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Expectations of Mentoring: Novice Teachers' Voices

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Mentoring, as an avenue to support and retain new teachers, has received a renewed interest. As Trubowitz suggests, “School systems are finding that beginning teachers who have access to intensive mentoring are less likely to leave teaching” (2004, p. 59). While several factors may cause teachers to leave, alienation has been identified as one of the major forces. According to previous research, teachers experience “a combination of feelings of isolation, normlessness, powerlessness, and meaninglessness” (Benham & O’Brien, 2002, p. 20). Such feelings of isolation are compounded by the current accountability demands and the professional pressure teachers’ experience. Thus, it is imperative to consider alternative strategies aimed at providing the kind of support congruent with beginning teacher’s needs in order to be successful (Breux & Wong, 2003, p. iii). A goal of such strategies should be the effective socialization of teachers, and providing on-going support for growth, through different approaches including mentoring (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Brennan, Thames, & Roberts, 1999). Although mentoring can be an effective means to enhance teacher efficacy and help beginning teachers (Breux & Wong, 2003; Delgado, 1999; Yost, 2002), limited research focuses on teachers’ perspectives associated with their own expectations of mentoring, particularly in diverse school settings (Wang & Odell, 2002). Further, researchers suggest, “There has been limited evidence that points to the expectations of new teachers relative to mentoring” (Tillman, 2005, p. 616). Thus, it is essential that teachers’ voices be illuminated to better understand their needs so that school leaders may “consider the benefits of consulting with novice teachers about their expectations in the mentoring arrangement” (Tillman, 2005, p. 626). Much of the current literature on teacher mentoring is based on experiences of mentors (Ganser, 1996; Trubowitz, 2004), and mentoring internship program descriptions (Brennan, Thames, & Roberts, 1999) however, novice teachers’ voices tend to be absent from the discourse. While few studies have focused on teachers’ perceptions (Rowley, 1999; Olebe, Jackson, & Danielson, 1999), additional research is needed so that beginning teachers’ voices contribute to a better understanding of mentoring as a vehicle to reduce isolation, successfully socialize new teachers into the demands of the profession, provide culturally responsive support to novice teachers, and reduce teacher turnover. Such inquiry could also be useful to avoid the common pitfalls that might have a detrimental effect on teachers and students. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present the results of a study conducted to examine teachers’ expectations of mentoring.

Theoretical Background

Each year thousands of eager individuals are certified to begin the daunting task of planning, delivering, and assessing instruction, with varying degrees of competence. Therefore, “Providing support to beginning teachers is essential for beginning teachers to become effective practitioners as soon as possible” (Andrews & Quinn, 2005, p. 110). As teachers enter the educational arena, they are expected to possess the knowledge and skills that will help them influence student achievement within certain school cultures, but it is also acknowledged that novice teachers should have access to someone to facilitate their own growth and professional development

(Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). In an effort to facilitate teacher development, novice educators are teamed up with a mentor who is expected to provide guidance and support throughout the first year. “Even when circumstances are more conducive to developing these partnerships, mentors are frequently given little more direction than to ‘help out’ the new teacher, and many experienced teachers have been at the craft for so long that they have forgotten what they did not know at the beginning” (Millinger, 2004, p. 67).

While an effective mentoring relationship provides an opportunity for the experienced and the novice teacher to form a cooperative bond, this collegial activity is a way to support new teachers, to facilitate their professional development, and foster self-confidence (Shulman, 1988). According to previous research (Huling-Austin, 1992) many mentoring relationships lack quality and questions regarding the “why, how, and what of mentoring continue to be raised” (Trubowitz, 2004, p.1). Furthermore, others affirm that “providing support to beginning teachers is essential for two reasons: the need to retain qualified beginning teachers and the need for beginning teachers to become effective practitioners as soon as possible” (Andrews & Quinn, 2005, p. 110). The multiplicity of mental, physical, emotional, financial, and new demands on beginning teachers (Cohen, 1999) dictates the need to provide a more constructive experience for the beginning educator. Mentoring beginning teacher is one of the most important novice teacher development endeavors a school district must improve.

