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Research supports the use of mentoring programs and induction assistance for retaining quality teachers and easing beginning teachers' transition into the teaching profession. Over the last three decades researchers have looked at the varying levels of the mentoring process. However, few studies have explored the perceptions of the teacher mentors serving in those roles. This qualitative case study was designed to take an in-depth look at the perceptions of teacher mentors working with first year teachers at the middle school level. The research questions that guided this study were designed to determine how experienced teachers serving as mentors describe their experiences and what are the best, most needed or most helpful mentoring practices.

The fifteen study participants taught at the middle school level in a suburban school district in North Carolina. The primary methods of collecting information for this study were one-on-one interviews, surveys, and focus group interviews, which allowed for a comprehensive perspective and a crosscheck of information. After a detailed analysis five distinct themes that emerged from the data were: (a) the qualities of the mentor and mentee relationship; (b) willing helper; (c) personal growth for the mentors; (d) support provider; and (e) advocate. The themes were interrelated which led to the factors that are necessary to create an optimal mentoring situation. The findings from this study revealed that mentors must create a positive relationship that is built on trust and respect with the mentee in order to combat the many challenges that occur during the first year of teaching. The experienced teacher must have a desire to help in order to create the

optimal conditions be an effective mentor and provide the personal and professional support that many first year teachers need. The role of the mentor extends beyond the one-on-one relationship with the mentee. The mentor serves as an advocate for mentoring by promoting its importance to school and district leaders which in return will hopefully invoke changes in the recruitment, training, and evaluation of the mentoring program.

MENTOR PERCEPTIONS IN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE

STUDY OF ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

Karen Boyd

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Approved by

Carl Lashley
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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Linda Boyd, father Carvin Boyd and sister, Sabrena Boyd Foxx. Without your support I would not have gotten this far.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The growing shortage of qualified teachers is one of the most crucial challenges facing our school leaders today. One reason for this shortage is that our new teachers are leaving the profession at alarming rates. On average, five percent of all teachers leave the profession each year (Hussar, 1999), and a full third of new teachers are gone by the end of their third year (Sweeny & DeBolt, 2000). In the next decade, this country will need two million new teachers (Voke, 2002). The prediction of the high demand for new teachers is attributed to the confluence of several factors including: (a) an anticipated increase in student enrollments; (b) education reform efforts requiring reductions in the numbers of students per classroom; (c) an increase in the numbers of teachers who are expected to retire within the next decade; and (d) teacher attrition (Bradley, 1999; Broughman & Rollefson, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997).

What is being done to address this growing problem in our schools today? State legislation has swept across the country since the mid-1980s mandating teacher induction programs to assist beginning teachers and help with retention of quality teachers. Concerned about attrition, policymakers began to see the logic of providing on-site support and assistance to beginning teachers during their first year of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Fideler & Hasselkorn, 1999; Little, 1990).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of teacher mentors working with first year teachers in urban middle schools. This qualitative case study is organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter I offers an introduction to the study. Chapter II provides a review of the literature as it relates to the mentoring process for first year teachers. Chapter III describes the research design of the phenomenological study, setting for the study and an introduction to the study participants. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study as the data relates to the perceptions of the mentoring process through the words of participating mentors. Finally, Chapter V provides a study overview, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future research on the topic of mentoring.

The first year of teaching for many middle school teachers is one of excitement, anguish, resilience and gratitude. Countless hours are spent decorating the classroom and preparing lessons for that landmark first group of students. For some teachers, a few hours into the first day and for others a week or maybe a month into school, the feelings of anguish start to emerge. As paperwork starts to pile up and students start to show their true colors, the feelings of agony are appearing on these new teachers' faces. For some, this is the time of more sleepless nights coupled with tears. This is when the importance of reflection starts to emerge. They begin to reflect back over situations that were good and not so good. Through conversations with a mentor, colleagues, or a family member, they begin to think of new ways to ameliorate the problems that they are facing. As the end of the year approaches, feelings of gratitude and jubilation surface for some new teachers. The end of the year has come and they are still standing. Many of them are

bruised emotionally and physically, but nonetheless still standing. At this point, many new teachers decide whether to stay or leave the profession.

Current estimates of the proportion of new teachers, particularly in urban schools who will not even last their first year as a teacher run as high as 9.3 to 17 percent (Breaux & Wong, 2003). Recent research confirms what many educators have long suspected—a strong link between the traditionally high rates of beginning teacher attrition and the teacher shortages that seem to perennially plague schools (Ingersoll, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), 2005; Portner, 2005).

Growing evidence suggests that there are not enough teachers who are both qualified and willing to teach in urban and rural schools, particularly in those serving low-income students or students of color. Certain geographic regions of the country experience a teacher shortage, especially in particular specialties such as special education, bilingual education, and the sciences (Bradley, 1999; Howard, 2003; NASBE, 1998). Ingersoll (2002) reported that the teacher shortage problem is a result of retention and not early attrition. The report goes on to say that the retention issue is more pronounced in urban and rural schools where there are large populations of students of color.

Nothing is more important to a child's education at school than having a well-prepared teacher. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires that states place a highly qualified teacher in every public school classroom by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. NCLB reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high

school. A provision of the NCLB Act is that all teachers be "highly qualified." Public Law 107-110 defines highly qualified as teachers of core academic subjects who meet three basic requirements: (a) hold a bachelor's degree; (b) obtain full state certification, which can be "alternative certification"; and (c) demonstrate subject matter competency in the core academic subjects taught (U. S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2004). With the added expectation of student achievement of NCLB for teachers factored in, it will be even more challenging to attract and retain quality teachers.

Secondly, teaching today has incredible demands due to increased diversity of the student body and increased accountability of state mandated testing. High turnover is not only detrimental to morale, but also it has ramifications to the intended goals of teaching and learning. With so many odds against them, school districts must attack the problem of teacher retention head on.

Over the last several years support for beginning teachers has increased substantially. New state and local incentives mandate particular kinds of assistance and assessments for beginning teachers. This process of preparing, supporting, and retaining new teachers is described as induction. Induction is an enculturation process in which the first few years of teaching are viewed as a phase when beginning teachers learn to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Wong (2001) defines *induction* as the process of systematically training and supporting new teachers, beginning before the first day of school and continuing through the first two or three years of teaching. Its purposes include the following:

1. Easing the transition into teaching.

2. Improving teacher effectiveness through training in classroom management and effective teaching techniques.

3. Promoting the district's culture--its philosophies, missions, policies, procedures, and goals.

4. Increasing the retention rate for highly qualified teachers. (p. 52)

During the past two decades, numerous descriptive studies have documented that the content and characteristics of different types of programs themselves widely vary (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Ganser, 2002). Induction programs can vary from a single orientation meeting at the beginning of a school year to a highly structured program involving multiple activities and frequent meetings over a period of several years. Programs vary according to the numbers of new teachers they serve; some include anyone new to a particular school, even those with previous teaching experience and others focus solely on candidates who are new to teaching. Programs vary according to their purpose. Some, for instance, are primarily developmental and designed to foster growth on the part of newcomers; others are also designed to assess, and perhaps weed out, those deemed ill suited to the job (Smith & Ingersoll, 2003).

Mentoring in which a new teacher is paired with a more experienced teacher for guidance and support has been reported to have a positive impact on teacher retention (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). In a New Jersey study, Gold (1999) reported that the first-year attrition rate of teachers without mentoring was 18%, whereas the attrition rate of first-year teachers with experienced teachers serving as mentors was 5%. Smith and

Ingersoll (2003) found similar results when the mentor was in the same subject field as the mentee.

As a mentor over the last several years I have had many interesting experiences especially with the middle grades teachers in urban schools. As examples that represent some of the teachers I have encountered during my tenure in the office of induction and success, consider these composite scenarios of some of the challenges of first year teachers. Although the teachers in these scenarios are fictional the struggles they face are all too real. Take Roberta Miles, who teaches seventh-grade math at an urban middle school. She struggled with classroom management, lesson planning, and organization. During my first observation, Roberta looked panicky and frustrated as she stood before a class of twenty uncooperative students. During the lesson, she tried to keep her composure as the students talked and passed papers. During our meeting she said, "They just won't listen to me. When I try to teach, some students are playing in their desk while others are talking to their neighbors. I am never going to be able to prepare them for the test at the end of the year." Roberta is just one of several teachers with whom I worked with who seem to have trouble with the students in her/his class.

Linda Johnson is working in a similar setting across town. In December she had decided to tender her resignation after just four months on the job. When asked why she wanted to leave she just shook her head and responded, "I can't take it. These kids are all over the place. They are so low and lacking in basic math skills. All I hear from administration is, get them ready for the big test in May."

Johnny Madison was contemplating his plans for next year. When asked why he was leaving he said, "I don't feel like I can reach these kids. My students spend too much time arguing and fussing with me and their classmates. I struggle to get through a full lesson without having to put someone out for disruptive behavior." Allison Watson struggles to keep her class under control on a daily basis. Her class is filled with students from various backgrounds and ability levels. "At times I feel so alone. I don't know what to do to reach these students," says Allison.

The number of linguistically and culturally diverse students throughout the United States is growing; however the number of teachers with diverse backgrounds is not growing proportionally (Mercado, 2001; Nieto, 2004). Programs to reform public schools abound and teachers are called on to design learning experiences for increasingly diverse populations of children who are not academically oriented. Through carefully directed activities, with ample opportunity for reflection, can beginning teachers grow to become the kind of educators who are capable of working with a diverse population (Garrett, 2002).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is that of mentoring as a means of developing the professional competencies associated with teaching in an urban school setting and promoting self reflection for the mentee and mentor.

Development of Professional Competencies

Beginning teachers must learn to handle all the responsibilities associated with teaching in and outside of the classroom. In today's schools urban settings provide a

different context for beginning teachers to develop the professional competencies that guide their work in the teaching profession. The development of knowledge, attitudes, and philosophies that guide the behaviors of beginning teachers in urban schools may be influenced by internal and external factors that often define these contexts (Tillman, 2005). Urban schools tend to serve poor children of color; teachers may suffer from low morale; bureaucratic demands are high; resources are scarce; and academic processes are often implemented differently which can prove to be overpowering for new and seasoned teachers (Costa, McPhail, Smith, & Brisk, 2005; Guyton & Hidalgo, 1995; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004).

Mentoring as a means of developing the professional competencies can help beginning teachers adjust to the norms and values of the school and to take their place as productive member of the school family. Effective urban mentors strive to understand the community in which they teach as well as articulate description of the community and the dynamics between community and school (Guyton & Hidalgo, 1995). Teacher mentors in the urban context may be called upon to assist beginning teachers in addressing the challenges of working with students who often live below the poverty level, are often viewed as separate from their families, and who often need additional emotional, social, and academic support (Claycomb, 2000). Specifically, mentors can use their expertise to help new teachers make connections between course content and the lives of their students (Koballa & Bradbury, 2009).

Professional competence includes expertise in instructional strategies, classroom management and discipline, and interpersonal relations with students, administrators,

staff, and parents, as well as participation in professional development activities (King &
Bey, 1995). Urban schools often have inadequate resources, which results in schools with
less than desirable teaching conditions (Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993). Mentoring can help
beginning teachers learn to cope with these issues. Beginning teachers can learn what
issues are important and understand what things they can affect and what things are
beyond their power. The mentor allows the mentee to observe them when they work with
others and are able to explain what and why they do certain things.

Promoting Self Reflection for the Mentor and Mentee

According to educational researchers and teacher educators, both past and present,
reflection is regarded as an essential teaching behavior (Boody, 2008; Dewey, 1933;
Langley & Senne, 1997; Parkinson, 2005; Schön, 1983; Tsangaridou & O'Sullivan,
1997). Reflection can be defined as active engagement of the mind to solve problems and
improve performance in the classroom; a critical analysis involving self-understanding,
heightened consciousness, and emancipatory learning (Dewey, 1933; van Manen, 1977;
Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Reflection "converts action that is merely appetitive, blind,
and impulsive into intelligent action" (Dewey, 1933, p. 17). Whereas non-reflective
teaching can be described as unconscious, automatic, and narrow, practitioners who
engage in reflection are those who do more than exhibit a set of teaching behaviors
identified and prescribed by others (Dewey, 1933; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991;
Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Development of reflective skills remains a key component in beginning teacher
induction. Most preservice teachers exhibit technical rather than critical reflective skills

and "many researchers concluded that developing deep levels of reflection is difficult for prospective teachers and generated few clues as to why this may be so and what can be done to better support their reflective development" (Risko, Roskos, & Vukelich, 1999). To improve, or develop, their classroom practice, teachers need an opportunity to reflect on their actions in the classroom while they are taking place and to evaluate them after they happen (Schön, 1983).

Teachers and students are described as knowers and learners in an active, experiential, and integrative process that functions within a social context, and that requires reflection as part of growth in becoming teachers (Tedick & Walker, 1995). Teachers make decisions about how to improve their teaching based on their experiences, their practical knowledge, and their reflections. Teachers need to be reflective about their own practice, and they need the opportunity to reflect collaboratively with their colleagues (Schön, 1987). It has been found that reflection coupled with experience is the greatest teacher (Garmeston, 2001).

Mentors work closely with beginning teachers to develop their reflection skills. The isolation that novice teachers experience behind their classroom doors can be exacerbated by the lack of time allotted for teachers to reflect on their own instruction or interact with other educators (Lieberman, Saxi, & Miles, 1988). Clarke (1995) suggests that reflection is not about a single event in time, but occurs over time as teachers begin to construct meaning for them.

Statement of the Problem

Building on the research documenting beginning teacher needs, many states have mandated induction programs that include mentoring. Mentoring and induction, when well-conceived, carefully implemented, and soundly supported by the schools in which new teachers work, have been shown to positively affect the retention of these teachers (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). Ingersoll and Smith (2004) conducted a study that analyzed the impact of induction on new teacher retention. The results showed that mentoring has a positive effect on new teacher retention in the profession, provided the mentor teaches in the same field as the novice. Effective mentoring programs "can help novices survive their stressful beginnings and emerge as confident and successful team players" (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 4).

The research on teacher induction conducted thus far has been focused on teacher turnover; however, there is a need for new research on mentoring practices for new teachers in urban school settings. Urban mentors, such as master teachers, cooperative teachers, peer coaches, and support teachers, play a critical role in the training, support, and retention of newcomers. Whereas the need and value of mentoring to improve teacher practice has been discussed in the literature, the mentoring of urban teachers has received less attention (Freiberg, Zbikowski, & Ganser, 1996). While the benefits of mentoring programs are well documented, many beginning teachers do not receive these benefits. The quality of mentoring programs varies according to researchers. The literature related to beginning teacher support suggests that schools serving poor communities may not provide adequate support and resources for new and existing

teachers. According to a study by Freeman, Brookhart, and Loadman (1999), for example, beginning teachers serving large minority populations in high-poverty areas are more likely to feel that they are not able to develop good relationships with students whose backgrounds are significantly different from their own.

For those teachers that are serving as teacher mentors, what are the challenges that they face? This problem is important because many mentors are struggling to meet the needs of the beginning teacher. There are a number of possible reasons why this process is successful for some, yet challenging for others. Perhaps they are struggling due to the lack of mentor training. Perhaps the school culture is creating a problem that is hindering the mentor/mentee relationship. Perhaps the lack of preparation or experiences on the part of the beginning teacher is creating a barrier in the relationship. The answers to these questions are crucial because the type of support that beginning teachers receive often determines their success or failure, which ultimately determines whether they choose to stay in the teaching profession.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how mentors address the needs of first year middle grades teachers in urban schools. This study will be used in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of these mentors.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do teachers serving as teacher mentors describe their experiences of supporting first year teachers in urban middle schools?

A. What are some highlights of positive experiences that mentors have encountered?

B. What are some challenges or barriers that mentors have faced while mentoring?

C. Has the mentors' view of their role and responsibilities as a mentor changed over the last 3 years?

2. What are the perceptions of teacher mentors in urban school settings about the best, most needed, or most helpful mentoring practices?

A. What are some key activities that mentors focus on when mentoring a first year teacher?

B. How does mentoring play a role in teacher retention?

Significance of the Study

High rates of attrition among new teachers impose steep costs on schools and their students. These include the expense of turnover, estimated by one national research, policy, and advocacy organization to be about $12,546 per teacher (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). Expenditures associated with teacher turnover levies at least three different types of cost, which include (a) organizational costs, (b) financial costs, and (c) instructional costs (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). Greater knowledge of what district and state officials can do to influence the retention rate of new teachers beyond their first years can benefit the student, the teacher, and the school system.

The results from this study should contribute to the current research on the mentoring process. Such an assessment can be used to identify perceptions of

professional support, develop effective strategies that mentors can use to help first year teachers survive difficult conditions in the classroom, and help district administrators as they make recommendations for changes in mentor programs at both the local and state levels. Further, the results should assist policymakers in determining what mentoring practices should be enhanced or eliminated as part of the teacher retention efforts.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used.

Induction—A systematic sequence of activities which orient and assimilate the new teacher into the teaching profession (Breaux & Wong, 2003).

Mentee—A first year teacher who has been assigned to receive the services of induction and ongoing guidance from a mentor.

Mentor—A person that offers support and advice in the area of curriculum, classroom management, instructional planning and other areas to beginning teachers.

Mentoring is "a comprehensive effort directed toward helping a protégé develop the attitudes and behaviors (skills) of self-reliance and accountability within a defined Environment" (Kay, 1990, p. 26).

Reflection is the act of active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed forms of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the consequence to which it leads (Dewey, 1933).

Relationship—Interactions and activities between the mentor and mentee, both professional and personal.

Teacher perceptions are the information gathered from a teacher's point of view, such as survey and interview responses, opinions, recollections or descriptions, about various aspects of teaching or strategies of mentoring (Smyth, 1995; Veenman, 1984).

Summary

As discussed earlier, school districts across the United States are facing serious teacher retention issues. Staff turnover keeps school administrators scrambling to find replacements, and in too many cases quality teaching is compromised in an effort to find a sufficient number of warm bodies to staff classrooms. The use of mentoring practices as a part of teacher induction programs to combat this problem was introduced. The goal of these mentoring programs is to use trained experienced teachers to assist first-year teachers with procedures and instructional strategies. The conceptual framework that guided this study explored the nature of the mentoring process with a focus on the development of professional competencies and promoting self reflection for the mentor and mentee. In the next chapter I take a look at the previous research that has been done on teacher induction, mentoring, the mentoring process, mentoring in urban schools, and teacher reflection.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter I offered an introduction to this qualitative case study. Chapter II

provides a review of the literature as it relates to the mentoring process for first-year

teachers. The purpose of this literature review is to describe what it is already known

about teacher induction, the mentoring process, mentoring training, and teacher

reflection.

Teacher Induction

The need for induction assistance is well documented in the literature at every

level, from large-scale national studies to in-depth case studies with only a few

participants in context specific settings such as an urban or rural school. A clear direction

is suggested by research studies and reports; induction assistance helps beginning

teachers adjust to their new professional responsibilities and encourages them to remain

in teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; NCTAF, 1996, 1997; Stedman & Stroot, 1998;

Wilson, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 2001).

Most of the literature on teacher induction through the 1980s focused on new

teachers' needs and roles of the mentor. Many beginning teachers experience isolation

during their initial years of teaching. Rationales given for induction programs and

internships were the high attrition rate for beginning teachers and for the personal and

professional well being of the new teachers. By the mid-1980s, induction programs had

grown dramatically as a result of educational reforms that were sweeping the country and in anticipation of predicted severe teacher shortages. By the late 1980s, more than 31 states and Washington D. C. had either implemented, or were piloting/planning teacher induction programs (Huling-Austin, 1990).

