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# Teachers' Sense of Professional Practices as a Result of Mentoring

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TEACHERS' SENSE OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES
AS A RESULT OF MENTORING

by

Leadriane L. Roby

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Advisor: Patricia Reeves, Ed.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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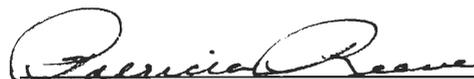Date _____ March 8, 2012 _____

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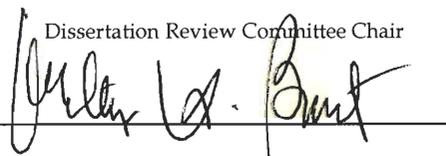
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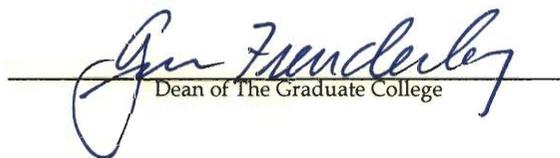
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TEACHERS' SENSE OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES
AS A RESULT OF MENTORING

Leadriane L. Roby, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2012

Formal mentoring programs focus on the probationary period of new teachers. Providing teachers with mentoring support during the initial years of teaching requires significant commitment and investment from school districts, mentors, and new teachers. Numerous studies argue the merits of mentoring programs, yet the research has been less clear about what happens once mentoring support has ended. The purpose of this study was to explore how mentored teachers, those beyond the formal mentoring experience, created sense and meaning of their teaching roles and developed professional practices after participation in a mentoring program.

There is an assumption that there is a translation of mentoring experiences which are embedded in the mentored teachers' professional orientation and instructional practices. This study examined new teacher's reflections of the relevance of mentoring, including the identification of experiences which held meaning as defined by teachers. Specifically, this study explored what makes mentoring unique and how teachers defined their own individual and personal development as a result of having been mentored. The questions that guided the study were: What are the meaningful components of a formal mentoring program which are used to develop a teacher's sense of what it means to be a teacher? What are the professional practices which mentored teachers have developed as

the result of having participated in a formal mentoring program? What are the activities mentored teachers engage in, that are sustainable once mentoring has ended?

Utilizing a qualitative research design that was based on a constructivist approach and rooted in phenomenology, this study addressed the mentoring phenomenon as described by teachers' own reflections of adopted behaviors and practices which were the results of, or in association with being mentored.   Use of in-depth interviews and observations offered insight into teachers' perceptions of professional growth due to mentoring experiences.  The study explored the ways in which teachers used their mentoring experiences to shape their overall professionalism, participation in the school's structure, the development of instructional practices, and how they engaged students in the learning environment.  The findings of the study, were created using the personal narratives from thirteen teachers in southwest Michigan, indicated that relationships matter with respect to their teaching practices.  All participants suggested that their mentoring experiences have had some influence in their development as professional educators.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my grandmothers, Mrs. Corean Hazel Brown Wilson and Mrs. Lillian

Brown Love.  These remarkable women were raised during a time when women of color

had limited opportunities or access to higher education.  Many pieces of my personality

as a wife, mother and woman can be attributed to the lessons and values that I have

learned from watching my grandmothers as a little girl.  Grandmother Lillian was

fearless, leaving the dust of Louisiana far behind her as she began her own business; and

Grandmother Corean showed me that true wealth does not come from material

possessions; it comes from having a relationship with God and from the love given and

received from family.  Both of these women were my first mentors and I have great

respect and love for the courage each of them demonstrated during their lifetimes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge those who assisted me in the preparation of this dissertation. Thirteen teachers shared their experiences and stories in order to shape this study. I thank them for sharing thoughtful reflections of lessons learned along the way.

Secondly, I thank my committee chair, Dr. Patricia Reeves. I thank her for her wisdom, guidance, and patience. The feedback and support she provided me along this journey has been something that I will always treasure and respect. Her insight has been graceful, candid, and always "spot-on!" Thank you. I also thank my other committee members, Dr. Stephanie Burrage, and Dr. Walter Burt. Their questions and feedback pushed me to look differently at my work and made my study stronger.

Others I would like to thank include Ms. Anthonette Cox for giving me the support to communicate the teachers' voices and taking me beyond my own writing block; and lifelong friends, LaShawn Goss-Love, Patrick and Stephanie Burrage, and Trevor and Missy Smiley for their support, encouraging words, laughter during stressful times, reading of various drafts, and providing "free" au pair services. Most of all, I thank them for their friendship. I thank Dr. Willarene Beasley, the modern-day matriarch of the Wilson family. I have patterned my professional life in her foot-steps. I also thank Dr. Jackie Sowell-Davis, my mother. She has been my friend, accountant, editor, and my lifeline. I am so glad that God made you my mom.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

**Overview of the Topic**

Many new teachers experience excitement as they enter their classrooms each school day. They have established professional relationships, and have a well-developed understanding of curriculum expectations and classroom practices. These teachers are confident. How are *these* new teachers different from other new teachers? These new teachers have been mentored.

New and novice teachers are considered probationary because they have not acquired tenure within their district. New teachers are educators with less than five years of experience, while novice teachers are recent graduates who have never taught before. Educational researchers have shown that a lack of support, both professional and collegial, contribute to uneasiness in perceptions of personal professional competence among these teachers. Merryman (2006) and Ingersoll and Y.M. Smith (2004) reported that mentored teachers, those who have received the supportive guidance of another teacher, staff member, or teacher-coach in the beginning stages of their teaching career, have described feeling better prepared for their teaching assignments. Other studies have found new teachers who were mentored reported feeling confident in their abilities because they have been coached and supported by another adult (Fluckiger, McGlamery, & Edick, 2006). These teachers reported feeling prepared in their various curricular responsibilities and not overwhelmed by interpersonal interactions, which often play a

large role in teaching. It is important to note, however, that these same studies reported new teachers who were not mentored and did not have an effective support system reported feeling isolated, unprepared, and overwhelmed by teaching. The teachers who had not been mentored also reported having had an overall sense of disillusionment about teaching because of their initial experiences.

Mentoring is part of educational reform designed to provide support for teachers. Mentoring is a combination of support, structured activities, and specific goals designed to acculturate new educators into the profession during an extended period of time, according to Davis (2008). Mentoring, however, is not so easily defined. It is an aberration to many, not because it is odd, but because there are so many variations and styles of mentoring. Styles of mentoring range from loosely configured and informal buddy systems, to formal and highly structured programs. There is great variety in how each state, district, and school team prescribes and implements mentoring and mentoring programs. Mentoring is further varied according to how teacher development is defined. Mentoring experiences are as unique as each individual teacher's career pathway.

Education literature is rich with research detailing various mentoring programs. Unfortunately, there has been limited research of teachers' reflections of mentoring experiences beyond the first few years. Ingersoll and Y.M. Smith (2004) suggested that public education has upwards of 50% teacher attrition within five years of entering the profession. The influx of new teachers, coupled with high attrition rates, has left school programs and teachers in a constant state of growth. Educational research has shown the lack of support, both professional and collegial, contributes to teachers' uneasiness concerning their own competence. Martin (2008) argued that experienced teachers have

a responsibility to guide new teachers up the "experience curve" in a comprehensive and efficient manner. According to Martin, the benefits of a formal mentoring program include components that cause measurable decreases in teacher attrition, such as the creation of an individual development plan and having an assigned mentor for new teachers. School districts served by the New Teacher Center (NTC) at the University of California-Santa Cruz are examples of institutions that have utilized a formal mentoring structure. NTC districts reported a drop in attrition rates of 12% over six years; meaning 88% of well-mentored teachers were still in the classroom, compared to the national average of 54% retention after six years (Martin, 2008; Strong & St. John, 2001). It is difficult to ignore these statistical implications and not investigate how to improve retention rates of other new educators entering the profession.

The reality for educators is that teaching is complex, encompassing, and much more difficult to navigate than most new teachers presume. Unfortunately, many teachers are not provided a structured scaffolding support system of induction to guide them through the covert intricacies of teaching. Receiving support early on in a teacher's career may influence the likelihood of a successful teaching experience and a promising, fulfilling career.

What are the meaningful components of a formal mentoring program which are used to develop a teachers' sense of what it means to be a teacher? What are the professional practices mentored teachers have developed as the result of having participated in a formal mentoring program? Finally, what are the activities mentored teachers engage in, to employ various instructional skills and strategies sustainable over time, after formal mentoring has ended? These questions will be explored as part of this

research study.

## Conceptual Framework

To understand the influence formal mentoring support has had on new teachers, it is important to understand the assumptions of how mentoring support has been conceptualized. This conceptualization is presented in several sections that describe the history, reasons, and origins of what is currently accepted and known about mentoring, as well as the overall impact mentoring has had on teacher retention. Explanations of the structural components found in mentoring programs, including various mentoring models and examples of professional learning communities are also presented. The final section of the conceptual framework outlines teacher effectiveness and quality, including the expectations of those who are most impacted by mentoring programs—the new educators within schools systems. The literature includes discussions of what is accepted and known about teacher certification criterion, teacher quality and capacity issues, as well as expectations of the mentees, mentors and others who have been involved with mentoring structures and programs. See Appendices A and B for further explanation of the study's conceptual framework.

### Reasons for Mentoring

The teacher shortage is not due to too few teachers entering the profession, but to too many leaving the teaching profession, en masse (Wong, 2009). Mentoring support evolved as a response to the high teacher turnover, and then mentoring expanded to address teacher competence. Good and Brophy (2003) reported that one of the reasons so many educators leave the teaching profession are the strategies which are learned at the university have not adequately or realistically prepared new teachers for the other "jobs"

hidden within the profession. As a result, novice teachers become overwhelmed and frustrated early on in their careers. Kaplan and Owings (2004) suggested large numbers of qualified teachers leave the profession due to job dissatisfaction and frustration. Dissatisfaction can be measured in many ways, including the inability to integrate curriculum, lack of understanding of grade-level expectations, and even the frustrations of keeping abreast of major educational reform initiatives.

Ingersoll and Y.M. Smith (2004) reaffirmed what others in the industrial and corporate sectors have long believed: Low-level employee turnover is normal and efficacious in a well-managed organization. Conversely, high levels of employee turnover are both cause and effect of ineffectiveness and low performance within organizations. The publication of *The Seven Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education* (Portner, 2003; see also, U.S. Dept. of Ed., July, 1997) stressed a need for special efforts to retain beginning teachers in their first few years; because 30% of teachers have left teaching due to lack of support. After this study, there was an outpour of legislation passed by states requiring some level of mentoring for beginning teachers.

The process of learning to teach is just that, a process. By looking more closely at formal, structured mentoring, this study will explore how those mentoring experiences fit into novice teachers' professional evolution and development.

**The Impact of Mentoring**

Responding to the conviction that effective mentoring of new teachers will boost their performance; over 30 states now require some form of teacher mentoring. Unfortunately, few states have clearly defined the parameters of their mentoring programs (Martin, 2008). There have been inconsistent structures and parameters within

state legislation, and from one school district to another.  The mentoring programs which have evolved have run the spectrum of regulated and mandated workshops and conferences, to informal pairings of veteran and novice teachers with a singular focus on mentoring new teachers.  The results have yielded wide variances in the delivery of mentoring support provided.

Mentoring does have significance on the retention of new teachers.  According to Markow and Martin (2005), 89% of teachers believed that mentoring programs improved teaching skills and their transitions into schools; Darling-Hammond (1999; 2005; Holley, 2008) argued about the confidence and competence mentored teachers acquired more quickly than their non-mentored counterparts; Brewster and Railsback (2001) found 96% of mentored teachers, as compared to 80% of non-mentored teachers returned for second year of teaching; and Strong and St. John (2001; Martin, 2008), reported a 12% decrease in teacher attrition over a period of six years for mentored teachers.

According to Ingersoll's 2002 study (Kaplan & Owings, 2004) nationwide 9% of U.S. public school teachers leave their positions before completing their first year of teaching.  More than 20% leave positions within three years and 30% to 50% of new teachers leave within five years.  The study by Markow and Martin (2005) reported teachers needed more training to prepare for their first year in the classroom including training on: (a) how to work with children with varying abilities; (b) being prepared to engage families in supporting their children's education; and (c) maintaining order and discipline in the classroom.  According to Rudney (2003), the values of mentoring are the potential outcomes stated as: (a) increased curricular knowledge, improved instructional delivery, classroom management, and (b) opportunities that will improve the overall

effectiveness of teachers. Rudney also argued programs which are supported by limited local commitment, will produce only adequate teachers, (e.g., those meeting minimum instructional and professional guidelines as defined by their districts). Villani (2002) found teacher programs that were intentional, focused, and had new teachers connected with another adult as part of a well-conceived induction; reported the skills (of the teachers) and their confidence had significantly improved.

Teachers with five or less years of experience reported three specific types of training that would have been most helpful in preparing them to be more effective during their first year of teaching: (1) the option of being assigned a mentor teacher; (2) more practical training once beginning their teaching assignment; and (3) the option of a one-year internship under a master teacher (Markow & Martin, 2005). Outcomes are raised significantly when teachers face the possibility of termination due to their inexperience and lack of overall development. Motivation and stakes are higher for teachers who have been required to improve their instructional practices. Their approach to mentoring and their own development can be viewed as a leveraged experience instead of a reciprocal learning opportunity.

Research which bears directly on the proposed study include studies conducted by Darling-Hammond (1997), who argued that teachers' quality and effectiveness was related to early experiences, including pre-service, and those who had access to mentoring were less likely to leave teaching early in their careers; and Portner (2003) who argued new teachers were more likely to leave the profession because of feeling isolated in a non-supportive teaching environment, which he defined by poor working conditions and overwhelming assignments. Other researchers have pointed to the lack of

mentoring which has resulted in the distinction of teachers' willingness to remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004; Portner, 2001; Rudney, 2003).

**Structural Foundations of Mentoring Programs**

Mentoring programs were designed to address teacher attrition, competence, and confidence. Teacher pre-service learning at colleges and universities has provided theoretical knowledge and has offered the mechanics of curriculum instruction. This is a foundation only. University coursework in pedagogy does not guarantee instructional quality. Many educators view current teacher pre-service, induction or mentoring programs as painfully slipshod, as reported in the DeWitt-Wallace Reader's Digest Fund (1997). A close examination of mentoring programs with a history of proven results is advised. This includes formal mentoring programs that allow mentors to receive training in how to support new teacher mentees. Villani's (2002) components of a formal mentoring program include: (a) a process for training and selecting mentors, (b) evaluation tools and resources that will allow mentors to support the goals and standards of the district, and (c) providing career placement services. The mechanics of how a particular school system operates are shared through mentoring programs, yet this should not be the only focus of providing support for new teachers. Mentoring programs should fit the needs of that particular school's culture; they are a combination of school norms, insights, and wisdom shared by veteran staff (Merryman, 2006). Villani and many others suggested the above components are (e.g., Hanson & Moir, 2008; Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Portner, 2001) as pieces that make up the structural foundations of formal mentoring programs.

Mentoring is not limited to school policies and procedural manuals. The objectives of mentoring provide useful guidance and information to others. Mentoring programs have included implementation strategies of the school's curriculum, cultures, and protocols. The purpose of mentoring is to alleviate isolation, social or physical barriers, and create opportunities for teachers to gain new perspectives through shared examples and stories with others. The literature reviewed in Chapter II will discuss mentoring programs and model programs.

**Capacity Building Through Mentoring**

The professional learning community (PLC) within schools is a collaboration of teachers and other staff, who are focused on the professional and instructional goals of the school community. The intent of PLCs are to enhance student achievement through team discussions, data-review sessions, and team planning (Henry, 2005) as established by mutually-agreed upon norms of the PLC members. Past research (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004; Rosenholtz, 1989) suggests teacher learning occurs in two realms: individual and interpersonal. As new teachers gain knowledge about curricular-content and pedagogy, they will make decisions that have direct impact on their classroom practices. Professional collaborations include the exchange of listening and sharing ideas with others, as well as opportunities to question and challenge ideas within the PLC peer-groups.

**Teacher Effectiveness and Quality**

Several educators (e.g., Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Holley, 2008; Levine, 2006) discuss ramifications that have been detrimental for school communities when issues of instructional quality and effectiveness are pervasive in new

teachers.  Teachers continue to evolve in their understanding of subject content, instruction and ability to assess students' growth.  High rates of turnover will continually inhibit the development and maintenance of the overall school learning community as projections to hire 200,000 K-12th grade teachers annually over the next ten years to address student enrollments; teacher attrition and retirements grow (Kaplan & Owings, 2004; Resta, Huling & Rainwater 2001).

Teacher preparation programs provide theoretical and technical training.  This is a foundation only.  It is the practical experience of teaching and learning which influences new teachers' success and more often than not, teachers are left to discover effective instructional strategies through trial and error.  Ingersoll and Y.M. Smith (2004) reported that new teachers are often left on their own to succeed or fail within the confines of their own classroom.  This experience has been described as "lost at sea" by a profession that is known for "cannibalizing its' young."

**The Mentors, Mentored, and the Others**

Simply being a good teacher is not enough, as mentoring is not a straightforward extension of being a good schoolteacher.  Mentors possess the distinct ability to be self-reflective, balancing their own strengths and weaknesses in their efforts to build relationships in trustful ways with mentees.  Additionally, mentors must be ready for the mentor-mentee relationship.  Mentors are experienced educators who continually encourage and support their colleagues who are entering the teaching profession.

The syntheses of various studies (Darling-Hammond 1999, 2005; Levine, 2006; Martin, 2008) have concluded mentored teachers are more self-reliant, successful and likely to remain in the profession longer than non-mentored teachers.  This is supported

by others in education and has been repeated throughout the literature (e.g., Markow & Martin, 2005; National Commission on Teaching America's Future, 2007). Additional studies (e.g., Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004; Kaplan & Owings, 2004) reported teachers, who were confident and competent, had a higher sense of personal efficacy regarding their work and were more likely to stay in the profession.