Mentoring programs are recognized as a way to socialize beginning teachers, but more importantly, to provide the necessary support to survive and succeed in the classroom. Despite the obstacles faced by many beginning teachers for a successful mentoring experience to occur, research clearly delineates the characteristics and structures needed to influence a beginning teacher’s initial experiences in the classroom in a positive manner (Anzul, 2000; Odell & Huling, 2000; Ovando & Trube, 2000; Schwille & Dynak, 2000). These practices include: identifying the needs of novice teachers, refining teacher performance, understanding the dynamics of mentoring to better support and assist beginning teachers, and enhancing beginning teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and skills. However, teachers’ expectations are seldom highlighted, and therefore, clarifying novice teachers’ expectations should be an integral part of a mentoring process (Tillman, 2005).

Previous researchers (Bey & Holmes, 1992; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986) have identified a framework with characteristics describing effective mentoring practices. A component of the framework outlines the process for mentor selection and matching of novice teachers with experienced educators. Criteria for mentors may include: a desire to continuously learn and promote self-improvement, an ability to work with a diverse group of individuals, a readiness to seek to understand first and not make judgments about the novice teacher, an ability to demonstrate effective practices in the classroom and serve as a model for a beginning teacher, an enthusiasm to serve in a support role rather than in an evaluator role, and a readiness to accept the time commitment involved in mentoring a beginning teacher. Others have also highlighted how mentors set guidelines to achieve success (Trubowitz & Robins, 2003), but these criteria and guidelines address only the role of the mentor.

Mentoring, as a viable medium to enhance teacher learning and development, continues to be an area of interest. According to previous research, policymakers at the state level have led the movement to implement beginning teacher programs to provide assistance and support. School districts, regional service centers, state departments of education, and institutions of higher education have been chiefly responsible for implementing support programs for beginning educators entering the profession (Furtwengler, 1995, p. 2).

Furthermore, states across the country have required the creation of mentoring programs to assist new teachers (Portner, 1998). However, most recently it has been concluded that “with the growing acceptance of the need to mentor novice teachers comes the danger that schools will attempt to implement mentor programs without paying adequate attention to the factors that create mentor/mentee relationships that provide growth and satisfaction for both participants” (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 59).

Existing mentoring programs usually operate under institutional prescribed assumptions of how to best help beginning teachers. Consequently, mentor assignments can render negative outcomes. For example, “if administrators pressure an experienced teacher into working with a novice, the likelihood that resentment will taint the relationship is high” (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 59). Taking into account that novice teachers' expectations are shaped by their ideology and their experiences frame their identity as educators, ignoring their voices may also exacerbate a negative situation. By illuminating their voices, novice teachers' expectations can be identified and possibly contribute to the development of a culturally responsive mentoring program.

Others have focused on effective mentoring practices (Rowley, 1999), fostering teacher leadership through mentoring (Moir & Bloom, 2003), and mentor responsibilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004) however, teachers' own voices have been absent from the discourse, and often times mentoring programs render fruitless results with teachers becoming more frustrated about the current job demands. Further, as Benham and O'Brien (2002) assert, “It is impossible to overestimate the degree of job intensification that has taken place in teaching within the past decade, as society asks its schools to do more and more” (p. 28). Thus, additional inquiry related to teachers' expectations of mentoring might enhance existing knowledge on how to better assist novice teachers as they attempt to respond to the ever increasing demands for quality teaching and student learning success.

Given the current state of teacher turnover and the shortage of teachers, it is imperative to hear teachers' voices concerning their perspectives of mentoring. Previous research has focused on novice teachers' views, however, Wang and Odell (2002) stated,

research on the novice teachers' perceptions of mentoring has generally been approached with surveys and questionnaires. In spite of the large number of studies on preservice teachers and beginning teachers, we found that the questionnaires, especially those with fixed questions, were often difficult to explore. It was difficult to determine the origin and nature of expectations held by novice teachers (p. 510).

