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Mentoring in the Political and Cultural World of Academia: An Exploration of the Experiences of Literacy Educators

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Recent trends in academia have emphasized the need for effective mentoring initiatives for faculties and students, either by calling for programs for faculty development (Gaff, Pruitt-Logan, Sims, & Denecke, 2003; Preparing Future Faculty, 2004; Sorcinelli, 2000; Yarger, et al., 1999) or through the establishment of standards for teacher educators (Association of Teacher Educators, 2004; Young, 2000). Included in this body of literature are emphases on the importance of developing relationships across an academic career that are mutually satisfying for both mentors and mentees, the value of drawing on multiple mentors, and the feasibility of “telementoring” through digital technologies.

Existing research examining mentoring relationships in the academy has primarily focused on the doctoral student-advisor relationships in both the formal (residency requirements, teaching and research apprenticeships, etc.) and informal (communication and interaction with faculty advisors) experiences (Golde & Dore, 2001). In the field of literacy education, knowledge about successful mentoring relationships between faculty and graduate students has been described as “virtually uncharted territory” (Alvermann & Hruby, 2000, p. 46). Traditionally, mentoring within such relationships has been viewed as one where the mentors are perceived to possess more power and status than the mentees (Ervin & Fox, 1994; Mullen & Kealy, 2000). Recent inquiries within literacy education, however, do document how the process of mentoring is being redefined to reflect mutual growth, trust, and reciprocity (Mullen, 2000; Young & Alvermann, 1997; Young, Alvermann, Kaste, Henderson, & Many, 2004).

Mentoring with respect to new faculty development has been the focus of less research than the area of doctoral student/advisee relationships. Existing research underscores the importance of mentors across a career (Stansell, 2000) and the important role support groups can play in an academic’s personal and professional development (Many, et al., 2005; Wiseman, 2000). Given the paucity of information on the mentoring of literacy educators, we believe additional research is needed focusing on literacy educators to explore the nature of the mentoring they receive and the types of mentoring they believe are needed in our field. Although others (e.g., Adoue, 2000)

have provided insights into the nature of mentoring of professionals in fields other than literacy, until more research examines the needs and experiences of literacy teacher educators, we are left to wonder if mentoring needs and experiences vary by field. Differences might be expected when the contexts within which faculty work differ from those in other fields, when the tools used within those contexts differ, and when the expectations for how to behave within these contexts also differ (Wertsch, 1991).

In addition, research needs to take into account the fact that mentoring practices and mentoring relationships must be examined with respect to race, class, and gender (Ervin, 1995; Lin et al., 2004; Moody, 2004; Spore, Harrison, & Haggerson, 2002; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993; Turner & Myers, 2000). At NRC in 2004, we conducted an alternative format session in order to explore literacy educators' experiences with mentoring. Reflecting on participants' responses in that session, we found that (a) perspectives on mentoring and perceived needs change across the course of a career; (b) changing roles and need for dialogue are evident across all stages; and (c) political and cultural issues may be strongest during the doctoral program and prior to promotion and tenure (Cobb et al., 2006). Based upon these discussions as well as our own keen interests in mentoring, we designed the current study with the following purposes: (1) to describe the nature of mentoring experiences of literacy educators, (2) to describe literacy educators' perceptions of their needs in relation to mentoring, and (3) to analyze the data from participants with respect to diversity and their stage of career.

METHOD

This research inquiry focused on written responses to a survey consisting of open-ended, reflective prompts that were emailed to literacy educators using email addresses from the NRC online member database. In addition to requesting general demographic information, the survey invited respondents to reflect on mentor and mentee experiences in their current stage of their career, describing (a) their mentoring experiences, (b) the benefits and the challenges of these experiences, and (c) their mentoring needs (see Appendix A). A total of 1022 surveys and informed consent letters were emailed to prospective participants. Two letters were sent as follow-up reminders in two-week intervals after the previous requests. Each returned survey was assigned a number and all identifying information from that participant was deleted from email in-boxes and the original database. Responses included 90 returned surveys from 19 doctoral students, 27 assistant professors, 19 associate professors, and 25 full professors. Table 1 provides detailed demographic data and professional background information on all participants. Data were analyzed through a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), both within groups to examine themes within each stage of career and across groups to explore issues of diversity.

