contact with the intention of assisting in the new teacher’s professional growth and development and of engaging in collegial conversation about the work of teaching. (p. 54)

Principals play an integral role in the training and professional growth of the novice teacher. Because of this, it is important that they engage the novice teacher in conversation on a regular basis.

Throughout the year, it was obvious to teachers that principals weren't always accessible to them. Both teachers expressed concerns of going to principals for help and then being redirected to someone else. This caused a sense of frustration for both teachers as they wanted help but didn't receive it. Principals need to not only be accessible to new teachers for help, questions, or just reassurance that what they are doing is a good job, but they need to seek out first year teachers and offer them assistance. Hope (1999) stated that often times, new teachers do not want to bother principals because they feel they have more important matters to be involved with than their concerns. Because of this it is important for principals to go to first year teachers rather than wait for teachers to come to them. Hope (1999), noted "Principals need to seek out first year teachers and initiate conversation about instructional matters until the new teachers develop a level of comfort to initiate contact on their own" (55). By engaging novice teachers in conversation, administrators will help build a relationship with the novice teacher. This could potentially cause the novice teacher to feel comfortable going to the administrator when problems arise in the future.

While it is important for principals to engage novice teachers in conversation, it is also important for the novice teacher to approach the principal when they need assistance or when they have questions. Because many new teachers feel apprehensive to approach their administrator (Hope, 1999), it may help new teachers if they received some training

on how to be a mentee and what to expect their first year. Principals aren't always going to be able to approach the novice teacher. Because of this, it is important for the novice teacher to understand they need to be proactive when it comes to their own development and ask questions when they need help.

Principals Perceptions on the Impact of the Mentor Program

The two principals, Alexis and Ann, both expressed that mentor programs have an influence on first year teachers who participate in them. One aspect that both principals found to be beneficial is that new teachers who have a mentor have a great support system. They have someone they can always go to ask advice or just to vent problems to. This support allows teachers to feel better about what they are doing and also gives them confidence. Alexis, the principal at Ashville, stated,

I think it's really good because it does give them a sounding board and a shoulder to lean on. The support not only gives them somebody they can go to and say this happened in my class how would you handle it or this is how I handled it what do you think I should have done. A lot of times the mentor has gone through most of what they are going through and they can sympathize with them or give them ideas and get them on the path they need to go so I think it's very beneficial.

(Interview 1, p. 4)

By having a mentor, who is there for you whenever you need them, novice teachers have a support system that not all teachers have. This is critical in their development as they can learn, grow, and just have someone to talk to when things aren't going to plan.

The principal at Fullbright agreed that support is one of the most beneficial aspects of the program. She found that teachers constantly are wondering if they did something right or how they should handle certain situations. By having a mentor, they have someone they know they can go to, that is experienced, and will be able to help them. Ann noted,

I think the most important aspect is the support that it is providing the new teachers, because I know there are a lot of things that pop up. You just have somebody there that you can go to and say oh my goodness this just happened. Should I have done this, should I not have done this, how would you handle it? I just think the support and the expertise from that person help. (Interview 1, p. 3)

Ann felt that having the expertise of someone to help guide Shonda through her first year really made a huge impact on the successes she did have in her first year of teaching. Ann stated,

I think having a mentor has helped Shonda be more successful than she would have been had she not had a mentor. While Shonda definitely struggled throughout her first year, I believe she would have been much worse off had she not been involved in the mentor program. (Interview 2, p. 1)

This support, while it may have seemed insignificant in the eyes of Shonda, was perceived to be crucial in her development by Ann, her principal.

Alexis, principal at Ashville, also perceived that the mentor program had a significant impact on Amelia, her first year teacher. Alexis stated,

I think Amelia learned a lot by being in the mentor program. From the district, she learned valuable skills like communicating with parents, how to plan intervention for students needing additional assistance, and day to day teacher tasks. She also learned a great deal by having the support of veteran teachers both on my campus and from another teacher at a different campus. This support helped her be effective both in the classroom with the students and the curriculum, but outside of the classroom as well. (Interview 2, p. 1)

Alexis shows that by being a part of the mentor program, Amelia learned about vast number of topics that helped her be successful as a teacher.

Recommendations for Further Research

The qualitative design of this study allowed for an analysis to be conducted of the teacher's thoughts and feelings towards the program and teaching through their reflexive journals. In addition to this, the qualitative analysis of the first year teachers, the mentor teachers, and the administrators allowed for their viewpoints and feelings about the mentor program to be expressed. Continuous checking of my interpretations of the participant's experiences and understandings throughout the course of this study was a methodological strategy used to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study. Through a picture that has been painted using thick descriptions, it is now the readers' responsibility to take the findings of the study, which are context bound, and make the transfer to his or her own situation or context.