Thus, understanding teachers' views related to mentoring and how they may contribute to mentoring might also help school leaders to respond effectively to the socialization and support needs of novice teachers. As Tillman (2005) suggested, “It is important that new teachers be socialized to the school culture in ways that would counter negative perceptions and expectations of students” (p. 621). Moreover, novice teachers' capacity may vary depending on the type of preparation program they come from. As a result, their needs and expectations may also be varied. Not only may such variability be a challenge for school districts, but mentoring programs designed only from an institutional perspective may also not be the best approach to socialize beginning teachers. As Wang and Odell (2002) suggested, “The expectations that novices and mentors bring to their work together have the potential to shape the process as well as the consequences of mentoring novice's learning to teach” (p. 513). Therefore, novice teachers' perceptions associated with the mentoring relationship need to be illuminated.

Methodological Considerations

The purpose of this study was to identify novice teachers' expectations of the mentoring relationship. Specifically, four main questions were addressed:

1. What do novice teachers expect from the teacher/mentor relationship?
2. What do novice teachers perceive as the most important attributes of the mentor?
3. What do novice teachers contribute to the teacher/mentor relationship?
4. What kind of training do novice teachers recommend for mentors?

This study was conducted following a qualitative research paradigm with a grounded theory approach. Charmaz (2003) explained "Grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data" (pp. 250-251). Qualitative methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.6) was used to "explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day to day situations." The intent was to let the data drive the development of theoretical explanations related to the phenomenon of study.

Study participants were selected using convenience and purposive sampling (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The 25 teachers selected to participate in the study represented two groups of novice teachers with a mentor assigned according to the district's mentoring model. One group included those teachers who had begun their teaching career with district, and the other group included experienced teachers who were new to their teaching assignment. These teachers represented different schools and grade levels in a school district located in the southern part of a central state. The sample included teachers who graduated from a traditional four year college program as well as those who completed their preparation through an alternative certification program.

The school district's mentoring program requires a mentor-teacher application/contract that describes a mentor as follows:

A mentor teacher is a person who is willing to provide on-going support and assistance to the first year teacher to which he/she has been assigned. The mentor teacher should demonstrate excellence in teaching. A mentor is a person who has the ability to work well with adults and can build a relationship or trust with the first year teacher. The mentor teacher must be sensitive to the viewpoint of others, be an active, open learner and display competent social and public relations skills. (LISD, 2005, p. 1)

The school district mentoring model also contains information about mentoring activities, sessions between the mentor and the teacher and other related matters (LISD, 2005). However, novice teachers' expectations or professional needs are not noted.

The primary data collection protocol was a questionnaire containing open ended questions mailed to the teachers at the beginning of the school year. This instrument, a letter inviting them to participate, a document explaining the purpose of the study, and an addressed envelope were sent to the teachers with instructions to return the items through mail. Teachers' written responses to open-ended questions have the potential to capture the respondents' perspectives without predetermining those perspectives through a previous selection of questionnaire categories of responses (Patton, 1990). Participating teachers were able to share "information, perspectives and experiences related to the topic of research" (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The main interest was to allow teachers' voices describe their thinking associated with mentoring so that the analytical, conceptual and theoretical explanations could be developed from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The researchers carefully examined the participants' written responses. Such examination was completed to analyze, compare, and synthesize emerging themes. As Straus and Corbin (1990, p. 71) state "It is through careful scrutiny of data, line by line, that researchers are able to uncover new concepts and novel relationships and to systematically develop categories in term of their properties and dimensions" Thus, the researchers coded and organized teachers' responses according to emerging themes and clustered together congruent to the research questions (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982).

Findings

The findings of the study generated four dominant themes: (a) teachers' expectations of the teacher/mentor relationship; (b) perceived attributes of the mentor; (c) teachers' own contributions to the mentoring process; and (d) development of mentor's capacity to perform the role.