MENTORING OF LITERACY EDUCATORS IN THE ACADEMY: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Doctoral Students' Perspectives on Mentoring

Hughey (2000) reminded us that "when we use the term mentor, it conjures up different words and shades of meaning for each of us" (p. 101). The doctoral student respondents to the survey

Table 1. Demographic and Professional Information for Participants

	Stage of career				Total
	Doctoral Students	Assistant Professors	Associate Professors	Full Professors	
Participants	19	27	19	25	90
Gender					
Females	17 (89%)	25 (93%)	16 (84%)	17 (68%)	75 (83%)
Males	2 (11%)	2 (7%)	3 (16%)	8 (32%)	15 (17%)
Race/Ethnicity					
Asian	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Af. Am.	1 (5%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	3 (3%)
Hispanic	1 (5%)	1 (4%)	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	4 (4%)
Euro-Am.	16 (84%)	22 (82%)	13 (68%)	18 (72%)	69 (77%)
Mixed	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Euro-Canadian	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	3 (3%)
Other or did not disclose	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	3 (16%)	6 (24%)	10 (10%)
Years in academy					
In current stage	1-5 yrs. 3.2 yrs. avg.	3 mo.-10 yrs. 3.2 yrs. avg.	1 mo.-15 yrs. 6.6 yrs. avg.	1-30 yrs. 13 yrs. avg.	1 mo.-30 yrs. 6.5 yrs. avg.
Total	1-10 yrs. 4.6 yrs. avg.	3 mo.-29 yrs. 7.1 yrs. avg.	7-22 yrs. 13.4 yrs. avg.	7-38 yrs. 24 yrs. avg.	3 mo.-38 yrs. 12 yrs. avg.
Type of institution					
Two-year	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Four-year or teaching	4 (21%)	7 (26%)	5 (26%)	3 (12%)	19 (21%)
Research	12 (63%)	18 (67%)	8 (42%)	20 (80%)	58 (64%)
Other or did not disclose	3 (16%)	2 (7%)	6 (32%)	2 (8%)	13 (14%)

regarded a wide range of supportive activities as mentoring. Doctoral students most often named their advisors or major professors as their mentors. To a lesser extent, they referred to other professors, and only rarely to fellow students. The most formal and required activities given as examples of mentoring were basic advisement tasks, such as planning academic programs. Shared research projects

and apprenticeships with professors offered opportunities for mentoring on how to conduct literacy research, how to present at conferences such as NRC and IRA, and how to publish in literacy journals. Many also reported very personal support in the form of encouragement and advice.

Mentors were seen as supervisors, colleagues, and/or friends. Doctoral students' descriptions constituted a wide range of relationships and activities, which tells us that mentoring, as understood by these respondents, is a very broad term. Thinking of mentoring as an umbrella term for a range of different types of support could lead to the expectation that doctoral students will likely need to be mentored by several different people. One person might serve as an expert on publishing, another on grant writing, and yet another as the doctoral student's personal counselor. A single mentor should not be expected to play all these roles.

Value of mentoring. The majority of the doctoral student respondents spoke of the great value of the mentoring they received. One wrote,

Without my mentors, I would never have made it this far. I've depended on them at every stage of my program, but especially now as I'm preparing my proposal. They've offered advice on how to create a balance in my life (personal and professional), how to write the various pieces of the dissertation, how to best conduct research, how to publish an article. They've also offered . . . encouragement when I've thought about quitting . . . academia.

Some doctoral students spoke specifically about the importance of being involved in research and presentations. One student describing participation in a middle school "literacy project" with her advisor and two other professors which helped her "learn from their knowledge of research design and analysis" and understand how to write up results. Another student underscores that her advisor was "instrumental in helping [her] complete and attain a presentation for the IRA conference." Such experiences were described by participants as invaluable to their entrée into the profession.

Although some of the doctoral students also mentioned the value of being a mentor, one-fourth of the doctoral student respondents explicitly stated they had never mentored others. While these students spoke about the importance of mentoring, they appeared not to have considered that they might be in a position to be mentors. One possible explanation for this finding is that doctoral students still think of themselves as novices in regard to academia. Many doctoral students in literacy education are classroom teachers who are just beginning to take on the role of expert among their colleagues and do not always recognize that they have something to offer as a mentor. The following comments show how their roles at the university and their perceptions of themselves may vacillate: "I frequently feel overwhelmed and incompetent as a doctoral student" and "Working with student teachers reminds me that I do have valid experiences and I know valuable and useful current information that can benefit them."

When beginning a new period of mentoring others, we often enter an uncomfortable stage in which we feel, as Adoue (2000) put it, "slightly like an imposter" (p. 92). In the case of mentoring in the academy, doctoral students' discomfort with offering support to others seems to follow from a dichotomy between novice and expert. Where being a mentor is associated with the highest levels of expertise, much potential peer support is undervalued. Mentoring others can help work through those tensions, as Adoue suggests, "What I had to offer was not the answers to all of their questions, but a belief that they could find answers within themselves" (p. 93).