Colleagues who support mentored teachers include the principal and other "go-to" people within the building (i.e., teacher colleagues, and departmental and resource teachers who are a part of the school community). The "others" understand the importance of their individual ability to positively influence and accelerate new teacher effectiveness within the school community by assisting new teachers' familiarity with important school protocols such as instructional focuses within the school's culture, evaluative procedures, discipline policies, dress codes, etc. (NTC, 2009).

The expectations placed on new teachers have often been mismatched by the uneven and inconsistent support given, and this problem has existed for far too long in education. Levine's (2006) education policy project reported new teacher induction has been shown to increase retention and found "effective induction programs are rare" (p. 44; see also Davis & Higdon, 2008). It is clear, new teachers are in need of support. There are various mentoring programs used in school systems, with intense attention directed toward teacher attrition. The literature, however, does not discuss the long-term influence of the mentoring experience upon a teacher's professional evolution. Little is known about how mentoring influences the types of instructional activities and teaching practices utilized by new teachers, the development of their professional relationships, or their sense of self once the formal mentoring relationship has ended.

## Statement of the Problem

Formal mentoring programs often focus on the probationary period of a teacher. Mentoring is a part of new teacher induction and support offered throughout the first year of teaching. Providing teachers with mentoring support during the first year, or the probationary period (up to four years in Michigan), requires significant commitment and investment on the part of the school district, the mentors, and the mentees themselves. Often this is an intense experience.

Numerous studies (e.g. Angelle, 2002; Markow & Martin, 2005; Martin, 2008) have illustrated the importance of a mentoring experience for new educators, especially the experiences that take place in a structured, formal program, and include assisting new teachers through their early years. The research has been less clear about what happens after the first year or probationary period, when formal mentoring has ended. There has been limited research on how teachers use their mentoring experiences in shaping their professional practices and their sense of what it means to be a teacher (Levine, 2006). Research has shown that as teachers move into the profession, the support of an expert mentor improves both teacher effectiveness, up to 89% (Markow & Martin, 2005) and retention, up to 88% retention after five years (Brindley, Fleege, & Graves, 2000; Martin, 2008; NCFT, 1996; Whitebrook & Bellm, 1996; Whitebrook, et al., 1990). This is important; yet, research has not examined how the experiences of being mentored, once ended, influences teachers as they settle into the profession and develop their professional practices.

As previously discussed, teachers who have gained experience through the mentoring process developed a greater sense of competence than their corresponding

counterparts, had higher perception of personal efficacy regarding their work, and has led to improved retention of teachers in the profession. It is important to understand how teachers assimilate into their approach to teaching as a result of an early mentoring experience. Specifically, it is important to know how teachers reflect on their mentoring experiences, connecting mentoring experiences with who they are, and how they use those experiences to shape how they function as teachers. It is equally important to understand how teachers use their mentoring experiences to develop their professionalism; that is, how they relate to and fit into the school environment and their roles within that environment. Finally, we need to understand mentoring experiences and its' influence on teachers' efficacy, competence and confidence, as well as their evolution beyond the probationary period of teaching.

## Research Purpose

There are several reasons why this study may be important to new teachers, experienced educators, and administrators. One of which is the limited literature and research regarding formal mentoring of teachers after their first few years of teaching. The purpose of this study is to explore how formally mentored teachers, that is, those beyond the first year of teaching but are still new to the profession, create sense and meaning in their work as teachers, and how these same teachers develop their professional practices. Specifically, this study explored how teachers translate their mentoring experiences into the decisions and choices they make regarding their instructional practices.

This study addressed the phenomenon of mentoring, generally described as a relationship designed to support or coach a new teacher into the school's learning

community over an extended period of time, by exploring the experiences described by mentored teachers who have adopted behaviors in their teaching approach and practice as a result of being mentored. The study also explored ways in which teachers use their mentoring experiences to shape their overall professionalism, including how they work with other teachers, how they work with parents, how they engage students, and how they participate in the school's structures.

## Research Questions

Teachers' reflections of the mentoring experience are the research questions that guided this study:

1. How have teachers used their mentoring experiences to shape their personal sense of what it means to be a teacher?

2. How have mentored teachers used their mentoring experience in developing their instructional practices?

3. How have mentored teachers used their mentoring experience to shape their overall professional orientation and behaviors, i.e. how they work with colleagues; how they shape their classroom community; and how they engage students and work with them?

## Research Significance

This study is significant for developing a clearer understanding of the relevance mentoring has for teachers. Mentoring is more than providing instructional knowledge, emotional support, and is more complicated than assisting with curriculum content for inexperienced teachers. The study examined how teachers reflect upon the mentoring support they received. The literature has repeatedly stated that learning to teach is a

process that evolves through reflection, dialogue with others, and time to process the experience. In this study, participants shared their experiences and the lessons that have guided what they do as teachers.

Previous research studies have documented the high teacher turnover within the first five years of teaching, with projections as high as 50% (Anderson, 2000; Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Kestner, 1994). Turnover has been linked to new teachers feeling ill-suited and under prepared for the job of teaching. This is significant because the insight gained through this study provides an opening to the "phenomenon" of mentoring. Does mentoring reach its original purpose of molding teachers into the profession by affecting the turnover trend, providing encouragement, and support as they learn about the social components of being a teacher, and developing their instructional skills and practices?

The principal amount of research on mentoring programs has focused on the probationary period of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fluckiger, McGlamery, Edick, 2006). After the probationary period has ended, the research is silent. There are gaps in the literature of how mentoring experiences shape professional practices and how teachers develop their "teaching sense." This study provides insight of the influences of mentoring through mentored teachers' own reflections.

Schools are social organizations riddled with furtive induction processes. It has not been well documented how teachers have processed the mentoring support received. This research fills the gap in what we know about the mentoring process, particularly with teachers who have been mentored for one school year or longer. It is important to capture and explore their mentoring experiences. This is where the literature has fallen short. The social implications of this study creates an understanding of the how and why.

How intentional are teachers in using their mentoring experiences as a part of their current teaching lives, and why do some mentoring experiences resonate more and become part of the "consciousness" of teachers' professional practices? These questions have implications for how school programs provide mentoring support.

## Methodology Overview

The strength of qualitative research is its focus on how people interact in their natural settings (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Creswell (2003) made note of four approaches in qualitative research described as: (1) *post-positivism*, defined as objective reality that includes a building of evidence and no absolute truth; (2) *constructivism,* where reality is subjective as meaning is based upon the experiences of participants; (3) *advocacy/participatory,* which serves as the "voice" of the underserved and marginalized; and (4) the *pragmatic approach,* which is defined as "real world" and problem-centered, not committed to one reality.

The research design for this study was based on a constructivist approach, which makes the argument that multiple realities exist because reality is constructed as each individual experiences it (Hatch, 2002). Constructivist research is rooted in phenomenology, which recognizes the importance of subjectivity in creating meaning (Heidegger, 1927; 1972; Hesse-Biber & Levy, 2006).

The research was framed by the detailed descriptions of those who are included in the study. The study centered on teachers' reflections, and included the feelings and meaning they attributed to their mentoring experiences.

## Limitations and Delimitations

This study was designed to investigate the reflections and lived experiences of

mentored teachers, and explores the emergence of themes of those who have participated in a formal mentoring experience.  The sample size was determined with practical considerations of qualitative research inquiry, including in-depth exploration of the phenomenon as shared by the participants through interviews, observations and explorations of related document artifacts.

This study was confined to select school districts that had formal mentoring programs in and around the Southwest Michigan area.  Interviews and observations were limited to teachers who had completed a formal mentoring program with at least one year of teaching experience, and were between one to five years beyond completion of their mentoring experience.

The identification of subjects selected for the study involved multistage procedures utilizing snowball, criterion and rotational random-sampling.  The research findings, therefore, are not generalizable to all mentored teachers or mentoring programs. The focus of qualitative research is to understand the participants' perceptions and the manner in which those experiences make sense in their lives (Creswell, 2003).  To ensure the trustworthiness of the themes revealed in the findings, the researcher employed member checking and feedback loops with the participants, thereby improving the accuracy of the interpretation of their experiences.

## Definitions of Terms

The definitions of the following terms provide explicitness and direction for the study.

*Mentoring Programs:* A program of educational reform designed to provide support for new teachers as part of their induction into schools/districts.  Many school

districts have programs, such as "career in teaching" departments, which pair an experienced teacher with a probationary teacher for assistance or support as part of the program design. The programs are developed to encourage teachers to construct informed instructional practices and teaching modalities based upon the support provided (Portner, 2001).

*Competency development:* Possessing knowledge, skills and abilities not limited to, yet inclusive of educational pedagogy, evaluation and assessments, student inquiry, diversity, and parent involvement. These domains of teaching foster a teacher's development towards a positive learning environment and experience in the classroom.

*Formal mentoring:* Programs designed to help new teachers adjust to their school communities. This includes a structured process where mentors and mentees are matched and explore a range of topics (e.g., classroom management, authentic assessments and best practices). Formal mentoring programs may vary, but all have guidelines or focus areas in which support is provided for new teachers. Personal and professional goals are measured through personalized plans, as opposed to a generic district-prescribed model (Sullivan, 2004).

*Informal mentoring:* Loosely structured or natural pairing of novice and veteran teachers where support takes place through collegial friendships, coaching and/or counseling. Professional goals may be set, yet they are not typically evaluated through this process (Portner, 2003).

*Instructional best practices:* Good and effective teaching methods that enhance student learning (Gagen & Bowie, 2005; NASPE, 2001).

*Mentor:* A tenured, veteran teacher who is knowledgeable in his or her field, and

is a good listener and keen problem solver.  Hunter and Kiernan (2005) defined mentors as: (1) approachable and supportive; (2) committed to his or her profession as demonstrated through a desire to learn; (3) skilled at what he or she does; and (4) willing to share knowledge, including practical skills of curriculum and instruction, as well as the contextual and institutional ideas of school cultures.  Merryman (2006) suggested that cheerful, responsible and empathetic teachers were better mentors than those who were highly organized and rigid.

*Mentee:* A teacher who is the protégé of a more experienced, veteran teacher/colleague.  Typically mentees are non-tenured or probationary.  Mentee teachers often seek advice, encouragement, and clarification of systems pedagogy related to instruction within the school setting from others.

*Novice teacher:* A first time educator, who does not have prior teaching experience.

*New teacher:* An educator with at least one year, but less than five years teaching experience.  New teachers are considered probationary because they have not acquired tenure in their school districts.

### Chapter Summary

There has been significant research conducted on induction and mentoring for new teachers, as well as numerous studies of the variations found in mentoring programs. There is not enough known about the inherent relevance mentoring has upon shaping the instructional practices of teachers once the experience has ended.  Teachers' reflections of their practices that evolved in part, or as a result of mentoring, have not been explored.

The introduction of this chapter discussed the origins of mentoring programs as an

initial response to the high teacher turnover in public schools and the efforts by the U.S. Department of Education and other organizations to establish programs for beginning educators to positively affect the new teacher stop-loss. By most accounts, teacher attrition rates range from 30% to 50% leaving within the first five years. This is an astronomical cost considering the number of people and financial resources teacher attrition translates into. Projections include replacing 200,000 teachers nationwide and at a cost of $2.6 to $7.3 billion annually (Holley, 2008; NCFAT, 2007).

Much of the research, both in empirical and theoretical studies have specifically focused on the development cycle of new teachers. Education journals are saturated with related topics of new teacher development. In addition to the plethora of studies, journals have prescriptive literature and articles available for those within the education-research community. This literature includes longitudinal studies conducted to measure job satisfaction and attrition trends from "how-to" guides to descriptions of what works in classrooms and schools.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest teachers unions, are in accord with the establishment of mentoring and induction assistance programs for new teachers. Some local affiliates have played a role in co-implementing induction programs (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Portner, 2003). The research includes literature chronicling mentoring experiences, teacher programs and organizational studies of the collective works of Ingersoll and Y.M. Smith (2004), T.M. Smith and Ingersoll (2004), Darling-Hammond (1997) and others. All of the named studies are discussed in the literature review found in Chapter II.

A varied and comprehensive look of formal mentoring is needed. This study was

guided and uniquely framed by the lack of theoretical research relevant to teaching

practices of mentored teachers once their mentoring experience has ended.  This study

explored how newer teachers, those who are beyond their formal mentoring experience,

have created sense and meaning in their teaching roles and professional practices after

participation in a formal mentoring program.  The researcher intended to uncover

mentored teachers' reflections of how they have settled in to their professional lives.

The background for this study includes related research and literature found in

Chapter II.  In particular, Chapter II examines the history of mentoring, including

structural foundations, the impact of teacher quality and effectiveness, state and federal

legislation, examples of mentoring programs, and lessons gleaned from mentoring

experiences as part of the intentional practices of teachers.  This study's design including

the research methodology and questions is explained in Chapter III.  The findings and

data gathered for this study are described in Chapter IV, and the implications of this study

are summarized in Chapter V along with recommendations for future studies and

additional research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching is more encompassing, complex, and difficult than most new educators presume. When left without support, new teachers become overwhelmed and leave their positions. The process of learning to teach is just that, a process. Becoming a teacher involves forming a professional identity and constructing a professional practice. Both aspects of learning to teach must unfold in a manner that strengthens a teacher's capacity to further grow (Carter, Foster, & Cormier, 2006). Often novice teachers leave before their first year of teaching has been completed.

The origins of teacher mentoring programs were an initial response to the high teacher turnover in U.S. school systems, and were part of the effort to affect the stop-loss of the new educators leaving the profession after only a few years. By most accounts, teacher attrition rates are estimated between 30% to 50% within the first five years, at a cost between $2.6 to $7.3 billion dollars a year in turnover (Holley, 2008; National Commission on Teaching America's Future [NCFAT], 2007). The research in supporting studies found public education has upwards of 50% teacher attrition within five years of entering the profession (Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004). Recent research indicates mentoring has influence on changing this trend and diminishing teacher migration in the initial three years (Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004).

**Mentoring Defined**

Mentoring is not easily defined. It is an aberration ranging from loosely

configured and informal buddy systems, to formal and highly structured programs. For the purposes of this study, mentoring is defined as educational reform designed to provide support for new teachers as part of their induction into schools. Induction can be broadly characterized as professional development tailored for teachers in first and second years of teaching; a critical phase in the career trajectory of teachers (Olebe, 2005). Induction support provides collaboration opportunities with colleagues and other services for new teachers while working to improve the quality of their teaching (Carter, et al, 2006). There is a lot of variety in how mentoring and induction are implemented and prescribed by schools. Mentoring and induction have been used interchangeably in the research, yet there really is a difference. Inductions are short, informational training sessions near the beginning of a school year that include policy overview, explanations of schedules, etc. Relationships between new teachers and mentors are not typically developed or maintained through induction activities. Conversely, mentoring is an ongoing professional collaboration with a new teacher over a period of one to several years. Although the breadth and depth of mentoring and induction may vary, many educators and researchers use the terms interchangeably throughout the literature.

Mentoring programs vary considerably in their goals. Some programs are designed to acculturate new teachers into the school system. Other mentoring programs are geared toward instructional practices, such as in Chicago Public Schools' GOLDEN Teachers Program Consortium (Kapadia & Coca, 2007) for first and second year teachers. Many other programs are designed to evaluate, assess, and even counsel out those who are ill suited for teaching.

Educational research has shown lack of support, both professional and collegial,

contributes to teachers' uneasiness concerning their own competence. Mentoring

programs have drawn the attention of policy makers and educators as one of the foremost

methods for impacting novice educators. Martin (2008) has argued for a continued

responsibility of veteran educators to guide new teachers up the "experience curve" in a

comprehensive and efficient manner.

**Reasons for Mentoring**

Multiple research studies have reported that mentored teachers, those who have

received the supportive guidance of another teacher whether staff members or teacher-

coaches in the beginning stages of their teaching career, described feeling better prepared

for their teaching assignments (Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004; Merryman, 2006).

Fluckiger, McGlamery and Edick (2006) reported mentored teachers felt confident in

their teaching abilities and attributed their feelings to having been coached and supported

by another teacher colleague. These teachers also stated feeling very prepared for various

curricular responsibilities, and having confidence in their ability to deal with the

interactions with students, other colleagues, and parents, all of whom can play a large

part in daily teaching roles.

The teacher shortage in public school systems has the potential to result in

catastrophic human and economic costs for American schools. The teacher shortage is

not due to too few teachers entering the profession; instead, the shortage is due to

teachers leaving the profession en masse. Teachers and education researchers point to an

estimated need to hire an average of 200,000 K-12th grade teachers annually. In urban

areas and rural school systems, which traditionally have higher rates of poverty, the need

for teachers grows to 700,000. Some estimates concerning the need for teachers reach

upwards of 2.5 million new hires in the next decade (Angelle, 2002; Fidler & Haselkorn, 1999; Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004; Villani, 2002).

The high rates of teacher turnover will continue to inhibit the development and maintenance of school learning communities as school administrators look to employ a minimum of 200,000 new teachers annually (Kaplan & Owings, 2004; Resta, Huling & Rainwater, 2001). The attrition effect will have an affect on the overall quality of public schools. The direct and indirect impact these issues have had on teacher ranks include a weakening of the numbers of willing and capable teachers; and under-prepared teachers affecting classrooms instruction (Ingersoll &Y.M. Smith, 2004; Kaplan & Owings, 2004; T.M. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

**Pre-service teacher preparation.** As stated, mentoring programs were designed to address teacher attrition, competence and confidence. High attrition rates illustrate just how complex and specific new teachers' needs can be. Pre-service learning and teacher preparation programs provide theoretical knowledge and offer the mechanics of curriculum instruction. This is a foundation only. University coursework in pedagogy does not guarantee instructional quality. There is a straddling of organizational boundaries between teacher colleges' pre-service experiences and public school systems' inductions, which has been problematic. Olebe (2005) argued that the relationship between the two educational sectors must evaluate the nexus between the university-endeavors and school districts' professional growth experiences needed for employment. Critical of teacher colleges, Levine (2006) found inadequate preparation, insufficient quality control, and disparities in the institutional quality as fundamental problems of most teacher colleges. He argued of the chasm between theory and practice. There is

much more to be accomplished in teaching than learning how-to-teach.  Good teaching is too diverse to be captured, bottled, and reproduced to the masses.  Many educators view current teacher pre-service, induction and mentoring programs as painfully slipshod (DeWitt-Wallace Reader's Digest Fund, 1997).