Novice teachers' expectations of the mentor-teacher relationship

The data revealed that novice teachers have specific expectations of the mentor-teacher relationship. These included the development of a close professional working bond, teaching-centered instructional leadership, guidance to navigate the administrative bureaucracy, and clear communication between both parties. Providing such supportive leadership and assistance may be accomplished when mentors embrace the role of helper and provide novice teachers with support and suggestions learned from experience (Sawyer, 2004).

Development of a close professional working bond. The need to form a close working relationship with mentors emerged as one of the teachers' expectations. This kind of relationship requires that mentors spend time getting to know their mentee and together determine areas of importance for the teacher. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2006) suggested, "The mentoring relationship is special because

of its entrusting nature. Those being mentored depend upon their mentors to help them, protect them, show them the way, and develop their skills and insights more fully” (p. 264). Others also recognize the value of a positive working relationship between the mentor and the teachers. For instance, Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2005) asserted that a “trusting, helping relationship can make the difference between a successful and failed entrance to the profession” (p. 252). The participating teachers expressed the need have access to their mentor collegial support throughout their first year of teaching. One participant expressed

I expected to build a relationship with my mentor that would allow me to be better prepared and with a little insight into the profession that was new to me. Also, I expected my mentor to be a viable source of educational information and able to guide me to the resources that would help my students achieve academic success.

Teaching-centered instructional leadership. The data revealed that novice teachers expect their mentors to be instructional leaders. They expect mentors to be knowledgeable and informed about teaching matters both in general and particularly related to their own school, including classroom management techniques, and ways of incorporating those into their teaching repertoire. Glickman et al. (2005) suggested, “Mentoring typically is direct assistance provided by an experienced teacher to a beginning teacher. The mentor may provide any of the forms of direct assistance” (p. 252). Thus, mentors who are instructional leaders usually tend “to help new teachers improve their effectiveness in demonstrating the schools’ standards for teaching” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2006, p. 264). As teachers said

I expected my mentor to provide me with tips and instructions on how to carry out some of the activities (instructional) and paperwork that teachers have to do. My mentor always answered my questions and guided me through things that I wasn’t sure how to do.

I expected to acquire valuable experiences and information from my mentor. For example, discipline advice, time management, and other useful classroom information.

I expected to learn more on how discipline was handled and teach at the same time. Even though one might have experience, but he or she might want to learn more on that. This year, I did have what I wanted to learn with the mentor and help of the district.

Guidance on how to navigate through the bureaucracy The data revealed that novice teachers expect to have assistance to navigate the educational bureaucracies. Novice teachers usually face challenges associated with bureaucratic paperwork, so they need guidance from their mentors to better understand the different processes and mechanisms related to school operations. Novice teachers may have a “number of interrelated needs” (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthal, 2000, p.13) and these must be addressed through “orientation to the school system, school curriculum and community” (p. 12). Functioning within a school bureaucracy requires help to interpret and to meet state laws and specific policy requirements. As a teacher observed

I expected my mentor to provide me with tips and instructions on how to carry out some of the activities (instructional) and paperwork that teachers have to do. My mentor always answered my questions and guided me through things that I wasn’t sure how to do.

Clear communication

Data also revealed that novice teachers expect clear communication from their mentors.

This communication should be two-way and on-going. Teachers, as professionals, need to be able to share their concerns as well as exchange ideas with the mentor so that their immediate needs may be addressed in a positive environment. The need for professional communication was also identified as an attribute of successful schools where teachers in successful schools have on-going conversations about teaching (Glickman et al., 2005). Teachers in this study conveyed

I expected to have an open teacher/mentor communication this year. The open communication between the teacher/mentor was always present. I believe that my expectations for my mentor were achieved. This year, I was always in communication with my mentor. We kept each other informed in reference to datelines, meetings, etc.

The communication level that I was able to share with my mentor was great. He was always willing to give a helping hand and gave me many valuable lessons.

Clear communication, based on a common language between mentor and protégé, may lead to a joint exploration of better teaching practices (Olebe, Jackson, & Danielson, 1999). This common journey may be further enhanced when “the good mentor communicates hope and optimism” (Rowley, 1999, p. 22), in that way that validates the mentee’s efforts.