Challenges of receiving mentoring. Data also indicated that although the doctoral students had a clear sense of the value of mentoring overall, they overwhelmingly reported that a lack of time interfered with both receiving and providing mentoring. Some of the respondents reported difficulties in seeking help and felt sensitive about appearing needy. Other obstacles to receiving mentoring included the challenge of choosing an advisor and negotiating among conflicting opinions of committee members. One participant advocated the perspectives multiple mentors could bring, noting she would love to participate in an opportunity to be mentored by someone “who has been out there and can offer me a different perspective than [her] advisors.... Maybe NRC or some other organization could link students with literacy professionals to fill this gap?”

The supports provided by mentors form a central part of the education of doctoral students. A new sense of the diverse types of mentoring necessary for doctoral students should lead to expectations that doctoral students will have a number of mentors who support them in different ways. Also, a “flattening” of the hierarchy among faculty and students might help doctoral students both provide and receive more help. Stansell (2000) points out that these more transactional relationships require a genuine conviction from mentors to understand the value that the mentee brings and to challenge not only the hierarchy, but also their own position within that hierarchy through continual self-examination. In addition, mentees must be capable of seeing value in their own abilities and insights and of viewing the hierarchy as unnatural, yet inevitable. These ideals are not easily attainable. Stansell argues that “experience disempowers some people so completely that it’s hard to imagine a set of circumstances that would convince them of their competence and worth” (p. 143).

Assistant Professors’ Perspectives on Mentoring

Our 27 assistant professors had much to say about mentoring students and generally felt enormous benefit from this type of experience. On the other hand, when they discussed their experiences, benefits, and challenges as a *mentee* in their current positions, the issues and overall tone of surveys changed. Three major interconnected themes surfaced in the data: being assigned a mentor, time considerations, and issues of power and voice. It is important to note that these topics are *interconnected*, especially issues of power and voice, which manifest within being assigned a mentor as well as within time considerations.

Mentoring as an assignment. Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, and Adoue (2000) explain that mentoring is about relationships while Young et al. (2004) describe mentoring in terms of friendship. If mentoring mirrors relationships, then mentoring should be a multi-faceted, sometimes encompassing friend, guide, peer, information source, and more; however, many assistant professors noted that they were assigned mentors and only four of the respondents indicated they had input with respect to their needs. Some truly valued their assigned mentors: “I am thoroughly satisfied with the mentorship that I have received. The experience has been extremely positive and I have benefited greatly from my mentor’s scholarship and knowledge of university policy.” Others were less enthusiastic: “I had an ‘official’ faculty mentor my first few years in this position. Those experiences were fairly thin—conversations occasionally about a paper draft in progress. But, not a lot of discussion about ideas.”

Most assistant professors also talked about the value of informal mentoring such as working with colleagues on projects and sharing syllabi and other materials. For example, one assistant

professor wrote, "One literacy faculty member helped me greatly when I was first hired, showing me her syllabi and giving me a lot of information about our students and local schools." Another respondent reflected, "I was given a formal mentor. We never met nor talked. I have been informally mentored by faculty from my Ph.D. program and by colleagues, including those with more experience and those with similar experience. We have mentored each other in the writing and conducting of research and in attaining grants and negotiating the tenure process." Assistant professors indicated they often had to seek out informal mentoring by asking questions of peers as issues arose, particularly when no formal mentor was assigned or when a strong relationship with an assigned mentor didn't develop. One assistant professor explained that she received helpful mentoring from informal contacts at conferences:

I would like more mentoring from other literacy professionals related to publishing, doing research, and getting grants. I am connecting with researchers at NRC and AERA and that is very rewarding and fulfilling. I feel as though I am among family when I attend these conferences, and I get very good feedback from those I communicate with.

Time considerations. If we liken mentoring to a method of professional development (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000), it is not surprising that time considerations and constraints permeate the conversations since the literature on professional development across stages and programs showcases the lack of time for quality professional development (Anders et al., 2000; Richardson, 1997; Standerford, 1997). Similarly, lack of time for mentoring stood out as a challenge, and assistant professors explained that their mentors did not meet with them often enough. One said, "As a new assistant professor last year I was assigned a mentor—an experienced professor at the end of his career. He met with me once and explained the tenure and promotion requirements. The meeting was helpful, but we never talked after that." Another wrote, "I would like to have someone I could meet with on a regular basis."