A study conducted by Hirsch, Koppich, and Knapp (2001) reported that by the end of year 2000, 56% of K-12 public school teachers reported that they had participated in some form of formal support for beginning teachers. Induction programs in the early years ranged from a few days' orientation before the teacher's first day at school to programs with sustained mentoring from experienced teachers (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2007). In addition to duration and intensity, induction programs vary according to the numbers of new teachers they serve. Some include anyone new to a particular school, even those with previous teaching experience, while others focus solely upon inexperienced candidates new to teaching. Programs can also differ according to their purposes. The success of school-based induction programs hinges on how teachers work together.

Researcher Richard Ingersoll (1997) conducted a study on the teacher induction that compared public and private school programs, school size, as well as high and low poverty schools. This study was one of four parts in a statistical analysis of data from public and private school teachers for the 1990-91 school year. The data showed that 67% of the schools implemented a mentor program, however only 16% of these schools were viewed as having effective assistance. The study revealed that simply offering

formal mentoring programs does not guarantee that new teachers were effectively

assisted in matters of discipline, instruction and adjustment to the school environment.

Mentoring

Mentoring has been the most common form of induction assistance. *Mentoring* is

defined as comprehensive efforts directed toward helping a protégé develop the attitudes

and behaviors (skills) of self-reliance and accountability within a defined environment

(Kay, 1990). The two most commonly stated purposes of mentoring are teacher induction

and career enhancement (Little, 1990). Traditionally, mentoring has been used to develop

the most promising individuals into leaders but, in recent years, it has come to be viewed

as a promising way to enable all people to become more successful. The mentor was

probably someone who had "been there, done that" before. A mentor might use a variety

of approaches, e.g., coaching, training, discussing, counseling, etc.

The two most commonly stated purposes of mentoring are teacher induction and

career enhancement (Little, 1990). Mentoring may be informal or take the shape of any

number of formalized programs. With informal mentoring, mentor and protégé self select

each other and there is a mutual respect for one another. Informal mentoring may be

interpreted from the perspective of a gift exchange economy where costs cannot be

calculated, hours of labor are not measured and where worth is judged in personal effect

by the individuals (Gehrke, 1988).

Formal mentoring programs usually assign beginning teachers to mentors or

consultants. Attempts are often made to match grade level and/or content area of the

mentor and the beginning teacher. Many formal programs are structured with efforts

focused on improving specific teaching behaviors. Another strategy used in some formalized programs is to match the new teacher with another teacher in the school, preferably one who teaches at their same grade level or in the same subject area (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). This may not be possible when there is only one teacher of the subject area in the building, as is often the case in non-core subject areas.

During the last twenty years many researchers have investigated the benefits of mentoring and the need for on-site assistance and support for first year teachers (Little, 1990). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) conducted a study that analyzed the impact of induction on new teacher retention. The results of this study showed that mentoring has a positive effect on new teacher retention in the profession, provided the mentor teaches in the same field as the novice. In another study, Little (1990) cited mentoring efforts as most effective in lowering attrition among beginning teachers, reforming teaching, and retaining talented professionals. Another research study in the area of mentoring was conducted by Kardos (2004). In this study, Kardos surveyed a group of new teachers from four different states. From the teachers whom she surveyed, 78% were assigned mentors. Unfortunately only a small number of these teachers had mentors who shared the same grade level and school or had conversations about teaching issues. However, she did find that those teachers, who have mentors with whom they conversed about teaching issues and who shared the same grade level and school were on average more satisfied with their jobs.

In 2004, The Public Education Network (PEN) conducted a research project on teacher mentoring. Data was collected from 200 new teachers through surveys, focus

groups, and interviews. PEN researchers found that most teachers felt they benefited from having a mentor. Effects were especially positive for new teachers who taught the same grade and subject as their mentors and worked more often with them. These novices were more likely than their counterparts with less aligned and engaged mentoring experiences to indicate that mentoring substantially improved their instruction.

Studies indicate that mentoring has a positive effect of teacher retention. Odell and Ferraro's (1992) study of the effects of mentoring on teacher retention indicated that 88% of the participants who were mentored for the one year of the study were retained. Breaux and Wong (2003) reported that 95% of beginning teachers who experienced mentoring support during their initial years remained in teaching after three years, and 80% remained after five years. New teachers, those with fewer than three years of experience, generally felt they were not prepared to meet the needs of their students. NCES (1999) reported after surveying new teachers that 18% of them felt confident in addressing the needs of diverse students, 24% felt confident in integrating technology, 28% felt confident in implementing state and district standards, and 15% felt confident in addressing the needs of students with disabilities. One reason for these numbers is that less than 75% of all teachers in the United States have had courses in child development, teaching methods, learning, having degrees in their subject areas, and have passed state licensing requirements (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000).

In summary, mentoring is a crucial factor in determining the success of first year teachers. Researchers stress the importance of the mentoring relationship and how it can relate to increased retention rates for school districts. When new teachers consistently

have meaningful conversations with mentors, their level of job satisfaction is increased.

Happier teachers are more likely to stay in the profession. In the next section I will take a

closer look at the mentoring process.

<div align="center">**The Teacher Mentoring Process**</div>

The position of mentor teacher carries many responsibilities. One of the first

responsibilities is to attend training sessions for mentor teachers. These training

sessions assist the mentor in understanding and identifying the purpose of the teacher

mentoring program. The sessions help the mentor to identify and understand the

procedures for accomplishing these purposes (Varah, Theune, & Parker, 1986). Another

responsibility of the mentor is orienting the new teacher to the educational setting. The

orientation responsibilities include an understanding of the hierarchy in the organization,

acquaintance with faculty and staff, and familiarity with services available through

support personnel (Varah et al., 1986). Mentoring offers a vast array of life and

professional learning experiences that enhance their ability to interact with their

colleagues in a collegial manner (Boreen, Niday, & Johnson, 2003).

Initially mentors gather and diagnose data about their mentees professional

abilities in a variety of areas. The mentors analyze their ways of teaching and learning,

they determine their mentees' competency and confidence to handle a given situation,

they identify unique aspects of the school and community culture, and they take notes of

the school district's formal and informal procedures and practices. Assessing behaviors

ensures that the mentees' professional needs are identified so that mentoring decisions

can be based on a thoughtful consideration of a variety of data (Portner, 1998).

Prioritizing mentoring issues is a key factor in providing the right type of support to beginning teachers at the right time (Martin & Robbins, 1999). Management issues often overwhelm the beginning teacher, especially early in the school year. In an extensive review of the literature, Veenman (1984) identified the perceived problems of teachers and reported them in rank order. First-year teachers needed assistance with disciplining and motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students' work, relations with parents, organization of classwork and obtaining materials and supplies. Kent (2000) confirmed Veenman's findings that beginning teachers have common problems.

Identification of areas where instructional help is needed is also important in supporting beginning teachers. Shulman (1986) noticed that research had not focused on the subject matter itself. He saw a need to focus on the knowledge base of beginning teachers and how subject matter was transformed from the knowledge of the teacher into the content of instruction. He felt that subject matter was a central issue that needed to be addressed within the induction research literature.

An effective mentor teacher validates a protégé often, which assists in the protection from the problems that occur during the first year while strengthening the mentoring relationship. Tasks for mentors such as teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and befriending colleagues are complex and intense. These tasks, of course, vary among mentors as their work changes according to teachers' needs and levels of preparedness (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993).

The connection between mentors and protégés is a key feature in promoting the school as a learning community of professionals (Ganser, 1997). Although mentors are usually comfortable in offering help to their inexperienced counterparts, the success of any mentoring relationship hinges on whether the beginner is comfortable seeking help from the mentor (Tellez, 1992). According to Ingersoll (2001), "The functions of the mentors are many and varied, including giving information of various types, providing access to resources, role modeling, counseling, coaching, encouraging reflection, helping with career moves and the development of friendship" (p. 298). Kay (1990) suggested that the mentoring relationship is designed to assist the protégé in learning the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of self-confidence and competency. Further, the mentor must bring together the resources necessary to affect the development of the protégé from entry-level status to seasoned practitioner. For this relationship to be successful and confidence in the performance to escalate, each must participate equally.

In a later study, Ballantyne, Hansford, and Packer (1995) described and evaluated the role and function undertaken by mentor teachers in relation to the changing concerns, needs, and expectations of beginning teachers. They concluded, subsequent to an analysis of data collected from the reflective journals of the beginning and mentor teachers, that there are four mentoring functions which beginning teachers reported they required and which buddy mentors were able to provide, with varying degrees of success. These functions were:

1. Personal support

2. Task-related assistance and advice

3. Problem-related assistance and advice

4. Critical reflection and feedback on practice

Thies-Sprinthall (1986) examined specifically the collegiality between mentors and mentees. In her study of the North Carolina model for new teachers' support, she found a close proximity between mentor and mentee and ongoing on-site training of the mentor teacher by a support team that based its training on theory and research. Thies-Sprinthall (1986) concluded that as an element in a comprehensive new teacher support program, this model not only benefited new teachers but mentor teachers and mentor-teacher trainers as well. Areas of growth for new teachers included self-concept, teaching, attitude toward teaching, and retention in the profession. Areas of growth for the mentor teachers included more awareness of their own development as teachers and the development of a rationale for their teaching strategies. Through the collegial interaction, the mentor gained an appreciation for the diverse styles of successful teachers.

The relationships built between a mentor and mentee can move beyond collegial support. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1995) indicated through their research that experienced teachers offer continued professional support during the mentorship. Wang and Odell (2002) identified three major areas through their research that are crucial in the success of beginning teacher mentoring component:

- Humanistic: assisting teachers on a personal level immerse themselves into the teaching profession

- Apprentice: assisting beginning teachers transition into the culture of the school and help with the progress of teachers in specific contexts

- Critical constructivist: reconstructing teaching, asking questions and questioning current teaching practices

In a study conducted by Jones, Reid, and Bevins (1997), mentoring was seen as most effective when it incorporated such practical help as providing guidance and feedback, observing teaching and classroom management, and enabling the beginning teacher's understanding of the many facets of instruction by demonstrating equipment, modeling good teaching and classroom management, encouraging observation of less successful classrooms, and introducing school issues. This included providing experiences in teaching a wide range of age and ability groups in the classroom. Two other meaningful areas were those of helping new teachers with time management and providing encouragement.

Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, and Yusko (1999) suggest there needs to be thoughtful selection, training and support of the mentor while experienced teachers are supporting beginning teachers. Mentoring is a powerful tool that helps new teachers to develop insights into the profession. Mentors must examine and be able to articulate the perspectives and pressures they bring to mentoring, to see the patterns and behavior they manifest in their mentoring relationship along with the limitations these may bring to their mentoring practice (Hawkey, 1997). In the next section we will look more closely at what researchers say about the training process associated with mentoring.

Mentor Training

The topic of mentor preparation has been up for debate for the last several decades. Moir (2003) stresses that training mentors is as important as training the novice teachers they will serve. Gold (1996) found that preparation for teaching provided little or no preparation for giving support. Kajs (2002) argues a similar point that even the most experienced teachers may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to serve as both a colleague and a supervisor of a novice teacher. Acquiring the special knowledge and skills of mentoring is critical to the development of an effective mentor (Portner, 2001).

Evertson and Smithey (2000) studied the effects of mentor training on the mentee. Their methodology included an experimental design with two groups of mentors. One group received a full four day workshop conducted by a local university; one group received only a one day orientation by the district. The format for the four day training included information about the role of the mentor, concerns of beginning teachers, supervision skills, creating learning environments, and developing action plans. Researchers conducted interviews with mentors throughout the year. Mentors talked about how they used the techniques learned in the four day training as they worked with their mentees. The untrained mentors did not use any specific techniques with their mentees. Weekly summaries also indicated that trained mentors were more likely than untrained mentors to assist the beginning teacher with specific strategies for developing discipline plans, pacing lessons, and changing student-centered pedagogy. Mentors are required by No Child Left Behind (2001) to have quality training, and may have follow-up professional development and support while mentoring the beginning teachers.

The researchers concluded that training not only strengthened the mentees' teaching but also the achievement of the students in their classrooms. Beginning teachers of the trained mentors rated significantly higher during classroom observations on managing instruction, arranging the physical setting, establishing routines, motivating students, managing student behavior, and classroom climate, all expressed as beginning teacher needs by Fuller (1969) and Veenman (1984).

A later study on mentor training by Kyle, Moore, and Sanders (1999) found that prospective mentors should participate in professional development to learn about the mentoring process and what is expected of them before assuming their duties. Their research also shows that mentor teachers need support and the opportunity to discuss ideas, problems, and solutions with other mentor teachers. The researchers found that novice teachers working with trained mentors possessed a higher level of teaching skills than new teachers whose mentors were not trained. This finding demonstrates that the mere presence of a mentor is not enough; the mentor's knowledge of how to support new teachers and skill at providing guidance are also crucial.

In conclusion, mentor preparation programs work to enable mentors to better understand and critically evaluate their own particular mentoring style and preference. Mentor teachers must be able to build professional relationships, gather and diagnose data, coach and conference, expand mentees' repertoire of teaching modalities, instill sensitivity within the classroom, and guide their mentee through the application and reflection processes (Portner, 2001). Mentors must examine and be able to articulate the perspectives and pressures they bring to mentoring, to see the patterns and behavior they

manifest in their mentoring relationship along with the limitations these may bring to their mentoring practice (Hawkey, 1997). Researchers have shown that effective mentor training is necessary. In the next section I will discuss the benefits of mentoring for experienced teacher.

Benefits of Mentoring for Experienced Teachers

While research substantiated the benefits of mentoring for beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Ganser, 1992), there were also many benefits for the mentor. In his 1992 study Ganser surveyed 13 teacher mentors and one counselor mentor, and 13 beginning teachers and two beginning librarians, from three different school districts about their perceptions of the personal and general educational benefits of a state-mandated mentoring program. The benefits cited by the experienced teachers serving as mentors included:

1. Personal enjoyment

2. Contributing to the profession

3. Rejuvenation and reflection

4. Learning new ideas, theories and techniques through collaboration with beginning teachers.

5. Extrinsic rewards such as additional payment, tuition vouchers and in-service credits.

Mentoring can generate as much, if not more professional development for the mentor as it does for the beginning teachers (Freiberg, Zbikowski, & Ganser, 1996).

Ganser (1997) conducted a related study looking at mentoring programs. In this study, 94 teachers who had been both cooperating teachers and mentors in seven school districts in Wisconsin were surveyed by researchers. Respondents emphasized that their careers as teachers had been affected by these roles in four ways: (a) source of pride, (b) expanded view of teaching, (c) enhancement of knowledge and skills, and (d) professional rejuvenation. While many mentoring programs compensate the mentors, it appears that intrinsic benefits and the greatest reward (Ganser, 1997).

An evaluation of the Milwaukee Dorothy Danforth Compton Fellowship Program designed to recruit, prepare, and retain new middle school teachers of color showed that veteran teachers benefit from the mentoring process. Survey data showed that the mentoring experience proved to be very positive for the veteran teachers (Edwards, 2002). Those who stepped out of their classrooms for three years for this mentoring position increased their knowledge of the performance-based standards and strengthened their teaching and leadership skills. In Saffold (2003), mentors described four specific benefits of participating in the program: improved reflective practices, a higher level of professional responsibilities, a broadened view of the profession, and a renewed appreciation for the education field. In the next section I will take a more in depth look at mentoring in the urban school setting.

Mentoring in Urban Schools

Teacher mentoring may be affected by the school context and culture (Guyton & Hildago, 1995). The culture of urban schools often presents a teaching and learning context that is different from what might be found in suburban schools. Thus, the

development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that guide the behaviors of beginning

teachers in urban schools may be influenced by internal and external factors that often

define these contexts. Teachers in urban schools usually serve poor children of color,

they may suffer from low morale, resources are usually scarce, there may be absence of

parental involvement, and academic instruction may be administered differently

(Tillman, 2005). Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, and Donaldson (2004) compared the

experiences of teachers working in low-income schools with those working in high

income schools. They concluded that teachers working in low-income schools "receive

significantly less assistance in the key areas of hiring, mentoring, and curriculum" than

their colleagues working in high-income schools and referred to this disparity as the

"support gap" (p. 2).

The urban school culture may also pose different roles for teacher mentors than

would be found in schools serving predominately middle class children. Teacher mentors

in the urban context may be called upon to assist beginning teachers in addressing the

challenges of working with students who often live below the poverty level, are often

viewed as separate from their families, and who often need additional emotional, social,

and academic support (Claycomb, 2000). Teacher mentors in urban schools may also be

called upon to help new teachers reflect on and understand their unique histories and

experiences and varied learning styles and needs of students from various racial, ethnic,

and socioeconomic groups. The deliberate focus on mentoring can enhance new teacher's

professional development and can help the teacher transfer knowledge and skills to the

specific urban school setting (Tillman, 2005). High teacher and student absenteeism, high

teacher turnover, high numbers of uncertified teachers and great numbers of inexperienced teachers all contribute to stress of urban teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Research on the nature of urban schools, effective mentors, and the importance of role models for beginning teachers in urban schools suggests that mentors in urban schools need to possess characteristics and skills in common with mentors in any school but that they also must have skills and characteristics peculiar to the environment (Guyton & Hidalgo, 1995). For instance, Cochran-Smith (1991) insisted that urban teachers need to learn to "teach against the grain" and that they learn from experienced teachers:

> Teaching against the grain is deeply embedded in the culture and history of teaching at individual schools and in the biographies of particular teachers and their individual or collaborative efforts to alter curricula, raise questions about common practices, and resist inappropriate decisions. These relationships can only be explored in the company of experienced teachers who are themselves engaged in complex, situation-specific, and sometimes losing struggles to work against the grain. (p. 280)

Some studies have identified characteristics of successful teachers of children who live in poverty (Brookhart & Rusnak, 1993; Knapp & Shields, 1990; Means & Knapp, 1991). Zeichner (1993) summarized these characteristics, which include high expectations, strong identity, a variety of teaching methods, an understanding of the community, and advocacy for justice.

In urban settings, beginning teachers experience the complexities of teaching children beset by poverty and teaching children whose social class and/or ethnicity often

is not that of the teacher, and they must do so with bureaucratic inflexibility and social isolation (King & Bey, 1995). As beginning teachers cope with those issues, mentors can nurture their professional growth (Guyton & Hidalgo, 1995). Colbert and Wolff (1992) found that a beginner teacher support system was effective in increasing the retention and reducing the isolation of teachers in urban schools.

The research has shown us that teachers serving as mentors in urban school settings must be equipped with various strategies. Good urban mentor teachers need to be able to articulate their beliefs and practices, and they need coaching skills to foster professional growth in beginning urban teachers (Guyton & Hidalgo, 1995). In the next section a review of the literature on teacher reflection will be presented.

Teacher Reflection

Philosopher John Dewey (1933) looked at the concept of reflection. He described it as a process that begins when one inquires into his or her own experiences and relevant knowledge to find meaning in his or her own beliefs. Dewey's (1916) premise was that teachers should be encouraged to become thoughtful and alert students of education, and should continue to grow through reflection. Schön (1983, 1996) expanded Dewey's notion of reflection, suggesting that professionals frame and reframe the complex problems they face, and modify their actions accordingly.

Reflection has been proposed as an important concept with sound theoretical foundation in education (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1987; Van Manen, 1977). Teachers, through reflection, can become aware of their intuitive knowledge and engage in problem solving that helps to strengthen their teaching ability (Vacca, Vacca, & Bruneau, 1997).