Mentor attributes

Novice teachers in this study expect their respective teacher mentor to possess several attributes for a successful mentoring experience. According to the novice teachers mentors should be willing, caring, and ethical.

Willing. Data revealed that teachers expect their mentors to demonstrate a willingness and genuine interest to help new teachers with their complex tasks, be available throughout the year at all times, and make teachers’ first year of teaching a positive professional experience. Such a willingness is an important dimension of the selection of mentors (Bey & Holmes, 1992; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986). An important characteristic in identifying mentors to support beginning teachers includes “a willingness to spend time helping beginning teachers” (Glickman et al., 2005, p. 282). As participants observed

I believe that a mentor should be someone with experience, willing to help and provide for the new teacher, and present resources upon availability. My mentor was friendly, not only with me but also with the rest of the faculty and staff, and I believe I’ve learned to be that way and improve the work environment.

I believe a mentor should display a willingness to help out new teachers and ease their (novice teachers) transition into the school system

Caring. Data suggested that teachers expect their mentors to practice a caring philosophy and exhibit a high level of collegiality, one that is inspirational as well as a professional virtue (Sergiovanni, 1992). Sergiovanni and Starratt (2006) affirm this notion, “Collegiality speaks not only to the degree of trust, openness, and good feelings that exist among a faculty, but also the kind of

norm system that bonds teachers as a collective unit” (p. 353). A caring mentor, therefore, should strive to achieve a type of collegiality that is “characterized by mutual respect, shared work, values, cooperation and specific conversations about teaching and learning” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2006, p. 353). One mentee expressed

I believe that a mentor should be someone who is caring, helpful, who is an excellent colleague with determination, and who is understanding and overall inspiring.

Ethical. Data also revealed that novice teachers expect their mentors to be ethical in their interaction with teachers. They expect their mentors to adhere to a professional code of ethics as they work with teachers who are valuable professionals, possess dignity and deserve respect. While a specific code of ethics for mentors is not available, researchers (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthal, 2000) suggest that “as practitioners, mentors and supervisors need to be aware of the ethical issues that they will face” (p. 321) because “ethical supervisory leadership requires a knowledge of social justice issues and related contemporary professional issues, and a commitment to be a model and change agent when confronted with institutional injustice or individual racism or sexism” (p. 317). As a teacher noted

I feel that a true mentor should follow the Code of Ethics that he or she is expected to follow. A good mentor should take time needed for answering questions that a mentee asks.

Novice teacher contributions to the mentoring process

The data revealed that these teachers did not realize they had anything to contribute to the mentoring process. Even though these teachers’ perceptions were one dimensional, the mentoring process can be a reciprocal exchange (Millinger, 2004). Novice teachers reported feeling surprised when they became aware of how much they actually contributed to the mentoring process. Beginning teachers’ contributions included the sharing of ideas, and asking relevant teaching-focused questions.

Sharing of ideas. According to the data, one way to contribute to the mentor-teacher relationship was offering ideas. In addition, teachers also played a part in the development of specific teaching plans, contributing to the mentor’s learning, regardless of their extensive teaching experience. Thus, “the relationship becomes more of a partnership when it comes to figuring out how to deal with new issues facing teachers and schools” (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 62). Sergiovanni and Starratt (2006) concur

While the emphasis in mentoring is on helping new teachers, mentors typically report that the experience of mentoring is expansive for them as well. By helping a colleague, they are forced to come to grips with their own teaching, to see their problems more clearly, and to learn ways to overcome them” (p. 267).

By sharing ideas and information, novice teachers contribute to the process and make their experience more meaningful and rewarding. “Co-developing and collaborating on the learning process are far more helpful to the mentee and make wiser use of the mentor’s time” (Millinger, 2004, p. 67) As mentees noted

My contributions to the relationship were more than simply being an apprentice. I believe that I was easy to talk to, eager to learn and at the same time very willing to share some of my ideas, specifically when it comes to technology.