Further, assistant professors explained that this lack of time was linked to lack of formal mentoring relationships and lack of commitment to mentoring as a priority: "Despite the informal support, I feel I lack a more experienced colleague with whom I can discuss my teaching and research activities on a regular basis. I blame our high teaching and service loads as contributing to these missing conversations, but also the lack of an institutional commitment to support new faculty." Another wrote, "No one here anticipates the problems or concerns I may have as a new assistant professor so they don't think to clarify things before minor concerns become big problems." Finding time for meaningful mentoring was echoed again and again: "Time! Everyone is so busy that sometimes I feel uncomfortable interrupting their work to ask questions." Another reflected, "It's difficult to get substantive feedback to writing, and to not feel like a burden to senior faculty time."

Power and voice. For assistant professors, mentoring in general raised questions of power and voice. Traditional mentoring relationships are deeply linked to power and status since the mentor is generally established in the world of academia or within a given institution (Ervin & Fox, 1994; Mullen & Kealy, 2000). Critical theorists believe that issues related to power, authority, and control manifest within education just as within society (Carspecken, 1996). When a new faculty member is assigned a mentor, that power structure has been imposed upon the relationship. One reflected, "I am concerned about the political ramifications of being assigned one mentor, having one

faculty member choosing to mentor me, and being told that I should ask others questions about tenure." When not given the opportunity to choose their mentors or develop their own mentoring relationships, assistant professors' voices are sometimes silenced.

Simply understanding power constructs in academia is daunting, and the assistant professors who responded expressed an ongoing need for help navigating such territory as the culture and politics at their universities and also in the literacy field. One respondent wrote, "I don't know nearly enough. I feel as if I need a tremendous amount of mentoring, but I don't often feel that developing these types of experiences is 'safe'—the politics of academia is frightening—to the point where I often think of leaving." Issues of power especially challenged participants when they received conflicting advice: "I get conflicting advice so I look at the mentor's track record and kindness toward me. Can I trust them or do they want something from me? Is this a genuine mentor/mentee relationship I am getting into?" Others discussed their lack of voice, saying that they did not always feel comfortable or free to talk to mentors: "I was assigned a mentor when I started at this university. My mentor and I had actually wanted to be assigned to each other, but we became friends first—and as a result, we didn't really develop a mentoring relationship. In fact, I sometimes felt uncomfortable going to my mentor when I needed advice." Sometimes, there was a feeling of competition between mentors and mentees, or worse, in some instances mentees felt that they could not be honest without consequences.

Associate Professors' Perspectives on Mentoring

The 19 associate professors who responded to our survey reported that they had experienced myriad beneficial, reciprocal, and intellectually satisfying mentoring experiences, but they also discussed important challenges and barriers to mentoring. Similar to the descriptions of mentoring in Mullen (2000) and Young, et al. (2004), most viewed mentoring as a mutually beneficial process where both mentor and mentee learn together. As one respondent described, "I am always learning from the experiences and wisdom of the people I work with and mentor, regardless of their position as undergraduate or graduate students or junior colleagues." Themes from their responses indicated that associate professors were experienced mentors who were "learning to work smarter" at mentoring and who saw time spent in mentoring as an "investment" in the future. In addition, associate professors reported that their own mentoring needs were changing as they moved toward full professorship.

"Learning to work smarter" as a mentor. In their years in the academy, associate professors reported that they had served as mentor to a wide variety of others including undergraduate and graduate students as well as part-time faculty and full-time faculty. Because of what they saw as the challenge of lack of time for quality mentoring, many associate professors reported that they had worked over the years to develop sound leadership skills and create formal structures for mentoring in literacy education (Kealy, 2000). Several types of structures allowed the respondents to "work smarter" and integrate various aspects of their scholarly and teaching lives (Wiseman, 2000). For example, many talked about holding regular meetings (e.g., weekly, monthly, twice a semester, annual review, etc.) with groups of graduate students or faculty or conducting workshops for doctoral students and faculty on various aspects of life in academia. One associate professor described a required graduate seminar for doctoral students that focused on the academic career from doctoral program through promotion and tenure at a university. While this seminar was

facilitated by one faculty member who counted it as a regular course load, other department faculty contributed as guest speakers or as online participants through WebCT. Another described a course on academic writing that had developed out of student interest and need. This course not only provided students with support in writing for publication, but it also provided a course credit for the associate professor and lifted some burden from other faculty mentors. In addition to creating these formal structures to consolidate mentoring sessions and to use time more wisely, many associate professors reported that they had also created various types of collaborative projects in order to initiate occasions for mutual and reciprocal mentoring. Collaborating with graduate students and junior faculty on research projects and working together to co-author conference proposals, articles, books, and grants provided opportunity for mentoring where all participants could potentially benefit. Such collaboration works to combat the "isolationism, competition, and individualism" that are so much a part of the system of academia (Wiseman, 2000, p. 192).