Levine (2006) conducted a national study of college deans and others in education, and examined the relationship between teacher preparation programs and student achievement.  Among the many findings, the study revealed teaching programs lacked a common, uniform length of study, including the "how" and "what" of methods courses needed for effective instruction.  Levine concluded that teacher colleges had an ambiguous split between academic and clinical instruction, with an overemphasis on academic.  Levine evaluated teacher college graduates' preparation, and findings revealed more than three out of five (62%) teachers felt their pre-service teacher program did not prepare them for classroom realities.  Forty percent of their principals agreed.  The overriding theme of the Levine study was pre-service fieldwork has an affect on teachers' abilities to handle the realities of the classroom.

**The teacher shortage.**  Until recently, education scholars believed teacher attrition could be attributed to an aging teacher force and increased birth and immigration rates; yet novice and veteran teachers are leaving the classroom at rates up to 50% annually (Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004; Kaplan & Owings, 2004; Markow & Martin, 2005; T.M. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).  Research points to teachers complaining of the challenges of teaching outweighing the rewards.  As an outcome, they leave the profession to pursue other opportunities.  The seminal work of Dr. Richard Ingersoll and his colleagues (Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004; T.M. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) has

changed how educators are approaching the early "opting-out" of new teachers. The teaching shortage is not due to retirements alone. The shortage can be attributed to a variety of factors including limited interactions with other adults, coupled with the lack of direction in managing time; inexperience with maintaining classroom order; ill-matched teaching assignments; and under-prepared teachers. These factors have left new teachers feeling marooned on the isolated desert of their classrooms. Because of the alarming rates of turnover, Ingersoll and Y.M. Smith (2004) suggested public education has upwards of 50% teacher attrition. The influx of new teachers, coupled with high attrition rates, has left school programs and teachers in a constant state of growth.

Among frustrations cited is the prevalence of the "sink or swim" attitude toward new teachers by other educators (Brindley et al., 2000; Carter et al., 2006; Good & Brophy, 2003; NCTAF, 1996; Whitebrook et al., 1990; 1996). It has been reported that many teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years because they are not adequately supported or prepared for the other jobs in the beginning of their careers. Often novice teachers exit teacher preparation programs with false perceptions. The nebulous and politicized nature of districts' educational policies which determine tenure, and statewide measurements of accountability, which determine certification, have shocked new teachers who quickly discover the strategies learned at the university do not assist in the day-to-day realities within the classroom (Good & Brophy). Case in point, Markow and Martin (2005) found that 58% of teachers reported dissatisfaction in the number of hours worked, along with a self-admission they did not have realistic expectations of their work, such as the number of students with special needs with whom they would have in their classrooms. Other realities revealed by Markow and Martin

include the need for more training to prepare for the first year in the classroom; one-quarter (26%) of teachers reported they were unprepared to work with children with varying abilities during their first teaching assignment; one-quarter (26%) reported feeling unprepared to engage families in supporting their children's education; and one in five (20%) stated they were unprepared to maintain order and discipline in the classroom.

Other researchers have also suggested large numbers of qualified teachers leave the profession because of dissatisfaction. Kaplan and Owings (2004) found many teachers, often due to their inexperience, become overwhelmed with challenges identified as difficult classes; classroom management issues; inadequate materials; and extra duties and assignments. Brewster and Railsback (2001) further identified dissatisfaction as the inability to integrate curriculum and lack of understanding of grade-level and state standards, as well as frustration with keeping abreast of major educational reform initiatives that center on improving teacher knowledge and skills.

**Educator's call for mentoring.** The teacher shortage is real, and continues to grow in low-income and rural school districts as reflected in the literature. Estimates vary, but most research maintains 30% to 50% percent of teachers leave the profession within five years, and nationally 14% of new teachers will leave the profession after one year. The cost of replacing the departed teachers is expected to reach $7.3 billion (NCTAF, 2007). The National Center for Educational Statistics (1997) argued high-quality preparation, induction and mentoring programs are needed to keep teachers in schools (Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, Cowan-Hathcock, 2007).

The proportion of new teachers participating in induction programs across the U.S. has doubled in the past ten years (Angelle, 2002; CCSR, 2007). The benefits of

mentoring produce measurable decreases in teacher attrition as found in school districts studied by the New Teacher Center (NTC) at the University of California-Santa Cruz. The NTC found a drop in attrition rates of 12% over six years, meaning 88% of well-mentored new teachers were still in the classroom after six years, compared to the national average of 54 % new teacher retention after six years (Martin, 2008; Strong & St. John, 2001). The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) describes other rewards associated with mentoring in this way:

> [Mentoring] aids recruitment and retention; for teacher associations, it represents a way to serve members and guarantee instructional quality; for teachers, it also represents the difference between success and failure; and for parents and students, it means better teaching. (Portner, 2003, p. 4)

Additional research by Markow and Martin (2005) revealed responses concerning three types of training which would have been most helpful in preparing for a more effective first year of teaching nearly equally divided from teachers with five years or less experience. Thirty-eight percent preferred being assigned a mentor teacher; 34% stated a year internship would have been most helpful; and 28% would have preferred more practical training. Because this support is an expectation, many new teachers have sought mentor partnerships even when a mentor was not formally assigned to avoid feeling disadvantaged and isolated.

An emerging body of research reveals that mentoring is not idiosyncratic to a particular mentor or mentee. Rather, mentoring principles are rooted in shared ideologies; that is, teaching practices and professional standards defined by reflective teachers willing to employ a repertoire of strategies and participate in self-critical dialogue with other colleagues (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). These are the principles that drive the discussions of

mentoring and the professional intentions of mentored teachers.

The level of mentoring support received by novices clearly has influenced their experiences and intentions according to the Consortium of Chicago Schools Research at the University of Chicago ([CCSR], Kapadia et al., 2007). The CCSR study combined 871 teachers' responses about the quantity and quality of support received to obtain a measure of the collective influence mentors had on novice teachers; those receiving weak (no) support; average (somewhat helpful) support; and strong (very helpful) support. The results were consistent with other studies; of the 38% of new teachers who reported weak mentoring support, 26% intended to return to their positions the next year; 42% of teachers who stated receiving average support had 54% of respondents indicated that their intention to stay on the next year; of the 21% who reported strong levels of mentoring support, 63% reported the intention to return for the upcoming school year These responses were among elementary school teachers only (CSSR, 2007, p. 32).

To affect teacher attrition, the NCTAF (2007) recommends a three-part strategy: (1) creating learning environments; (2) building and maintaining quality preparation, accreditation, and (3) licensure programs; and making teaching a professionally rewarding career (Algozzine et al., 2007, p. 137; NTCAF, 2003).

**The Impact of Mentoring**

Ingersoll's 2002 study (as cited by Kaplan & Owings, 2004) found that nationwide, 9% of U.S. public school teachers leave before completing their first year of teaching. More than 20% leave their positions within three years, and 30 to 50% of new teachers leave within five years.

Empirical studies indicate mentors have a direct effect on mentees' level of

professional involvement, commitment and innovation, as well as an indirect effect on

mentees' instruction (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a; 1996b; Mangin, 2007; Sheppard, 1996).

Educational researchers have shown the lack of support, both professional and collegial,

have contributed to teachers' uneasiness concerning their own competence.  Research has

also shown that new teachers struggle most in achieving high quality, effective

classrooms (AFT, 2001; Carter, et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Feistritzer, 2001).

Various researchers have repeatedly stated that mentoring operates best within a program.

When new teachers are connected to another adult as part of a well-conceived program,

their overall instructional practices, skills, and confidence improve significantly (Kaplan

& Owings, 2004; Villani, 2002).

**Federal legislation and state mandates.**  Mentoring programs in education

evolved in response to the high turnover rates among teachers, and then expanded to

address teacher competence.  Responding to the conviction that effective mentoring will

curtail the attrition rates of new teachers, 30 of 50 states require some form of teacher

mentoring support.  As mentoring has expanded to also address teacher competence,

Kaplan and Owings (2004) found additional challenges include teachers not completely

understanding the social and political structures of schools, state mandates, and the

renewal process for teacher certificates and licenses.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 reauthorized the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, and placed emphasis on the importance of

teacher quality in improving student achievement while targeting and encouraging

schools to retain quality teachers through induction and other programs that help teachers

become successful.  NCLB includes extensive language indicating "highly qualified"

criterion for teachers. While the NCLB legislation is part of education reform and requires each state guarantee every teacher in its system is certified as highly qualified in all subject areas that they teach, it does not set a national standard outlining specific directives for quality teacher certification programs.

Federal legislation of NCLB requires states to report their guidelines for teacher certification. As part of the push to improve instruction, every state has defined what it means to be highly qualified. Many of these efforts are in the form of subject-knowledge testing, stepped-up pre-service credentialing at the university level, and mentoring and induction programs once teachers are hired into school districts. T o date, there has been no one-size-fits-all approach (Anonymous, 2006). Levine (2006) and others found that the road to teacher certification is as varied by state as teacher pre-service programs are varied by college. The results of NCLB legislation has been certification standards are set by states, and local educational agencies are charged with developing induction programs, projects, and activities designed to encourage affective teacher retentions (Michigan Department of Education [MDE], 2009; National Education Association [NEA], 2009; United States Department of Education [U.S. Dept. of Ed.], 2008).

Unfortunately, accreditation standards for maintaining teacher quality have not been effective. The irony is that there are financial penalties in federal dollars for school districts that do not meet a vague series of nebulous one-size-fits-all standards. The NCLB Act does not assert a national standard for states, and the states have not set a consistent standard for teacher colleges or even school districts. The results have been a (mis)interpretation of "standards" for teacher certification that states have been left to define (U.S. Dept. of Ed, 2008). This exemplifies the misalignment of state and federal

guidelines for teacher effectiveness and quality. Levine (2006) has argued the lack of

national consensus of basic certification standards for a high-quality designation is one of

the many reasons so many problems exist in public education.

The NEA (2009) argued that NCLB correctly focuses on teacher quality as an

essential component of accountability, yet federal involvement in state policies regarding

teacher quality misses the mark. Additionally, NCLB defines "highly qualified" as

persons with subject-matter mastery, but not necessarily with preparation-mastery

(Levine, 2006), as preparation training begins at the pre-service college experience.

Other examples include inductions as one of the main pathways to professional

credentials, and the struggles that have emerged. Mandates and resource guidelines of

professional expectations flow, in part, from the regulations of NCLB, and trickle down

to the local school districts state as it relates to professional expectations and criteria for

inductions. Because of the inconsistent measures of quality control, the results are a

proliferation of paper-only partnerships between federal or state laws and local school

districts (Olebe, 2005).

State policies must compliment instructional practices. The unfunded mandates

requiring districts to provide induction experiences for new teachers should have regard

for program quality if there is to be improvement in teaching practices (Moir, 2009).

Currently, many state policies allow districts to merely comply with the law, instead of

looking for opportunities to improve teacher performance standards through robust

induction programs (Moir, p. 18). Funding for programs typically is the responsibility of

local districts, and many induction and mentoring programs are implemented from the

districts' leaders (e.g., superintendent, principals) interpretation of the state-level

directives outlining support. The school leaders' interpretations of the law offer partial

explanation to the variety found in mentoring programs, including how they are

implemented within schools. Although the programs vary widely, over 27 states use

mentors to assist beginning teachers, and 30 states require beginning teachers to go

through an assistance program, while other states make it optional (Brewster &

Railsback, 2001, p. 30).

NCLB legislation has established minimum standards for teacher quality, and

sifting out ineffective teachers as an understood, if not directly stated purpose, according

to Holley (2008). Other unintended consequences exacerbate teacher shortages in high-

need areas, including low-income, urban and rural communities; and those who teach in

the areas of math, science, and special education. In fact, the numbers of novice special

education teachers who opt out of teaching is consistent with general education teachers,

within the first five years of entering the profession, and for similar reasons that include a

lack of support and feeling inadequately prepared for teaching. Markow and Martin

(2005) found over one-quarter (26%) teachers reported not being prepared to work with

children with varying abilities during their first teaching assignment.

The availability of qualified educators as a necessary prerequisite for providing

appropriate education for students with disabilities has been well documented by the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990. The issues are believed to

have a direct affect on the quality and effectiveness of new special education teachers'

development, similar to new general education teachers. What is the impact? The early

departure of special education teachers leave special needs students to be educated by

non-certified, or certified, but limited-in-experience special education teachers (Brownell

& Smith, 1992; Stough & Palmer, 2003).

   **State of Michigan.**  The legislation of NCLB has attempted to make teacher quality a national priority, and has encouraged individual states to enact standards based reform.  In Michigan, this is determined in part by "...require[ing] all teachers of core academic subjects be "highly qualified" as determined by three essential criteria: (1) attaining bachelor's degree in subject taught; (2) obtaining full state teacher certification; and (3) demonstrating knowledge in subjects taught (Holley, 2008; MDE, 2004; U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2008).

   The state of Michigan's interpretation of NCLB's highly qualified designation includes a number of minimum hours new teachers must spend on professional development activities.  The mandates have influenced how local school districts plan and allocate resources, implement support, and track professional development hours. The MDE requires school district programs to include standards for induction of new teachers.  These induction standards must ensure: (1) the provision of effective professional development strategies to meet continuous learning cycle, and (2) oversight of adequate time, equitable responsibility, and an experienced mentor at the building level to aid in the success of new teachers, (MDE, 2004).  As a matter of state law, Michigan requires new teachers complete 15 days of professional development during their first three years of teaching.  This requirement is in addition to the five days of professional development required annually for them as well as their tenured colleagues (Holley, 2008).

   The Michigan Department of Education, like other state departments of education, measures teacher professional development (PD) requirements in hours.  There is not a

requirement that teacher PD be specific to any topic relevant to instructional best

practices or directly related to student achievement, which makes the mandate less than

effective.  The professional development activities required are a part of new teachers'

certification in the state of Michigan, including15 days of PD training over a period of

three years (MDE, 2003; Holley, 2008).  The required standard for professional

development for new teachers is stated very generally as "...the experiencing of effective

practices in university-linked professional development schools, conducted by

master/mentor teachers" (MDE, 2003).

**Structural Foundations of Mentoring Programs**

Mentoring programs are interactive, circuitous, and personal.  Recent studies on

teacher learning are grounded in the works of Rosenholtz (1989), Ball and Cohen (1999),

and Ingersoll et al., (2004).  Their collective research suggested teacher learning occurs in

at least two realms: (1) the individual, and (2) the interpersonal.  Individually, teachers

gain knowledge about content and pedagogy, and make decisions that impact their

classroom practices.  In the interpersonal realm, teachers engage in dialogue and

collaborate with others to further their own development (Huebner, 2009).  Successful

mentoring programs consider practical matters, such as common planning schedules of

the mentor and mentee to provide opportunities to build community and rapport.  The

investment of time and the two-way exchange of listening, sharing, and questioning ideas

build professional collegiality among teachers within the program.

Researchers have asserted the period of growth for beginning teachers goes far

beyond their first year, yet most state-supported programs for new teachers are aligned to

short-term induction procedures geared towards district protocols and rules rather than

on-going mentoring over an extended period of time.  Additionally there is little

agreement among schools about what constitutes good induction support.  Olebe (2005)

described a dilemma within the educational community; Should programs struggle to

measure teaching success, support professional development (PD) and induction

experiences that are job-embedded, or should teaching success be measured by students'

achievement on standardized assessments?  Moreover, should successful teaching be

measured through the exploration of capacity-building activities and emotional support,

which are often the components of mentoring programs?

**Mentoring programs.**  As discussed, teachers leave the profession for many

reasons.  Teachers, who stay in the profession stay for various reasons.  Two common

reasons for staying in the profession are the successful transitions into the school

environment, and the support of an expert mentor during initial teaching experiences

(Brindley et al., 2000; NCTAF, 1996; Whitebrook et al., 1990; 1996).  Both reasons are

thought to be beneficial for new teachers.  The 1997 National Center for Education

Statistics (Portner, 2003) reported that having a mentoring program to assist beginning

teachers is less important for improving teacher performance and commitment than the

quality of the assistance offered to the teachers.

The components of a mentoring program are not limited to one mentor working

with one or several new teachers.  The support provided through mentoring is more than

building the instructional knowledge base of inexperienced teachers.  Mentoring

programs should fit the need of a particular school's culture.  It should be a combination

of "This is how we do things here," mixed with veteran teacher wisdom of "I wish I

would have known this," combined with the fresh ideas of the newly hired mentees

(Merryman, 2006).  Mentoring goals are to provide useful guidance and information to novice teachers.  Often the mechanics of how school systems operate are shared through mentoring, yet it is not the only focus of support for teachers.  The NTC provides a suggested list of lessons learned from over 20 years of experience, including: (a) induction programs accelerate new teacher effectiveness; (b) effective inductions combine high-quality mentoring within communities of practice; (c) and good induction programs are accountable, not just compliant (Moir, 2009, p. 16).

In evaluating 3rd year teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of North Carolina school systems, Algozzine et al., (2007) compared 19 induction activities and their relationships to teacher retention.  Eighty percent of respondents reported creating individualized development plans, participating in a systems-orientation, and having an assigned mentor as the most favorable activities.  Formal observations by administrators was perceived as an effective induction tool, receiving the fourth-highest rating among responding teachers (p. 139).  Among the least-favored induction activities was non-instructional aspects of teaching that diffuse global PD opportunities, such as district-wide orientations and workshops.  Mentoring is not limited to school policies and procedural manuals, nor should it be.  New teachers often need support in creating a positive classroom environment and building rapport with students whose backgrounds and experiences may be vastly different from others, including the teacher.  These soft skills can affect teachers' sense of personal connection and effectiveness.