Reflective teaching contributes to professional development by encouraging teachers to analyze, discuss, and reflective teaching contributes to professional development by encouraging teachers to analyze, discuss, and evaluate practice. Teachers need to be reflective about their own practice, and they need the opportunity to reflect collaboratively with their colleagues (Schön, 1987). Parsons and Stephenson (2005) indicate that reflective practice in teachers involves the need for individuals to be aware of, and able to monitor, their own thinking, understanding and knowledge about teaching and to be aware of the different kinds of knowledge upon which they can draw to help develop their practice.

There is a great deal of consensus by researchers as to the value of practicing reflection. Shulman (1987) and Richardson (1990) contend that reflective models are in keeping with the holistic way in which teachers actually think and act in classroom. Thus, they have more intuitive credibility suggesting that integrating reflective practice models in teacher education is one way to develop better teachers. A study conducted by Calderhead (1993) found that reflective teaching encourages teachers to analyze, discuss, and evaluate practice, all of which are part of professional development. Teachers, through reflection, can become aware of their intuitive knowledge and engage in problem solving that helps to strengthen teaching ability (Vacca et al., 1997), and promotes professional growth.

From the start of their careers, beginning teachers should be encouraged to engage in verbal reflections regarding school matters (Pedro, 2006). By becoming independent and reflective thinkers, beginning teachers are able to cooperate, contribute, and grow

professionally. Reflection can lead to professional forms of inquiry and goal setting (Boreen et al., 2000). Ross (1989) describes teachers who are learning to teach as progressing through increasingly higher stages of competence as they learn to make more effective and efficient judgments based on their reflections. To improve, or develop, their classroom practice, teachers need an opportunity to reflect on their actions in the classroom while they are taking place and to evaluate them after they happen (Schön, 1983). Teachers make decisions about how to improve their teaching based on their experiences, their practical knowledge, and their reflections.

Studies conducted by researchers propose that novice teachers can reflect and can be helped to learn the value of reflection in teaching and learning (Rudney & Guillaume, 1990; Pultorak, 1993, 1996; Wildman & Niles, 1987). According to Dollase (1992), becoming more reflective and thoughtful about one's teaching is an area of need for beginning teachers. Mentors play a vital role in the development of reflective thinking for beginning teachers. The role of support provider is to guide the novice in reflective experiences, such as examining delivery of instruction and student outcomes (Lucas, 1999). Educators must be mindful that reflection on teaching is a process; to become a truly reflective teacher involves time, experience and inevitably, effort (Brubacher, Case, & Reagan, 1994). A beginning teacher can share verbal reflections with a mentor whose experience and support can help during that first year. By engaging in reflective practice, beginning teachers can reflect not only on technical aspects, but also on the social and moral issues of teaching (Pedro, 2006).

Ultimately, reflection is beneficial only to a point; when teachers apply their learning, they change and improve their teaching (Lucas, 1999). Reflection should become an active way of living one's life personally and professionally. With the guidance of effective mentors beginning teachers will enact this process in their daily practice which should hopefully prove successful to the teacher as well as the student.

Summary

There is no doubt that the role of the mentor is crucial in today's educational system. Mentoring helps to overcome the isolation, can assist the beginning teacher with first year needs, can help to lower attrition, and can strengthen teaching and learning. It can determine whether or not the beginning teacher becomes that "truly good teacher." Mentor teachers provide guidance and assistance to beginning teachers in many facets of teaching, especially in the urban school setting.

Research over the last two decades has suggested that reflection is at the heart of effective educational practice (Sweeny, 1994) in that it considers the cognitive, social, and moral implications of teaching (Valli, 1993; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Mentors play a key role in fostering the development of this practice in beginning teachers. The proponents of reflective practice see it as the vehicle for getting the new cadre of teachers involved as active partners in school renewal (Valli, 1992; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Johnson and Kardos (2002) conclude that

> What new teachers want in their induction is experienced colleagues who will take their daily dilemmas seriously, watch them teach and provide feedback, help them develop instructional strategies, model skilled teaching, and share insights about students' work and lives. (p. 13)

This chapter reviewed the current literature on the mentoring process. It offered an overview in relation to the central purpose of this case study. This study used a qualitative research approach to reflect the perceptions of teacher mentors working with first year teachers in an urban school district. Chapter III will describe the research design for this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III focuses on the purpose of this study and offers an overview of the design of the study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teacher mentors working with first-year teachers in urban middle schools. A qualitative approach was used by the researcher in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the teacher's experiences. Qualitative research is interpretive; it provides an opportunity for people to talk about ideas and feelings in their own language or to be observed by the researcher for their meanings and relationships (Maxwell, 2004). A case study research design was the most appropriate method for this research. A case study is concrete and contextual, taking a holistic view of the situation (Merriam, 1998). Conducting a case study enabled me to understand how the experienced teachers see themselves as mentors and the role they play in meeting the needs of first-year teachers.

This chapter will focus on the methodology used for this case study. Specific topics will include research questions, study design, setting of the study, study participants, data collection methods, data analysis, and researcher subjectivity. The next section will outline the research questions that guided this study.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to provide a voice for teacher mentors' perceptions of their lived experiences serving as mentors for first-year teachers. The primary research question that guided this study was:

1. How do teachers serving as teacher mentors describe their experiences of supporting first year teachers in urban middle schools?

    A. What are some highlights of positive experiences that mentors have encountered?

    B. What are some challenges or barriers that mentors have faced while mentoring?

    C. Has the mentors' view of their role and responsibilities as a mentor changed over the last 3 years?

2. What are the perceptions of teacher mentors in urban school settings about the best, most needed, or most helpful mentoring practices?

    A. What are some key activities that mentors focus on when mentoring a first year teacher?

    B. How does mentoring play a role in teacher retention?

Design of the Study

Using the research questions as a basis for this research, a qualitative research design was selected. Through a qualitative design, this study involved the identification of experiences, perceptions, and feelings gathered through rich, thick accounts obtained by open-ended focus group interviews, survey responses and one-on-one interviews.

Glatthorn (1998) points out that qualitative inquiry emphasizes a phenomenological view, whereby the substance of the research is inherent within the perceptions of the individual participants.

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Creswell, 1998). Merriam (1998) stated, "Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities—that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perceptions. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring" (p. 17). Because it best explores the question of *what* and *how*, qualitative research was chosen as the methodology for this study. In this study, the qualitative method will facilitate an understanding of how mentors perceive and interpret their lived experiences, especially their relationships with novice teachers (Van Manen, 1990).

In this qualitative study, a case study approach was used to capture the essence of the mentor's experiences in one school district. Case studies offer an exceptionally powerful method of inquiry for researchers who have little control over the real life events they wish to study (Yin, 1994), and they may be used instrumentally to illustrate an issue (Stake, 1994).

Setting of the Study

This study was conducted in a large urban school district in the southeastern quadrant of the United States. At the time of the study the school district employed more than 10,000 full and part-time employees with a student enrollment of more than 71,000

students. The school district has more than 120 schools located in both urban and rural areas. There were 71 elementary schools, 25 middle schools, and 28 high schools.

The featured school district has an extensive induction program that is designed to offer support for beginning teachers. In accordance with state mandated legislation, each school district must offer a three day orientation program for all teachers with less than six months experience. In addition to the orientation, the basic component to the induction program is a trained mentor for all beginning teachers during the first 3 years. Mentors serving beginning teachers during their first and second year receive a paid stipend from the state. All mentors complete a twenty-four hour initial training requirement.

The Office of Induction and Support in which this study occurred manages the mentoring program for the school district. The state mandated mentor training for experienced teachers is conducted by the coaches that work in this department. In addition to mentor training, all activities for beginning teachers with less than six months teaching experience are provided by this department. Some of the activities include the state mandated three day orientation held at the beginning of each school year, monthly meetings for beginning teachers facilitated by Induction Coordinators, and initial professional development training in the areas of curriculum and classroom management. The names of all teachers serving as mentors for teachers with less than three years experience are kept on file in this office.

The Office of Induction and Success provides continuous professional development training for all mentors. These professional development sessions are called

Coffee Houses and are held after school from September to May. During these sessions,

mentors participant in round table discussions about various topics related to mentoring.

These sessions are not mandatory, but teachers who attend five or more sessions receive

CEU credits toward license renewal.

In an effort to smooth the transition into teaching the Office of Induction and

Success employees nine full-time mentors who serve as Induction Support Coaches.

These coaches work closely with an assigned group of first and second year teachers at

selected schools. They assist the teachers with lesson planning, classroom management,

instructional resources, and mentor documentation. The coaches also provide training for

mentors and teachers serving as Induction Coordinators.

Each school in the district has a staff member who serves as the Induction

Coordinator. The Induction Coordinator is responsible for making sure that all teachers

with less than 3 years teaching experience are assigned a mentor, facilitating monthly

meetings with all first year teachers to discuss a variety of topics related to professional

competencies and other pertinent issues, and submitting semester reports to the Office of

Induction and Success. These coordinators attend quarterly training sessions provided by

the Office of Induction and Success. Induction Coordinators receive a stipend of $500

each semester for this position.

Interviews

The researcher conducted two one-on-one interviews with ten teacher mentors.

The interviews provide the explanations and interpretations through the voices of the

specific interviewees who can provide important insights into this particular situation

(Yin, 1994). Essentially, in-depth interviewing provides the researcher with an understanding of other people's experiences, and the meaning they make of those experience (Seidman, 1998).All interviews were held in a private setting and took place in a location of the mentor's choice. All of the mentors were interviewed at their work location with the exception of Sara who was interviewed at her home. Key questions were asked by the researcher to gather facts as well as the opinions of the participants, and insights into certain occurrences (Yin, 1994). A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C) was used with the participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Each participant was given the opportunity to read the typed transcription of his/her interview. A follow-up interview was held to verify the interview transcription and to gain elaboration on the participants' experience.

Teacher Mentor Participants

The participants in this study were fifteen middle school teacher mentors selected from the participating school district. A focus exclusively on teachers at the middle school level allowed for easier comparability in the study. The general population of this study was all of the current teacher mentors at the middle school level from the selected school district.

The researcher began the mentor selection process by gathering data about teachers currently serving as mentors at the middle school level in the selected school district. Initial data were collected from district officials regarding the mentors' years of experience and mentoring skills. District officials included in this selection process were Induction Coordinators, Induction Support Coaches, Curriculum Facilitators and

Administrators. Once the list was created, an appeal in the form of a survey was sent to

the mentors. The survey (see Appendix A) included questions about the mentors'

experiences while working with first year teachers, mentoring background, and

willingness to participate in an one-on-one or focus group interview. The final

participants for the study were then selected based on the survey results. To qualify for

this study, prospective participants (regardless of gender or ethnicity) had to meet the

following requirements:

1. willingness to participate in the study;

2. currently serving as a mentor for a beginning teacher at the middle school
    level;

3. the mentor must have served at least one previous full year as a mentor;

4. the mentor must have served two or more years in the same school;

5. the mentor must be currently working at an urban middle school.

Poor timing of the solicitations for initial nominations resulted in only five viable

candidates. A second appeal was made two weeks later with a more appealing invitation

that resulted in an expanded pool of fifteen candidates that met the criteria. The

researcher made contact by phone and e-mail with all viable candidates in early October.

The researcher described the project, the time commitment, the value to the school

system, and the confidentiality ensured for the participants.

One of the researcher's goals throughout the study process was to develop rapport

with the participants. This included being sensitive to the teachers' needs, their time, and

their teaching. As a result, all interviews and meetings were scheduled at the teachers'

convenience and not before holidays, prior to parent conferences, or preparation of report cards. Despite the fact that the researcher made contact with the participants in early October, she waited until after first quarter grades were due at the end of the month before conducting interviews with teachers. This caused a brief delay in the start of the study but contributed to rapport between the researcher and participants who appreciated the sensitivity of the researcher to their needs.

One-on-One Interview Participants

Nan is a 34-year veteran in the field of education. In addition to a degree in education, Nan holds a master's degree in Guidance Counseling. During her career she has taught at the high and middle school level. She has worked as a high school guidance counselor, language arts and social studies teacher. Nan currently serves as the chairperson for the special education department at her school Truman Middle School.

Nan started mentoring 10 years ago after being asked by her principal. She describes herself as a laid back mentor. Nan really enjoys working with beginning special education teachers. She prides herself in being able to help them understand the policies, procedures and organizational skills needed to stay afloat in this profession.

Gwen is a Literacy Coach at Truman Middle School. She has been in the field of education for 25 years. During that time, she has taught at the elementary and middle school level. She spent 10 years working overseas in a bilingual school. There she taught the United States curriculum in a SACS accredited elementary school. While there she became fluent in Spanish, a skill that she still uses today. Her other work experiences

include working as a reading specialist, a community college instructor, academic coach, and curriculum facilitator.

Gwen began mentoring 12 years ago after being asked by her administrator. She describes herself as a good listener. She says, "Most people think it's easy to ask me questions or confide in me because I don't talk about them or spread it around or anything." During the interview she stressed the importance of not telling the mentee what to do but to give them suggestions or options. She explains, "I don't try to tell them exactly how to do it. That would make them 'mini-me's' because each person has their own way about them."

In addition to serving as a middle school Literacy Coach, Gwen has extended her mentoring duty to serve as the Induction Coordinator for her school. This position gives her the opportunity to work closely with all of the first-year teachers by facilitating monthly meetings. During these meetings, they are able to discuss various issues related to teaching in and outside of the classroom.

Elizabeth began her teaching career in 1988. She received her teaching degree in elementary education from a local university. Elizabeth has worked at the elementary, high school, and district level. She worked for seven years at the elementary level before taking some time off to raise her children. When she returned she took a job as a Teacher Cadet instructor at Wellington High School. This was one of her first encounters with mentoring. As the Teacher Cadet instructor she worked with high school students looking to become teachers. She arranged for the students to go into local schools and serve as teacher helpers. She stated, "These students really got firsthand experience at dealing

with students. These experiences were very enlightening for the students." During class instruction, she worked hard at helping the students understand what goes into being a teacher and the importance of self-reflection.

Elizabeth's mentoring experiences extended as she moved to another position. This job allowed her the opportunity to work at the district level as a Lateral Entry coach. Lateral entry is an alternate route to teaching for qualified individuals outside of the public education system. Lateral entry allows qualified individuals to obtain a teaching position and begin teaching right away, while obtaining a license as they teach. Elizabeth assisted these teachers with their transition into the profession by offering training in the areas of classroom management, lesson planning, and curriculum design. Her time in this position allowed her to expand her mentoring practice to adults.

Elizabeth is currently working as a remedial reading teacher at Truman Middle School. She is currently mentoring two teachers at her school. Elizabeth continues to maintain contact with several of the lateral entry teachers who she worked with in previous years so her mentoring extends beyond the walls of Truman Middle School.

Tina is a sixth grade math teacher at Truman Middle School. Her teaching career began eight years ago at the elementary level. She taught fourth grade at Crestdale Elementary School. After four years she transferred to Wellington Elementary where she co-taught with another teacher. One year later, Tina transferred to the Truman Middle School to teach sixth grade math and science.

It was at this time she was asked to become a mentor by her principal. She willingly accepted. When asked what she thinks the mentor's role is, she states, "They

assist the new teachers in pretty much anything that they need help with. Mentors try to make the transition as easy as possible and reduce the level of stress." Tina feels that it is important that mentors receive proper training in the mentoring process. Her time as a mentor has inspired her to look into a career in counseling. She is currently enrolled part-time in the Guidance Counseling program at one of the local universities.

Janice is a sixth grade math teacher at Jennings Middle School. Her career in education began 30 years ago. She started as a theater teacher at the high school level. She has fond memories of her time teaching at the high school. Janice stayed at the high school level for four years.

After her time in high school, Janice accepted a position at a middle school as a sixth grade teacher. She describes that transition as being very difficult. She started in November after two other teachers had quit. The class that she was asked to teach had 36 students. Her predecessors couldn't handle it because "it was too many, too much, and they didn't particularly like it." However she loved the challenge that this class presented. She has been at the sixth grade level ever since but only teaching math.

Janice has been involved with mentoring for over 10 years. During that time she was recognized for her mentoring ability by wining Mentor of the Year for her school district. Her philosophy about mentoring is simple. Janice explains, "Mentoring for me is a natural progression of teaching. You're just teaching somebody older and something different, but it's still teaching." Her passion for teaching and mentoring is evident in everything that she does.

Marilyn retired from teaching five years ago after 30 years of service. After taking a few months off, she decided to return to the classroom. Marilyn is certified in foreign language and currently teaches Spanish at Jennings Middle School.

Marilyn was one of the first teachers to complete the mentor training in the selected school district. When asked why she became a mentor over 15 years ago she says, "Originally it was to find out a little bit more about the details of what they were doing with the observation and evaluation instrument." While serving as a mentor, Marilyn began to see "that it really was a benefit for all of us" as she continued to participate in the program. After a few years the district changed the mentoring process and mentors were no longer required to play a role in the formal evaluation process for beginning teachers.

In addition to mentoring beginning teachers, Marilyn has served as the Induction Coordinator for her school for the last two years. As the coordinator, she has contact with other mentors and all of the beginning teachers at the school. She makes sure that all of the beginning teachers know that she is there for them. Marilyn works closely with administration to assign mentor and beginning teacher pairings. When doing this she takes into consideration various factors such as teaching subjects, grade level, and personality. In order to be an effective mentor, Marilyn feels you have to be a "knowledgeable person in what you're doing, but you also have to be a compassionate person."

Landy is a special education teacher at Walton Middle School. She has been teaching for 21 years. During that time she has worked with students at the elementary,

middle and high school level. Landy is currently serving as the chairperson for the special education department at Walton. Looking to make somewhat of a career change she is pursuing a master's degree in Library Media Science.

Landy's mentoring experiences extend beyond the school doors. To Landy mentoring is necessary because "someone has to show them how to do it." She has served as a cooperating teacher for student teachers for several years. Helping beginning teachers with classroom management and organization is essential to their success. Like other mentors, Landy struggles with time management. She wishes that she had more time to get in and observe her mentee, but unfortunately she said, "There's just not enough hours in the day."

Teresa serves as the Curriculum Facilitator and Induction Coordinator for Walton Middle School. Her teaching career began 17 years ago as middle grades math teacher. Teresa spends countless hours working with teachers and administrators to ensure that the school is providing equitable and challenging instruction for all students.

When asked why she became a mentor Teresa explained, "I enjoy helping others reach their potential and in turn creating a successful environment for students." Teresa has been known to go into the classroom of her mentee and conduct demonstration lessons. She feels that modeling is a "visual" way of helping the teacher instead of just telling him or her.

Serving as Curriculum Facilitator has sharpened Teresa's leadership skills and inspired her to pursue a master's degree in school administration. She hopes to work as

an assistant principal at the middle school level in the next three years. In addition to being a hard worker at school Teresa described herself as a devoted wife and mother.

Ronald is in his seventh year of teaching at Addison Heights Middle School. He currently teaches sixth grade math. During his time at Addison, he has also taught writing and reading. Ronald taught for two consecutive years before taking time off to pursue his master's degree. Like so many other teachers at Addison Heights, Ronald began his career as a lateral entry teacher.

Two years ago, Ronald was approached by his principal to serve as mentor to a first year sixth grade math teacher. He happily accepted the position. In his words, "We do have a bigger obligation. When we're gone others will follow and we need to do what we can to make their jobs as successful as possible." Unfortunately during his first year of teaching his mentor was not very involved. He stated, "My mentor was a fine teacher in her own right, but I think we spoke maybe twice. Mostly just to sign a log. I think she took me out to lunch at the very end of the year because she felt guilty." Remembering this experience, he makes sure that he is in tuned to his mentee's needs by meeting with her frequently. Luckily they are on the same grade level and share a common planning time.