Even though associate professors were enthusiastic about their creation of these formal structures, some reported challenges and continuing concerns to keep in mind regarding such formal structures. Associate professors pointed out that they felt a sense of responsibility to share institutional history and infrastructure with their mentees and to help uncover the implicit rules of academia (e.g., "what meetings you need to attend, which you could miss"), issues that may be better suited to informal conversations. One associate professor reported that she "enjoyed demystifying the culture of academia and sharing the 'tricks of the trade' with new faculty" while another said, "knowing the politics of our department, I can guide students in what to tell and not tell 'power' people." Associate professors pointed out that mentoring ultimately should be focused on the individual: "My way may not be their way. I need to help my mentees find their own balance between the department's interest and goals and their own."

Viewing time spent in mentoring as an "investment." As stated above, most associate professors saw mentoring as a reciprocal process where both benefited from the experience: "I learn as much as those with whom I work." While lack of time for mentoring was reported as a major challenge, the associate professors viewed the time they "spent" in mentoring as an "investment" that brings about "rewards" in the future both locally and nationally. One associate professor wrote, "Finding time [for mentoring] can be a challenge, but I feel the investment helps me, so I don't find that a problem... It benefits me (and my program and university) if [my mentees] teach better, serve better, and publish more." Some associate professors reflected that their mentoring helped to provide "consistency across programs" and contributed to the "positive development of colleagues," which contributed to the betterment of their local institution. Others pointed out that mentoring not only "helps my department" but also helps the broader "field reap rewards [when] mentees become active participants." Associate professors felt that their time invested in mentoring enabled them to achieve a sense of intellectual satisfaction since they were helping to shape the next generation of literacy scholars. One wrote, "It's rewarding to see my former students assume faculty positions in other institutions, while another reported a "sense of satisfaction in knowing that I've helped others navigate their way in academia." Not only were associate professors learning to "work smarter" and use time wisely, they viewed time spent in mentoring as an investment in their future and the future of the field.

Longing for (different) support as an associate professor. Faced with many different challenges in their next career stage, some associate professors reported a need for continued or different types

of mentoring. "Although I have support from colleagues," one associate professor reflected, "the mentoring I receive is infrequent and unstructured." Some longed to continue or initiate mentoring conversations (especially with those whom they had already developed long-term relationships) about their scholarship, research and grant development, and teaching (e.g., "I have not met my writing goals" and "I could improve my teaching"). Others reported that since they had reached promotion and tenure, they were beginning to feel isolated: "I find myself being very alone... It would be really good to have someone to go to for mentoring and advice . . . on moving toward full professor." Beyond moving on to the next academic rank, others discussed moving into different roles within the broader academy and expressed a need for different, specific forms of mentoring. One wrote, "I need help to know how to break into leadership roles in NRC," and another reflected, "As I am moving into administration, it would be very helpful to learn from the experiences of other (especially) women regarding negotiating the gender issues related to leadership and ways of negotiating the academic world." As Wiseman (2000) suggested, when educators make a change in their professional lives, even experienced individuals need mentoring. Finally, because so much of their current time is focused on program administration (e.g., "intern placement, NCATE, and teaching assignments"), some associate professors reported a need for "intellectually stimulating conversations that help me to stay engaged with ideas as opposed to never-ending tasks."

Full Professors' Perspectives on Mentoring

A somewhat different tone is obvious in the responses of the 25 full professors who responded to the survey. The contrasting tone is most evident in their descriptions of the roles they assumed, the initiative they took, and the control they assumed over the mentoring experiences. Whereas the doctoral students and assistant professors stated their mentors tended to be assigned, for these full professors, their mentoring experiences were more likely self-initiated. While a few full professors discussed their recent experiences as a mentee, all addressed their experiences as a mentor of doctoral students and new faculty. To illustrate the influence of this group of mentors, one respondent indicated that during his 28 years as a full-professor, he has mentored 120 doctoral students and 15 post-doctoral fellows. The view that emerged of these full professors as mentors was one in which they performed reciprocal roles, one as *guardians of the literacy field* and the other as *beneficiaries of the mentoring experiences*.