Mentoring programs should be designed around needs of participants, not participants around the program.  It is important to recognize that teachers, like students, are individuals with different learning styles and needs (Brewster & Railsback, 2001;

Gordon, 1991; Kestner, 1994; Lawson, 1992), which are best supported when responsibilities, roles, and goals are clearly communicated and understood by all.  In meeting the teacher's needs, T.M. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) considered life and work experiences from a holistic learning approach, and argued that whole classroom experiences with a purposeful context have more impact on teacher learning than isolated, distant, procedural-driven content.

New teachers often report the first year of teaching as especially tough and requiring very specific assistance (Algozzine et al., 2007; Conway, 2002; 2003). Research supports the need for structured mentoring, with various activities designed to direct, shape and form practices that will become part of teachers' professional self once mentoring has ended.  Villani's (2002) research equated the first year of teaching to Maslow's theory of needs: Teachers must satisfy their own "survival" before instructional practices and student engagement can occur.  After an examination of approximately twenty mentoring programs in school districts across the United States, Villani described teachers' growth as an experience that spanned over the school year cycle, ranging from anticipation and survival at the beginning of the school year, to mid-year disillusionment and rejuvenation, to reflection at the end of the school year. Similarly, Mills, Moore, and Keane (2001) found by October, new teachers are in a state of "survival," and by late November, they reported feeling extremely disillusioned.  If teachers are fortunate enough to receive specific help and support; they can be rejuvenated and by March, and begin to reflect analytically and start planning for the upcoming school year.

Ingersoll and Y.M. Smith (2004) suggested that mentoring support received early

in a teacher's career influences the likelihood of a successful teaching experience and a promising, fulfilling career. Teachers should be provided a structured support system to guide them through the covert intricacies of teaching in their second through fourth years as well. Often second, third, and fourth year teachers have challenges that are different from their first year needs. These new, but not novice teachers need support in honing skills and building their repertoire of best instructional practices. This can be accomplished by designing an individual development plan (IDP) to expand the instructional knowledge base of the new teacher. The IDP includes input from the mentee teacher, as their specific needs will affect the direction of the IDP, and includes goal setting to measure, assess, and evaluate their own growth.

**Models with effective program support.** New teachers learn of their school's culture through the mentoring process. The most effective programs have veteran teachers with a sense of empathy, who are willing to share their skills as a service to other teachers (Carter et al., 2004). The mentors' sharing provides an opportunity for new teachers to gain perspective and encouragement from examples and stories of others. Again, the key to an effective mentoring program lays in the support, that is, the quality, nature, scope, and the depth of which support is provided. Highly structured programs with encouraging and engaged mentors appear to have positive residual influences for new teachers as found in various studies.

Much has been written about the effect induction has on teacher retention (Davis & Higdon, 2008; see also Bartell, 2005; Breaux & Wong, 2003; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; NCTAF, 2003; Strong, 2005); yet few studies have examined the influence support has on teacher's effectiveness (p. 262). Although, retaining teachers is important, the quality

of teachers retained is equally important (Davis & Higdon, 2008; NTCAF, 2005).

In a study conducted by the MDE (1996), twenty-eight of 550 public school systems shared information about their districts' mentoring programs. Although differing in their approach, the 28 districts reported successful mentoring programs. An Oakland County district required potential mentors complete a battery of assessments to determine compatibility, temperament, and ideological matches between mentor and mentee (Mills et al., 2001). Mentoring includes more than pairing two people together with the hope they will get along. Mentoring is also emotional support. The MDE study was an intentionally non-representative geographic sample, and the results were not statistically verified representations of Michigan Schools, but instead offered as examples of a cohort of school districts.

Many positive outcomes of mentoring are actualized when program implementation includes what is referred as "best practices" in educational settings. The New Teacher Center (NTC) is recommended (Martin, 2008; Villani, 2002) for being highly structured, as well as for one-on-one mentoring by explicitly trained mentors with limited caseloads. The mentors' roles are well defined, and the NTC model calls for two years of mentoring support for all new teachers, including two hours, each week. NTC participants use a standard language and structure learning focused dialogue for continuous training during the two-year cycle. The NTC model encourages mentors to serve a three-year cycle, after which they return to the classroom or assume other leadership roles within the district (Moir, 2009, p. 17). Those who return to the classroom have a broader understanding of how to effectively impact student achievement and contribute to school reform (Moir, p. 17).

Another program designed to combat new teachers' isolation is the Urban Academy Laboratory High School (Wyatt & Weber, 2006). Their approach includes scaffolding teaching loads with abbreviated schedules and pairing mentors with new teachers during the first year. Through teacher-pairings, the Academy has retained teachers beyond the probationary period, and their new teachers have been well trained. It is important to note that the Urban Academy's mentored teachers receive less one-on-one support in subsequent school years, but the new teachers are connected with their mentors through tenure attainment. Coaching, team-teaching, and mentoring experiences have been effective strategies in alleviating social and physical barriers (Hicks et al., 2005; Hunter & Kiernan, 2005), while increasing teacher's commitment, confidence and capacity through ongoing, daily collaborations with others in this school's environment.

A close examination of mentoring programs with proven results is advised. The NTC was established in the late 1990s, and currently has programs in over 40 states (Moir, 2009). The NTC suggests induction programs that build pathways for teacher leaders. The foundational components of any well structured program (Villani, 2002) include a process for selecting mentors and training mentees, mechanisms to evaluate program goals, resources to support district standards, and career placement services.

A program's sustainability is dependent upon the commitment of those within the organization. There is discussion in the literature of the principal's role in a mentoring program's sustainability. A principal's active support of education reform lead teachers to be more likely to perceive programs as legitimate, which leads to greater success and sustainability of programming efforts (Mangin, 2007; see also Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; 1978). The overall benefits are the commitment of all stakeholders (e.g., teachers,

administrators, and teacher unions).

**Models with less effective program support.** According to Moir (2009), a well articulated vision, and policies that guide development and impact teacher effectiveness are the only outcomes that count; and true accountability resides at the district level (p. 19).

Flynn and Nolan (2008) studied a mentoring program in a downstate New York school community as a cautionary example. The focal point of the districts' mentoring program was to protect the mentor-mentee relationship. Mentor coordinators and principals led this effort; even the superintendent was in support of the program. The partnerships established trust and honesty as the crux of the relationship, and the foundation of the mentoring program. Part of this model was an expectation of established norms of confidentiality before mentoring pairs were expected to work and team together for collaboration, including team-teaching and planning as a part of on-going professional development.

The rise and subsequent fall of this well-established mentoring program (Flynn & Nolan, 2008), indicated that programs cannot be self-perpetuating. Once lauded for its best "instructional" practices, the mentoring program was reorganized under different leadership of a new superintendent, whose expectations for mentoring was vastly different than his predecessors. The hallmarks used to qualify mentors, including extensive screenings, and evidence of subject mastery and pedagogical skills were dismantled. The vital program components in leadership development, differentiated instruction, and assessment that had shaped the program were either reduced or eliminated altogether.

The incremental program reductions and optional use of "best practice" strategies, including the collaborative time between teachers, were no longer a part of the mentoring program. Common planning times for collegial mentor-mentee partnerships were dissolved as well. The many changes to the program severely affected the relationships between mentors and mentees. Ironically, New York state law that states that mentoring programs must be "…non-prescriptive in direction and nature" was the catalyst needed to enact policies allowing for a less mandated mentoring structure. The subsequent actions and reactions by district leadership ultimately contributed to the dismantling of the districts' mentoring program (Flynn & Nolan, 2008).

Flynn and Nolan's (2008) case study exemplified how what school district leadership mandates are typically what those within the system follow. A mentoring program that lacks structure and foundational integrity will likely dissolve without a climate of support. Specifically, leadership support of a program must be consistent with the magnitude of change represented. If the stakeholders' commitment does not match the needs, the mentoring program will fail regardless of its merits (Marzano et al., 2005). Any mentoring program without a developed and clear purpose runs the risk of suffering a similar fate as described in the Flynn and Nolan study.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) reminded that the constant within K-12 education is that it is always changing. There is always a new program or practice being proposed. Many well-researched educational initiatives have not endured because of the limited buy-in from those within the organization. Mentoring programs with unfocused goals and undefined roles dissipate quickly, and are permanently cast into the "already-tried-that-and-it-did-not-work-for-us" file. The underlying concept for effective program

success is commitment.  According to Rudney (2003), this not only affects professional growth and performance of new teachers, it helps all stakeholders meet their needs.

Other issues that have led to less effective induction programs are unclear roles of participants and unfocused goals of the programs themselves.  Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) argued the policy environment, which is compliance with institutional norms and values through ideological means, determine what is allowable and legitimate within the school system.  Examples include programs that are undefined, loosely configured, or have a poor selection process for mentor candidates.  Mangin's (2007) study questioned the mentors' effectiveness and ability to produce significant instructional reform for new teachers, if their mentors' motives in accepting a leadership position were focused on personal career enhancement rather than collective instructional improvement of mentees.

Another example of mentoring program norms being out-of-sync with stakeholder's commitment is the behavioral study of beginning teachers conducted by the School of Effectiveness and Assistance Program using the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching (Angelle, 2002).  The study measured the difference in classroom performance of beginning teachers in more effective and less effective schools.  The data was categorized with a-priori themes, including mentoring assistance, effective instruction, and the roles of the mentor.  Of the findings, the most telling was the positive correlation between schools' effectiveness and relationships developed with new teachers and mentors.  The findings revealed 80% of schools identified as ineffective also had teachers report being disconnected or having a poor relationship with their mentors.  New teachers in the ineffective schools described mentors as passive and disinterested in the mentees' development (Angelle).  A lack of clear role expectations within a program

affirms Hicks et al. (2005) suggestion that veteran teachers, selected out of convenience (e.g., teach in the same subject area) or other reasons which their investment in the new teachers' success is limited, are not ideal choices as mentors for mentoring programs.

**Backlash of mentoring programs.** Mentoring programs are often defined by contractual agreements and governed by state laws or local district policies. The literature reveals many mentoring programs that have had unwavering support of their local school boards, administrators, teacher and others have positively benefitted. The political realities that belie rhetoric, causing programs to falter, are limited resources, time allocations, and unclear role definitions (Olebe, 2005). Indications that teacher leaders can promote schoolwide improvements are tempered by evidence suggesting mentors face formidable challenges as studies (Mangin, 2007; see also Hart, 1990a; Smylie & Denny, 1990) cite negative school climate, role ambiguity, and resistance among the factors that inhibit mentor effectiveness. Teachers become distrusting of mentoring programs, when implementation is subject to turf control between administrators and the local bargaining unit, or when confidentiality issues threaten teachers' rights. The limited resources, additional workloads, and even questionable evaluative measures have been viewed as violations of negotiated contract language by teachers' associations.

The mentoring backlash has also come from claims of differential treatment, negative experiences, and requirements to reveal the nature of the mentor-mentee contact. Although certain induction practices have been criticized for their negative potential to promote unconventional norms or practices, mentoring has been well received and is considered beneficial when those within the school organization understand practices.

Feiman-Nemser (1996) observed that very few mentors practice the kind of conceptually oriented and learning-centered teaching advocated by reformers, nor do they model best practices for their mentees, resulting in new teachers adopting less effective approaches and even bad habits from their mentors.

How closely teachers' evaluations are tied to mentoring is another consideration that can either propel or hinder the support of induction programs. The Educational Resources Information Center (Brewster et al., 2001) and others (Portner, 2001; Olebe, 2005) have stated the more evaluative the mentoring program, the less safe teachers will feel to make mistakes, or participate in discussions. Most researchers agree that assistance should come before assessment (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; see also Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997; Olebe, 2005; Portner, 2001); and recommended that mentoring programs should not be tied to teacher evaluation at all.

Adding to the negative perception is a chasm of desperation created when relationships between mentor and mentee is destructive, non-existent, or weighed down by fear. Feelings of stress and isolation creep into staff members' psyches when positive adult contact has not been established and maintained (Schlitche, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). Compounding others' negative perceptions are teachers who have received the message they are not expected to do well, or are told they are not capable of being successful in their position without the guidance, advice, and support of a more senior staff member. Many schools have limited choices of mentors in the same building who are appropriate to mentor novice teachers. Additionally, the identification and effective training of mentor teachers, is often a missing element of many mentoring programs (Gagen & Bowie, 2005).

The approach new teachers make toward mentoring support is driven by their experiences. It is understood that outcomes of mentoring are raised significantly when teachers face the possibility of termination due to negative experiences or lack of overall development. The pushback against mentoring is what Portner (2001; 2003) and others have called the *law of unintended consequences*. This term describes the instance when the motivation and stakes are higher for new teachers who have been required to improve their instructional practices; their approach to mentoring and development could be viewed as a leveraged experience instead of a reciprocal learning opportunity. The efforts to alleviate negative feelings should include a professional agreement between all stakeholders. Flynn and Nolan (2008) have recommended creating mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders. Portner (2001) reminds that mentor pairings run the risk of being perfunctory and routine when relationships have not been established or maintained. The importance of defining mentoring relationships creates support for teachers, which leads to more opportunities to reach far beyond individual classrooms as suggested by various authors (Martin, 2008; Portner; Rudney, 2003).

**Capacity Building Through Mentoring**

Educational researchers have repeatedly shown that a lack of support contributes to teachers' uneasiness in their own competence. The research has discussed teachers leaving their positions because of isolation and being disconnected from other adults in the school. Inman and Marlow (cited in Fluckiger et al., 2006) found once teachers have begun their first classroom experience, they often mistake their feelings of uneasiness as an indication they have made a mistake in their choice of profession. This uneasiness can be quelled by discussions within other teacher colleagues. Constant and increased

pressures to improve student achievement on standardized assessments have hastened the

implementation of mentoring programs. This alone can have an impact of professional

development experiences offered to new teachers (Mangin, 2007, p. 320). As school

districts grapple with demonstrating evidence of continued efforts to achieve adequate

yearly progress, mentoring trainings are often geared towards teacher capacity-building

in the area of instruction. This type of professional development is often situational and

directly tied to school improvement goals.

**Professional learning communities.** It is critical to explore how professional

learning communities (PLC) are defined before embarking on any initiatives or

collaborations. Teacher collaboration is often mistakenly identified and limited to

departmental meetings. Collaboration focuses on instructional goals designed to enhance

student achievement through instruction. Collaboration is more than discussions of

student behaviors, purchase orders/texts, or supply distribution, as Henry (2005) and

others have acknowledged. Building a collegial system requires addressing

administrative and managerial impediments, including any contractual obligations. It

also requires streamlining building or district-level educational initiatives and obtaining

buy-in from district-level administrators whose support is needed to maintain an effective

collaborative team.

The facilitation of professional learning communities, such as the Learning

Circles Program in St. Paul Public Schools (Minnesota) is an example of collaborative

program support. The formal structures of Learning Circles allow teachers to share ideas

and build their own community of teacher-learner colleagues (Villani, 2002). All

teaching strategies have been formalized with more self-directed implementation of best

instructional practices in the classroom. Villani described Learning Circles' monthly sessions as a small community of new teachers who support and share ideas determined by the needs and interests of the participants. The sessions include enrichment activities, the physical placement of academic centers, role-playing parent-teacher conferences, group discussions, and guidance of how to foster positive connections (e.g., with parents, students and teachers). The teachers who participate in PLCs can and should solve problems together, evaluate student growth through alternative assessments, and discuss other curricular and academic needs (Fluckiger et al., 2006).

The relational connections of the mentor-mentee pairings are part of reciprocal learning and shared philosophies that can shape professional beliefs and promote dialogue between mentor and mentee (Huebner, 2009; Lee et al., 2006). Of note, Markow and Martin (2005) reported teachers' expectations of their profession are borne out of their experiences, and found 89% of teachers surveyed noted the support offered by mentors improved their teaching skills and transition into school environments. Nearly 50% of teachers reported their personal satisfaction higher than they anticipated. They attributed their satisfaction, in part, to connections felt as part of the school community. Factors such as school culture and atmosphere, communication with principals, and having respect of parents and others were important in fostering teachers' sense of satisfaction. Eight in 10 teachers rated the principal showing appreciation of the teacher's work (82%) as important; and 69% felt the local community treating teachers as professionals was very important (p. 45).

PLCs broaden teachers' view of themselves. The study conducted by the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project (SCNTP) interviewed fifty of 72 former mentors between

1994 and 2004.  Findings revealed 94% (of mentor teachers) agreed they gained deeper insight to teaching and learning through mentoring others, which increased their ability to analyze student work and incorporate techniques into focused discussions and collaborations with the mentees with whom they worked (Hanson & Moir, 2008).  By incorporating discussions about data while collaborating, new teachers and mentors assist one another in building a foundation for future, on-going coaching and collaboration. This can take place in many forms: From training new teachers to prioritize grade-level objectives with school initiatives, to creating and sharing reflection journals, to looking at samples of student work and discussing how to improve instruction.  As teams convene to examine gap analysis data and other types of assessments, instructional practices become more intentional, yielding effective implementation of power standards and best teaching practices.  The impact of professional collegiality cannot be contrived; it is characterized by authentic interactions and being respectful of mistakes and the lessons learned, as well as objectively analyzing practices (Marzano, 2003).

Davis and Higdon's (2008) mixed-method study examined the effects of a university induction partnership on the instructional practices of two groups of beginning teachers; one group participated in the university program and received induction support from their district (teacher-fellows), and the other group only received mentoring support from their district (non-teacher fellows, p. 261).  To determine the influence of the comprehensive induction programs on teaching practices, classroom observations utilizing the Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC) were used (p. 265).  Davis and Higdon's study found significant differences between two groups (i.e., teacher-fellows and non-teacher-fellows) in the areas of instructional and

social contexts.  Teacher-fellows used more hands-on, concrete materials and activities; and were more likely to model group activities.  Overall, without support, new teachers were quicker to abandon best practices for what they perceived as safer, less complex activities (p. 269).