Ronald describes himself as a dedicated educator. Recently he was recognized for his exemplary teaching ability by being named Teacher of the Year for the school district. When asked how teaching has changed his life, he said, "It brings me great pride to say that I am a teacher and that I am among those that help shape young lives."

Sara is an eighth grade science teacher at Easterly Hills. Her teaching career began in August 2000 at Wallace Middle School. She taught there for two consecutive years. Feeling the need for a change, she transferred to a nearby high school to teach ninth grade environmental science. After one year she realized that middle school was a better fit for her so she returned to Wallace Middle. After three years she transferred to Easterly Hills.

Sara had a very positive experience with mentoring early on in her career. She spoke lovingly of her mentor, Mrs. Foust. She stated, "I have such fond memories of our conversations. Our relationship was great because we learned from each other." Sara feels that mentoring is vital part of the future of education. Working with first year teachers has always been something that she enjoyed so when asked to mentor she jumped at the opportunity. Sara has mentored as many as three teachers at a time. When asked why she took on so many teachers she said, "I just couldn't leave them out there by themselves."

While at Wallace Middle School, Sara served as the Induction Coordinator. She took this job on without hesitation. "I felt like I had something to share with them," Sara explained. While in that role she worked closely with all of the first year teachers. She spent countless hours sharing resources, giving advice and just listening to the teachers.

Sara continues to look for ways to grow professionally. Sara stated, "If there is a workshop or training that will help me help new teachers, I am there." In addition to attending monthly mentoring sessions presented by the school district, she is pursuing her

graduate degree through an on-line university. Sara's dedication to teaching and the teachers she works with is clear in everything she does.

The wealth of experience among the participants was unique. The average years of teaching experience for the participants was 18 years in the field and nine years experience as mentors. Table 1 outlines the participants along with their experience.

Table 1

Participants' Years of Teaching and Mentoring Experience

Teacher Mentor	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Mentoring Experience	School
Nan	34	10	Truman
Gwen	25	12	Truman
Tina	8	2	Truman
Elizabeth	12	7	Truman
Janice	30	11	Jennings
Marilyn	35	15	Jennings
Landy	21	10	Walton
Teresa	17	13	Walton
Ronald	7	2	Addison Heights
Sara	9	4	Easterly Hills

Focus Group

Qualitative research concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations. Keeping this in mind the researcher conducted a focus group interview as one of the data collection methods. Krueger (1988)

defines a focus group as a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 18).

The researcher conducted the focus groups in November to discuss the mentoring process. A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D) was used during the session. Participants in the focus groups were selected because of their relevancy to the topic and willingness to participate. Hunt, Hirose-Hatae, Doering, Karasoff, and Goetz (2000) suggested focus groups permit key stakeholders opportunities to share their perceptions and to listen and respond to the views of other members within the focus groups in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Members within the focus group hear themselves and receive feedback from the interactions.

The focus group interview was conducted in a mutually agreed upon location after school hours. In order to gather the true essence of the discussion the interviewer used an audio and video tape recorder. Babbie (1998) stated that group dynamics in a focus group frequently bring out aspects of the topic that would not have been anticipated by the researcher or would not have emerged in interviews.

Focus Group Participants

A 90-minute focus group session was conducted with a selected group of middle school teacher mentors. A semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D) was used to guide the discussion. As previously stated, the participants were selected based upon the criteria set for the study. The focus group participants had an average of 23 years teaching and 11 years mentoring experience. The group consisted of two men and three women.

Table 2

Focus Group Participants' Years of Teaching and Mentoring Experience

Name	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Mentoring Experience
Samuel	7	5
Gavin	9	5
Evelyn	39	2
Susan	31	18
Denise	30	25

Samuel is a retired military instructor. He currently teaches career and technical education to students in the sixth, seventh and eighth grade. Gavin also comes to the group with military experience. He currently teaches sixth grade math. Evelyn is the veteran of the group. She currently teaches reading to struggling students at her school. In addition, she works closely with the language arts teachers to provide additional support in and outside of the classroom. Susan is a former language arts teacher who currently serves as the curriculum facilitator and induction coordinator at her school. She works with teachers across all three grade levels in the areas of reading and math. Denise is a math facilitator at her middle school. In addition to working with beginning math teachers, she provides professional development training for teachers across the school district.

Data Collection Methods

A variety of data collection instruments were used to achieve better understanding of the participants and to increase credibility of the findings (Merriam, 1998). Primary

methods of collecting information for this study were one-on-one interviews, surveys,

and focus group interviews, which allowed for a comprehensive perspective and a

crosscheck of information.

> Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of
> information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective. . . . By using a
> combination of observations, interviewing and document analysis, the fieldwork
> is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings.
> (Merriam, 1998, p. 137)

Survey

A multi-item electronic survey was distributed to 50 mentors and 36 second year

teachers at the middle school level. Data collected from the survey allowed the researcher

to gain a greater understanding of the mentor/mentee relationship from both perspectives.

The survey contained questions related to the focus of the study. The surveys were

designed to analyze the mentor/mentee relationship through three lenses: professional

competencies, support and reflection. The survey questions given to the mentor teacher

paralleled those asked of the second year teacher. Participants were asked to give

comments and specific examples when answering questions.

The participants were asked to complete the electronic version of the survey

within a two week period of time. Each teacher participant took approximately 30

minutes to complete the survey. Due to a low initial response, a second appeal was sent

out to potential participants. The second appeal yielded a greater response rate for the

mentor survey. However, the second year teacher survey (See Appendix B) response rate

was still low. A third appeal via e-mail was sent along with a follow up phone call in an

attempt to get more participants. Of the 50 teachers invited to participate, 33 mentor teachers and 19 second year teachers responded.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a practical approach when managing the data collected from the surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interview. Data were analyzed for this study working inductively from the particulars to more general perspectives to derive themes of categories (Creswell, 1998). One way to conduct an inductive analysis of qualitative data is the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the constant comparative method, each new category of meaning selected for analysis is compared to all other categories of meaning and grouped (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Because it is a continually evolving process, the constant comparative method was chosen as the process for refining categories and deriving themes for this study.

The data collected from the surveys were compiled using the on-line computer software program Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). Once calculated by the computer program, the researcher created a chart displaying the results by survey item and then emerging patterns. A separate chart was created for each survey and then compared with the other for similarities and differences. Each section of the surveys was analyzed separately. During the analysis, any survey question that yielded a response rate of 50% or higher was recorded for further comparison. A list was compiled of the most prominent responses and used by researcher to create the interview protocol to be used during the one-on-one and focus group interviews.

The one-on-one interviews were organized by the question, then by the participant, and lastly by emerging patterns and categories. Hard copies of all interviews were printed and color-coded. Coding allows the researcher to sort statements by content of the concept, theme, or event rather than by the people who told you the information (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). These became the basis for the initial data analysis. Next the researcher used a data analysis technique described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) the researcher identified the chunks or units of meaning in the data.

> The search for meaning is accomplished by first identifying the smaller units of meaning in the data, which will later serve as the basis for defining larger categories of meaning. In order to be useful for analysis, each unit of meaning identified in the data must stand by itself. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 128)

The researcher identified these units of meaning by carefully reading though transcripts from the one-on-one interviews and focus group interview. The researcher let the units of meaning emerge from the data itself noting very finite categories such as "role of mentor," "levels of mentor support," and "mentor gratification." These units of meaning were written in the margins on the hard copy transcripts.

The researcher completed an analysis of all first round interviews before beginning the second round. Quotes for all themes were placed on a matrix. This provided a visual framework to develop questions and probes, and to expand on themes from the first round of interviews when conducting the second. A final chart was created that displayed all the research questions along with the participant responses and themes identified by the researcher.

Finally, all of themes were reviewed along with the responses from the participants. During this final analysis the researcher looked for ways to combine certain themes that emerged from the first analysis. This afforded me a final opportunity to check my hypotheses and provided additional information for me to include in my description of the mentoring process from the teacher mentors' perspective.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is established when findings as closely as possible reflect the meanings as described by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher became an integral part of the process. In addition, participants were given time to review the data and make corrections as warranted. Lincoln and Guba (1985) saw this as one of the most critical techniques for establishing credibility in case study research. The process of peer review included the dissertation committee, especially chair and colleagues who were involved with the researcher in each step of the process. Their feedback and the resulting refinement, helped strengthen the conformability and dependability of my analysis and interpretations. In addition, the questions that they asked gave the researcher an idea of how much information needed to be included in the presentation of findings to create the kind of thick description that allows readers to determine the transferability of my conclusions. By using multiple sources of data the researcher was given frequent opportunity to verify data from one source to another. The researcher measured reliability by looking for consistency across the interviews. Consistency was evident through the use of similar words and descriptions of events.

Lastly, the researcher took great care to ensure that the data made sense. This is achieved by using "rich thick description" (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) that allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability. Such description draws pictures in words of something tangible, giving vivid descriptions of what it feels and looks like.

Researcher Subjectivity

The topic of mentoring is close to me. During my first year of teaching, I was fortunate enough to have a great mentor. Over the years, I have been drawn to offer support to the beginning teachers working around me. During the summer of 2006 I had the opportunity to serve as an intern in a teacher induction department. This opportunity led me into the position of full-time mentor for beginning teachers within this district. When this position came available, I was excited to see that district officials were looking closely at the importance of providing support for new teachers. As a mentor, my role was to provide support and professional growth opportunities to enhance the skills and effectiveness of beginning teachers in the areas of classroom management, lesson planning, professional development, and time management. I also had an opportunity to speak with the teachers who are serving as mentors at the school level.

My own experience with mentoring influenced me examine the perceptions of other teachers serving as mentors. As the principal researcher, I was upfront about my feelings and experiences with the participating mentors. Some of the participants in the study are current and former colleagues of mine. Several months of data collection and analysis allowed me to capture the true essence of the subjects and control my personal subjectivities. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the interview

transcripts for accuracy. The data collected was detailed and reviewed by a colleague. By having another person review the data, I was able to monitor my personal subjectivities as I reported the results of the study.

Summary

Chapter III presented the research questions, research design, instrumentation, data collection methods, a description of the research setting and participants, and data analysis procedures. This study was designed to explore the perceptions of teachers serving as mentors. By gaining insight into their practice and experiences the quality of mentoring and some mentoring programs can be improved. In the next chapter the findings from the data analysis are presented.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The mentoring process is one strategy used by school districts to increase teacher retention. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the teacher mentoring experience through the lived experiences of a select group of teacher mentors. This chapter will focus on the data analysis and findings from the surveys, one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do teachers serving as teacher mentors describe their experiences of supporting first-year teachers in urban middle schools?

   A. What are some highlights of positive experiences that mentors have encountered?

   B. What are some challenges or barriers that mentors have faced while mentoring?

   C. Have the mentors' views of their roles and responsibilities as a mentor changed over the last three years?

2. What are the perceptions of teacher mentors in urban school settings about the best, most needed, or most helpful mentoring practices?

   A. What are some key activities that mentors focus on when mentoring a first year teacher?

B. How does mentoring play a role in teacher retention?

Data Analysis Presentation

All three data collection methods describe a rich experience of mentoring with many unique attributes. Each set of data was analyzed and compared by the researcher in an effort to define relevant themes. These themes are discussed below using the research questions as a guide. First, the researcher describes the experiences of the mentors while supporting first year teachers. Chapter III gives a detailed description of each participating mentor. The second section will discuss the best and most needed mentoring practices from the mentor's perspective.

1. How do teachers serving as teacher mentors describe their experiences of supporting first year teachers in urban middle schools?

Theme 1: The Qualities of the Mentor and Mentee Relationship

One key quality to successful mentoring appears to be the mentor/mentee relationship itself (Gray & Gray, 1985). The data revealed that this relationship is very intricate. Four specific qualities emerged from the surveys and interviews with the mentor participants. These sub themes have been identified as positive relationship, time investment, communication style, and challenges.

Positive relationship. A meaningful relationship between the teacher mentor and the beginning teacher establishes an effective mentoring experience since the relationship mediates the experiential exchange (Covey, 1997; Hawkey, 1997). Compatibility between the two teachers is based on the interpersonal interactions that occur during the mentoring process (Cline & Necochea, 1997). Specific questions about the mentor-

mentee relationship were asked on the survey taken by teacher mentors and the second-year teacher participants. During the one-on-one and focus group interviews, the researcher delved deeper to get a better understanding of this relationship. The majority of the participants in this study described their relationship as being positive. Eighty-one percent of the mentor survey participants strongly or moderately agreed that mentoring had been a positive experience for them. While slightly lower, seventy-three percent of second year teacher survey participants strongly or moderately agreed that the time spent with their mentor was meaningful.

The teacher mentor participants who participated in the interviews spoke in more detail about the mentor-mentee relationship. During the interview sessions, some mentors described how they had set the foundation for this positive relationship early on. Gwen explained, "I would let them know at the beginning that I was there and available." Another mentor Janice had an approach slightly different than Gwen's. During the interview Janice explained how she starts her relationship in a non-threatening way. She explained:

> The first thing I like to do is go out to lunch with that person and get to know them a little bit. I think that part of the relationship is really important, so we actually meet off campus before school starts. I would never start with a person unless I absolutely had to after school has started. During the summer time, I'll call a couple of times to get them started because you don't want them to be so terribly anxious when August comes. Generally we'll start looking at pacing guides and working on lesson plans right away.

Making that personal connection was reiterated during the focus group interview. Sam stated, "Get to know that person so you know how to communicate with that person.

Especially if it's an off campus setting and it's before school. It gives you a chance to break the ice." Gavin discussed his need for that personal connection before the mentoring began.

> A couple of years ago, I knew before school started who my mentee would be for that year. I gave him a call and we just got together, so I could get to know him. Is he married? Does he have a girlfriend? What are his likes? What are his dislikes? What else does he like to do besides teach?"

Evelyn was in complete agreement. She added, "I think it's really important to build a relationship early where they feel comfortable talking to you. They aren't afraid of you." Denise added another important area to be addressed early in the relationship. She explained, "I think it's important to not only build the relationship, but know their likes and dislikes. Sometimes we find ourselves over helping or helping where we shouldn't. Knowing how to communicate with that person must be determined early." Building a firm foundation early on is vital to a good mentor-mentee relationship.

Time investment. Once the mentoring relationship has been established, it must be nurtured. The amount of time given to the mentor-mentee relationship is critical. Time for the participants meant time to spend together, time for planning, and time for mentor/mentee observation. One of the key questions asked of the participants was about the time mentors spent with their mentee's during the school year. The results from the survey data analysis show that there was consistent contact between the beginning teacher and mentor during their first year of teaching. Seventy-three percent of the mentee respondents indicated that they met with their mentor on a regular basis. One

second year teacher stated, "She helped me mostly by keeping me from getting bogged

down by the little things that do not matter as much and stay focused."

In contrast, three second year teachers indicated that they had not met with their

mentor on a regular basis. There were three comments in this section that related to these

responses. They stated:

- We did not get a chance to discuss issues due to time constraints.

- My mentor was usually available if I needed him. However, there were times
  when I questioned whether he had my best interests in mind based on
  comments from some of my colleagues.

- When I needed help, which was not very often, I had to seek my mentor.

With the conflicting responses on the survey, the researcher decided to explore

the topic of time further during the one-on-one and focus group interviews. During the

interviews, Susan expressed that having time to observe her mentee was a bit

challenging. She explained,

> I always had my mentees who were on my grade level and I could never go see
> them teach because I was teaching at the same time. I talked to them every day at
> planning, after school and before school. Unfortunately, if I was to go sit in their
> classroom I had to have someone cover my classroom and it wasn't going to
> happen.

Other mentors expressed having these same types of issues when it came to

spending time with their mentee. Janice felt that she did not meet with her mentee like

she really wanted to. She reflects back on her practice, "I need to make more time for me

to touch base with them. Because, let's face it, it's almost like being a mother. You never

do it enough." One interview participant, Tina was faced with scheduling conflicts,

"Being in different content areas and different grade levels makes it a little bit more difficult to meet." From the participant comments the researcher found that time was a serious issue that many tried to overcome.

Communication style. According to the mentors, time is often limited; therefore, the components of the mentor-mentee relationship must be defined early on. A clear line of communication was an essential part of the relationship according to the participants. One mentor teacher noted that weekly meetings allowed for "gripe time and consoling" between the two teachers. As introduced in Chapter 2, in order to maintain a productive mentoring relationship, mentor-mentee pairs must be willing to share their thoughts and feelings about teaching (Portner, 1998). During the interview, Gwen outlined how she communicated with her mentee, "Daily I'd check on them and ask them how they were doing. Send them little treats. It was very informal, but when it needed to be more formal or serious it would be that way as well." During the focus group interview, Sam had a unique mentoring conversation with his mentor that he shared.

> My mentee for this year called me at 9:30 one Sunday night. He was at his mother's house out of town and he was hurting. He told me where he was hurting. It was in his stomach area. I told him to get his mess to the hospital. He went and had an emergency appendectomy. He felt comfortable calling me at 9:30 on a Sunday night. Just little things like that. He was at his mother's house, but he called me.

Sara, the interview participant from Easterly Hills, maintained an open and consistent communication style with her mentee.

> It was not uncommon for us to be at home on a Sunday night in our pajamas talking on the phone about science experiments and students. The school day is

often so busy that we don't get to talk as much as we like so we talk at night over the phone. This works best for both of us.

These were just a few examples of how important it is that the mentor let the mentee know they can talk about anything at anytime with them. Elizabeth stated, "I feel like the mentor is that other person besides the administrator that the first-year teacher can go to. Unlike the administrator, the mentor is not there to judge or evaluate." Through the conversations with the mentors it is easy to see that the mentor is more than a colleague, but a friend.

Another participant, Janice, stressed the importance of confidentiality when it comes to communication. She stated, "There has to be a stated anonymity. You're not judging them or running down to one of the administrators and tattle telling on them." Knowing that what you say will be kept private is important to both teachers. One of the younger mentors, Tina also gave details about the role of confidentiality in her mentor-mentee relationship. She explained, "They feel comfortable talking to me about stuff that they don't want to get out. They trust me. They know that I won't tell anyone what they say."

In addition to confidentiality, a mutual respect for one another was just as important to the mentor-mentee relationship. Ronald described this aspect of the relationship,

> My mentee respects what I do in my classroom and she appreciates any advice that I may have to lend. I try not to be overly critical and I think she responds to that. I try to listen and validate her ideas as well. We have a very good rapport.

During the focus group interview Denise shared an experience with one of the teachers she worked with a few years ago.

> One year one of my teachers was having a conflict with another team mate. She was very upset about the way the other teacher was treating her. She confided in me. I gave her suggestions on ways to handle the teacher. I was glad she trusted me.

Gavin also added, "I make sure that the teachers I am working with know that what they say does not go beyond my ears." It was clear that all of the mentors went to great lengths to ensure the mentees felt safe and secure when it came to communicating personal and private issues with them.

All parties must feel relaxed and at ease to speak or share anything during the conversations. Janice spoke about the sharing of ideas. She stated, "We work things out together and even though we may have a different teaching style; nevertheless, we have to hit the same finish line. So that's when we start sharing ideas and saying I think this will work." Sara spoke about how she still communicates with one of her mentors from two years ago.

> Mrs. Wilkes, my mentee from two years ago still comes to me when she needs advice. She just e-mailed me the other day about a parent issue. It makes me happy to know that she still values my opinion and is willing to share.

As shown above the communication style between the mentor and mentee is very intricate and must be taken seriously. The relationship is based on a mutual respect for each other's opinions and the strictest level of confidentiality.

Challenges. The relationship between the mentor and mentee can be strained at times. While mentors tend to have their own ideas about mentoring because of previous experiences, the novice teacher may be uncertain about the mentoring process. Differences in expectations and viewpoints could result in stress and a dysfunctional relationship between mentor and novice teacher (Hawkey, 1997; Nelson & Quick, 1997).