Literacy mentors: Guardians of the field. Generally, guardians act in ways to support and take care of others. Thus, choosing the phrase of *guardian of the field* to describe these full professors' mentoring experiences suggests they viewed their role as mentors as a way to support the development of others as literacy scholars and as a way to enrich the literacy profession. Their descriptions of their mentoring of doctoral students and new faculty suggested a parental, yet not patronizing, stance to their role. For example, one spoke of being challenged by knowing when to "push them [mentees] out of the nest." Another spoke of the need to, "release [them] and let the young scholar make his or her own choices." The comments of one professor suggested the desire to protect new faculty: "[I hope to] help others learn important lessons without [them] having to attend the school of hard knocks." The work with others made the full professors aware of their position as role models, as illustrated by this statement, "Being a mentor makes me more vigilant about my own acts and strategies. If I'm not practicing what I'm proposing, I can hardly be a mentor." Like the associate professors' comments, the full professors' spoke of mentoring as a

personal investment in the development of those they mentored and of how their work as mentors was a way to enrich the literacy field. "I feel like I'm influencing the future," one wrote. Another stated, "I feel like I'm doing all I can to promote literacy research and practice." The commitment these full professors felt toward their mentees and to the profession is clearly evident in these comments, but as invested as they are in these experiences, they also feel they benefit from these mentoring relationships professionally.

Literacy mentors: Beneficiaries. This group of experienced full professors spoke of the many ways they were the beneficiaries of their mentoring experiences. Many spoke of the intellectual benefits of working with new faculty and doctoral students: "Graduate students keep you fresh. They ask about papers you haven't read, about topics that are situated on the edge of your competence. They raise questions you've never thought of. All of this is sheer intellectual stimulation." Another spoke of how through these experiences she had, "to think in ways [she] wouldn't have." Several spoke of how their own scholarship was positively influenced by their mentoring relationships. "[Mentoring] expands my own learning. I write more interesting pieces than I would have otherwise." Another said, "[Although] the formal relationships ended a year ago, I have been in email contact with [them]. One invited me to speak at a conference. The friendships that evolve from all of these experiences are valuable to me." One experienced full professor, now an administrator, spoke of how those whom he mentored at one time were now supporting his scholarship. "Now that I have been in a senior administration role for quite a long time, and this takes away from my scholarly time. These former mentees are sometimes inviting me to work with them on their projects. So, in fact, I am working on two research projects as a third and fourth co-investigator rather than the principal investigator."

In sum, mentoring for these full professors was a richly rewarding experience. Their work with others was a way to participate in the development of future scholars, yet from these experiences they reaped many professional benefits, benefits they likely would not have had without their mentoring relationships. To understand the previous responses, it is helpful to consider what Boyer (1990) and Frost and Taylor (1996) referred to as the rhythms of the profession. Boyer (1990) argued that during the course of a professor's career, she goes through several underlying professional rhythms as interests change, opportunities expand, and responsibilities increase. Even when provided with such a rich professional menu, Boyer suggested that full professors at different junctures in their careers need renewal to maintain vitality. For these experienced full professors, mentoring is a professionally renewing experience. They wrote of experiencing intellectual renewal from exposure to new ideas and new theoretical perspectives. Others wrote of being personally enriched by the new relationships formed with doctoral students, which continued even when the formal mentoring ended. For the full professors who responded to this survey, mentoring provided opportunities for them to participate in ways that enriched both the field of literacy and their own professional lives.

Mentoring and the Cultural Component: The Missing Equation

As we look across all of the survey responses, one of the serious, intriguing, and even uncomfortable questions that we must ask ourselves as literacy educators and researchers is what happens to an institution when people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, places, and countries of origin are conspicuously present or absent from that community. Our analysis points to a missing

element, one not merely attributive to survey design or limitations but perhaps more directly related to the background of the majority of our respondents, who were primarily female and European American. Our respondents are representative of the general postsecondary faculty population in education, which the National Center for Education Statistics (2005) reports as follows: White 83.1%; Black 6.6%; Asian/Pacific Islander 4.1%; Hispanic, 3.3% and other, 2.9%. What we did not see in the survey responses is the possible impact of a professoriate that may be non-middle class, non-European, non-American, or American born. What difference does the absence or presence of these groups of doctoral students and professors really make in terms of mentoring in literacy education within the academy?

Writings on the difficulties and tensions of surviving in the academy for working class academics, women, and people of color abound (e.g., *The Chilly Collective*, 1995; Lin et al., 2004; Moody, 2004; Spore et al., 2002; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993), yet these specific tensions were not reflected in our data. Also, while there are known difficulties with navigating the different stages of academic life (Frost & Taylor, 1996) and those stages are clearly reflected in our survey responses, we do not know if those stages are more difficult for people of diverse backgrounds and experiences, because again, respondents did not discuss these issues.