**Autonomy of teachers.** Advocates for instructional quality suggest that policy standards and pedagogy provide teachers with greater certainty about what and how to teach (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999), and also raise the quality of instruction and improves student achievement.  Studies point to new teachers beginning their work with a clean slate, having fewer biases towards new reform ideas.  While new teachers need guidance and want clear expectations, they also desire professional autonomy and freedom to explore how to meet expectations (Berliner 1986; NCES, 1997; Voke, 2003; Watkins, 2005).  Hirsch (1996, cited in Marzano et al., 2005) warns teachers to be careful with too much freedom because the coherency between teaching content and what is taught can be misleading.  New teachers making decisions regarding what should be covered in the curriculum, and to the extent covered, cause the common problems in instructional learning gaps.

Analysts posit accountability provisions and standards that are well developed and implemented system-wide, lead to greater coherence, collaboration and attention towards improved teaching skills (Gandal & Vranek, 2001; Smith & O'Day, 1991).  In related work, Lambert (2003, cited in Mangin, 2007) advocates school communities constructing mutually held beliefs as a means to engage teachers (p. 325). Additionally, Darling-Hammond's (1993; cited in Lambert, 2003) called for system-wide accountability as a means to create continual collegial inquiry to make necessary changes (p. 87).

Opponents counter such policies have deleterious effects, have narrowed teacher discretion, and are focused on lower-level learning (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 1997).  The limitations of inquiry-oriented learning opportunities are reflected by the ongoing tension between instructional quality and professional autonomy (Achinstein & Ogawa).  Davis and Higdon's (2008) study comparison of fellow and non-fellow teachers revealed teacher fellows exhibited several components of higher level performance in research-based strategies (e.g., analysis of teaching via instructional practices related to literacy and numeracy for classroom-based projects, reflective journaling, and peer coaching within instructional and social contexts p. 270).

**Teacher Effectiveness and Quality**

Proponents of teacher quality have described the lack of qualified teachers as an unspoken problem.  Currently 47 states and the District of Columbia have adopted alternative programs to speed entry of teachers into the classroom byeliminating teacher-education coursework (Levine, 2006).  The NCTAF (1996) made its' case that well-qualified teachers make a big difference in children's learning (Evans, Stewart, Mangin & Bagley, 2001).  The most important ingredient in educational reform is a caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child (p. 3, NTCAF, 2007).

There is a schism between those who believe teaching, like law or medicine requires substantial education before practice, and those who think teaching is a craft, like journalism, taught principally on-the-job (Levine, 2006).  At the core of the disagreement is the wide variability of the beginning requirements for teachers, as well as discussions of what constitutes teacher quality and effectiveness.  Studies point to the use of under-certified and non-certified teachers instructing outside of their subject areas,

with local political demands as well as teacher shortages as the rationales offered by school districts. In many states, the novice teachers, who may not yet be certified, but are working under provisional licenses, have had their teacher pre-service experiences cut short to place them in classrooms more quickly (Gagen & Bowie, 2005). The data from Schools and Staffing Survey, (Smith & Y.M. Ingersoll, 2004; see also Gagen & Bowie) suggests multiple induction components have a strong, significant effect on teacher turnover; that is, as the number of induction components increased, the probability of teacher turnover decreased (p. 262, Davis & Higdon, 2008).

There is an imbalance and disparity among teacher-preparation programs. Hard to staff teaching assignments are most often assigned to the least experience–new teachers. Understandably, teaching has been described as the profession "which devours its young" (Angelle, 2002). Research and anecdotal evidence support this sentiment. Prior to having a teaching position, many new teachers' first experiences with teaching are during college, in a practicum, pre-service, or within a student-teaching experience. Levine (2006) noted the wide-variance in state requirements for teacher certification and the limited control districts have over the instructional standards at the university level as another layer and explanation affecting new teacher attrition.

Current attention to teacher quality stem not only from certification issues and experiences; additional challenges include ability to integrate teaching with standards-based curriculum, and inadequate supplies and resources that do not appropriately address student needs (Brewster & Railsback, 2001). All of this coupled with the increased accountability standards of NCLB and state certification requirements of "highly qualified" have left many overwhelmed, confused, and frustrated.

Competing definitions of teacher quality continue to proliferate. The growing debate among researchers and educators who argue effectiveness, certification, and quality are not any more associated with a teachers' *impact* on student outcomes (achievement) than students' learning gains a measure of teacher quality (Holley, 2008). Teaching capacity should be the focus; and capacity should measure "highly effective" instead of "highly qualified," as quality is statistically unobservable. Marzano et al. (2005) noted the relationship between teacher subject matter knowledge and student achievement is not straightforward, but rather spotty.

**Teacher effectiveness and achievement.** Studies that have disaggregated the effectiveness of various teacher characteristics have shown experience to impact students' achievement positively, but only in the first few years of a teacher's career. Several studies support this conclusion. Mackinac Center for Public Policy (2008) found by the fourth or fifth year, teacher effectiveness is set; those who are relatively effective (or ineffective) will remain so (Holley, 2008). Goldhaber (2007) and Holley (2008) succinctly asserted, "...the most important thing a school can provide its students is good teachers." Furthering this notion, Hunushek et al .(2007) found "[a] good teacher will get a gain of 1.5 grade level equivalents, while a bad teacher will get 0.5 in a single academic year." The synthesis of the aforementioned researchers, as well additional studies including a study published by the Urban Institute (Holley; see also Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2006; Goldhaber, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2007) led to this particular outcome confirmed:

> According to the Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education
> Research (2007), students with a teacher who has one to two years of
> experience outperform students with novice teachers by 3 [%] to 7 percent
> of a standard deviation: Students with teachers with three to five years

experience tended to outperform those whose teachers' had one to two
years experience by an additional 2 % of a standard deviation. (Holley,
2008, p. 30)

The differences are not large, yet they provide evidence to further discussion of

effectiveness and quality, which may be indicative of teachers' experiences having

implications upon student achievement.  As a side note, in 1994, 25% of new teachers

hired, held no teaching license.  Prominent advocate for teacher certification, Darling-

Hammond (1994, 1996; see also Holley, 2008) found teachers with traditional

certifications were generally more effective in producing student gains than were

uncertified teachers by 1% of a standard deviation.  The NTCAF (1996) concluded,

"student learning will only improve when we focus efforts on improving teaching" (p. 5);

and "inadequate induction practices of beginning teachers" are one of the barriers to

improving teaching (Davis & Higdon, 2008; see also NTCAF, 1996).

Earlier discussions of mentoring activities that contributed to higher student

achievement have been upended by recent reports.  A three-year study conducted by the

U.S. Department of Education found teacher groups that received intensive mentoring

services, resulted in statistically significant improvements on students test scores in the

areas of reading and mathematics (Sawchuk, 2010).

**Teacher quality and certification.**  The criticisms are public schools have

allowed loopholes described above by permitting unlicensed and under-trained teachers

into classrooms to address shortages (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Levine, 2006; T.M.

Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).  Teachers who participate in programs such as Teach for

America (TFA) often have more difficulty with curriculum development, pedagogical

content knowledge, classroom management, engagement, motivation and accounting for

the different learning styles of their students according to Darling-Hammond (1997; also

see Holley, 2008).  In a varied, yet equally critical view of teacher certification programs,

Levine (2006) explored 1200 U.S. schools, departments of education, and teacher

colleges and found several weaknesses in teaching programs due to lack of a common

first degree, allowing college students to earn a host of degrees or certificates (offered at

both undergraduate and graduate level) that are unrelated to teaching; and lack of

consistency in teacher preparation programs, as pre-service training and alternative

certification range from one to five years for program completion.  Levine made five

recommendations, three of which were to: (1) make five-year education programs the

norm; (2) establish effective mechanisms for teacher quality control; and (3) close failing

teacher education programs and strengthen and expand excellent ones (p. 55).

Other researchers more optimistic of teacher pre-service programs have disputed

Darling-Hammond's work, and have provided compelling evidence that the route taken

towards certification holds little significance in student achievement and certified

teachers perform no better or worse than their alternatively-certified colleagues.  Of note,

Kane, Rockoff and Staiger (2005; see also Holley, 2008) reported students assigned to

alternatively certified teachers had the same rate of performance as students of certified

teachers.  In fact, the students of teachers who were alternately certified in the TFA

program scored .02 standard deviations higher in math, than students of certified

teachers.

Researchers have found common agreements in the expectations placed on new

teachers are mismatched by uneven and inconsistent support.  Other researchers weighing

in on the debate, include Carter, Foster and Cormier (2006), who argued teacher

effectiveness is not based on certification and credentials, instead point to the need for psychological support and contend teaching is the only profession where novices are expected to assume the same responsibilities, with the same level of competence as veteran teachers (Veenman, 1984; see also Carter et al, 2006). This includes the simultaneous management of student behaviors, intellectual engagement, and awareness of physical space and time. Olebe (2005) argued consistent standards of teacher quality should be a practice in school systems; yet quality and standards mean little to new teachers who just want to know what is expected and how to demonstrate meeting expectations (p. 162).

The overlapping and contradicting standards of teacher quality are evidenced by the arguments of the researchers mentioned above. The standards of quality are not always clear to veteran educators and researchers, let alone to new teachers. A study of third year teachers conducted by Algozzine et al. (2007) affirmed negative outcomes for five (of 20) of the following induction activities: (1) opportunities to engage in cooperative planning; (2) being assigned preparations; (3) release time to observe mentors' classrooms; (4) having no extracurricular duties; and (5) not having reduced teaching loads (p. 141).

**The Mentors, Mentored, and the Others**

The lack of investment on behalf of the school district has resulted in lack of growth in new teacher competence, confidence, quality, professionalism, and retention. As previously stated, a teacher's willingness to build a career in education has been influenced by the encouragement and support received. Conversely, the lack of encouragement and support has an impact as well. Teachers who have been provided

support, often in the form of a mentor, have repeatedly stated it was the support and encouragement that made the difference in their ability to see themselves becoming a competent and successful teacher (Villani, 2002). Ellen Moir, executive director of the New Teacher Center, acknowledged districts' reluctance to recruit the best teachers from the classroom, but argues of the powerful opportunities to develop leadership skills of mentor teachers, as well as the educational vision gained which extends beyond the classroom (Moir, 2009, p. 17). New teachers who are connected to another adult or part of a well-conceived induction program have reported that their skills and confidence in their work significantly improved as well (Markow & Martin, 2005).

**Expectations of mentor teachers.** Everyone cannot or should not be a mentor. Simply being a good teacher is not enough, as mentoring is not a straightforward extension of being a good schoolteacher. Many educational leaders also recognize the fallacy of assuming veteran teachers, by virtue of their experience will make good mentors (Portner, 2003). Mentors are made, not born. The critical differences of successful mentors are those who possess distinct capabilities to be self-reflective, and can balance their own strengths and weaknesses in the effort to build relationships in trustful ways with mentees (Portner, 2001). Other requisite traits a mentor should possess are honesty, sensitivity, enthusiasm, and being self-aware (Arnold, 2006; Brooks & Sikes, 1997). The role of a mentor is to facilitate the improvement of teaching practices.

The literature is consistent: mentor teachers must possess the ability to coach, inspire, reflect, and provide constructive feedback, as well as specific criticism to guide mentees into a socialized continuum of teaching. Through the process of coaching,

mentors learn to codify and value their own experiences and skills (Moir, 2009). Additionally, mentors must expand beyond a one-size-fits-all approach in order for new teachers to embrace their own growth.  This calls for specifically skillful veteran teachers who have developed an extensive repertoire of technical and pragmatic knowledge balanced with discriminating interpersonal skills. This includes the ability to appropriately assess situations and respond in a manner that does not hinder relationships or undermine the integrity of those involved in the mentoring process (Arnold, 2006; Lee et al., 2006).

Mentors are still learners and their role is not one of a "know-it-all."  Portner (2003) explained a mentor functions best when he/she is relating, assessing, coaching, and guiding.  Mentors must be willing to be transparent. Several studies (Carter et al., 2006; Lee et al, 2006) advised transparency can be achieved by cultivating an open dialogue, sharing personal and professional goals, and lessons learned along the way. The mentors also assist mentees with navigating school politics, and provide direction of the hidden cultural and social norms of the school community (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006).

Although the literature on mentoring has traditionally recommended separating assistance from assessment, mentors can do both.  Formative assessments outline goals and points of growth and act as a progressive guide for teachers.  The powers of formative assessments lie in the ability to provide specific information about practices (Olebe, 2005).  Assessment is integral to promoting and gauging teacher quality.  It can meld support, development, assessment and accountability as done in the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project (SCNTP).  A comparative analysis revealed assistance and

assessment could coexist.  Findings confirmed that programs offering high levels of support (e.g., mentors with extensive professional expertise) retain more teachers.  Ninety percent of participating SCNTP teachers have remained in the profession after five years (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Yusko & Feiman-Nemser, 2008).

Mentors do not evaluate mentees; that is the responsibility of the building principal.  However, mentors can conduct summative assessments of mentoring support by tracking participants' success.  Mentors can assess their mentees growth, when especially careful to determine the purpose of evaluations and when assessments are done in collaboration with the mentee.  Assessments can be done through creating an individual development plan (IDP).  The IDP is created in concert with discussions of personal and professional goals.  The IDP includes a portfolio of the mentee, with any action research projects, teaching strategies learned, and documents that validate mentoring activities.

The relationship between mentor and mentee can be compromised if there is a perception that learning opportunities will show up in a formal evaluation.  Portner (2003) and Feiman-Nemser (2008) recommend avoid pairing new teachers with their department chair or immediate supervisor; the more closely the mentors are tied to evaluations, the less willing teachers are to take risks and ask questions.

The mentor-coach guides mentees towards finetuning skills in order to expand their capacity and confidence, as well as their ability to make informed choices.  Mentors coach by example, team teaching, and role-playing.  Again, the topics of coaching are created in collaboration with the mentee's input and previously agreed upon areas of professional growth and school culture criterion.  Possessing knowledge about subject

matter will not ensure success.  Mentors guide mentees by leading them through critical

thinking activities, envisioning future situations, and taking informed risks to expand

perceptions.  The focus of mentors is to help new teachers make the transition from

content specialist to teaching specialist by expanding their range of knowledge from

simple fact recitation (Hicks et al., 2005).

The overriding purpose of a mentor is to give structured support through an

experienced, positive, and hopeful veteran teacher.  It is equally important for new

teachers to have mentors who are proud to be teachers.  The mentors' ability to connect

humor and optimism are essential qualities (Kyle et al. cited in Schlitche, et al., 2005),

and will help build confidence among teachers.  Additionally, the mentors' challenge is

to see their profession anew by being able to view teaching from the perspective of new

teachers.

**Expectations of mentored teachers.**  Mentored teachers are expected to evolve

into more self-reliant and successful teachers.  The Southwest Regional Laboratory

(Chambers, Lam, & Mahitivanichcha, 2008) found mentored teachers were more likely to

use best instructional practices to affect student achievement, and more likely to use new

state curriculum frameworks to accomplish the goals of the curriculum.  Darling-

Hammond (1999; 2005 cited in Holley, 2008) wrote of the quickly gained "competence"

of mentored teachers compared to non-mentored teachers, who must learn through "trial

and error."  It is the NTC's belief that induction programs not only accelerate new teacher

effectiveness by "fast-tracking" their progress towards being exemplary teachers;

mentored teachers possess the ability to positively impact student achievement as well

(Moir, 2009).

Mentoring allows new teachers to move away from implementing a "best guess" plan to developing analytical skills based upon what is in front of them. As previously stated there has been a 12% drop in teacher attrition for mentored teachers of the University of California-Santa Cruz New Teacher Project (Martin, 2008; Strong & St. John, 2001) with nearly 90% of SCNTP teachers remaining in education beyond the five-year mark. In another example, 96% of teachers who were mentored through the University of Alabama's first year teacher pilot program returned for a second year, compared to 80% of non-mentored teachers returning for a second year (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Yusko & Feiman-Nemser, 2008). Simply stated, mentored teachers develop more quickly and mentored teachers remain in the profession longer.

**Expectations of principals.** The principal as the instructional leader affects the tasks and responsibilities that he or she performs within the school. Principals who value adult-learning support will create a culture of learning and affect the quality of their schools' induction (Moir, 2009). The primary relevance in the role of the principal is to assume ways to generate a positive and collaborative climate within the building and among the stakeholders (Capprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003). Effective principals are called to foster innovation and promote collaborative integration among teachers, staff members, students, and families. Smith and Andrews (1989; see also Marzano et al., 2005) identified four dimensions of the principal as: (1) resource provider, (2) instructional resource leader, (3) communicator, and (4) having a visible presence. Unfortunately, the responsibilities of building principals are far-reaching, and at times, are in direct competition of the administrators' time. In schools where teachers view their principal as a good leader, great efforts have been devoted to sharing

responsibilities and common goals of the school.

Marks and Printy (2003; cited in Mangin, 2007) found teachers' school performance (identified by pedagogy and capacity) had a positive correlation with students' achievement, and was more likely to improve when teachers had principals who were supportive of others. Additionally, new teachers are influenced by the strength of the school leadership and the extent to which they are welcomed into the school community (Kapadia et al., 2007). The NTC (2009) affirms, regardless of the model or structure, effective induction requires active involvement of the principal.

Faced with competing priorities, principals benefit from sharing leadership responsibilities, including the dispersing of mentoring and induction activities to teachers-leaders and mentors within the school building, according to Mangin (2007; see Darling-Hammond, 1997; Donaldson, 2001; Spillane & Lewis, 2002). Other benefits of shared leadership experiences were measured in the CCSR study (2007), as novice educators identified the support having the greatest influences as: Encouragement and assistance from the principal (43%); regularly scheduled opportunities to collaborate with peers (45%); and participation in a network of teachers (39%). It is important to note that of these supports, the first two, that is principals' encouragement and peer collaboration, had the most influence on novices' intention to continue teaching.

### Chapter Summary

Research has shown the beginning and ending cycle of a teacher's career may only be separated by a few short years. Mentoring was designed to support the retention of new teachers as part of their transition into school systems. Participation in mentoring and induction programs creates opportunities for new teachers to further develop skills

learned during their pre-service teacher preparation experiences. As the attrition rates of new teachers has steadily grown, the approach taken to support address attrition issues and instructional capacity concerns has been mentoring.