Yes, I feel that I contributed to the teacher/mentor relationship to some extent. I was open to suggestions and contributed as well as in developing a comprehensive teaching plan, including strategies for teaching TEKS to children, developing and

implementing discipline strategies for children with discipline problems, and effectively communicating through meetings on a weekly basis, including developing agendas.

I learned many things from my mentor but I did share many things with my mentor that he did not experience throughout his teaching.

Asking focused questions. According to the data, mentees also contributed to the mentoring process by asking focused questions. In doing so, their professional needs are directly addressed as they emerge. Teacher-initiated questions may lead to joint decision making in different aspects of specific interest to the teacher. Moreover, by asking pertinent questions, novice teachers expect to get direct assistance in matters of professional concern. Mentoring is a form of providing direct assistance to teachers, and as such it may be offered through co-teaching arrangements in which “the expert peer and teacher seeking assistance together can plan, teach, and evaluate a lesson. Co-teaching establishes trust and rapport, and foster the collegiality, dialogue, and mutual reflection that foster teacher growth” (Glickman, et al., 2005, p. 252). As a mentee conveyed

I believe that I contributed to the teacher/mentor relationship by asking my mentor questions about school district policy procedures and by asking my mentor for help as situations arose.

Recommendations to develop mentor capacity

According to the data the experience mentors possess may not be enough to successfully perform their role. Therefore, as Evertson and Smithey (2000) express, “If mentors can be taught to work with their protégés in more learning-centered ways perhaps the changes in mentors would result in changes in the teaching of their protégés” (p. 294). Two areas for mentor development emerged from the data, preparation to work with novice teachers and capacity to communicate.

Preparation to work with novice teachers. Novice teachers' conceptions conveyed that experienced teachers who perform the role of a mentor should have the training to be able to guide new teachers through the complex legal issues and responsibilities in the educational setting. If mentors are to be successful, they must identify the strengths and needs of the mentee, thus helping to develop internal capacity for improving student learning (Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000; Anzul, 2000). Mentor preparation, according to Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998), could include concerns for the novice teacher, active listening, and teacher's cognitive developmental stages. Mentors should also possess skills at providing instructional support in different interpersonal contexts and model continuous learning (Rowley, 1999, pp. 20-22). As mentees noted

I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training to teach us first time teachers what the process for the computer is to fill out an ARD form if we are in Special Education or even a regular teacher on how to look for better ways to help Special Education students with modifications.

I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training on how to work on the same timeline. I would also recommend for mentor teachers to also receive training on how to go over rules and guidelines for their department and campus. Also, I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training on writing and developing timelines.

I would recommend for the mentors to attend a series of workshops to help them target the areas that new teachers experience.

Capacity to clearly communicate. The findings also indicated that mentors are expected to clearly communicate campus and district policies, to support new teachers who may come with different professional and preparation backgrounds, and who may teach in a variety of formats. An extremely important aspect in working with novice teachers is clear communication to tailor support to the mentee's individual needs. Ultimately, this interactive effort of using learned communications skills and knowledge can effectively improve interactions between mentor and mentee (Evertson & Smithey, 2000). As teachers commented,

I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training on mentoring strategies to be able to study and identify the strength and weaknesses of the novice teacher and how to work on and build on these strategies. And, I would also recommend for mentor teachers to receive training that stresses the importance of communication.

I would recommend for mentor teachers to receive training on up-to-date procedures, how to use effective communication, and how to teach novice teachers effective first year teacher training procedures.

I believe that mentor teachers should receive training in which they would learn to be able to communicate and make time to share with the new teacher what it's corresponding school expects of the new teacher.

Timeline for a meaningful mentoring process. Finally, the data revealed that the mentees expected to be mentored between six months to two years. According to the participants, this time frame would not weaken the mentoring process. It would also be sufficient time for novice teachers to learn what they needed to know in order to have a successful initial experience in the teaching and learning process. The following novice teachers' comments describe what novice teachers perceived to be an effective timeline:

In my opinion, a one-year minimum is necessary. The teacher/mentor relationship should be intense the first three months of the school year as the new teacher becomes acquainted with the school, the procedures, and the discipline problems. After that, a constant follow up is needed, meeting once a week and communicating ideas and concerns. Also, the end of the school year is very important, and it would be great for the mentor to be there to answer any questions of all the paperwork chaos that comes with the end of each school year.