How is the cultural dimension reflected in mentoring? Our definitions of culture reflect Gee's (1996) concept of Discourse which he defines as something larger than language but also ways of "doing-being-valuing-believing combinations" (p. 526). Our views also capture Pang's (2001) definition of culture which "represents a complex system of thinking, behaving, and valuing" (p.13) and Geertz's (1973) description of culture as "the shared patterns that set the tone, character, and quality of people's lives" (p. 216). Because mentoring is basically about human relationships in which culture is omni-present, we identified "culture" as one of the lenses in reading and interpreting the survey responses. However, other than cross-institutional differences, we found little evidence of cultural dimensions in the data, whether culture is defined as ways of thinking and behaving, or understood to be manifested as sets of expectations, languages, or traditions, or whether it is associated with race, ethnicities, nationalities, countries of origins, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, or educational background.

Correspondingly, dissonances or tensions that we expected would arise out of cultural differences were not quite in evidence either. Out of 90 participants of the study, one doctoral student mentioned the challenges faced by language minority students, saying, "The lack of support and awareness of the unique needs of English language learners is often disheartening." However, this respondent did not elaborate on these unique needs and how these could possibly be addressed through mentoring. In addition, one female full professor did show some sensitivity to the unique needs of students in terms of awareness of cultural differences in mentoring:

I realize that I mentor differentially. When students are comfortable seeking out my advice and sharing, we tend to develop close relationships that are very supportive. I worry that those individuals who are not comfortable asking for support may not be getting the mentoring they need.

Dimensions or meanings of culture evident in the survey responses were generally restricted to tensions and adjustment needs arising from change of institutional settings and contexts. These challenges manifested through discussion of the need to learn written or hidden rules, procedures,

roles, and expectations associated within higher education in general or within particular departments or academic programs. Tensions related to understanding the culture of these academic contexts were the most prominent in the stages of the academic career where participants took on a new faculty position or started a doctoral program.

We believe that when diverse professors and students are present in the academy in numbers large enough to make their presence visible, everyone benefits, not just those who have an obvious or known racial or cultural match. Positing a framework for global competence in teacher educators, Merryfield (2001) encourages all teacher educators to be much more culturally attuned by developing our knowledge of diverse cultures and to become aware of interpersonal communication skills that enable us to work with people different from ourselves.

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING MENTORING IN LITERACY EDUCATION

Three constructs stand out as we consider the mentoring experiences and needs expressed in the participants' responses: *alignment*, *reciprocity*, and *opportunity*. First, successful mentoring experiences seem to be aligned with the needs of the mentee. For example, doctoral students and those in their first years of the academy spoke of their need to understand the range of abilities needed for successful entry into academia. Many doctoral students and novice teacher educators in literacy are expected to perform in ways which differ from those performed in their elementary, middle, and secondary classrooms. Doctoral students need to understand how to conduct research, how to teach adults, and how to present at national conferences; assistant professors need substantive, "not thin" feedback on manuscripts and how to expand their role as researchers. Respondents at all levels described successful mentoring experiences as those which shifted to meet their changing needs: If a doctoral student needed assistance to write a conference proposal, that assistance was available; if a new assistant professor needed assistance with developing a syllabus, that help was provided.

Reciprocity is another construct descriptive of successful mentoring experiences of the respondents to the survey. Successful mentoring relationships at all levels were characterized by mutual respect and a collaborative spirit. For example, respect for what novice members bring to the academy is evident in the comment of one full professor who spoke of the friendships formed with doctoral students and how these relationships "keep you fresh." Experiencing mutual benefits from mentoring relationships appeared to be more likely when the relationships were formed informally rather than when mentors were assigned, as suggested by a comment from one assistant professor, "I was given a formal mentor. We never met nor talked." This respondent continued by describing the value of informal meetings with others who shared similar needs, such as negotiating the tenure process.

Opportunity, as a characteristic of successful mentoring, was evident in statements made by respondents in all career levels: doctoral, assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors. Opportunity for mentoring was often constrained by time. Whereas heavy course loads and competing responsibilities were the culprits, apprenticeships with professors was one remedy which formalized opportunities for mentoring. Other remedies included several types of structures that allowed individuals to "work smarter" and integrate various aspects of their scholarly and teaching lives.

We acknowledge that the responses to our survey were few in number, limited in their representation, and self-reported. However, with these limitations acknowledged, we offer several suggestions for enhancing the mentoring of literacy educators.