Throughout this study, evidence has been provided to show that if this study were repeated with similar contexts and similar participants that it would produce similar theories and results. Strauss and Corbin stated (1999), “Theories are always traceable to the data that gave rise to them- within the interactive context of data collecting and data analyzing, in which the analyst is also a crucially significant interactant” (p. 278). Implications for further inquiry are provided to the reader based on the results of this particular study. It is the readers’ additional undertaking to determine the applicability of implications for the readers’ situation.

The school district in which both Ashville and Fullbright reside usually inducts approximately 200-250 new teachers into its fifty six schools each year; however, due budget cuts, the district has been hiring fewer teachers. Both teachers taught at different elementary schools within the district. Both teachers also had very different experiences with the mentor program. Shonda had a mentor who taught next door to her, and Amelia had a mentor who was not a teacher and worked at central office. Each school had different socio-economic statuses and different issues like mobility, parent involvement, etc. Despite having different school environments, different issues to deal with, different grade levels, different content areas, and different experiences with the mentor program; both teachers reported very similar frustrations. On numerous occasions, both teachers discussed the feedback they felt was lacking during their first year. Both teachers felt they needed this feedback from their administrators in order to be successful. The literature on principal involvement suggests that principal involvement is important to the success of the first year teacher. (Jones and Pauley, 2003). What type of feedback should

administrators provide to novice teachers? To what extent should administrators provide feedback to novice teachers? How often should principals engage in constructive feedback with novice teachers? These are all questions needing further inquiry, both by the school district and by researchers in general.

This particular district has a mentor program that provides all first year teachers with a mentor from the district such as a demonstration teacher, curriculum coach, or someone within the professional development department. Throughout this study, both teachers discussed how they received more support from the teachers who taught around them. This was especially true for Amelia who only had a mentor assigned to her at the district level. Amelia felt she received more support and gained more confidence from the teachers around her rather than she did from her actual mentor. Because this is a single case study, conducted using two first year teachers and their mentors, further exploration of this topic is needed to determine if campus-based mentors are more beneficial to the success of first year teachers or if there is no difference between campus based and district based mentors.

Amelia wrote on several occasions about meetings she attended hosted by the district mentors where they discussed hot topics and gave new teachers additional information they felt would help them in their rooms. Amelia stated she didn't feel this was as helpful to her as the district thought it might have been. She also added though, that she had more experience in the district as a substitute than most first year teachers had. While this had minimal implications in this current study, it brought about a question of the validity of these meetings and the perceived influence it potentially had on first

year teachers. This raises the question of what professional development would be most appropriate for beginners as they go through the process of learning to how to teach.

In an interview, Alexis noted that she believes that mentor programs can help keep teachers in the profession long term if the mentor program itself is effective. Alexis stated, “I think having an effective program is key in helping retain teachers to the profession” (Interview 2, p. 1). This raises several questions; one being what makes a mentoring program effective? Further research needs to be conducted in this area in order to determine what attributes make a program successful.

Throughout this study, it was apparent that both first year teachers were apprehensive to approach their administrator when they needed assistance. They often felt like the principal should come to them and offer them support. This raises several questions on different levels. If the university trained pre-service teachers to observe and take initiative when in need of assistance, would this help first year teachers ask questions when necessary? Also, is this the responsibility of the school district and the administrators to train new teachers take this initiative when in need of assistance? Finally, if pre-service and novice teachers were taught to act as an ethnographer and take in the school culture by observing everyone around them; would this help novice teachers be more proactive and initiate conversation with administrators?

Summary

This study was designed to follow two first year teachers on their journey and discover what perceived influences the mentor program has on their teaching. It

attempted to uncover what ideas a new teacher took from the program and how this helped them as a first year teacher. Additionally, it sought to understand the impact the mentor program has on how a first year teacher perceives the profession and if they think of themselves as long-term teachers.

The data for this study was gathered through audio recordings of interviews (first year teachers, mentors, and administrators), informal meetings with teachers and mentors, journals of first year teachers, and my researchers reflexive journal.

In this study, five prominent issues emerged. They were program inconsistency, mentor and first year teacher benefits, classroom teacher as the mentor, principal involvement and feedback, and teacher retention. Both teachers who participated in this study followed a different program. Amelia followed the program the district designed for all new teachers in the district while Shonda was somehow left out of the program and followed a different type of mentor program at her own campus. Despite the fact that both teachers were involved in different mentor programs, they both saw benefits to having a mentor and being involved in the mentor program whether at their campus or at the district level. Shonda's mentor, Johanna, also received benefits to mentoring Shonda even though they were not involved with the mentor program at the district level.