During the interviews, some mentors disclosed stories about some of their tense mentoring experiences. Some of the mentors spoke about teachers who did not listen to the suggestions being given to them. Tina explained,

> When the mentee is having difficulties in areas that you've tried to help them with by modeling, conferencing, and observing, but they don't implement what you say. They don't do what you say, but they continue to be frustrated. You know that you've tried to help them and other people have tried to help as well.

Teresa echoed this same challenge by stating, "Teachers that don't listen, sink their own boat. As the interviews continued, Gwen spoke about a similar challenge. Gwen stated, "I have had mentees that know it all. They don't have any questions or concerns however; their teaching is less than exemplary. When you talk to them they always have an excuse and get very defensive."

During the focus group interview Samuel discussed the challenges he faces while mentoring.

> Trying to get the teachers to see that school and children are different today than when they were in school. I have butted heads with some of my mentees on how to handle certain situations. They think they know what to do, but often times they end up making the situation worse.

Susan followed up his comment by adding,

> What I have trouble with is getting the mentees to handle problems early on before they get too out of hand. They often tell me everything will be okay, but then a week or so later the situation has exploded into a bigger problem. Then I have to help them put the fire out. If only they would have listened to me earlier.

These experiences have made some mentors really do some soul searching as they try to find ways to improve these vital relationships.

Age difference. During the focus group interview, three mentors expressed concern about another type of challenge—age differences. Samuel spoke about a challenge between him and his mentee that could be attributed to age.

> I had a mentee who was trying to be the student's friend instead of teacher. He never had control of the class. He was very immature. I was constantly trying to get him to understand that he was the teacher, not a buddy. There is a fine line between the two, and he continued to cross it.

Beginning teachers may experience resentment toward seasoned basic educators who feel that they know best because they have more years of experience and because they have a better understanding of curriculum standards within their specific subject area (e.g., language arts, math, science, social studies) (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000). Tina, one of the younger mentors has been faced with age difference challenges.

> When I work with older teachers new to teaching they sometimes have trouble communicating with me. I think they think I can't relate to them because I am younger. I explain to them that I am here to help. Once they get over the idea that someone younger than them can actually offer some helpful tips things go much better.

During the interview, Marilyn shared her thoughts on this subject as well. She explained,

"As I've gotten older the age difference sometimes becomes an intimidating factor. We

have differences in personalities, teaching, and learning styles."

Gavin spoke about a similar challenge. He added,

> Conflicts with other colleagues who have different belief systems can create
> problems for the mentee. I found myself running referee because my mentee was
> not listening to the suggestions made by her teammates which was creating
> friction on the team.

Landy, a mentor at Walton Middle School, has experienced similar challenges

when it comes to age differences.

> One time I had a first year teacher to expect me to do everything for her. She felt
> like since I was older that I knew everything. She would expect me to solve all of
> her problems. I had to let her know that although I have been teaching for several
> years I still have problems. I tried to get her in the habit of problem solving
> together instead of me giving all the answers.

In summary, the results from the survey and the interviews support the

importance of mentor-mentee relationship for all parties involved. For a mentor teacher

to be completely effective, he or she needs to create an experience where the beginning

teacher feels certain emotions: enjoyment, belonging, partnership, and enthusiasm

(Banschback, & Prenn, 1993; Glazer, 2004; Hole & Hall-McEntree, 1999; Stedman &

Stroot, 1998; Useem & Neild, 2005). Teacher mentors are expected to offer assistance to

first year teachers in a variety of ways including coach, professional advisor and

confidante. Mentoring relationships extend outside of the classroom, expanding the

relationship from being merely professional to a personal friendship that could extend for years to come.

Theme 2: Willing Helper

Some teachers love learning and want to share their knowledge with others. They want to help someone else learn new things and improve their skills. Teachers who want to help others will many times go far above and beyond their duties. They will do whatever is necessary to help someone. Through the conversations with these mentors, it was evident that they have a desire to help others. This theme emerged through the mentors responses to various questions about their experiences as a mentor.

Willingness. For some actually choosing to become a mentor was based on their willingness to help others. Six of the mentors said they became mentors after being asked by a colleague or administrator. Nan stated, "I was asked to mentor by my principal. They didn't have anyone else to do it, so I did it." Landy also said that she was asked to mentor. Landy explained, "I was asked to mentor. I accepted because if you don't help the beginning teachers, they'll never know how to do things." Tina reflected back on her experiences as a first year teacher as she explained why she became a mentor.

> I became a mentor, because when I began my teaching career several years ago it was tough. I know how essential it was to really have that support mechanism in place, because you're going to have some days where you become discouraged.

Elizabeth's response echoed Tina's. She stressed, "Knowing how my mentor helped me in such a tremendous way. I now can give back to new teachers who are going through the same feelings and doubts as I did."

Janice provided an introspective response about why she became a mentor.

Mentoring for me is a natural progression of teaching. You're just teaching somebody older and something different, but it's still teaching. It is the same sorta thing only you're passing along some things that you realized will work on to others. It's great and I realize that it's payback time. We need more teachers.

The focus group participants expressed some of the same reasons for becoming a mentor. Samuel described his reason for deciding to mentor. He stated, "I like working with people so I volunteered. That's my natural thing. I especially enjoy working with young people and that's what a mentee is pretty much." Gavin's reason was somewhat different than Samuel's, but similar to Elizabeth and Tina. He explained, "The first mentor I had was a great impression on me, this made it easier for me to want to help others with some of the best practices and things that I have been successful with." Denise attested her mentoring start to her administrator. She explained:

I was asked to mentor. I have worked under some awesome administrators. My administrator recognized something in me that they wanted to see in others. So I was asked to go to mentor training before I even knew what a mentor was. At that time you couldn't mentor without the training. I have enjoyed it ever since.

Susan added to Denise's comment about being asked by an administrator. She stated, "I had been helping the new people for years, because I was young like them, too. It was like an instant bond. We were more on the same level. I just enjoyed helping them and sharing." That willingness to help was very apparent to the researcher through the statements made by the mentors.

Guardian. The innate ability to help a person in need is very strong for mentors. Many new teachers entering the field are not prepared to handle the realities of the job. New teachers enter a highly unique professional context in which they are not only expected to perform at the same level of competency as their more experienced colleagues, they are also left largely on their own to sink or swim (Lortie, 1975). This is where the mentoring relationship is most important. The mentors served as guardian over their mentee. In order to gain an understanding of the first year teachers' preparedness for the job the researcher selected two specific questions on the survey targeting that area. Survey question #9 asked teacher mentors to give their opinion about whether they felt the first year teachers that they worked with came into the school year prepared to work with the students in that school setting. Eighteen of the thirty-three teacher mentors felt that the teachers were prepared. One mentor stated, "It depends on the mentee; however, most are not prepared for the reality of the classroom."

Survey question #10 asked teacher mentors to give their opinion about the first year teachers' ability to handle the pressures associated with teaching. This question yielded interesting results. Twelve teacher mentors moderately agreed that their mentee was able to handle the pressures associated with teaching in that school context while twelve teacher mentors moderately disagreed with the statement. One mentor commented, "Initially, my mentee did not have a real perspective of a highly impacted school, but has adjusted well with advice and guidance."

This same question was explored further during the focus group and one-on-one interviews. Janice, an interview participant, gave her thoughts about teacher readiness. She explained,

> New teachers are not coming in normally very confident. So they have the old adage I have to know all and be all. I can't ask questions and then they suffer and that's really bad. I've had a few meltdowns.

During the focus group interview, Samuel put a different twist on this same idea. When asked about teacher preparedness he spoke about the role that the teachers' background plays in their ability to adjust. He states:

> There's some teachers where this is their second career. Some of them have already raised a family with kids. It's a big difference in having two teenage daughters and starting to teach and only having a girlfriend and starting to teach.

Denise had an additional theory about the role of the teacher's background in their ability to handle teaching. She explained, "Beginning teachers, no matter what age, model what they've done or seen. If they've had good modeling then that comes out. Like, I think a lot of military gentlemen and ladies have a strong classroom management component." Based on these responses the mentors evaluate the situation and determine how to proceed with the mentoring relationship.

Overseer. The mentor's innate ability to help in all facets prompts him/her to monitor his/her mentee's professional growth. Some of the areas mentioned in the surveys and interviews included: leadership skills, conflict resolution, reflection, and teaching strategies. Initially, the survey asked the second year teachers to respond to

ways that their mentor helped them reflect on their practice. The majority of the responses about reflection were positive. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents strongly agreed that their mentor helped them reflect on their practice. One second year teacher responded by saying, "My mentor helped me with classroom management strategies, though his style is very different from mine. He helped me to think about how I want my students to view me and what kind of teacher I want to be."

Another second year teacher commented specifically on how the mentor helped him or her reflect. The respondent stated, "She encouraged me every day to reflect on the things that I enjoyed and the things in which I would change. She encouraged me to ask myself tons of questions." While mentors provide support and understanding, they must also challenge first-year teachers to use their talents to strive for excellence in their teaching (Hawkey, 1997). Moreover, mentors should challenge beginning teachers to be change agents, transforming schools instead of maintaining their status quo (Cline & Necochea, 1997).

Question 14 on the survey asked the second year teachers if they felt their mentor helped them reflect on their teaching by offering meaningful feedback. Thirty-six percent of the teachers strongly agreed with this statement. One teacher responded to the survey by stating, "She observed my teaching, gave feedback on how I could improve and allowed me to discover ways to improve on my own."

Mentors should be knowledgeable of the beginning teacher's needs as they progress developmentally as a professional. Berliner (1988) points out that teachers progress through five stages of development: novice, advanced beginner, competent

teacher, proficient teacher, and expert. Second year teachers were asked if the process of having worked with a mentor helped them to take a closer look at their own professional development plan for future growth. Thirty-six percent of the respondents felt that they had helped in this area. One teacher commented,

> My mentor helped me with classroom management strategies, though his style is very different from mine. He helped me to think about how I want my students to view me, and what kind of teacher I want to be.

Based on the responses the researcher found that as an overseer the mentor was influential in helping the mentee make decisions about their professional growth. The teacher mentors spoke about helping their mentee improve their teaching practice. Gwen shared some of the things she has shared with her mentees, "I've shared some books and titles with my mentee. Saying if you could buy one book this would be a really good one because it has all the information that you need." Marilyn had a similar area that she worked with during her mentoring. She stated, "I start talking to them about looking towards what courses you would take as far as your certificate renewal." These types of exchanges help as the mentees think about their future in the profession.

Professional security was also brought to the forefront during the interviews by the mentors. As an overseer the mentor wants to be sure that the mentee is protected on all levels. Two mentors spoke about encouraging their mentees to find ways to protect and enhance their future as an educator. Marilyn stated, "I try to encourage them to be involved in professional organizations where they can network with other people in their subject areas and the education field." Nan corroborated this idea by stating, "I tell my

teachers to join NCAE. I know it costs, but in the long run it is worth it. I wish they

would give the new teachers some type of discount." Landy, a special education teacher,

stressed the importance of helping the mentee get involved in networking groups.

> I tell my teachers, especially special ed ones to network with other teachers in the
> district. When you have someone to bounce ideas off you can find solutions to
> your problems easier. During monthly meetings I try to introduce my mentee's to
> other teachers in their same grade and content level.

The guiding light for mentors is their desire to help beginning teachers learn

something new or become more self sufficient in and outside of the classroom. The

willingness to give and receive help on the part of both parties further strengthens the

mentor-mentee relationship. The mentors in this study strive to show their mentees that

effective teachers never stop growing professionally.

Theme 3: Personal Growth for the Mentors

The data revealed that the mentoring process is just as beneficial to veteran

teachers as beginning teachers. The benefit one receives from mentoring seems to be an

important variable in the success of that relationship. This is often reflected by the degree

to which the mentor feels a sense of professionalism in helping another teacher. While

research substantiated the benefits of mentoring for beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser,

1996; Ganser, 1992; Little, 1990), there are also many benefits for the mentor. Mentoring

can generate as much, if not more professional development for the mentor as it does for

the beginning teachers (Freiberg et al., 1996).

Teaching practice. A survey item prompted the teacher mentors to reflect on the

effect that mentoring had on their own teaching. Forty-six percent of the mentors reported

that they felt as if their own teaching had been changed in some way as a result of serving as a mentor. One mentor commented on the personal effects of mentoring: "Mentoring new folks makes me a better teacher and helps me understand the pressures new folks go through compared to what I went through 30 years ago." Another mentor stated, "Being a mentor made me aware of the effect I have on others and caused me to examine myself more."

Survey question 12 focused on reflection. Participants were asked if mentoring has made them more reflective of their own teaching practices. Eighty-one percent of the survey participants strongly or moderately agreed that since becoming a mentor they have become more reflective about their own teaching practices.

Exploring the question further yielded more details about the changes. Daily procedures were one area that the mentors spoke about during the interviews. Janice said, "It's made me really stop and think about the way I do things. So it forces me to look at my processing a little bit more. How can I put my procedures on a piece of paper?"

Sara spoke more specifically about student management procedures. She explained:

> When I'm walking with my class it's made me wanna really try to model good student management. It's made me be a little bit more critical of myself. What am I doing, because that new teacher could be watching me. How can I give them advice when my own class is a mess?

A second participant, Tina expressed some of the same feelings about the effects of mentoring. She explains, "It just kinda helps you keep yourself on track because if

you're giving someone else advice then you have to think back, well am I doing what I'm saying?"

During the focus group discussion this topic created some serious dialogue. Samuel was the first to answer the question during the group discussion. He said, "For me it's probably made me more cognizant of things I've addressed with my mentee." Gavin immediately chimed in by saying, "Pretty much just 'practice what you preach.' I think it's made me more reflective and made me get more in their shoes." According to the mentors mentoring truly makes you take a deeper look within.

Denise spoke intently about how mentoring affected her practice. She revealed, "I realized that processes were very necessary and it made me more aware of my own. In order to change another teacher I think I needed to know the processes and steps that are necessary to transform someone else."

Self-Reflection on mentoring practices. Self-reflection about their own mentoring practices was a topic that was explored during the interview process. Teacher mentors were asked what areas needed strengthening in relation to their mentoring practices. The technical duties associated with mentoring were addressed by two of the mentors. Nan stated, "I need to take the paper work more seriously. Right now I am a little too casual about it." Sara's response was very similar, "I would need to do better as far as the paperwork and keeping up with the logs and stuff. It just becomes so tedious sometimes."

The issue of time resurfaced in the responses of two mentors when asked about how they could improve their mentoring practice. As mentioned earlier the mentors

wanted to find a way to have more time to work with their mentees. Tina described her

need to be more "available" for her teachers. Landy also wanted to have more time when

working with her teachers. She explained, "I have to make more time to observe."

Three other mentors spoke about the need to improve their technique when

working with beginning teachers. Elizabeth stated,

> One area that I know I need to work on is the listening piece. Listening more and
> being able to delve. Ask the right questions that will hopefully lead that mentee
> into the solution that they need uh, for their challenge.

Gavin and Denise, members of the focus group interview revealed personal areas

that they needed to improve in as a mentor. Gavin stated, "I really need to improve my

record keeping strategies. When my mentees need help with grading procedures they

look to me for guidance. My procedures are not consistent therefore I have trouble

helping them." Denise made a comment similar to Gavin's.

> Over the years I have really gotten slack in the organizational techniques. As a
> mentor I need to set a better example. Often times I do not keep track of my
> parent contact logs which have to be turned in monthly. If I am late what kind of
> message does that send to the teachers I am working with that year.

The mentors were very honest and open about the areas that they feel needed

improvement. The data has shown that self reflection on the part of the mentor is a

definite advantage for them as teachers and mentors.

Learning experiences. Learning in the mentor-mentee relationship is not limited

to the first year teacher as shown in the data. The data revealed that the mentor was

learning as much from the relationship as the mentee. Freiberg et al. (1996) maintained

that "mentoring can generate as much, if not more, professional development for the

mentor as it does for the beginning teachers" (p. 15). During the interviews mentors

spoke about learning new things from their mentees. Sara described how her learning

curve has been increased since mentoring. She explained,

> I learn from my mentee. She worked in a lab before teaching so she had experiences that I didn't have. She would share and teach me about different chemicals and lab procedures. They come in with a new perspective and view on things.

Nan, a veteran of over 30 years admits she is still learning new ways to improve

her teaching practices,

> I've been teaching a very long time and it gives me the opportunity to see new things and new ideas. For example, I've had a token economy system in my class for years. My mentee, Meredith and I were talking about it. She was kind of doing that same thing in her class. She had a little check list that made things easier. I thought it was great. I borrowed it and I adapted it to my class. It's the sharing thing that I think is really important.

Marilyn, another veteran spoke about the benefits of mentoring for her teaching

practice. She explained, "I've learned classroom things like new strategies and new

practices. You get set in your ways. Sometimes you forget that there are new things. Kids

change. I learn new ways to approach them. Ways to motivate them."

The researcher found that mentoring addresses the personal and professional

needs of all teachers, no matter how long they have taught. Through working with first

year teachers the mentors are finding ways to improve their own practice in and outside

of the classroom. Self-reflection for mentors is an important part of their own growth. In the next section data findings that address the second research question will be presented.

Research Question #2: What are the perspectives of teacher mentors in urban school settings about the best, most needed, or most helpful mentoring practices?

Theme 4: Support Provider

The fourth theme that emerged from this study was mentors as support providers. As mentioned in Theme 1, a key element of the mentor and mentee relationship is support. As a support provider, the mentor has to assist the beginning teacher in areas in and outside of the classroom. Five sub themes emerged from the data as ways that mentors served as support providers for their mentees. These areas are professional competencies, adjustment, adversity, reflection and professional growth.

Professional competencies. Professional support offered by mentors includes assistance with teaching strategies, career guidance, reflection, communication strategies in and outside of the classroom, and classroom management. The interview and survey results yielded a variance in the frequency and degree of support being offered. Two of the thirty-three teacher mentors who responded to the survey commented that they were on the same grade level with their mentee: therefore they talked and planned together daily. This type of professional support was commonly mentioned throughout the study. One of the other survey participants commented on the varying levels of support offered by her. She stated, "Many times it depends on the mentee's level of need. Over the years I have had at least one at each end of the spectrum and many in the middle." One second

year teacher spoke in detail about the type of professional support he received during his

mentoring experience.

> My mentor did so much to help me reflect on my teaching practice. She forced me
> to answer the difficult questions when I was troubled my first year. If I said I
> didn't know what I was doing in class that day her response would be "Where are
> your plans?" We worked on a way to help me stay ahead. If I said my students
> had mastered a topic she forced me to answer that awful question "How do you
> know?" I had to focus on the assessment needs in my classroom (formal and
> informal). My mentor actually developed a curriculum plan for math with me
> before the district developed GEMS for my grade level. I dare not imagine what
> life would be like this year without my mentor.

The researcher found that during the interviews the teacher mentors spoke about

the types of support they provide. Landy spends several hours helping her mentees with

behavior plans.

> In an EC class the students need lots of structure. I help my mentees develop
> classroom management plans that will be user friendly. They don't want the
> students to be confused about the expectations. Be clear and consistent is what I
> always tell them.

Like Landy, Elizabeth focuses on classroom management strategies with her first

year teachers as well.

> I start out by asking the teachers what rules do they plan to have for the students.
> Most of the teachers have a laundry list of rules. I help them cut the list down to
> about 5 or 6 simple rules. That makes it easier for the students and the teacher.