Learning to teach is a process that evolves through practice; namely through pre-service experiences and closely monitored induction support. Both pre-service experiences and closely monitored induction support provide new teachers opportunities for self-reflection and dialogue as they grow towards confident, competent practitioners. The formal structures and goals of mentoring programs have positively impacted the commitment of teachers as shown through increased retention over time. The effectiveness of mentoring has less to do with one person, program, or structure versus another, and more to do with the relationships and connections between those who are involved in the mentoring process, as well as the professional learning communities that evolve as a result.

The foundations of many teacher preparation programs are theoretical and technical. Yet, the practical experiences of teaching and learning combined with collaborative opportunities are what make teachers feel as if they can teach with confidence.

Effective mentoring and induction programs focus on the needs of the mentees, are highly-structured, and have identified roles, goals, and objectives that have been well communicated. Programs that have received a fair amount of criticism are typically disconnected from district agendas and have not established stakeholder buy-in.

The value of effective induction programs includes varied experiences and opportunities for growth. New teachers' mentoring experiences that allow practical

applications appear to be more meaningful connections as teachers learn to assess their own growth and effectiveness.

The effect formal mentoring has upon teachers is related to its impact on teacher retention, and the value teachers attribute to the quality of the support they have received. This includes special consideration given towards developing mentees' competence and confidence in their professional selves.  The real impact of formal mentoring programs is tied to those most closely connected—the new teachers.

The purpose of this research study was to understand the influence formal mentoring has upon new teachers.  There are several reasons why this study is important. Research indicates formal mentoring affects new teacher attrition; develops confidence and competence; and influences teachers' professional behaviors and practices. Important questions have emerged given previous research studies, including: (1) How mentoring shapes the personal sense of what it means to be a teacher; (2) how are instructional practices developed through mentoring; and (3) how mentoring experiences shape the overall professional orientation and behaviors of new teachers (e.g., how they work with colleagues; how classroom communities are shaped; and engagement with students and others).

These questions were addressed in this study by exploring the reflections and perceptions of mentored teachers in the southwestern Michigan area using in-depth interviews and classroom observations.  Mentoring is not often fully integrated into the professional structures that operate in schools, and requires an investment of time and resources.  Findings in the research have established broad areas of impact related to new teacher mentoring, but this study probes deeper into the subtle ways in which the

mentoring experience shapes a teacher and contributes to an overall disposition of professionalism and commitment to the profession.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Introduction and Overview**

There has been limited research conducted of formal mentoring beyond the first

few years of teaching.  In review, teacher mentoring was initially a response to high

teacher turnover in public schools.  Many new teachers have left the profession, upwards

of 50% teacher attrition within five years, because they have not felt adequately

supported (Ingersoll & Y.M. Smith, 2004).  Educational researchers have shown that a

lack of support, both professional and collegial, contribute to the feelings of uneasiness in

teachers' confidence and competence of their instructional practices.  High attrition rates,

coupled with an influx of new teachers, have left many public schools in a constant state

of growth.

The stark reality for new teachers is the discovery that teaching is more

challenging and difficult than they presumed.  Studies have revealed the reasons so many

teachers leave within the first few years is because they are overwhelmed and feel

isolated; however, research has revealed mentoring support, when received early on in a

teacher's career, influences the likelihood of a successful teaching experience and a

promising, fulfilling career.  The literature has also revealed many of the mentoring

programs that have evolved have had positive effects on teacher attrition, confidence, and

competence.

Over 30 states require some form of mentoring for novice educators in an effort to

boost teacher retention and performance rates. Mentoring includes guidance with state curricular mandates, implementation of teaching strategies, and support in navigating the social and political structures of schools.

Most states have mandated districts to provide mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, while the financial support for mentoring remains the responsibility of local districts. There is a lack of consistent parameters and structures to guide programs from state to state, or district to district. This creates a wide variance in how mentoring is utilized and understood by others and makes it difficult to assess strategies which are beneficial.

This study examined the meaningful components of formal mentoring that teachers have sustained as part of their professional practices. The literature has illustrated the importance of mentoring; yet the research has been less clear of what happens after the probationary period, after mentoring has ended. It is important to understand how new teachers assimilate towards teaching as a result of an early mentoring experience. Specifically, it is important to learn how teachers reflect on their mentoring experiences and the connections made to shape how they function as educators. Finally, it is important gain an understanding of the experience mentoring has had and how it influences new teachers' efficacy, competence, and confidence once mentoring has concluded.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The purpose of this research was to study and explore the influences and perspectives of teachers who have been mentored. The research design for this study was

based on a constructivist approach, which argues multiple realities exist because they are constructed by the individuals who experience them (Hatch, 2002). Constructivist research is rooted in phenomenology. The phenomenological approach recognizes the importance of subjectivity in creating meaning (Heidegger, 1927/1972; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) from the stories constructed by the teacher-participants.

A phenomenological method was used for this qualitative study, as the purpose of the study was to explore how mentored teachers beyond the first year of teaching, yet still new to the profession create sense and meaning in their work. The research aims were exploratory and descriptive, examining the influence mentoring has had on mentored teachers as part of their professional development and their sense of what it means to be a teacher. Van Manen (1990) and Hatch (2002), describe phenomenology as "how one orients to a lived experience … and hermeneutics is how one interprets the 'texts' of life." The time spent with study participants guided the explanation of events, which is part of a constructivist-interpretative approach.

The strength of qualitative research is its focus on how people interact in their natural settings (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). This research was framed by the detailed descriptions of teachers included in this study. It centered on their reflections, feelings, and meanings attributed to mentoring experiences. The design is aligned with Creswell's (2003) definition of phenomenological research, which identifies the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon or "lived experience" as described by the participants in a study. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) expounded further, stating constructivist-interpretative designs are approached when the researcher assumes reality is subjective and consists of the stories produced by the individuals within their natural

settings.

Participant mentoring experiences were explored using narratives, in-depth interviews of the mentored teachers, classroom observations (for the purpose of examining and discussing teachers instructional practices used) and any shared artifacts the teacher-participants believed illustrated who they are or how they have settled into their profession.

A hermeneutic phenomenology study (Bogden & Bilken, 1992; Creswell, 1994; Eichelberger, 1989) is a constructivist approach which assumes multiple socially constructed realities exist. The meanings individuals give to their experiences is what is studied. Specific to this study was an examination of how teacher-participants translate their mentoring experiences into the decisions and choices they make regarding their instructional practices. Phenomenological studies are widely used in education as both descriptive and interpretive/hermeneutic methods for the purpose of examining the lived experiences of the people being studied as defined (Hatch, 2002).

## Role of the Researcher

It is important to frame researchers' own biases and experiences in respect to what participants share, and to place great care on the objectivity of the study. Because perceptions and memories are at the core of developing this understanding, the researcher will be careful to carry out what Husserl (1970a) referred to as an advantaged point; the researchers' personal consciousness of having once been a mentored teacher. In following the characteristics of a phenomenological study, this approach includes a full disclosure of the researcher, setting aside prejudgments, being open, receptive, and naïve in listening and hearing participants describe their own experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher's professional career began in a third grade classroom of a large urban Midwestern school district, with a population of approximately 200,000 students. As a new teacher, the researcher recalls experiencing competing emotions of excitement, nervous energy, and fear. The researcher's first experience with mentoring was as a mentee teacher during the initial three years in the district. The mentoring experience proved invaluable because of the mentor's guidance and advice that included meaningful tidbits which were not learned during the researcher's college or in pre-service student teaching experience. The mentor also provided curriculum resources as well as structured instructional support during the first few years. Later, a more personal mentoring relationship developed and the mentor provided professional career guidance. The researcher credits her mentor and the structured forum of the districts' mentoring program for her solid start in education. The professional relationship that developed during the beginning years of the researcher's teaching experience evolved into a friendship that has continued over the researcher's career.

Although the researcher acknowledges her mentoring experience as positive, it is important to do as Creswell (2003) recommends, and remain honest, balancing the personal-self and the researcher-self in a reflective and open manner. Because the researcher has insider status as a previously mentored teacher, and has been an educator for many years, her experience provides an opportunity and a warning. The researcher has spent her career in education, and has an insider's understanding of schools' culture, structure, and politics.

According to Creswell (2003), in qualitative research, validity is referred to the trustworthiness of the themes revealed in the data analysis. It was important the

researcher limits involvement in the participants' stories. This includes sharing reflections and stories of her mentoring experiences to avoid revealing the researchers' own feelings toward mentoring. Instead the researcher set aside her immediate awareness and past experiences and listened to the participants' stories. Part of clarifying the researcher's bias was the admission of the mentoring influence on the researcher's professional self and as previously stated, the researcher's mentoring experiences was framed, bracketed, and then set aside.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) acknowledged a conversational flow which occurs between the participants and researcher during the in-depth interview experience. The acknowledgment and awareness of the researcher's mentoring experiences are hers alone, and are not connected to others who have been mentored as part of clarifying potential biases. It is important the researcher maintains an objective ear and has a receptive presence, using the heuristic approach; not to uncover some pre-existing meanings from the researchers' experiences, but to understand the participants' experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994).

Other challenges are constructing textural descriptions of the participants' experiences within the totality of the phenomenon described; as well as differentiating the descriptions of what each participant shares as part of the essential components in data analysis. Creswell (2003) recommended using reliability checks for uncovering of consistent patterns or themes. This is accomplished by utilizing member checks, allowing participants to view the written descriptions to verify the accuracy of the data collected. The collective descriptions illuminate underlying meanings to provide a synthesized account of the experiences shared and studied (Moustakas, 1994).

**Data Collection Methods**

Narratives can be either personal-experiences or life-history stories. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) suggested that narratives allow people to tell their "storied lives" while the researcher constructs a written account of the individual experiences and meanings attributed to those experiences. How humans experience the world around them provides a structure to frame knowledge within context of what is examined.

In education, narrative events include social and personal experiences of the individual participants (Creswell, 2008). Narrative data collection involves the collection of data over a period of time using various communication tools, including in-depth qualitative interviews. Narrative interviews are described as conversations which are issue, not story-telling oriented. This style of interviewing is intense because the conversations between researcher and participant require active asking and listening (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). It is the researcher's responsibility to ask thoughtful, relevant questions in response to what is being shared. This process calls for building rapport and reciprocity between the researcher and participant. To create understanding of the mentoring phenomenon, the researcher utilized in-depth interviews to explore the participants' experiences, adopted behaviors, and practices which have evolved as a result of having been mentored.

The research questions were designed to explore the ways in which teachers use their mentoring experiences to shape their overall professionalism; that is, how they work with other teachers, how they work with parents, how they engage students, how they participate in the school structure, etc. Specifically, teachers' reflections of their mentoring experiences were guided by the following questions:

1. How have teachers used their mentoring experiences to shape their personal sense of what it means to be a teacher?

2. How have mentored teachers used his/her mentoring experience in developing their instructional practices?

3. How have mentored teachers used their mentoring experience to shape their overall professional orientation and behaviors, i.e. how they work with colleagues; how they shape their classroom community; and how they engage students and work with them?

**Data Collection Procedures**

The method used to collect data in this study was experiential narrative primarily through in-depth interviews. Because this study centered on the issues of mentored teachers, the data is a collection of the participants' experiences through conversations, personal documents (e.g., participant journals, mentor meeting notes, and feedback sheets), observations, and other artifacts the teacher-participants believed illustrate who they are or have had an impact. Field notes were used to document interactions and personal conversations with informants. Semi-structured questions guided conversations with participants. The interviews conducted for this study utilized specific and issue-oriented focused questions to facilitate the conversations and explore informants' experiences (Hatch, 2002; Mishler, 1986; Spradley, 1979).

Through interviews, the researcher constructed narrative accounts of the meanings given of mentoring experiences. The retelling of experiences is where potential learning occurs. The goal is to uncover meaning which has had significance, by the descriptions of the behaviors of mentored teachers. Throughout the process, the researcher probed

teachers' reflections of behaviors learned as a result of formal mentoring.

Each interview was audio-taped and field notes written on the interview protocol form, including instructions to the interviewer and key research questions, as suggested by Creswell (2003). Following each interview, the recorded conversation was transcribed by a transcriptionist who worked closely with the researcher. The anonymity of the participants was protected by the use of identification numbers before any audio recordings are turned over for transcribing. Identifying information was excluded from the written transcription for participant anonymity as well. All information collected was kept in a secure location to ensure confidentiality.

The researcher asked participants to allow for one hour for initial interviews. Follow-up interviews and observations were scheduled as appropriate for clarification purposes and opportunities to further dialogue with participants about their current teaching environments (see Appendix C for teacher cover letter and invitation).

**Instrumentation**

Questionnaires for initial participant screenings, document artifacts, interview questions and audio-recorded interviews are the instruments that were utilized in this study. Open-ended questions, with follow-up probing questions guided the interviews as participants described their mentoring experiences. Each interview was designed to be an exploration of personal reflections of the formal mentoring experience. Each interview began with an open-ended prompt designed to allow the telling of their mentoring story (see Appendix D for interview questions and researcher script).

**Timeline**

Rossman and Rallis (1998) and Creswell (2003), found the process of establishing

a deeper understanding of data and creating larger meaning is based on interpretation of the data.  This includes organizing and preparing data for analysis.  The complete analysis (i.e., transcribing interviews, typing field notes, and sorting and arranging data, interview and field notes) took several months to glean specific information into general codes and reflect upon the overall meaning of collected data.

**Details and sequence of data collection procedures.**  The data collected includes recorded interviews, classroom observations, artifacts, and reflective journals. The sequence for data collection included: (a) participant interviews and artifact sharing; (b) classroom observations; and (c) follow-up interviews as part of the internal validity processes.  The researcher used reflective self-journaling throughout each phase to track thoughts, perspectives, and to reveal potential bias.

The sequence of collected data and notes guided the creation of narratives which will be included later in the study.  The participants shared their stories and experiences during interviews and observations with the researcher.  This information was organized, and data was stored for constructing narratives and reporting findings described in Chapter IV.

One hour was allotted for initial interviews.  During the interview session, participants were encouraged to share personal artifacts that illustrate: (a) who they are as teachers; (b) the general impact of their mentoring experiences; or (c) the way the mentoring experience impacted their instructional practices specifically (e.g., diaries, sample lessons, etc.).  Participants were not required to share a specific number or type of artifact with the research, but were encouraged to offer any at their disposal that might help illustrate the points the interviewee is making in the narrative of the interview.

All interviews were audio recorded and field notes written on interview coding sheets (see Appendix E). Interview questions were be semi-structured, with some pre-determined questions, allowing for "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (Yin, 2009, p.106). Each interview began with an open-ended prompt, allowing participants to begin sharing their history, and included probing questions to keep conversation flowing, encouraging participants to reflect on the essentials of their experiences.

Additionally, a researcher journal was maintained throughout the study to document comments and actions observed by the researcher, which may not have been elicited through the direct interview and observation processes. Journal notes were used in developing follow-up questions in subsequent interviews.

Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The interviews were transcribed and documented on an interview coding sheet. Participants were assigned an individualized number code for ease of identification, and were tracked by an assigned code throughout the study. Interview and researcher notes were categorized by identification codes. The researcher reviewed data from the interview phase of the study before embarking on the next phase of data collection, the classroom observations.

A target of two hours maximum was designated for observations. The observations were used to explore the interactions of participants in their natural settings. Observations enhance the reliability of collected data (Rudney, 2003). Triangulating the interview and artifact data sources with observations adds support to participants' self-described actions. More specifically, triangulating with observations helped the researcher assess whether different evidence yields similar conclusions as teachers' own

perceptions (Rudney, 2003). Triangulating the phenomenon's overall evidentiary data, including artifacts, observations and interviews offers comparative measures which enhance trustworthiness of the narratives constructed.

The researcher recorded observations using observation forms (see Appendix F), and included descriptive and reflective field notes. The researcher's journal was used to summarize thoughts and ideas, as well as the researcher's impressions. The observation form documented interactions between the participant and the classroom and school environment (e.g., comments and discussions). The researcher did not record identifying information of others in participants' school environments. Measuring participants' descriptions against the researcher's observations enriched the textural layers and increased the credibility of narratives.

Additional procedural sequencing included follow-up interviews with participants. Follow-up interviews allowed the opportunity to clarify researcher's understandings and hunches against participants' interpretations of their own responses, actions, and interactions. As part of a feedback loop, these secondary interviews checked the accuracy of the interpretations and understandings of data collected as recommended by Creswell (2003). Follow-up interviews reviewed emerging issues from the initial phases of data collection. Follow-up interview questions were specific and based on the summary of data collected from researcher notes, transcribed interviews, artifacts, and observations. All follow-up interviews were transcribed for interpretation and interview field notes were documented in the researcher's journal.

**Sites, Sampling, Subjects, Access, and Setting**

The identification and selection of participants for the study involved a multistage

procedure where the researcher sampled school districts and elementary school sites which met the study's characteristics, obtained the names of individuals within each school, identified and obtained the names of potential study subjects, and then sampled within the pool of subjects.  The specifics of this process are identified below.

**Sites.**  The researcher utilized the Michigan schools data-base to identify districts in the southwestern quadrant of Michigan.  This facilitated access for multiple interactions with participants and researcher.  From the pool of possible sites, the researcher identified districts and elementary schools that have mentoring programs that met the following characteristics: (a) programs that begin with orientation before or as new teachers start working; (b) a plan for regular, ongoing interactions between mentors and mentees; (c) programs which have some guided structure for interactions (e.g., identification of goals and topics); and (d) mentor-mentee interactions which take place over the course of a school year or longer at minimum.