I believe that the appropriate time length for the mentoring process should be a minimum time of one month of classroom observations and training before the new teacher starts teaching would be extraordinary.

I believe that the appropriate time length of the mentoring process should take place for about a year and a half. The first year (of mentoring) should be for any type of help and the half year to see if the teacher is ready to be on their own.

I believe that the appropriate time length of the mentoring process should be two years.

It's hard to say what the appropriate time length would be. I suppose it may vary from grade level to grade level. However, perhaps documentation of the time spent or hours logged would be one way to measure the appropriate time required for the mentoring process.

Conclusion

Despite the robust scope of studies that includes the benefits of mentoring (Kram, 1985; Murphy & Ensher, 2006), fostering teacher leadership (Moir & Bloom, 2003) describing mentoring characteristics and effective practices (Anzul, 2000; Arnold, 2006; Bey & Holmes, 1992; Brennan, Thames, & Roberts, 1999; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986; Hon & Shorr, 1998; Hope, 1999; Odell & Huling, 2000; Ovando & Trube, 2000; Poulter, 2005; Rowley, 1999; Schwille & Dynak, 2000), most of the previous research related to mentoring

teachers has focused on reports of mentoring programs (Brennan, Thames, & Roberts, 1999) and mentors' reports of their experiences (Trubowitz, 2004). Thus, this study aimed at identifying novice teachers' expectations of the mentoring process, in an effort to add teachers' voices to the discourse of a phenomenon that may affect their level of success during their first year of teaching.

This study suggests that novice teachers perceive the mentoring experience during the first year of teaching as critical to their success including the mentor's knowledge and skills (Evertson & Smithey, 2000, p. 301). This is also congruent with the notion that "experienced teachers will serve as mentors and models, helping novices learn new pedagogies and socializing them to new professional norms" (Feiman-Nemser, 1996, p. 1). Additionally, a positive mentor- protégé relationship "prevents potential problems later in the school year" (Sargent, 2003, p. 47).

This study's findings suggest that teachers have specific expectations of the mentor-teacher relationship. The most significant expectations relate to the development of a professional working bond, teaching centered instructional leadership, guidance to navigate the bureaucracy and clear communication. Wang and Odell (2002) have also indicated that such expectations have the potential to affect and influence a mentoring relationship. Thus, it is imperative that school leaders make a concerted effort to initially clarify teachers' expectations.

The results also support the notion that mentors should possess several attributes that are most important for a successful mentoring process. These attributes include a willingness to help new teachers with their complex tasks,

acting as a caring colleague and being ethical. Moreover, mentors must genuinely desire to help new teachers, are available throughout the year, demonstrate care and compassion, and provide the support to make the mentee's first year of teaching successful (Holden, 1995; Odell et. al., 2000; Rowley, 1995; Schulz, 1995).

Findings suggest that these attributes are more important than the formal credentialing of experienced teachers. Others have also found additional mentor characteristics that in a way echo the ones reported here. For instance, Rowley (1999) suggested that the following are also important qualities of a mentor: "commitment to the role of mentoring; acceptance of the beginning teacher; skill at providing instructional support; effectiveness in different interpersonal contexts; model continuous learning; and communicate hope and optimism" (pp. 20-22).