Lesson planning was another area that the teacher mentors addressed with their

mentees early on in the school year. Ronald found it easier to help with lesson planning

when his mentee taught the same content area. He stated, "If we both teach math, we can

do planning together. I can show them what concepts are essential to student success." As a Curriculum Facilitator, Teresa provided lesson planning support in a variety of areas.

> When I work with my first year teachers I ask them what burning issues they have with the curriculum. Many of them have already looked at the text books and wonder how in the world they can cover all of that stuff. I immediately tell them that they are not expected to cover everything. I then introduce them to the pacing guide. This usually reduces their stress level.

Forty-two percent of the respondents identified communication with parents as an area of support that was addressed on weekly basis. One second year teacher commented, "Although my mentor was not in the same instruction area, she was very open to providing professional advice and encouragement that helped me through some difficult situations, especially with parents. She was great!!!" As support providers, the teacher mentors revealed that they provided assistance in a variety of areas associated with professional competencies.

Adjustment. Like the overseer in theme 2, the mentors must provided support for new teachers when it came to adjusting to the school setting. Older beginning teachers seemed more able to cope with the survival phase of teaching on their own, but this was not so for young beginning teachers who needed more collaboration. Throughout the interviews, the mentors constantly spoke about the level of support needed for lateral entry teachers. Denise spoke about the lateral entry teacher's lack of knowledge about new educational terms and jargon. She explained, "Some of our lateral entry teachers who don't understand AYP, sub groups, No Child Left Behind and things like that are doomed from the beginning." Gavin, another participant in the focus group interview,

commented on Denise's response. He stated, "The lateral entry teachers that I have

worked with seem to have more trouble with the administrative procedures. They want

the principal to solve all the problems." Evelyn had a similar comment.

> One year I had a mentee that wanted to send the kids to the office all the time. I had to get him to understand that he had to find a way to deal with the difficult student because sending him out was not the solution. He just couldn't understand why he couldn't just send the student out. We worked on a behavior plan for that student which helped a little bit.

Janice spoke about adjustment issues when working with lateral entry teachers

new to the classroom.

> I think they have sometimes an unrealistic expectation, because they often times have that perfect classroom in their head. They know how they're gonna do everything. Kids come in with so many different problems that we never had to deal with as a child. They come in with baggage and I think a lot of lateral entry teachers don't realize the baggage that is coming in with them.

As a support provider, Tina struggled with meeting the needs of her lateral entry

teachers as well. She explained:

> Last year in particular, I had someone who I really shouldn't have been given. They needed more time. They needed someone on a daily basis who could work with them by sitting down and thinking through things. She was lateral entry and didn't have that student teaching piece. If they don't have that constant daily feedback serious problems could occur.

Sara expressed concern about helping the lateral entry teachers understand the

bureaucratic issues that teachers face. Before coming into teaching, her mentee spent

several years in the college setting where she could make decisions for herself. Once she

became a public school teacher, she struggled with some of the policies and procedures at her school. Sara explained,

> The biggest challenge was things that I knew that I just couldn't control and make that better for her. Class size, I couldn't change that for her. Like the school not having science tables or modern equipment in the lab. I just had to try to explain to her that I wish there was something I could do, but the school doesn't have any funds. I tried to reassure her that we'll get through this, but there are just some things like this that I couldn't change for her.

As support providers the mentors always wanted to find a way to fix the problem.

Adversity. It is no secret that first year teachers face some days filled with adversity. These are some of the most crucial times in the mentor-mentee relationship. Survey question 10 asked the second year teachers if they felt supported by their mentor when they encountered an obstacle. Sixty-three percent of the respondents strongly agreed that their mentor provided them with the support needed when they encountered an obstacle or challenge. Having someone to turn to when faced with hardships was very important.

Janice, the mentor from Jennings Academy spoke about helping her mentee through a teaching problem,

> I had an opportunity to observe my mentee during her difficult class. The class was up and down all the time. I know she was kind of down on herself because there was a part of the lesson that the kids didn't quite get, but there was another part that the kids did get. After the lesson we talked about what was good about what she had done and how she could redo. Of course she had the kids come back the next day and she reviewed parts of the lesson and things went much better. Try again. You know there's no perfect lesson. Nobody anywhere at any time does the perfect lesson. It can always be better.

Janice had to use that reassuring part of her mentoring style to get the mentee back up on her feet. Evelyn spoke about her lateral entry mentee struggling with the students at the beginning of the year.

> My mentee came in as the new band teacher. The students were use to the old teacher. They were constantly challenging her authority by reminding her of the things that the old teacher did. There were many days that she came to me in tears. I really had to help her build her confidence up so that she could establish her own routines with the students.

Denise and Evelyn shared similar experiences while working with first year teachers. Evelyn had a teacher who was facing personal issues which affected her work performance.

> Mary, a teacher that I worked with a few years ago was going through a divorce. She was coming to work late and missing deadlines. The principal approached her on the situation. She was very upset and fearful that she may lose her job. We had to talk about ways to handle personal and professional issues effectively. She was in real trouble for a while. Luckily I was able to help.

Parent issues created some difficult situations for some of the mentors. Elizabeth had to help her mentee through a difficult situation.

> Earlier this year a parent called the district office on one of my teachers because he wouldn't let her child eat lunch in his class. The teacher was so afraid of the parent that he forgot what the school policy was and how he could use it to his advantage. I had to remind him that he can't please everyone.

Nan had to come to her mentee's rescue during a grading issue. She revealed, "One year a parent was putting pressure on a teacher to change her child's grade in

science. I told her that she had to do what she thought was right and forget about the parent's threats." The mentor had to be that shoulder to lean on for their mentee.

Reflection on practice. Reflection was another area of support addressed in the analysis. As pointed out in Chapter II of this study, first-year teachers need modeling and guidance when it comes to being self-reflective. Reflective thinking allows teachers to analyze their pedagogical methods to improve their teaching performance (Schön, 1987). This is especially important since teachers tend to focus more on doing than thinking (Hawkey, 1997).

The survey asked the second year teachers to respond to ways that their mentors helped them reflect on their practice. The bulk of the responses about reflection were positive. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents strongly agreed that their mentors helped them reflect on their practice. When asked how, one second year teacher responded by saying, "My mentor helped me with classroom management strategies, though his style is very different from mine. He helped me to think about how I wanted my students to view me, and what kind of teacher I want to be." Another second year teacher commented specifically on how their mentor helped them reflect. The respondent stated, "She encouraged me every day to reflect on the things that I enjoyed and the things in which I would change. She encouraged me to ask myself tons of questions." While mentors provide support and understanding, they must also challenge first-year teachers to use their talents to strive for excellence in their teaching (Hawkey, 1997). Moreover, mentors should challenge beginning teachers to be change agents, transforming schools instead of maintaining their status quo (Cline & Necochea, 1997).

Question 14 addressed teacher reflection. The second year teachers were asked if they felt their mentors helped them reflect on their teaching by offering meaningful feedback. Thirty-six percent of the teachers strongly agreed with this statement. One teacher responded by saying this about her mentor. She said, "She observed my teaching, gave feedback on how I could improve and allowed me to discover ways to improve on my own."

As support providers, the mentors monitored their mentees' growth. During the interviews, eight of the mentors spoke about ways that they saw their mentees grow as a result of the mentoring relationship. Tina described how her mentee became more confident when dealing with colleagues. She explained, "My mentee's teacher voice has developed. She now speaks up when she feels strongly about something." Sara spoke about her mentee's teacher voice as well. She described her mentee as being irritatingly anxious about various issues at times.

> She could be real worrisome about some things. Not so much to me, but to our colleagues at times during team meetings. We talked about different ways to get your questions answered or just being patient. As the year progressed I've seen her grow professionally in her level of persistence. She is practicing some patience and even biting her tongue a little more.

Support providers must address all areas during the mentoring process. Not all of them are so pleasant but still need to be addressed. During the interviews some mentors spoke of some of the challenges they faced while working with their mentees. Nan described how she had to speak with her mentee about the importance of professionalism.

One year I had a mentee that was not dressing appropriately. She was wearing clothes that showed a great deal of cleavage. At the middle school level these students especially the boys can't handle that type of behavior. I had to speak with her about this matter. The conversation was not one I was looking forward to, but it had to be done.

Gwen spoke of a challenging situation that she had with her mentee as well.

I did have to address my mentee one time for leaving his class unattended. When I have to do something like that it's always for a reason. I had to explain to the teacher that it was not because I said so, but it was a safety factor.

At times the mentor-mentee conversations have to take a different turn, especially if the issue is going to harm the teacher or students. Nan had to speak with one of her teachers about confidentiality.

One of my mentee's was very cavalier when it came to confidentiality. She would always leave the student's personal records out on her desk for everyone to see. I had to speak with her on more than one occasion about this issue. I finally had to tell her that this was very serious and could get you fired. She quickly changed her tune when I mentioned termination.

Another mentor described a situation where the mentee was very downbeat. Marilyn stated, "I had a mentee that was never happy. The situation was very negative and antagonistic. That was very hard to handle. She would go back and tell things to my administrator trying to destroy my character. She didn't last long at our school."

The mentors in this study were models, guides, and facilitators of growth and learning for the beginning teacher. Mentors guided them technically and professionally. Mentors taught the skills necessary to survive daily experiences and promoted career-scope professional development for their mentees.

Theme 5: Advocate

The role of the mentor did not stop at the classroom door. Mentors have to be the voice for the future of the teaching profession. The researcher asked the participants to describe how they advocated for themselves and beginning teachers. Five sub-themes surfaced from the data. The themes were contributor, external forces, mentor duties, mentor characteristics and teacher preparation. Each theme is explained in detail in the following section.

Contributor to the profession. Many of the mentors spoke about the role that mentoring plays in teacher retention. All of the mentors stressed that teacher retention rates increase when the beginning teacher feels supported. During her interview, Sara described the effects of mentoring on teacher retention rates, "When novice teachers receive quality mentoring, they are more likely to feel supported and valued and will probably be more willing to remain in the classroom." Marilyn added an additional comment that supported this same idea. She stated, "I think a teacher that's gone through a successful mentoring situation is apt to stay as a teacher."

During the focus group interview, all of the participants felt that mentoring played a role in teacher retention. Denise had a very strong position when it came to this topic.

> As an educator it is my job to help the new folks. I have to guide them so that they get off to a good start. As a mentor that is my job. I feel that f the teachers get off to a good start they are more willing to stay.

Evelyn, a mentor at Truman Middle School agreed with Denise's statement and also

added. "At my school the teachers have to have that back bone that mentoring provides if

they are expected to be successful." Gavin, one of the other participants added.

> Without mentoring I know that I would have left the profession 2 days after I
> started. My mentor helped me and I want to return that same favor. Mentoring is
> my way of giving back. Maybe I can be the one that helps to save a teacher that
> we might have otherwise lost.

The data revealed that the mentors felt an obligation to secure the future of the

profession. The participants felt that mentoring is a way that they can do that. Landy

explained how mentoring helps the profession. She stated, "It is hope for the future,"

while Ronald stressed, "We certainly have an obligation to pave the way for other

teachers."

External forces. Mentors must advocate for themselves and the profession at all

levels. The researcher asked the participants if they felt supported by their building level

administrators. This question yielded varying responses. Gwen and Nan, both mentors

from Truman Middle School, felt that the administrative team was definitely supportive

of the mentoring program. Gwen stated, "Mr. Johnson supports the new teachers. He is

always willing to give me the time or supplies needed to support the new teachers in our

building." Nan added, "When my mentee is having an issue that I can't solve I seek help

from administration. They are always willing to help."

While Tina and Elizabeth, also teachers at that school explained their feelings a

little more in detail. Tina stated,

In theory, yes. I think that they would both acknowledge that mentoring is important to the success of new teachers. However, the site level administrators are limited by the resources that the county gives them. Sometimes I have to speak up when I think my mentee is not getting all of the resources she needs. As a new teacher she does not know how to as for what she needs. That is when I step in.

Elizabeth's response was similar.

I feel as though they think they are supporting the mentor program, but it could be done more effectively. During scheduling they should take into account that new teachers need a mentor that can be available to observe them while they are teaching. Sometimes I don't think they think about things like that.

Marilyn and Ronald felt supported as mentors at their school. Marilyn described how her principal assists with the process.

Yes, I had the extra time. Mentors are encouraged to ask if they need coverage to go help their mentee to do something. Maybe the mentee tells their mentor they would like to have them come in and observe during a difficult class or particular lesson. Administration will work it out and try to get coverage for them.

Ronald who teaches in a similar setting spoke about the support mentors received at his school. He explained, "We have addressed this in leadership meetings. I think we definitely value mentorship and anything that we can do to help our first year teachers. Particularly at more highly impacted schools we definitely need to retain teachers as much as possible. It is definitely a goal of ours to try to try to ease this transition for first year teachers." This same question prompted a lively discussion during the focus group interview. Samuel spoke without hesitation when asked about site level administrators

support for mentoring. He declared, "I don't think they have any idea what mentors do on a daily basis."

Susan was of the same opinion,

Basically I don't think that principals really know what the mentors are doing. They know they were assigned and hopefully doing their job. After that it was out of their hands. Most of them I think don't have their finger in the pie at all because it's handled by other people.

Gavin's response took the conversation in a different direction. He stated, "I think it just depends on how long the administrator was a classroom teacher themselves." With this comment Evelyn interjected,

Sometimes I think administrators need to go back into the classroom. You know, not a demotion, but just let them sit in class for maybe a week and not the same class, but you know different classes. By doing this they will get a clearer picture of what the mentor and beginning teacher go through.

Another external force discussed during the interviews was district level support. The majority of the mentors felt that the support from the district level was sufficient. As mentioned in Chapter III the participating school district has an Office of Induction and Success that offers support for beginning teachers. Eight of the mentors spoke about the support offered by the Induction and Success Department. Gwen stated, "Yeah, there is an Induction and Support office and Lee's done wonders over the years. You know it's important to keep up the communication. We've got the monthly newsletters with mentoring tips provided by this office."

Janice spoke about another service offered by that office,

I especially like the fact that the district level comes out and sits in their classroom and helps them. That is really helpful since sometimes I can't get in to observe.

Marilyn, in full agreement, added.

The staff within the central office is a great help. Whatever I've asked I've gotten an answer or I've gotten the names of the people you need to ask, because they don't know the answer. To me that's an answer. I think our beginning teachers feel supported with these people, too.

Landy and Tina spoke about the Induction Coordinator position provided at the school level by the district. Landy stated, "The Induction Coordinator is extremely supportive at times. Very cognizant that things can be overwhelming. The Induction Coordinator positions are a great idea." Tina was thankful for having her Induction Coordinator on site. She explained,

Having Janice Cross, the Induction Coordinator at the school to go to if we have questions is great. Just knowing that we can either go to her or contact the people who are in charge of that downtown makes me stress level decrease.

When asked about district support during the focus group interview, Denise spoke about the mentor training offered by them. Many educational leaders recognize the fallacy of assuming that veteran teachers, by virtue of years of successful experience in the classroom, automatically make good mentors for adults (Portner, 2005). She stated, "They support mentoring through the professional development course offerings like mentor training."

Evelyn was concerned with the future training of mentors. She explained, "I would like to spend more time learning new things that can help my mentee. All I had was the twenty-four hour training offered by the Induction and Success coaches after I started mentoring. If possible mentors should be trained before they begin mentoring" Susan offered an explanation to this problem. She stated, "Sometimes it's hard to get people trained in advance. Now a days we have more new teachers, especially lateral entry. The principal assigns someone and worries about the training later."

Sam added a very important part to this conversation, "Mentoring is a job even though it's not a very well paid job. I think it's important and like any job I mean we have to have CEU's in everything else why not in mentoring."

Continued mentor training was a concern for the participants. This comment prompted a spirited discussion about the mentor training. Denise continued her thought by adding.

> I would like for the district to do a mentor survey at the end of the year. I am not sure what drives the professional development of the mentoring program. The mentors don't have any input in the decision making process.

Samuel expressed a similar concern. He added, "I think it would have been nice if the district had you (the researcher) to conduct this type of study. They need to hear from us before making decisions that affect us." The data revealed that the level of support offered at the school and district level varied. The mentors had very strong feelings about what was happening with the program in this district and what things needed to be changed.

Mentor duties. As advocates, the mentors are concerned with the changes in the mentoring program. Two of the areas looked at were changes in the roles of the mentors and the characteristics of teachers selected to serve as mentor. Some of the mentors felt that there have been few changes in the expectations of mentors over the last three years.

Gwen described some of the changes she has seen over the years,

> Yeah, it changes with the times and the different needs .and the needs. Also, I'm more aware of things as the years have gone by. I know more like the children can be different at different schools and the game playing of the school politics. Each situation has its own need. So yeah, it's always changing. It's never ever going to be the same.

Janice's comments were more focused on the mentoring relationship. She explained, "Over the years I have found myself thinking more globally. I try to guide my mentees through the same process. Thinking more about the picture and not focusing on one or two things with the students when teaching."

Marilyn, one of the senior mentors in the study, spoke about some of the changes she has seen.

> In the very beginning of the mentoring program the idea was that we would be an additional evaluator. I can actually remember going in as a part of an evaluation team. We went from an evaluator, to a support person, to a coach. I think that was a very good move.

Secondly, the mentors were asked to give the characteristics of a good mentor. This information is extremely important as new mentors are selected. A dedicated, experienced teacher becomes an effective and accomplished mentor by design and training, not by chance (Portner, 2005).

Sara spoke intently about mentor selection,

> It's not really something I think that you can teach necessarily. Some people are either going to make a good mentor or their not. There are some people who mentor naturally. I think those are the people that need to be targeted. We should take those natural abilities and try to develop them. The people who flat out say, "I don't want to be a mentor or I'm not interested." Leave them alone.

According to the participants, potential mentors should be people oriented, compassionate about teaching, resourceful, a good listener, inviting, and patient. Janice spoke about potential mentors having positive communication skills when dealing with people. She stated, "You need to be positive. Anybody that's a Gloomy Gus shouldn't do this because it's too difficult." Marilyn added, "Someone who can interact with people well would probably make a good mentor. They can develop rapport with a variety of people."

Resourcefulness was a characteristic discussed during the focus group interview. Susan used the word resourceful as she described future mentors.

> Mentors have to know where to find supplies and other teacher resources. If the mentee needs help teaching polygons, that mentor has to know where to go, even if they aren't a math teacher. You have to be a Jack of all trades.

Denise took the conversation in another direction as the group talked about mentor selection. She stated, "We need to empower more teacher leaders. Mentors are usually the busiest people in the school. We need to get more people involved." Sam agreed with Denise by adding.

I have my hands in a lot of pots, but that's just my personality. We have to nurture people, especially teachers with five to six years of experience. They are the ones with the power. With the right guidance they could go on to be great leaders.

Teacher leadership roles empower teachers to realize their professional worth while still maintaining the centrality of their teaching roles (Fay, 1990).

Teacher preparation. The last area discussed during the focus group discussion was teacher preparation. The mentors expressed concern about the type of learning that was going on at the college level. Sam stated,

I'd just like to know what they're teaching in college to young teacher candidates. It would be interesting to me if I could go back and talk with a professor and see what courses they are taking. How many methods courses are being taught?

Evelyn agreed by stating, "I would like to shadow a professor for a week and then have them shadow me." Gavin added a powerful statement.

I think some college professors are so far fledged from the classroom. They don't know what issues teachers are facing today. They are using the textbook as a guide instead of lived experiences. They are not in the day to day operations of a school, especially one like mine.

Denise was in total agreement with Gavin's statement. She added, "Or they've been at the college level and never been true classroom teachers. So it's kind of hard for them to tell someone else what to do." Denise went on to describe some of the challenges she has faced over the years relating to this issue.