**Sampling.**  To find elementary schools that met specific study requirements, the researcher used three strategies: (1) snowball sampling, (2) criterion sampling, and (3) rotational random-sampling.  Snowball sampling includes selecting districts that fit the study's criteria, and identifying additional elementary schools with mentoring programs. The researcher contacted intermediate school districts (ISDs), instructional and curricular specialists, or directors of mentoring programs.  From these sources, the researcher contacted superintendents in the southwest Michigan area to explain the study and obtain permission before approaching any individual schools (see Appendix G).  The researcher continued this technique until obtaining ten districts willing to participate in the study. The researcher contacted then elementary principals to explain the study and request

names of mentored teachers within their buildings.

Criterion sampling was used to create a pool of participants. Criterion sampling includes participants who meet predetermined characteristics identified for in-depth, qualitative analysis (Palton, 2002). The pool of potential study participants was identified by a screening questionnaire (see Appendix H). The data collected in the questionnaires generated a pool of 15 potential teacher-participants from the elementary school sites. At this stage, a rotational random sample was used to extend invitations for participation.

Creswell (2003) defined random sampling as individuals in the targeted population with an equal opportunity of being selected for the study (p. 156). The researcher rotated the school sites, extending an invitation to one mentored teacher before moving on to the next school site of the identified teacher pool. The rotation was based upon the teacher's willingness to participate in the study. Once a teacher agreed to participate in the study, the researcher rotated to the next site and teachers within that pool. This rotation was repeated until eight teachers from the pool agreed to participate in the study.

The sample size was determined with practical considerations of qualitative research inquiry. Qualitative inquiries are information-rich, including in-depth exploration of the phenomenon as shared by the participants. Hatch (2002) identified the importance of "human-connectedness" characterized by building rapport, and listening and learning about participants before beginning the data-collection process. Unlike quantitative research, which aims for larger samples in order to seek statistical significance (Miles, & Huberman, 1994, p. 26), qualitative research work with smaller

samples; people nested in the context of their experience and studied in-depth.  Limiting

the research study to eight participants was purposive; the intensity and exploration of the

conversations attempted to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and the

contextual data of in-depth interviews was co-created with input from the teacher

participants.

**Subjects.**  Study participants were elementary teachers who have participated in

and completed a formal mentoring program.  Participants were selected from a pool of

teachers with at least one year of teaching experience, and who were between one to five

years beyond the completion of their mentoring experience prior to an invitation being

extended to participate in the research study.  The participants were available for a one-

hour in-depth interview and follow-up interviews as needed.  They also allowed the

researcher to shadow and observe them in their classrooms.  The observation provided

context of what was shared during the initial interview to better understand the teachers'

stories.  The data was collected over a period of one to two months, with the researcher

spending one to three days with each participant.

**Access.**  The researcher obtained permission to conduct research from Western

Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board ([HSIRB] see

Appendix I).  The researcher provided study information to obtain permission from

school district offices (i.e., superintendents or designee) before approaching any potential

school sites.  The researcher also provided research study information to building

principals to gain access to participants within their school settings.  E-vites and

information flyers were given to teachers within chosen sites, including a screening

questionnaire for the pool of teachers.  The screening questionnaire was utilized as

confirmation of criteria inclusion and validity.  The researcher made follow-up contacts with teachers who express an interest in being included in the study.  Finally, identified participants received information about the study, an informed consent form (see Appendix J) including a cover letter outlining interview questions in the study.

**Setting.**  Much of qualitative inquiry takes place in the subjects' natural setting, and according to Creswell (2003) allows the researcher to develop a level of detail about the participant in his or her natural environment.  Research settings for this study will be public areas (e.g., classrooms, school hallways, offices) as determined upon mutual agreement between the participants and the researcher.

### Data Analysis

According to Hatch (2002), data analyses are defining elements of all qualitative research.  The purpose of analysis is to bring an understanding to complex social phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a precise, statistical relationship.  There are multiple meanings in any social phenomenon.  Authors Hesse-Biber and Levy (2006) argued interpretive epistemology as a challenge to objectivity.  The implications are different social actors may in fact understand social reality differently, producing different meanings and analysis (p. 78).  Denzin (2000) and Hesse-Biber and Levy (2006) posited the art of interpretation in qualitative analysis described as moving from the field to the text, and finally, to the reader.  According to Denzin, "The practice of this art allows the field-worker-as-bricoleur…to translate what has been learned into a body of textual work that communicates understanding" (p. 344).

The orientation of this study allowed the researcher to analyze and treat social actions and participant activity as part of the text.  Researchers with more general

interpretive orientations are likely to organize data in order to uncover patterns of human activity, action and meaning (Berg, 2004). The theoretical orientation for this study's analysis was inductive. The manner in which the data collected was through a combination of open-ended, semi-structured in-depth interviews, as well as observations, all of which lend analysis towards capturing the essence of the mentoring phenomenon.

Qualitative analysis is an iterative process of data collection and analysis. The processes proceed simultaneously and it is important to begin analysis right at the beginning data collection (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). The authors recommended writing complete notes each time, creating an audit-trail to allow for better management of the thick descriptions found in open-ended and in-depth interviewing settings. Writing memos after the first in-depth interview tells the researcher which ideas seem sensible and which questions need re-evaluating. Creating memos early on and in a manner that makes sense to the researcher is recommended. "Memo-ing" and re-evaluation of interview questions are important tasks in data collection. Testing and incorporating hypotheses to make assessments of what themes emerge is also recommended.

Reflecting how data fits or does not fit together are important functions of generating analysis from the interview data according to Karp (personal communication, 2004 as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). The authors described data analysis notes as notes gathered "on-the-fly," and the interviewer's "thick descriptions" notes as researchers' brainstorming tools, an analysis of "the analysis" so to speak. These data analysis notes are valuable to the researcher because they contain the innermost hunches of what the learning has meant thus far (p. 259).

Computer-aided programs make analysis procedures systematic, permitting

flexibility in analysis revisions. *Atlas.ti* is a recommended program (Creswell, 2008) for coding and annotation and comparing segments of information, while building networks that visually connect selected passages, memos, and codes in a concept map.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analyzed in this study utilizing an inductive approach; the commonalities of what was revealed through the narrative stories and interpreted by the researcher with the assistance of the participants. The specific instances, perspectives and experiences of participants' were transformed by what Wolcott (1994) and Hatch (2002) called "making sense," and giving meaning to the storied-data and by generating explanations and developing insights to extrapolate lessons (p. 180, Hatch, 2002; see also Denzin, 1989b, 1994; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Patton, 1990).

The participants helped guide the research project by sharing stories and experiences, including classroom observations and any personal document artifacts. This helped the researcher construct a written narrative of the meanings each participant attributed to his or her experiences. Hatch (2002) posited the quality of interpretative analysis is in direct proportion to the richness of the data (p. 190), and constructivist's assumptions are a natural fit with the interpretive analysis model when approached under narratives and hermeneutic phenomenologies (p. 191).

Hatch (2002) found including unobtrusive data for analysis allows for interpretive analysis to be more meaningful. Hatch further stated, in any study design, the analysis should be guided in a systematic fashion which generates interpretation and grounding in the findings (p. 191). The described advantages in document collection, according to Creswell (1993), enabled the researcher to obtain information in an unobtrusive manner.

For this study, the collected and analyzed data included in-depth interviews, document artifacts shared by participants, and the researcher's observations of participants in their classrooms and school settings.  Participants were invited to share experiences through conversations and personal artifacts which they feel: (a) illustrate who they are teachers; (b) have impacted their mentoring experiences; or (c) impacted their instructional practices (e.g., sample lessons, personal notes, etc.).  The artifacts were not required for study participation and were only discussed as part of conversation.  Artifacts provide unobtrusive methods that offer evidence of a participant's values (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.107) and support the written narratives.

The process of organizing and preparing data into meaningful information is the most challenging, yet most relevant part of research collection and analysis.  Creswell (2003), Merriam (1988), and Marshall and Rossman (1989) contend data collection and analysis work in tandem, with each seeking to identify and describe patterns and themes from the perspective of the participant, while also attempting to define and explain patterns and themes (p. 203).  The phases of data analysis are iterative: recording, reviewing and then cycling back between the data to build a deeper, richer understanding of the information shared.  The analysis of large amounts of data, including interview transcriptions can be overwhelming.

The researcher used observations to learn more about the participant's overall professional orientations and behaviors as described.  Observation assesses the accuracy of findings from the researcher's standpoint, identifying the trustworthiness of what information participants' have shared.  This also allowed the researcher to compare her own impressions to specific descriptions given by the participants.  Another purpose of

observations during data collection was to record and observe participants' behaviors and interactions which have not been expressed verbally. Creswell (1994; 2003) suggested that observations allow the first-hand account; triangulating data collected which strengthens reliability as well as internal validity of findings (p. 203; see also Merriman, 1988). The researcher wrote in her journal about participants' expressions and interactions with others, including any non-verbal gestures (e.g., laughter, tears, hugs, etc.) as well.

During data analysis, Creswell (2003) recommends organizing data categorically and chronologically, while reviewing, reading and re-reading throughout (p. 203). This involves reading through all the data to obtain the general essence of the information presented and finally "chunking" and coding text (Creswell).

The participant interviews were audio recorded. Recordings were reviewed and edited for participant anonymity by the researcher before being sent to be transcribed, verbatim, and then returned to the researcher, who reviewed them to glean insights and an overall sense of what has been shared. Hatch (2002) found the parallels between interpretive and inductive analysis models construct meaningful explanations and help make sense of what is being examined and recommends the researcher's immersion in reading and rereading data (p. 181). The integrity of analysis is dependent upon the researcher's ability to analyze data and link meaning through reading data. This step includes identifying and recording impressions as a deliberate attempt to guide the researcher in making sense of all that is going on in the data (Hatch, 2002). This occurs simultaneously, as the researcher makes notes and creates assessments of the themes captured during the interview process, including researcher reflections via journaling,

reviewing transcriptions, self-memos and interpretations to bracket researcher's own views (Lichtman, 2006); and then what has been bracketed for further interpretation development (Hatch, 2002).

Creswell (2003) recommended the reduction of data by patterns, categories, or themes for further interpretation (p. 154). This includes using schema, extracting general, unique themes from interviews, and synthesizing a composite summary to be shared with participants to clarify understandings and that stories have been appropriately documented.

Additionally, the meanings attributed to the phenomenon must include member checks with participants. This phase of analysis is inclusive of the constructivist perspective framework (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher summarized interviews, transcriptions, journals, and impressions before returning to the participants for validation to ensure the essence of the interview has been correctly captured. Bracketing or "reviewing impressions" includes recording researcher's personal thoughts along the way as the analysis process unfolds and is recommended by Hatch (2002, p. 182). The suggestion of the researcher employing feedback loops with participants ensures accurate interpretation of participants' experiences and researcher's interpretations of those experiences, and is a recommended step to ensure the trustworthiness of findings (Creswell, 2003).

Follow-up interviews were conducted to allow researcher to clarify questions that emerged from initial interviews and observations. The researcher made assessments of the themes captured during the interview process with the teacher participants. Rubin and Rubin (1995) reminded that themes heard in early interviews can be the subject of

follow-up and summary review in subsequent interviews (p. 166). The time spent with participants during follow-up interviews clarify the researcher's understanding and interpretations as well as involve the participants in the co-creation of the narratives, ensuring the truth value of data analysis and internal validity (Creswell, 1994; 2003).

**Reliability of Data**

Validity does not carry the same connotation in qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research stresses the importance of interpretation; that is, how individuals experience their lived reality. Validity checks through triangulation are designed to capture multiple perspectives. Norman (2003) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) discussed qualitative research as being measured from an issue of reliability, meaning the reasonableness of the gathered data, and how well it fits together with consistencies in the observations which have been conducted or within different social contexts. Creswell (2003) recommended researchers use reliability checks for consistent patterns or themes. The collective narratives of respondents' experiences were synthesized by common themes of all as consistent within the phenomenological tradition (Creswell, 1994).

**Trustworthiness**

Hesse-Biber and Levy (2006) pointed to the conversational flow, characteristic of in-depth inquiries, which provide opportunities to bond with participants. As noted, the researcher was once a previously mentored teacher; and this insider status is an opportunity and warning. Remaining objective and "distant" from shared stories will keep the researcher from revealing personal values towards mentoring.

Qualitative research focuses on the manner in which participants make sense of

their experiences (Creswell, 2003); it is the attempt to understand multiple realities (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). To ensure trustworthiness of themes revealed, member checks and 'feedback' loops, including follow-up interviews, were used to ensure researcher's accuracy of interpretations.

The general term for representing and measuring the internal and external quality of investigation is *trustworthiness*. Guba and Lincoln (1981), Rudestam and Newton (2001), and Schwandt (2001) noted the four criteria that serve as the naturalist's equivalents to this conventional term: (1) credibility, (2) dependability, (3) conformability, and (4) transferability.

**Credibility.** In naturalistic inquiry, credibility is referred to internal validity or truth-value ascertained through structural corroboration (Rudestam & Newton, 2001) and is the benchmark for inquiry (Schwandt, 2001). This is obtained through the researcher's engagement with participants. The quality of the study's findings is determined by reconstruction and representation of what has been shared (Schwandt). Credibility is subjective, rather than objective; and the plausibility of findings lay is subject to each individual (Krathwohl, 1993, p. 296).

**Dependability.** This term is parallel to reliability, and ensures the data collection process was logical, traceable and documented accordingly (Schwandt, 2001). The researcher recorded interviews, and analyzed transcripts and field notes for coding and categorizing results. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) recommended writing complete notes each time, creating an audit-trail for better management of data collected.

**Conformability.** Creswell (2003) reminded that validity does not carry the same connotations in qualitative and quantitative research, and it is therefore necessary to

check accuracy of the data collected by allowing participants to review and clarify their experiences. Conformability is defined by linking interpretations of findings in discernable ways (Schwandt, 2001). Allowing member-checks of transcripts is an example. Descriptive narratives were co-constructed with participants, by providing the opportunity to view written reconstruction of interviews, to verify and check for accuracy of the phenomenon (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Finally, the procedural steps employed include feedback checks, allowing participants to review transcripts and statements made during data collection.

**Transferability.** A fourth way of viewing validity is to think in terms of the reader. Merriam (1998) defines the reader or user generalizations to the extent of which findings are applicable to other situations including the people in those situations.

## Limitations and Delimitations

The intent of the study was to create a deeper understanding of how mentoring has influenced mentored teachers. The data was collected through using observations and a combination of structured in-depth, open-ended interviews with participants. The study was limited to participants who are newer, elementary school teachers with less than ten years of experience, who have participated and completed a formal mentoring experience within the past five years in the southwest quadrant of the Michigan area.

This study was designed to investigate the lived experiences of mentored teachers. A limitation to this type of study includes the 'interviewing' situation. A large part of in-depth interviewing is establishing rapport with others. People will only reveal their innermost thoughts when the environment is comfortable. The interviewer's role includes making participants feel comfortable. Participants may potentially reveal sensitive or

embarrassing information about themselves or others. This information may affect not only the participant, but other colleagues or staff at their school. It was important the researcher build rapport with participants and this includes assuming responsibility for establishing a level of trust, addressing questions, concerns and explaining all protective measures employed by the researcher to ensure participants' confidentiality.

Over the course of an interview, the conversation may veer off topic as participants share their experiences. Authors Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) argued the degree of structure imposed during the interview has an impact on the interview itself. It was, therefore, important for the researcher to utilize an interview guide, which was constructed prior to meeting with participants, as a way to 'steer' and direct conversations. During inquiry, the researcher was flexible and allowed both structured and more broadly framed questions to support the conversations that may evolve. The latitude and flexibility created made the interviews more of a conversation and less of an interrogation. This allowed for further exploration of details and experiences shared as the narrative process takes form.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

**Introduction**

In this chapter, thirteen teacher narratives offer insight into perceptions of the mentoring experience. Each of participant provided his or her personal definition of what it means to be a teacher, including how he or she approach his or her growth as an educator, how he or she engages others in the learning process, and the quality of his or her relationships with others within the school setting. Many of the participants described specific instances of the influence mentoring has had upon their careers.

**The Interview Process**

The researcher used observations to learn more about the participant's overall professional orientations and behaviors as described. As suggested by Creswell (1994; 2003) observations, collected data, and journaling that included impressions of interactions and non-verbal gestures strengthened the reliability and validity of the findings.

The information gathered through the use of instruments found in the Appendix was the basis of this research. More specifically, the findings of the study are the result of open-ended, semi-structured in-depth interviews, collected artifacts provided by the participants, and the researcher's observations.

The participant interviews were audio recorded, reviewed, and edited. The subsequent written transcriptions were analyzed for themes and sub-themes of each

participant interview.

## Participant Profiles

Table 1 is a profile summary of each participant included in the study. In-depth interviews were conducted with thirteen elementary teachers from seven schools in six school districts across the southwestern Michigan area. Three of the six districts were either urban or suburban, and the remaining three were rural districts. The student populations for the participating districts ranged from 700 to 12,000 students. Teacher participants met predetermined characteristics identified by the screening questionnaire found in Appendix I. Demographic information of participants included one male and 12 female participants. The participants had a variety of teaching assignments in their respective districts. There was one physical education teacher; three Kindergarten teachers; four 1st grade teachers; two 2nd grade teachers; one 4th grade teacher; and two 5th grade teachers. The number of years each participant taught ranged from 2 to 10 years, with three of the study's participants reporting that they included their experiences in charter, daycare and nursery schools as part of their total teaching years.