1. *Contributing to the personal agency of all involved should be an explicit outcome of a mentoring program.* For our purposes, agency is an outcome resulting from one's success with influencing his/her world (Schaeffer, 1996). Evident in the responses of these literacy educators are the rhythms of the profession noted by Boyer (1990) and Frost and Taylor (1996). To view these rhythms simply as a progression from novice to expert is too simplistic. The unsure voice of the doctoral student, concerned about interrupting the busy advisor; the new assistant professors' tensions between being perceived as needy versus competent; the associate professors' feeling of satisfaction in the mentoring of others but needing additional mentoring themselves; and the in-control stance of the full professor all suggest one aspect of these rhythms—agency. Comments from all respondents (e.g., *treated as a partner, when made visible*) reveal that achieving agency is a marker of satisfaction in a mentoring relationship.

2. *Mentoring should be embedded within the structure of a department.* When this occurs, mentoring is not perfunctory but is perceived as integral to the vitality of a department because it is part of its culture. Zachary (2005) identified several reasons why an organization should embrace a culture of mentoring. Although he spoke from the perspective of organizational theory, two of his justifications for a culture of mentoring are relevant to literacy departments. When a culture of mentoring is embraced, Zachary suggested, all, not just those involved in mentoring relationships, view mentoring as important and are invested in the process. Zachary also argued that mentoring is linked to the success of the department, and therefore is a way to encourage growth and development.

3. *Mentoring, traditionally conceived as a relationship between two persons, should be replaced with an expanded and collaborative version.* Darling (1985) as cited in Zachary (2005) called for the development of a mentoring mosaic. When such a perspective of mentoring is implemented, one has a network of mentors who can provide a variety of resources and support. When these networks follow the principles of collaborative mentorship, as described by Mullen (2000), what occurs is synergistic sharing. Hence there is, "a norm of equality and shared powers [which] requires . . . not just pragmatic interfaces but . . . integrated team players" (Mullen, 2000, p. 10). We believe that adopting such a vision of mentoring would go a long way to address the invisibility felt by so many mentees.

4. *Mentoring experiences within the academy must assume a framework for global competence* (Merryfield, 2001). This framework places responsibility on teacher educators in the United States to learn about other cultures. Merryfield asserted that such knowledge could lead to better interpersonal interactions with members from cultures different from the white European American culture that predominates in higher education in the United States.

In closing, traditional models of mentoring brought us to where we understand that mentoring is an effective strategy for professional development. Yet, the dyadic models common within these traditional frames are found wanting in the current environment in which literacy educators operate. Not only do we find that the work we do must be relevant to the increasingly diverse population of children and adolescents we educate teachers to serve, but our conscience is now attuned to issues of race, class, and power generally not considered in earlier, traditional models

of mentoring. Perhaps more differentiated, collaborative, and network approaches to mentoring of literacy professionals will project us forward. If so, we might avoid what Hargreaves (1998) calls *engulfment*, a reference to individuals' loss of identity within contexts governed by hierarchical structures supported by power and status. Perhaps then mentoring of literacy educators will be a transformative experience for all involved.

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APPENDIX A

Mentoring in the Lives of Literacy Researchers – Teacher Educators Survey Instrument

Your responses will remain anonymous and all identifying information will be deleted from the email and then purged from the email system.

1. Stage of Academic Career:
 doctoral student _____ assistant professor (1-3 yrs) _____
 assistant professor (4-6 years) _____ past tenure & promotion _____
 full professor _____ other _____
2. Years in Service:
 Number of years in this stage: _____
 Total number of years in higher education _____
3. Which best describes your own diversity in terms of gender, race, class, and culture:
 Female _____ Male _____
 Asian _____ African American _____ Hispanic _____ European American _____
 Mixed _____ Other _____
4. Which best describes your current institution: (Choose the best descriptor.)
 2-Year _____ 4 year _____ Research Institution _____ Other _____
5. Describe the types of mentoring experiences you have been involved in as a mentor in your current stage:
6. Describe the types of mentoring experiences you have been involved in as a **mentee** in your current stage:
7. Are the experiences you described assigned or self-initiated?
 Assigned _____ Self-Initiated _____
8. Describe the benefits of your experiences as a **mentor** in your current stage:
9. Describe the challenges you face as a **mentor** in your current stage:
10. Describe the benefits of your experiences as a **mentee** in your current stage:
11. Describe the challenges you face as a **mentee** in your current stage:
12. Describe your **needs** for mentoring in your current stage:

Thank you for completing this survey. Please send it as an attachment to mstjem@gsu.edu. Your responses will be anonymous and all identifying information will be deleted from the email and then purged from the mail system. If you have any questions, you may contact Mona Matthews at the ecerwm@langate.gsu.edu or by phone at 404-651-2983.