It is not always the teachers, but sometimes the students are not listening. I had the opportunity to work with a group of student teachers from the local universities. I did a lesson about lesson planning. The professor had given them a

template to use for a lesson plan. He would not let them deviate from that template. I think what I tried to spend my time trying to do was explain why they didn't want them to deviate from the plan. The template was similar to the Madeline Hunter's 7 steps. They saw someone else's template that was much shorter. The professor wanted them to understand that a lesson plan is not 1 page. If you're doing a good lesson even if you don't write it all down it's not one page. So that's what they were trying to do, but the students talked about shortcuts. They really wanted shortcuts to everything. It was amazing that these were people that were going into the classroom. In fact we hired some of them. I've seen some of them since then and a few of them are having problems. I refer back to that professor that made them write it all down and now they are seeing the value of it.

Collaboration between teachers, mentors, administrators and district level leaders is crucial to the development of future educators.

Overall Analysis

As shown in the data the mentors took great care in creating a relationship that was positive and non-threatening as described in the first theme. Helping the first-year teachers feel at ease by getting to know them on a personal level allowed the mentors to break through any potential barriers in the initial stages of the relationship. Once this foundation was built the mentors were able to assist their mentee with a variety of issues. Having an adequate amount of time to spend with the mentee was one of the challenges that emerged from the data. This was an issue expressed by both the mentor and mentee. Like all relationships, the mentors often had to deal with difficult and sometimes stressful situations when working with their mentee. Overall, the data showed that the mentor-mentee relationship is one that is important and must be taken seriously by all parties involved.

The second theme that emerged from the data was the willing helper. Some participants became mentors because they were asked, while others wanted to give back

because of the services they received early in their career. Regardless of the reason, all of the mentors were happy that they accepted the challenge of becoming a mentor. During the interviews, the mentors spoke about the desire to protect and monitor their mentee during that pivotal first year. Some of the ways the mentors assisted the first-year teacher included helping them adjust to the realities of teaching, understanding the students, and learning how to reflect on their practice.

The third theme outlined some of the personal benefits of the mentoring process for the mentor or experienced teacher. By serving in this role, the mentors became more self reflective of their own teaching practices and mentoring style. Through this self reflection, many of the mentors realized that there were things that could be improved in their own teaching practices such as classroom management procedures, colleague interactions and becoming more up to date with instructional strategies. The mentors identified some of their strengths as well as areas that they felt needed to be reinforced when it came to their mentoring style. The data showed that the mentors did not have an all knowing attitude when it came to dealing with their mentee. They were able to listen and learn from their mentee during the mentoring process which enabled both parties to grow.

The last two themes that emerged from the data presented the mentors perceptions on the best and most needed mentoring practices. The mentors revealed that they served as support providers in a variety of ways for the first-year teachers. These services included help with the personal as well as professional challenges associated with the first year of teaching. These mentors had to help the mentee's through some interesting

and sometimes not so pleasant situations. Nonetheless, they all gave the impression that they handled the situations with ease which resulted in a more confident first year teacher.

Finally, as advocates for the profession, the mentors described how important they felt their role was to the future of the profession. According to the mentors support from external forces in and outside of the school setting was inconsistent. Mentor selection and training were two areas that the mentors felt were important when it came to the future of the program. A desire to understand what type of teaching methods first year teachers were being exposed to at the college level was mentioned during the interviews. The data analysis has revealed that the mentors were very passionate about what they do and that they have strong opinions about the future of the mentoring process.

Findings and Discussion

This case study was designed to learn from the teacher mentors directly in order to share their knowledge and insights with others. In this section the researcher will summarize the findings from the data into two key sections: mentor experiences and best practices.

Mentor Experiences

The first research question asked how teachers serving as mentors describe their experiences while supporting first year teachers, including positive experiences, challenges or barriers, and the roles and responsibilities associated with the mentoring process. Based on the interviews and survey results, the teacher mentors have found

mentoring to be a positive and rewarding experience. Many of the mentors were asked to become mentors by an administrator or co-worker. Most of them accepted the challenge because of a previous positive experience with a mentor or a desire to provide support to the newest members of the teaching profession. The participants were happy with their decision and plan to continue mentoring in the future.

The mentors wanted the first-year teachers to feel relaxed, so the mentors often met with the first-year teachers in a non-threatening environment usually before school. This time was used to get to know each other on a personal level, which would help both teachers as the relationship progressed throughout the year. A mutual level of respect was experienced on the part of both teachers. This level of respect was crucial as the relationship progressed and challenges inside and outside of the classroom began to arise. As mentioned in Chapter II, the success of any mentoring relationship hinges on whether the beginner is comfortable seeking help from the mentor (Tellez, 1992). Denise worked very hard to create a relaxed and open relationship with her mentee, "I always find time to talk about other things besides school and students. I want to be able to help him with any issues he may be facing in and outside of the classroom."

The teacher mentors spoke of several different challenges that they have faced over the years. Some of those challenges included time to meet with the mentees, first-year teachers unprepared for the realities of the classroom, and communication issues. The lack of time was the biggest barrier faced by all of the mentors. The teacher mentors spoke about how they had to carve out time to meet with their mentees. This time was usually never enough to address all of their needs. Many of the mentors expressed a

desire to have time to observe and model lessons for their mentee during the instructional day. This was usually impossible because of the lack of release time provided by the school level administrator.

The traditional first year teacher of years ago has disappeared. As they graduate from college and enter the classroom, new teachers, many of whom may be living on their own for the first time in their lives, face the difficult transition from learning about teaching to learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Gold, 1996). This was apparent in the descriptions of the first-year teachers that the participants worked with over the years. Some of the first-year teachers were from traditional four year teacher education programs while others were lateral entry. Regardless of the background, the mentors felt that most of them were unprepared for the realities of the classroom. Helping the teachers adjust to the student behaviors and pressures associated with teaching was a difficult task at times. Helping the teachers create classroom management plans, efficient record keeping techniques, and understanding the curriculum are some of the responsibilities that have been increased for the mentors.

The mentoring experience has yielded many personal rewards for the experienced teachers in this study. Each teacher interviewed described how his/her own teaching practice had been affected by mentoring. Samuel commented on his teaching practice, "For me it's probably made me more cognizant of things I've addressed with my mentee." During the weekly meetings, mentors and mentees had opportunities to exchange ideas on a variety of subjects. The mentors explained how they learned new things about behavior management checklist, instructional strategies, and time

management tips while working with their mentees. These strategies were immediately put to use in their classrooms. Nan was able to take an idea that her mentee had and use it with her own students, "My mentee, Jenny had a behavior check list that she was using with her students. I took her ideas and tweaked it to for my students." Just like Nan, the other mentors expressed how they learned new things from their mentee's that helped to refine their own practice.

Self-reflection was an automatic experience for the mentors in this study. Marilyn was honest and upfront about the self reflection process, "In taking an objective look at someone else, you also have to reflect on your own actions. What you're doing, because you've also become a role model." Teachers, through reflection, can become aware of their intuitive knowledge and engage in problem solving that helps to strengthen their teaching ability (Vacca et al., 1997). One mentor from Walton Middle School, Landy, realized that her own teaching style was affected by her conversations with her mentee.

> During our conversations we would always talk about ways to adjust the lessons to meet the needs of the special learners. She showed me some paper folding activities that she used with her students to teach math formulas. I tried them with my students and realized that they grasped the concept easier. Now both of us use these types of hands on learning activities in math class.

Janice shared that she would like to be more patient when working with her mentees,

> I have to be more patient when I want to jump up and down and say, "Oh, try it this way." But I know that I have to be a little quiet and I have to listen. I have to be a good listener in general to make sure that kid or the person whoever it is gets a chance to do it their way and not my way.

Reflection by the experienced teachers during their mentoring relationships focused on activities that could be used to solve their issues. Such reflection-in-action allowed the teachers to come to terms with the challenges or situations that confronted them and to devise ways to solve problems. Ultimately, the reflective action triggered by mentoring caused the teachers to be more mindful of their responsibilities to their students and to their teaching practices, and in the process, enhanced the teachers' personal and professional growth.

The self-reflection behaviors demonstrated by the mentors carried over into their own mentoring practices. The reflective nature of mentoring contributed to the teachers' self-understanding. Gavin felt that his own self-reflection helped him as a mentor, "I often asked myself what could I do to help my mentee become more self sufficient. I don't want them to always do what I say, but have a mind of their own." All of the mentors expressed a desire to improve in one way or another. Teresa wanted to restructure her procedures, "After meeting with my mentor I have a bad habit of not completing my paperwork. I have to come up with some type of system to log our conversations."

Over the last three years, the mentors have seen their roles and responsibilities become more intense in certain situations but manageable. As mentioned earlier, the influx of lateral entry teachers have increased the amount of support needed by the first-year teachers, thus increasing their responsibilities. Helping mentees find instructional resources has become a central focus for Teresa.

> With so many budget cutbacks the resources once made available are being cut. I
> spend countless hours showing my new teachers things that I have used in the past
> to teach certain concepts to the students. They have no idea what to do. They just
> want to rely on the textbook. For our kids that's just not going to get it.

Tina had similar issues when it came to resources, "I had to step in and show my mentee

how to make some of the things she was buying. She was going broke trying to buy

preprinted materials. This new generation wants everything quick and easy."

The mentors described that the need to help first-year teachers adjust to the school

setting and students has increased. Evelyn found that some first-year teachers have very

little experience working with students from challenging backgrounds.

> Lately the new teachers at my school have to understand that our students struggle
> to get to school every day. So expecting that they will bring in homework and
> school supplies is unrealistic. I have to explain that to them early on so that they
> can adjust their thinking.

Ronald, a mentor at Addison Heights, works with a lot of lateral entry first-year teachers.

He has seen an increase in his responsibilities because of the lack of teaching experience

among his mentees, "They come in thinking that the students are going to act like they

did when they were in school. That is not the case at Addison. Classroom management

and relationship building is the focus of most of my mentor conversations."

Some of the mentors in the study have seen changes in the procedural aspects of

the mentoring process. Sara has been given added responsibilities such as helping with

the mentor pairings, "My principal has asked me to help with the mentor assignments for

my school. I have to monitor the mentor logs to ensure that the teachers are meeting."

The school district used in this study requires all paid mentors to keep a log of all

meetings held with their mentee. Gwen has seen a change in the mentors' responsibility for the record keeping procedures, "Now the district makes us document the time and topics discussed on our logs. The logs then have to be turned into the treasurer." The mentors have adjusted to the changes in their roles and responsibilities with ease.

Best Practices

The second research question looked at the perceptions of the teacher mentors regarding the best, most needed, or most helpful mentoring practices. Mentors were asked to tell about the topics that they focused on the most while working with their mentees. Classroom management and lesson planning were the two areas that were addressed the most according to the teacher mentor survey results. These same areas were mentioned continuously throughout the interviews. Sara described the areas that she focuses on with her mentee, "First I focus on the classroom procedures and then lesson planning for the first three weeks." Figuring out what the teacher needs instead of following a script was mentioned by two of the mentors. Gavin sees each teacher as an individual, "I evaluate each teacher's needs. They might exhibit some behaviors that say okay they might need a little help with classroom management." Ultimately each teacher is different, and the mentor must recognize that and treat them that way.

This study revealed that the one size fits all method does not work when it comes to mentoring. Janice found that each of her teachers have different needs.

> For one mentor I have to listen to her situation and then guide her to a solution. We make a list of off all the possible outcomes. This deductive reasoning helps her, but does nothing for my other mentee. She is stronger and usually knows what will work best for her and her students. I let her take the lead in the problem solving process.

Landy prescribed a plan of action for each of her mentees based on their individual needs.

> My mentee's and I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year talking about what they need. Many of them come in with ideas from student teaching. Some of them are practical while others need some tweaking before they can be used in our school.

Samuel discussed the importance of seeing each teacher as an individual, "What you did last year with a mentee probably won't work this year. With so many turnovers you have to meet the teachers at their level and work from there."

Mentors have to know what strategies to use when dealing with their mentees. Listening was the area that was mentioned constantly throughout the study. Nan felt that listening without prejudice was important when dealing with beginning teachers, "Mentors should not be judgmental and say things like I would do it this way. You have to be patient enough to let them make some mistakes."

Secondly, being able to guide the mentee is an important practice when it comes to mentoring. Janice recommended using the guiding practices when working with first-year teachers, "You have to let them find the way to the answer. It can't come from the mentor." Elizabeth felt that guiding was important as well,

> Allowing your mentee the freedom to try different avenues or strategies to reach a solution is the best practice. Seeing what works and what doesn't work. Again this is building on a repertoire of possibilities for the students. I think that's best for the teacher.

During the interviews, the participants described essential characteristics that

mentors should possess. Some of the qualities mentioned included compassion, good

listening skills, resourceful, and organized. Marilyn summed up these qualities in her

interview, "Mentors have to be nurturing. They are almost like a coach slash mom."

Mentors cannot be afraid to confront adverse situations with their mentee. Gwen was

faced with a difficult mentoring situation,

> One mentee would ask me something. Then go around and ask several others the
> same thing. It's almost as if their looking for the answer that confirms what
> they're thinking even though you have explained the reasons why it must be done
> a particular way.

The mentors in this study stressed the importance of mentors being able to handle

any and all situations they are faced with during the process. These coping skills are

taught during mentor training. Portner (2005) states acquiring the special knowledge and

skills of mentoring are critical to the development of an effective mentor. Tina used the

mentoring materials she received during the training to assist her throughout the process,

"I did use the mentor manual to help me a lot. It helped to guide me through the 1st nine

weeks of school. It covered things that I would have never thought about." The mentors

in this study expressed the need for continuous training for all mentors. Sam felt that

annual training should be mandated, "Mentoring is a job, even though it's not a very well

paid one. Like any job, refresher courses should be given, why not in mentoring, too."

One mentor even suggested that monthly mentor meetings would be a good idea. Having

time to network and exchange ideas was a concern mentioned throughout the interviews.

Beginning in the 1980s, school districts across the country began to turn to mentoring as a strategy for reducing attrition among new teachers (Little, 1990; Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992). All of the study participants felt that mentoring plays a role in teacher retention. Marilyn felt that there was a direct link between the two, "I don't have any facts or figures but I think a teacher that's gone through a successful mentoring situation is apt to stay." Knowing that mentoring plays such a vital role in teacher retention many of the mentors cited that as a reason why they continue to do it even though they are faced with many obstacles like lack of support from school and district officials, no release time, minimal compensation and limited resources. Janice summed it up best by saying, "I think ultimately the test of success is whether or not the teacher stays in the room or whether they grab their purse out of the file cabinet and their out the door and you never see them again."

This study exhibited the complexity of the mentoring process for experienced teachers serving in this role. Mentors spend a great deal of time building a personal connection with the first-year teachers that they will be working with throughout the year. Once this foundation is built the mentors have found that it is easier to support the teachers with issues in and outside of the classroom. A mutual respect for each teacher's ideas and knowledge is a key component of the relationship. The mentors created an atmosphere that was relaxed and inviting for the first-year teachers. Wanting the teachers to feel that their ideas were respected and would be discussed in a non-threatening way helped to support this relationship.

Reflection for the mentor and first-year teacher was prominent throughout the study. The mentors used questioning strategies to promote self reflection among their mentees. The mentees were encouraged to look closely at their practice in and outside of the classroom. During this reflection time the mentors began to take a deeper look at their own practice. This self reflection prompts the mentors to look at what they are telling the mentees to do and what they are actually doing themselves. The reflective behaviors that the mentoring process ignites are truly beneficial to the practice of both teachers.

In this study, other factors were found to be significant as well. Adequate training for experienced teachers serving as mentors is essential. The training should include strategies that can be used to help the first year teacher with instructional challenges as well as student behavior issues. Evertson and Smithey (2000) found in addition, that training of mentors not only strengthened the mentees' teaching, but also the achievement of the students in their classrooms. Mentors must be equipped to handle situations with their mentee that might not be so pleasant. Learning about different ways to approach or support their mentee is an essential part of the training.

The mentors in this study stressed the importance of time when mentoring. A top priority for the mentor is to observe, model and dialogue with their mentee. Often times the mentor must be creative when trying to fit this into their schedule. During these meeting times the mentor can help the mentee address the issues that are giving them trouble. The support provided by mentors can assist first-year teachers with instructional and personal needs as well as help to lower attrition.

Summary

The teacher mentors who participated in this study revealed that the mentoring process is very detailed and takes great dedication. The shared mentoring experiences were unique to each teacher, but the mentoring process each teacher experienced was related. The themes were introduced as they related to the research questions that guided the study. They were interrelated, which led to the factors that are necessary to create an optimal mentoring situation. The final chapter concentrates on recommendations for mentoring practice and implications for the future of mentoring programs at the middle school level.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide a review of the study, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and reflections of the researcher.

As a result of teacher retirement, reduced class size, and increased enrollment, it is estimated that more than two million teachers will be hired in the 10-year period ending in 2011 (Johnson & Kardos, 2002). This staggering statistic exists partly because, in the United States, half of all public school teachers leave teaching in their first 5 years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). In order to combat the teacher retention problem, new state and local incentives mandate particular kinds of assistance and assessments for beginning teachers. Mentoring is one essential component of these programs and the focus of this study.

The review of literature explained the theoretical perspectives that guided this research study. Chapter II of this study outlined previous research on teacher induction, mentoring, the mentoring process, mentor training, how it relates to beginning teachers working in urban school settings, and teacher reflection. In an effort to increase teacher retention rates many school districts across the United States have implemented teacher induction programs. According to researchers, induction programs vary in content and length, but all are designed to provide professional support to teachers into the field (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Ingersoll, 1997; Johnson et al., 2001). During the last 20 years,

many researchers have investigated the benefits of mentoring and the need for on-site assistance and support for first-year teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, Little, 1990; Villani, 2002; Wong, 2004). It has been found that teachers who were mentored by a colleague at their same grade level showed greater job satisfaction, which led to lower attrition rates (Kardos, 2004; NCES, 1999; Public Education Network, 2004).

Initially mentors take time to build a solid working relationship with their mentees. During this relationship, building mentors take time to diagnose the mentee's competency and confidence to handle a given situation, professional needs, and levels of preparedness (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993; Kay, 1990; Portner, 1998). The mentoring process in education involves helping first year teachers become acclimated to their new educational setting by providing guidance in teaching strategies, classroom management, school wide formal and informal procedures and practices, and time management (Jones et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 1991; Varah et al., 1986).

As outlined earlier, the mentoring process for beginning teachers is very intricate, and adequate training should be given to mentor teachers before they begin the process. Researchers have found that mentors who attended training sessions learned useful techniques that were used while working with beginning teachers on a variety of instructional and behavioral strategies that resulted in increased student achievement (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Ganser, 2000).

Mentor training is a form of professional development that gives experienced teachers an opportunity to dialogue with colleagues about the mentoring process and learn ways to reflect upon and evaluate their own mentoring style and practice (Freiberg

et al., 1996; Hawkey, 1997; Kyle et al., 1999). Ganser (1997) conducted two similar studies looking at the benefits of mentoring beginning teachers for experienced teachers. Some of the benefits for mentors that were identified from his study included: (a) personal enjoyment and source of pride; (b) rejuvenation and reflection; (c) enhancement of knowledge and skills; and (d) expanded view of teaching.

The literature showed that the working conditions in urban schools are challenging for veterans but even more so for beginning teachers. Researchers have found that in addition to providing the traditional types of support, teacher mentors in urban schools have to provide assistance in the areas understanding the student population needs, making accommodations for the lack of resources, understanding the diverse school culture, and curriculum variations (Claycomb, 2000; Johnson et al., 2004; Tillman, 2005).