Throughout the course of the study, it was also made apparent that principal involvement and the feedback principals gave to each first year teacher played an important role in how each first year teacher perceived themselves and the job they were doing. Because feedback was often lacking, both teachers reported feeling frustrated and confused throughout their first year. They both described a feeling of confusion when it

came to some tasks and while they had a mentor there to help them, they also wanted specific feedback from their administrator to know if they were doing a good job or not. Despite their desire to have this feedback, both novice teachers rarely sought out the advice of their administrators.

As the year went on and the frustration and the confusion built, both teachers made decisions that would impact their future in their career. While they both came back for a second year, neither teacher felt they would stay in the profession long term because neither felt they were successful at being a teacher.

This study has shown that there are some benefits to having a mentor program in place for first year teachers; however, it also shows that first year teachers also need to receive feedback from their administrators in order to feel successful as a teacher. It highlights the tribulations two first year teachers faced throughout their first year and the perceptions of the impact the mentor program had on them as they embarked on a journey of a lifetime.

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APPENDIX A



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Vice President for Research

February 1, 2011

Douglas Simpson
Curriculum & Instruction
Mail Stop: 1071

Regarding: 502734 New Teacher Mentor Programs

Dr. Douglas Simpson:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee has approved your proposal referenced above. The approval is effective from February 1, 2011 to January 31, 2012. This expiration date must appear on all of your consent documents.

We will remind you of the pending expiration approximately eight weeks before January 31, 2012 and to update information about the project. If you request an extension, the proposal on file and the information you provide will be routed for continuing review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary Cogan".

Rosemary Cogan, Ph.D., ABPP
Protection of Human Subjects Committee

APPENDIX B

Interview one questions for the first year teachers:

1. Why did you choose to become an educator?
2. Prior to the start of the school year, what concerns did you have?
3. As the year has progressed, have these concerns eased?
4. As the year has progressed, do you have new concerns about teaching?
5. How do you think having a mentor has influenced what you do in the classroom?
6. Has having a mentor helped ease concerns that you have throughout the year?
7. How often do you and your mentor meet?
8. What do you and your mentor discuss during your meetings?
9. Other than suggestions, how has your mentor helped you throughout the year?
10. What do you perceive would be different if you didn't have a mentor?
11. What changes, if any, would you make to the current mentor program?
12. How do you believe these changes would be beneficial to helping first year teachers?

APPENDIX C

Interview one questions for the Mentor Teacher:

1. Why did you choose to become involved in the new teacher mentor program?
2. Have you ever mentored a teacher before?
3. What training did the district provide for you prior to becoming a mentor?
4. Does the district provide you with ongoing training throughout the year in regards to the mentoring program?
5. How often do you and your mentee meet?
6. What do you and your mentee discuss during your meetings?
7. How do you think you have influenced your mentee?
8. How do you think being a mentor has influenced what you do in your own classroom?
9. What changes, if any, would you make to the current mentor program?
10. How do you believe these changes would be beneficial to helping first year teachers?

APPENDIX D

Interview one questions for the administrators:

1. Describe the mentoring program in your district.
2. How does the district's mentoring program differ from how the mentoring program looks on your campus?
3. Have you ever mentored a teacher before?
4. As an administrator, what benefits do you perceive the mentoring program has on first year teachers?
5. Have you seen any benefits for the mentors that are involved in the mentoring teachers?
6. Do you ever attend meetings between the mentors and first year teachers on your campus?
7. What do you perceive to be the most important aspect of the mentoring program?
8. What changes, if any, would you make to the current mentor program at the district level?
9. How do you believe these changes would be beneficial to helping first year teachers?

APPENDIX E

Interview two questions for first year teachers:

- 1) What was your principals' involvement in the mentor program for you during the first year?
- 2) How do you think their involvement influenced your success as a first year teacher?
- 3) Tell me about feedback influenced what you did in your own classroom and how you felt about the job you were doing?
- 4) Do you believe having a mentor your first year helped you to want to stay in the profession long term?

APPENDIX F

Interview two questions for the administrators:

- 1) Do you think the current mentor program as it stands is helping retain teachers?
- 2) Why do you believe most inexperienced teachers leave the profession to pursue other careers?
- 3) How important do you think feedback is in regards to new teachers. Do you believe this is an important part of mentoring new teachers?
- 4) How do you think having a mentor impacts the success of first year teachers?

APPENDIX G

The chart used to transcribe and examine the initial interviews from all study participants including: two administrators, two first year teachers, and one teacher mentor.

| Participant | Administrator | Mentor |
|---------------------|---------------|--------|
| First Year Teachers | Administrator | Mentor |
| First Year Teachers | Administrator | Mentor |
| First Year Teachers | Administrator | Mentor |

KEY
IF = Inclusion/Feedback
PI = Parent Involvement
PB = Program Improvement
TC = Teacher Concerns
CB = Campus Safety
MT = Mentor
R = Retention
I/F = Inclusion/Feedback
PI = Parent Involvement
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R = Retention