The findings also indicate that novice teachers perceive themselves as making significant contributions to the mentoring process. These include sharing ideas and asking focused questions. This aspect supports the notion that a reciprocal relationship is a critical aspect of effective mentoring (Reiman & Edelfelt, 1990). Zeldin (1995) affirms, "Reciprocity and mutual respect are the hallmarks of the mentoring relationship" (p. 20). Consequently, the mentees were not reluctant to share current teaching strategies, ideas, and research with mentors. As a result, mentors' learning was also enhanced. This is congruent with Moir and Bloom's (2003) report in that "mentoring offers veteran teachers professional replenishment, contributes to the retention of the region's best teachers and produces teacher leaders" (p. 59). Other novice teachers'

contributions included reminding mentors of deadlines, and developing a positive working relationship that, in turn, made the mentor's job easier and their experience more meaningful and rewarding. This echoes Zeldin's (1995) assertion that the

“protégé receives tutelage and wisdom from the mentor, and in turn gives the mentor new perspectives, helping the mentor see her old life through new eyes. The protégé asks questions about things that the mentor takes for granted, and shares ideas that the mentor may not have thought of for years, if ever” (p. 20).

Novice teachers' questions usually relate to the most pressing teaching needs experienced in their first year of teaching. Thus, by respecting and taking teachers' questions and contributions into account, schools may be in a position to actually address teachers' most pressing professional needs (Mandel, 2006). Furthermore, as novice teachers share concerns and ideas, they contribute a willingness to expose their own weaknesses. “The mentor is ready and willing to pass on the gift of self as philosopher, and the protégé is willing to share questions and vulnerabilities” (Zeldin, 1995, p. 21).

Additionally, findings propose that there are two main concerns regarding the preparation of mentors. First, novice teachers expect experienced teachers to have the necessary training to be able to guide new teachers through the complex legal educational issues and responsibilities required by law of all teachers. Some mentors may be excellent teachers but may not be able to communicate the nuances of teaching with developmentally appropriate terminology to the mentee (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Moir and Bloom (2003) add

“Our mentors come to us as excellent teachers, but they need training to develop new skills for fostering the talents and teaching styles of other teachers” (p. 59). Second, it is also extremely important for mentors to engage in training to build their communication capacity and become familiar with effective techniques and technology to have on-going conversations with novice teachers. Moir and Bloom (2003) also agree, “Effective mentors must be able to observe and communicate, track a new teacher’s immediate needs and broader concerns; and know when to elicit a new teacher’s thoughts and when to provide concrete advice” (p. 59). On-going communication also conveys feelings of compassion and care for new teachers. Thus, mentor preparation becomes a critical aspect of a successful mentoring process and researchers (Glickman et al., 2005) offer specific suggestions related to the content, design and implementation of mentor preparation programs.

Next, novice teachers expect the mentoring process to extend over a prescribed period of time. This time frame seems to be perceived as sufficient to provide the necessary information for a successful initial experience in the teaching and learning process and for an effective mentoring relationship. This view supports the idea that mentoring should be an ongoing process, must go beyond the first year of teaching if it is going to have a sustained impact, and be aimed at facilitating successful teaching experiences for novice teachers (Eberhard, Reindhardt-Mondragon & Stottleyer, 2000).

In light of the findings, the following propositions are advanced and may need to be further tested: (a) clarification of teachers’ expectations of the mentor-teacher relationship is an imperative initial step to a successful mentoring

program, (b) failure to consult novice teachers regarding the mentoring process may limit the desired effect on teachers' initial teaching experience and may ignore the most pressing needs of these teachers, (c) knowledge on how to assess the mentee's immediate needs may facilitate culturally responsive mentoring to avoid prescribing a "one size fits all" agenda, and (d) ongoing support for an extended period of time, beyond the first year of teaching, may maximize the benefits of a mentoring program.

Finally, the promise of mentoring may depend, to a certain extent, on the novice teachers' contributions which may lead to a richer and more focused mentoring relationship. Clarification of expectations and clear communication between mentor and mentee may also reduce the challenges associated with meeting the various needs of novice teachers. Successfully socializing novice teachers into the educational area during their initial year requires a conscious commitment from all stakeholders, whether designing and implementing induction and mentoring programs, or actively participating in the mentoring process. Mentoring with a teacher-centered focus may influence the quality of guidance and mentor leadership that novice educators require. Whether guidance includes effective classroom management techniques, interpretation and implementation of state laws and policy requirements, or helping a protégé to problem solve, listening to teacher voices may provide alternative strategies that ultimately will benefit teachers and students.

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