Reflection was the last area presented in Chapter II. Philosopher John Dewey looked at the concept of reflection and its importance to educators. Reflection is said to begin when one inquires into his or her own experiences and relevant knowledge to find meaning in his or her own beliefs (Dewey, 1933). Over the years, other researchers have expanded on his work and found reflection to be an opportunity for teachers to grow professionally, foster critical inquiry into their praxis, and goal setting (Boreen et al., 2000; Ross, 1989; Stronge, 2002). Studies have shown that reflection is an area that teachers struggle with during the early years of their career. Mentors have been called upon to help develop this important skill during the mentoring process.

It was the desire of this researcher to contribute to the literature that has already been conducted in the area of mentoring. This qualitative case study used surveys, one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews to gain the perspectives of the teacher mentors. Two original on-line Likert surveys were electronically distributed to second-year teachers and teacher mentors in an effort to gather their perceptions about the mentoring process. The information gathered from these surveys was used to create interview protocols for the one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews. Ten teacher mentors participated in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The focus group interview consisted of five additional teacher mentors.

The data collected from the surveys and interviews were analyzed and organized by emerging themes. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher in order to gain a better understanding of the participants' responses. A color coding system was used to help with the data analysis. The participant responses were categorized by the research question that they addressed. Five distinct themes emerged from the data analysis. These themes were qualities of the mentor and mentee relationship, willing helper, personal growth, support provisions, and advocacy.

The first theme, qualities of the mentor and mentee relationship, was very in depth as it outlined the types of interactions between the two teachers. Four sub-themes emerged as the researcher tried to capture the true essence of the relationship. The sub-themes were positive relationship, time investment, communication styles, and challenges. The mentors took great care in creating a positive and relaxed working relationship. In order for the mentor-mentee relationship to work, much time must be

invested by both parties. Finding the time to meet and observe each other were two of the areas that the teachers had to commit to whole heartedly. Lastly, effective communication between the mentor and mentee consisted of an open-door policy, mutual respect for opinions and ideas, and confidentiality, which further strengthened the relationship between these two teachers.

The second theme that emerged from the data was the willing helper. All of the mentors expressed a willingness to help others. Understanding the importance of support during the first year of teaching these mentors were willing to accept the role of mentor. As mentors, they served as guardians for the first year teachers by helping them cope with the demands of teaching and encouraging self-reflection.

Personal growth for the mentors was the third theme that evolved from the data. The professional development opportunities afforded to the mentors was invaluable. As a result of serving as a mentor the experienced teachers learned new teaching strategies, reflected on their teaching practice, and evaluated their own mentoring practices. These activities resulted in a growth promoting experience that benefited both teachers.

The data revealed that the mentors served as support providers for first year teachers. As described in the theme analysis the mentors provided professional and personal support during the mentoring process. Classroom management and instructional support were two of the most commonly areas addressed by the mentors. The support providers assisted the first year teachers during times of adversity. Mentors can provide the emotional and professional support that often influences teachers' decisions to remain in the profession (Lewis, 1996).

The final theme was advocacy. The mentors described themselves as advocates for the mentoring process; seeking ways to improve mentor training, increase support for the program and increase teacher retention. As advocates the mentors are petitioning for changes in the mentoring process. It is important to evaluate mentor effectiveness and establish clear and objective criteria for differentially encouraging or discouraging continued participation of mentors.

The themes that emerged from the data showed that the mentoring is a rich experience with many unique attributes. The mentors had a strong sense of their roles. This sense evolved from the needs of the mentee, the mentor's prior experience, and the mentor's reflections on their own early years of teaching. These themes substantiate the way the mentors and mentees relate to each other both professionally and personally.

Mentoring is an invaluable resource to the field of education. Mentoring purposes vary from orientation, to induction, to instructional improvement, to an intent to make the culture of the school more collaborative (Sweeny, 1994). An effective mentoring experience leads to beginning teachers' increased satisfaction and competence in teaching, and consequently, professional growth of mentored teachers outpaces non-mentored ones (Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997).

The mentoring process begins with the development of a positive working relationship between the mentor and mentee. Without this foundation the mentoring process can be challenging. A meaningful relationship between the teacher-mentor and the beginning teacher establishes an effective mentoring experience since the relationship mediates the experiential exchange (Covey, 1997; Hawkey, 1997). Effective mentors use

their expertise and interpersonal skills to build relationships that support beginning

teacher development in response to the individual needs of the new teacher (Moir, 2003).

Typical responsibilities of mentor teachers included: modeling lessons; observing and

coaching; modeling the use of technology to enhance instruction; analyzing assessment,

curriculum, and instructional planning; gathering resources; guiding teachers to

implement effective behavior management strategies; enhancing teacher understanding of

data analysis; and demonstrating a reflective approach to teaching, self-evaluation, and

implementation of new ideas (Auton, Berry, Mullen, & Cochran, 2002; Denmark &

Posden, 2000; Ganser, Marchione, & Fleischmann, 1999; Moir & Gless, 2004).

Mentors must be versatile in their practice. Mentors should be knowledgeable of

the beginning teacher's needs as they progress developmentally as a professional.

Mentors are expected to adjust their mentoring roles (e.g., confidant, counselor, and

guide) to meet protégés' needs as they move through these stages (Crewson & Fisher,

1997). As support provider's mentors must help first-year teacher's deal with the

personal issues that arise so beginning teachers can focus on their primary objective of

teaching.

Implications for Practice

The role of teacher mentor is critical and must be nurtured and respected by all

parties. School districts must strive to create the most favorable conditions to make this

role successful. The findings from this study offer glimpses into some essential factors

that need to be put in place. They form implications for current practice at both the school

and district level. The areas addressed in this section include: time for collaboration, mentor pairing, mentor selection, mentor training, and program evaluation.

Time for Collaboration

Lack of time to meet was one of the strongest inhibitors for the mentors in this study. The mentors struggled to find time to meet one-on-one with their mentees. This was especially difficult for those teachers in different subjects and grade levels. The lack of structured time created serious challenges for the mentors. Some mentors found themselves being creative schedulers in addition to the other demands facing them.

District officials should investigate uninterrupted release time for mentoring activities such as conferencing, observing, and lesson demonstrations. This teacher collaboration is an essential piece of the mentoring process, especially for struggling beginning teachers. Extended planning periods and common planning time for non-core teachers are options that can be explored. Administrators at the school level should dialogue about ways that they have included time for teacher collaboration at their school. Mentoring thrives in collaborative school environments. These best practices can be shared and used as a guide for others that are new or struggling with scheduling. Finding in-house coverage for these teachers can be challenging so the use of substitutes is an option, although it can be costly.

There is a need to have the mentor teacher spend time providing mentoring activities, especially during the beginning of the school year and throughout the first semester. There may be several reasons why spending time during these two periods are critical. First, all beginning teachers do not take the traditional path to teaching. As

mentioned in the study many new teachers do not complete a program in a school of education. For some, this is the first time entering a classroom other than as a student. The mentoring for a non-traditional teacher is often times more in-depth and requires more time. This should be taken into consideration by site administrators. Providing mentoring early is critical to the success and retention of these individuals.

Mentor Pairing

Good mentoring involves a variety of formal and informal contacts. Mentor teachers reported a need to teach the same subject area or grade level as the beginning teacher they are assigned to mentor. An assignment such as this could be important to overcome barriers in meeting instructional strategies as well as barriers that occur based on the developmental needs of the children. Assignment of a beginning teacher in a similar grade or content would be easier for the mentor to fulfill their contractual duties as a teacher. This method of pairing would help since most of the mentors are not receiving release time and their work load remains equal to other teachers in the grade level or content area. Additionally, administrators should also take into consideration classroom proximity when making a match which can assist with the meeting time dilemma. Gender and ethnicity should not be overlooked in the mentor pairing conducted by the administrator or lead teacher mentor. These factors may improve the level of comfort for both teachers. Supporting beginning teachers is the responsibility of the entire school division and all should be sensitive to the importance of building that support within the school community. These new interventions can assist

the school district in addressing concerns, regardless of the severity, and in helping the beginning teacher feel respected which will hopefully increase teacher retention rates.

Mentor Selection

The mentor selection process is very important. As pointed out in the data, not all teachers are willing or equipped to be a mentor. Consideration of personality, age, grade level, teaching style, and level of teaching proficiency should be taken into account during the selection and matching process. Too often mentors are chosen on the basis of who is available, willing, or has the required amount of teaching experience. Generally, the responsibility of assigning mentors is placed on the shoulders of the already over worked school based administrator or curriculum facilitator. As mentioned in this study, an on-site lead mentor should be seriously considered for all schools. By having this person in place the time and attention needed for mentor selection and pairing would be in place.

The participants in this study covered a wide age and teaching experience range. When selecting mentors administrators or lead mentors should expand their thinking beyond the traditional veteran teacher with many years of experience. An investigation into how the teacher interacts with colleagues and parents should be conducted prior to the mentor selection process. Selecting a mentor with a non-threatening persona and excellent communication skills should be of the highest importance.

Mentor Training

The preparation of mentors and development of their capacity to mentor effectively are issues that require attention. It is essential to have preparation for the new

role as a mentor (Debolt, 1989). The participants in this study based their perceptions of mentoring on their personal experiences. Mentor training programs should follow a clear and consistent plan of study. The role of the mentor should be clearly defined along with clarity of some of the common misconceptions about this role. Support, guidance, and resources should be prioritized for mentor training. Mentor teachers have a need to be consistent and accurate in providing the best model of good teaching possible; therefore, if they receive training, they will be able to meet the needs of the beginning teacher without guessing the school division's expectations.

The school district in this study has a mentor training program in place. Based on the comments from the teacher mentors in this study, the program should be reviewed to verify that all parties at the school and district level are doing what needs to be done. This training program could be expanded to strengthen the coaching and supervision role of mentors, consistent with the studies conducted by Joyce and Showers (1980), Evertson and Smithey (2000), and Ganser (1992) mentioned in Chapter II of this study. Mentors should be given follow up training in a timely manner. This training should help to sharpen their skills and keep them current with the best practices associated with mentoring. These trainings can be a time for self-renewal as well as networking. Teacher mentoring is best developed within a professional culture that favors collegiality and collaboration.

Program Evaluation

As with any worthwhile program the needs and design will change; therefore program assessment and evaluation should be on going. The mentors in this study

expressed a desire to see some form of evaluation put in place. Although the district mentioned in this study uses an annual on-line survey to evaluate the mentoring program the need for a more intensive evaluation was expressed by the mentors.

Administrators at the school and district level may find it helpful to meet with the first year teachers and the mentor teachers for the purpose of gathering information that will help to improve the mentoring relationship and the effectiveness of the program. This approach may give the administrators information on how to fully assess how well the mentoring program meets the needs of the school district.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Teacher mentors are invaluable assets to the field of education. The mentoring process encourages collaboration among colleagues. Future research on the topic of mentoring could include an in-depth case study on the perceptions of both the mentor and the mentee in relation to the mentoring relationship. Secondly, future studies could look at the perceptions of mentors in one school setting. The mentors in this study came from different schools which yielded a variety of experiences. By focusing on one school, the data collection methods could be expanded to include observations and interviews with other school faculty like the administrators and lead mentors. Further research might explore the role of the administrator in the induction of the beginning teacher. How do administrators view their role in the development of beginning teachers in their building? What role does the administrator play in the mentor/mentee relationship? Looking at the administrator would add a new dimension to the knowledge base and enhance the research on instructional leadership.

Based of the responses from the mentors in this participating district a future study that evaluates the effectiveness of the current mentoring program is needed. An in-depth look into the mentor selection, training, compensation and the external support offered to mentors will guide district administrators as they make decisions about the future of the induction program and strategies to reduce teacher attrition.

Researcher's Reflections

Support for beginning teachers has always been a topic that is near and dear to my heart. For the last several years I have been collecting information on this topic in preparation for my research. I must honestly say that this journey has been filled with excitement, anger, regret, confusion and finally relief. At times, I wasn't sure if I would get to this point, but with the encouragement of my family, friends and professors I have accomplished my goal.

This study has allowed me to take a deeper look into the practices of other teacher mentors like myself. I was fortunate to have flexible and willing participates in my study. Each of the teacher mentors quickly responded to any of my request during the data collection period. When I initially approached the mentors about participating in the study, they all eagerly agreed. I think they wanted the opportunity to share their thoughts about the mentoring process with someone. Through my conversations with them, I gained greater clarity on the issues facing teacher mentors in various settings.

Although the dissertation phase is a lonely venture, it is also the most rewarding part of the doctoral process. As I reflect back over the process a few things stand out.

1. Select a topic that is near and dear to your heart because you will be consumed by it.

2. Create a plan and stick to it. This is not an overnight process; however, you don't want it to be life-long either.

3. Speak about your study to anyone who will listen. The more you articulate what you are doing the more you will embrace it.

4. Stay focused on one topic during your study. It is easy to lose track and what to venture down another path. This will only confuse what you have already done.

5. Celebrate each milestone on your journey. It will make the finish line seem more attainable.

In conclusion, this journey was fulfilling and has intensified my passion to support the teachers that will follow in my footsteps. Beginning teachers must be equipped to handle the ever changing students that sit before them each day. With the help of a mentor, these teachers will be able to cope and develop a resilience that they can carry with them for years to come. I end with these words,

"My friend, my confidante, my backbone, my mentor."

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Appendix A

Mentor Survey

Section A: Professional Competencies

How frequently have you met formally or informally with your mentee to discuss the following professional competencies related to teaching?

Question	Daily or almost daily	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Once or a few times a year	Never
Classroom Management and organization					
Curriculum and Lesson Planning					
Meeting the needs of diverse learners					
Finding available resources					
Communication with colleagues					
Communication/conferencing with parents					
Time Management					
District and school level policies					

Other:_____

_____

Section B: Support

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Question	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My mentee came into the school year prepared to work with the students in my school setting.					
My mentee came into the school year prepared to handle the pressures associated with teaching in my school setting.					

My mentee and I met on a regular basis all year.					
I have had a strong professional relationship with the first-year teacher(s) that I have mentored in the past.					

Other:_____

_____

Section C: Reflection

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Question	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The effectiveness of my teaching has changed as a result of being a mentor?					
Being a mentor has been a positive experience for me.					
I plan to continue mentoring beginning teachers in the future.					
Since becoming a mentor I have become more reflective of my own teaching practices.					
As a result of mentoring I have taken a closer look at my own professional development plan for future growth.					

Comments:_____

_____

<u>Follow Up</u>

Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up session (one-on-one interview or focus group) to discuss the topic of mentoring further?

A. Yes   B. No

If yes, please indicate which session you would be willing to participate in?

____One-on-one interview (45-90 minutes)
____ Focus group (45-90 minutes)

2. Please complete the following information.

Name	
School Name	
Mailing Address	
Phone Number	
Best Time to Call	
E-mail Address	

Your contribution to this effort is very much appreciated.

Appendix B

Second Year Teacher Survey

Section A: Professional Competencies

How frequently did you meet with your mentor to discuss the following professional competencies related to teaching?

	Daily or almost daily	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Once or a few times a year	Never
Classroom Management and organization					
Curriculum and Lesson Planning					
Meeting the needs of diverse learners					
Finding available resources					
Communication with colleagues					
Communication/conferencing with parents					
Time Management					
District and school level policies					

Other:_____

_____

Section B: Support

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My mentor and I met on a regular basis.					
My mentor teacher provided me with the support I needed when I encountered an obstacle.					
My mentor has helped me reflect on my teaching by offering meaningful feedback.					

Other:_____

_____

Section C: Reflection

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My mentor encouraged me to think about the effectiveness of my teaching.						
My mentor has helped me to grow as a professional.						
My mentor has helped me reflect on my teaching by offering meaningful feedback.						
The time that I spent with my mentor was meaningful.						
My mentor has helped me to become a reflective, skilled, instructional problem-solver and decision maker						
Since working with my mentor I have taken a closer look at my own professional development plan for future growth.						

Other:_____

_____

Your contribution to this effort is very much appreciated.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little about yourself in reference to your teaching experience.

2. How many beginning teachers do you currently mentor?

3. How long have you been a mentor?

4. Why did you become a mentor?

5. In your opinion what is the role of the mentor?

6. How would you describe your relationship with the teachers you mentor?

7. What are some highlights of positive experiences that you may have encountered while serving as a mentor?

8. What are some challenges/barriers that you may have faced while mentoring?

9. What are some of the key activities that you focus on when you are mentoring a first year teacher at your school?

10. What are some of the scheduling conflicts that a new teacher at your school might face?

11. Has your view of your role and responsibilities as a mentor changed over the time?

12. Do you feel that administrators at your school and at the district level support mentoring?

13. What practices do you feel are best when it comes to mentoring?

14. What practices do you feel are most needed or most helpful when it comes to mentoring?

15. How has being a mentor changed your thinking about being a teacher?

16. How has mentoring affected your practice?

17. Think back to an experience you had with your mentee in the last few weeks that you thought was positive?

18. Think back to an experience you had with your mentee in the last few weeks that you thought was challenging?

19. What ways do you think you have helped your mentee grow professionally since working with him/her?

20. What would you say are your greatest strengths as a mentor?

21. What areas do you think you need to grow as a mentor?

22. What impact does mentoring have on teacher retention?

23. What else is there that you want to share with me about being a mentor and working with your mentee that you haven't shared?

Appendix D

Focus Group Protocol

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself. What is your name, current position, how long have you been education and the first paying job you had before teaching.

2. How long have you been mentor?

3. How has being a mentor changed your thinking about being a teacher?

4. What do you think is the role of the mentor?

5. Why did you become a mentor?

6. What qualities does a mentor teacher need?

7. What are some key activities related to teaching that you focus on when working with a first year teacher.

8. What practices do you feel are most needed or most helpful when it comes to mentoring?

9. What are some of the challenges or barriers that you have faced while mentoring?

10. Do you feel that school and district administrators support mentoring?

11. Do you plan to continue mentoring in the future?

12. What else is there that you want to share with me about being a mentor and working with first year teachers that you haven't shared?

Appendix E

Research Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Consent for Interview and Focus Group Participants

Project Title: Perceptions of Mentors in the Urban Middle School Setting

Project Director: Dr. Carl Lashley

Participant's Name: _____

DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF PURPOSE AND PROCEDURES:

I am conducting a research project on the perceptions of middle school level teacher mentors working with beginning teachers in urban schools. This study will allow us to get a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of these mentors.

Participants will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview or focus group interview.

One-on-one interviews will be 45-90 minutes in length. During the interview participants will be asked questions about their perceptions of the mentoring process. In addition to the time required for participation in an initial interview, an additional 20-60 minute follow up interview will occur for additional data collection and/or for member checking.

Focus group interviews will be 45-90 minutes in length. Participants will be asked to participate in a discussion with other mentors about their perceptions of the mentoring process. In addition to the time required for participation in the focus groups, an additional 20-60 minute follow up interview will occur for additional data collection and/or for member checking.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

The risks for participants are minimal in this study. During the interviews participants may reveal information that might be embarrassing to themselves or the school district. Extreme caution will be used on the part of the researcher to prevent any ramifications that might be harmful to the participant by using pseudonyms and other unrecognizable names.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

The benefit for participating mentors is that they will have better understanding of their role as a mentor and support provider for beginning teachers. This study will allow administrators at the district, state and national level to get a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of teacher mentors. All data will be kept in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher. Following the closure of the project after 3 years, interview transcripts, video tapes, and survey data will be shredded. Audiotapes and video tapes will be crushed and then discarded. All electronic files will be erased.

By signing this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants in all research reports and presentations.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Karen Boyd by calling (336) 375-3988. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature*   Date

IRB Approved Consent

Date: 9/5/08