The details of the participants' experiences are accurate, yet participant names and specific information which identify their school districts have been either changed or omitted (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Profile*

| Name, Age, Ethnicity, and Gender | Current Assignment/ Other Grades Taught | School District Type and Size | Experience/No. of Districts | Initial or Second Career | Advice on mentoring from participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kimber, 29 years, White Female | Kindergarten/pre-K, 1st grade | Rural, 700 students | 6th year/one district | Initial career | "Ask questions. Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Be willing to grow and learn." |
| Charize, 27 years, White Female | Kindergarten/pre-K, 2nd grade | Rural, 2660 students | 4th year/ two districts | Initial career | "Listen to the mentor. Be open to feedback" |
| Jayla, 31 years, White Female | 1st grade/Kindergarten | Suburban, 2275 students | 4th year/one district | Initial career | "Veteran teachers are here to help, use them and learn from them." |
| Anesa, 34 years, White Female | Kindergarten/1st grade, 5th grade | Suburban, 2275 students | 5th year/two districts | Initial career | "Watch and observe. Look to other people to see what is successful." |
| Monique, 41years, White Female | Physical education only | Suburban, 2275 students | 4th year/one district | Second career | "Ask a lot of questions and let mentor show you the ropes." |
| Julia, 26 years, White Female | 4th grade/5th grade, 6th grade, middle school language arts | Suburban, 2275 students | 4th year/one district | Initial career | "Be open and honest. Listen and loosen up. Enjoy the experience." |
| Cydra, 38 years, Black Female | 1st grade only | Rural, 2300 Students | 3rd year/one district | Second career | "Share how you feel. Ask questions. Use the eyes, ears and voice of mentor." |
| Skyler, 50 years, Black Female | 5th grade only | Urban, 6850 students | 8th year/two districts | Second career | "Be honest and straight forward with your needs." |
| Olivia, 27 years, White Female | 1st grade only | Urban, 6850 students | 2nd year/one district | Initial career | "Carry a notebook and be prepared." |
| Laurel, 31 years, White Female | 2nd grade only | Urban, 6850 students | 6th year/one district | Initial career | "Do not be afraid to ask other for help. Ask questions." |
| Jeniece, 26 years, Black Female | 1st grade/Kindergarten | Urban, 11,400 students | 4th year/one district | Initial career | "Talk. Extend a hand to receive help" |
| Tyler, 35 years, Hispanic Male | 2nd grade/4th through 6th grade world language, Kindergarten | Urban, 11,400 students | 4th year/two districts | Second career | "Be coachable. Do not take it personal." |
| Brooke, 30 years, Black Female | 5th grade/Kindergarten and 4th grade | Urban, 11,400 students | 4th year/one district | Initial career | "Ask mentors to model. Ask for help, support, tips and strategies." |

## The Participants' Stories

### Kimber's Story

Kimber is 29 years old. She has taught pre-school and Kindergarten during her six years as a teacher. Kimber hails from a small, predominately Caucasian, homogenous community in the upper peninsula of Michigan, and has taught in the same southwestern Michigan school district the span of her six-year career. During her tenure, she has published several articles in resource magazines for teachers.

**Kimber's views of the mentoring experience.** Mentoring, according to Kimber, helped her become more introspective of who she is as a teacher. She states:

> In the first couple of years, I did take everything personally. Initially, I interpreted constructive feedback as an assault on me personally. Mentoring has made me more open to feedback. My mentor helped me see that part of the learning process is feedback. Now, I actually seek it out from others, not just my mentor, but from colleagues.

> Having a mentor the last few years kind of helped me process (see myself). My mentor led me through different protocols including how to look at student work. During this protocol, I discovered that it wasn't about who was doing the best work or what you (as a teacher) was doing better than someone else. I learned how to look at the work and see what improvements could be made.

**A teacher defined by Kimber.** The role of a teacher is a person who facilitates learning of children, making students independent. Specifically:

> A teacher facilitates learning. I told my students that my goal is to make them not need me, to teach them what they need so at the end of the year they do not need me…A teacher's job is to be here for kids.

Kimber viewed her mentoring experiences as the opportunity to grow, receive feedback, and advised that new teachers need not be afraid to make mistakes.

> A teacher is a person who is always learning; always looking for feedback from other people about how to improve and always looking for ways to share ideas and to be a help to beginning teachers; a resource who

facilitates his/her own learning or that of someone else.

**Kimber's instructional practices.** Kimber had mixed feelings of the influence

mentoring has had on her personally and professionally:

> My mentor at that time had not taught the grade level that I had been
> assigned.  Therefore, my mentor was not as helpful in answering specific
> teaching questions, as my teammate.  It was my teammate, my colleague
> who assisted me the most with teaching strategies.

> My mentor was very helpful in bringing me through different protocols,
> for example, paperwork and the "ins" and "outs" of the way the district
> worked.

**Kimber's professional relationships with others.** Kimber admits that she has

been influenced, in part by the mentoring experience and shared how it has developed her

self-confidence:

> I could not present myself as someone who had something to offer other
> than "I'm just here to learn from everyone else."  I felt young…all the
> parents were older than me and I felt like they wouldn't respect what I had
> to say.

> I wanted to be neutral in everything, and now through the experience, I
> feel that I have something to offer to my colleagues.  I know how to
> approach them without stepping on their toes.

## Charize's Story

Charize grew up in rural southwestern Michigan.  She is a fourth year teacher,

who, due to district lay-offs, has worked in two school districts the past several years.

**Charize defines the role of a teacher.** This is an important role to Charize, one

that is characterized by respectful relationships between the teacher and students.

Charize defines being a teacher as a person who exhibits patience, is reflective of her

work, all the time.  She describes her first teaching experiences:

> When you first start (teaching) you have so much on your mind that you
> do not take time to be too specific and you are just trying to catch your

breath. Once I began putting things into place, establishing routines and finding out what works; then I was able to concentrate more in different (curricular) areas and become better in those areas. I felt like I am able to focus on the work, and not just getting through the school day.

Charize further defined how the mentoring experience assisted in her personal evolution of becoming a teacher, unpacking what being reflective meant as part of a character trait in her definition of a teacher.

Mentoring played a part of my thinking that a teacher should be patient and reflective. A particular experience I recall is when I was plowing through a lesson and I could tell the kids were struggling, and they (class) began to misbehave. I was getting frustrated. My mentor (who was observing) told me that when I feel frustrated, the kids start feeling that as well. She advised when the misbehaviors start, I must keep my cool, maintain respect and stop what I am doing (lesson or activity).

It was the mentor who pointed out that I do not need to wait until the end of the day to figure out what to do differently. She advised that I should self-check and re-adjust my teaching throughout the day; if a lesson doesn't go well, re-try it the next day, or do it again later in the day. She also recommended that I write notes to myself. This was a breaking point for me. Mentoring has made me continually look at myself and to be reflective of my work all of the time…so that I continue to grow and figure out what is my role (as a teacher). I look at my instructional practices, my use of multiple intelligences (utilized throughout the day) and my engagement with kids.

I know I am a lot more patient. Every day will have its challenges, so I know to expect them. In the beginning, if something wasn't working, I thought that I was no good. I took it really personal. My mentor walked me through (many of the challenges). I still journal at the end of each day and think through my reflections. I go back to (previous) journals to help me get started for the next year.

**Charize's instructional practices.** Charize has approached her instruction and teaching practices utilizing multiple strategies that she learned from her mentor. Charize described the importance of using curriculum guides as a "guide" and the sage advice of her mentor who repeatedly stated that, "the teacher" is the curriculum, whose responsibility it is to "fill-in" or "delete" as necessary to help (her) students' access and

understand what is taught.

**Jayla's Story**

Jayla describes herself as being destined to be a teacher. She knew at an early age that she would one day be a teacher. Jayla reported always loving school and her teachers. During her high school experience, Jayla participated in a program that allowed her to intern in an elementary school and job-shadow a teacher; she even tutored a small group of children in the teacher's classroom. Jayla is a fourth year teacher, and prior to teaching fulltime, she substitute taught for two years.

**The role of a teacher according to Jayla.** Jayla defined her initial teaching experience as "flustery." She was frustrated with herself because she was not as organized as she imagined she should be. Some of her frustration also originated from not clearly defining the role of a teacher. She felt conflicted with what teachers actually do as a matter of practice, and what she was comfortable doing in her role:

> At first I thought a teacher was the "giver" of facts. After watching my mentor and her interactions with children, and her relationships with parents, I realized that a teacher wore so many more hats than just that of an information giver. You hear a lot of teachers say they are counselors, social workers and all this stuff, but my mentor embodied all of that. I began to realize that I have to be all of that…the "school" mommy, the counselor…and everything else. I learned that a teacher wears many hats. I just saw these roles that my mentor took on and it changed my view. I was more than just a fact giver. I have to be everything else as well for my kids.

Jayla credits her acceptance of the "school mom" role as making her more in-tune to the needs of the children in her classroom and this awareness has made her a better teacher.

**Relationships with others.** Relationships with others was another area Jayla felt her mentor assisted in shaping for her. By Jayla's acknowledgement, she did not have

open communication with others, specifically parents, in her school community.

> I always kind of thought that you just went along with whatever the parents wanted. I would not stand up for myself. My mentor coached me through a difficult parent issue. I was so nervous. She rehearsed and role-played the conversation with me before I called the parent and even checked on me after the phone call to make sure that I was okay.

> My mentor has reassured me in other situations too…It is nice to have someone to bounce stuff off of because I am not sure how I will come across to others, and it is important to get feedback. My mentor has given me suggestions of how to approach conversations and how to share my own voice when I disagree with others.

With colleagues, Jayla credits the "voice" she now uses to communicate her opinions or messages to others as a direct influence of her personal mentoring experience:

> The paraprofessionals in the building have been here longer than me. There were things that I needed done in my classroom or I wanted the paraprofessionals to work with particular students. I always worried that I was overstepping or hurting people's feelings. My mentor reassured me that the paraprofessionals are support staff for the teacher and the students; and as the teacher, it was my responsibility to guide their work. My mentor reassured me that it was okay to direct the work of the paraprofessionals and not worry so much about "rocking the boat."

**Anesa's Story**

Teaching is a second career choice for Anesa. Initially she was interested in pursuing sociology. When she was unable to get into a social work program, she came upon an opportunity to volunteer in an elementary school and discovered that she enjoyed working with children.

**Initial teaching experiences and mentor support.** Anesa has taught five years in public schools. Prior to teaching in public schools, she had two years of experience as the lead instructor of a pre-school HEAD-START program. She describes feeling unsuccessful and stressed during her first year of teaching in a public school setting:

It was very nerve-wrecking. I would do my best and I did not feel successful. I had moved to Michigan from a different state and there were a lot of different requirements (for teaching). Because I was coming from out-of-state, I had to do this whole program with the other beginning teachers in my district. This was an added stress because they (mentors) had us doing additional things to stay ahead…like how to manage a class and all of those fun things. I thought it was more like overkill, because I had covered that in college. I received a mentor for part of the year, but then I changed grade levels mid-year (due to student enrollment). (*Note*: Anesa moved from Kindergarten to 5th grade). I no longer had a mentor assigned to me, and I had to go to the other teachers when I had questions.

Teaching is stressful and mentoring did give me a person to go to for support, but I learned that I had to go ask questions of anyone that I thought had a good answer for me. Anybody can be a mentor…If I see something that I like, then I'll ask that person questions....there is another teacher (who is not the assigned mentor) that I think is awesome. She shared things that I have incorporated in my own teaching.

**Role of a teacher.** Anesa described a teacher's role of one who encourages kids to develop into being good citizens.

Teachers help students by encouraging kids to like to learn and to study and grow into good future citizens. A teacher maximizes his/her students' ability to learn new materials, so that students have successes in their lives. Teachers are a part of the student's growing process.

## Monique's Story

Monique decided to pursue a teaching license after coaching sports in her community and being told by others that she would make a great teacher. She also said at the time she felt "bored" with being a stay-at-home mom. She began coaching sports at the middle and high school levels, and also volunteered at her own children's elementary school and discovered that she really enjoyed working with kids. After subbing as a physical education teacher in the same district for two years, Monique is now a 4th year elementary physical education (PE) teacher at her school.

**Monique's evolution.** With the exception of her biological children, much of Monique's experiences have been with older children. She readily admits that she did not demonstrate patience for the age group which she found herself working most closely, and viewed their abilities from a technical framework. It was during the time that Monique began working in the elementary environment that she decided to refocus her views and her approach towards teaching.

Her initial experiences in the lower elementary school is where Monique credits her own "awakening" and insight of the role elementary teachers play in the lives of students. Monique stated feeling frustrated in spending time helping younger students develop their techniques and ability. She often associated the lack of student mastery of physical skills to the holes within her PE curriculum.

> I primarily did things at the secondary level and working with elementary was not my sphere of teaching. It was a huge obstacle. I was implementing a new district curriculum for fitness (The Carol White PE Grant) and I was following the program grant to a "T." I had lots of complaints from kids and parents. It was driving me batty. I was thinking, "This is the job, but I can really make a difference." I had to develop a better understanding and more patience to deal with the age bracket that I was teaching. And I am becoming more patient, which is a good thing in the long run. This (experience) has helped me step back and think about why I became a teacher. I had to let some of those "technical" things go and look at the students from a different perspective, reflect on what I am teaching and then apply it to help students.

> I am constantly learning. I have to step back and analyze the whole picture…experience has helped in my reflections. Bottom line, I truly have passion for what I do…when I see that smile on a kid's face after making that perfect technique basketball shot and actually gets a basket doing it, it is gratifying. I just love it.

**Lessons learned from the mentoring experience.** Monique does not credit mentoring or a mentor's influence on her teaching practices. Her mentors were not specialist teachers and in her opinion, were unable to provide direct support of Monique's

subject area.  Monique does credit her mentor for being a sounding board and providing

encouragement during the first few years.  She readily acknowledges the help her mentor

provided her in being more understanding and patient with others in the school

community.  Having developed her own professional and personal emotional support

system, Monique utilized her mentor for moral support and applauds her mentor for being

a sounding board for the interpersonal conflicts Monique found herself a part of during

her first two years in the school district.

> My mentor is a good friend of mine.  She was assigned to me, but she was
> not a PE teacher.  The mentor helped me deal with other teachers in the
> building; she was a buffer for (me).  Many of the other teachers did not
> like some of the changes that I made to the PE program and my mentor
> acted as an advocate; she had worked with the other teachers longer and
> would tell them "change is good….or you've got to give Monique a
> chance."  She was a buffer!  I am the type of person who would fly off the
> handle…she would allow me to vent (my frustrations).  My mentor
> listened and she saw my side.  She has been an inspiration to me…she was
> always positive and encouraged me to give it a chance.
>
> I have developed a better understanding of colleagues.  I am wiser and
> more patient.  Although I am not sure that mentoring has helped in my
> reflections, but if I had any issues, I would go to my mentor and vent to
> her before going to another teacher because my mentor is also a personal
> friend.

**Julia's Story**

Julia made the decision to become a teacher after discussing career opportunities

with her parents.  She described not having many experiences with children outside of

babysitting, yet she toyed with the idea of pursuing a college degree in education.

Shortly after graduating from high school, Julia was still undecided about her career path

and she began a summer job working part-time in a daycare to see if she really wanted to

work with children.  She describes "falling in love" while working as a paraprofessional

in the daycare program.  Shortly after the summer job ended, Julia made her decision

official. She enrolled at Western Michigan University because of its reputation of being a good teaching school. After Julia declared a major in elementary education, she interned in a young-fives preschool program under the direction of a veteran teacher with 30 years of experience. Julia describes this teacher as her first mentor.

Julia is in her fourth year of teaching. Her teaching experience includes 4th, 5th, and 8th grade classrooms. She is currently teaching in a 4th grade classroom again. Julia reported that she would have likely been pink-slipped had she not been willing to move to different grade levels within her school district. Because Julia is a newer teacher, she anticipated having to be flexible in her teaching assignments. Julia describes her principal as encouraging, yet realistic. The principal shared that the reality of remaining in the building meant that Julia would have to switch to a different grade level to keep from being laid off. Subsequently, Julia has taught in three different grade levels in the past four years. Yet Julia states that she is appreciative of the opportunity and has taken her experiences in stride.

**The description of a teacher.** Julia describes feeling excited about her first teaching assignment, so excited that she spent the summer before school began preparing for what she felt were important tasks in this new role.

> I was so excited to be in the classroom. I spent the summer decorating the room! It was all surface stuff that I was doing to get ready for school. (I thought) it was more about the parents, the newsletters and planning classroom parties…I put a lot of effort and time in all of those areas. None of my activities had anything to do with teaching or the GLCE's (Grade Level Content Expectations). I look back at myself... (Laughs)…did I really spend all that time looking for clip-art images for my newsletters? What was I *thinking*?

**The mentor plus more.** Julia found herself struggling in quite a few areas, including classroom management. Julia described feeling unfocused because she had not

established routines and did not know where to start. She decided to seek out her mentor

for advice.

> My mentor was always modeling. She shared humor and stories and made me feel as if we were in the same boat. My mentor felt like a combination of a mom, a friend, and an advocate.

> I would ask my mentor stuff like "what are good activities to do with kids after recess?" She responded by asking me what were my key academic goals for the students each day? My daily focus had been on activities, and daily schedules….nothing curricular. She worked with me on understanding curricular activities which were student centered and helped me begin to look at a curricular schedule (and pacing my lessons).

> I'm more focused on student mastery than a timed schedule. I constantly monitor "who was paying attention." I am thoughtful about who I call on and I want to build (student's) confidence, but I also evaluate and ask myself "why should they pay attention?" My mentor helped me to focus and to begin to assess the kids' academic needs and determine based on assessments what I need to re-teach. Now I focus on goals…the academic ones.

Julia describes the support she received helped in making her more academically

accountable to her students; and seeking her mentor's advice in other areas of her

professional life.

> It was really helpful to see this (mentor) teacher model establishing a classroom community. Everyone in the classroom needs to participate and be respectful. I was worried my first year, because of the fighting among students in the class. I learned a lot from my mentor teacher. She modeled building a classroom community….she helped me work through student-to-student conflicts by conducting classroom meetings. I have used what she has modeled when I had to deal with a handful of dramatic 5th grade girls. My mentor helped me (facilitate) the discussions.

> My mentor also helped me create a positive discipline system, so that I would have a progressive system for addressing behaviors and a way to keep students on track. I developed small tips to make me constantly monitor my students and ask for their feedback or tips to make students feel more comfortable in the classroom, e.g. standing near someone who is not paying attention or tapping on their paper, not to embarrass them, but to let them know that I am aware that they are not paying attention. I have even watched my mentor give kids a (non-verbal) signal to be ready to be

called on for the next question, so he/she will be prepared with the answer.

Julia sought her mentor's advice in finding balance between career and her

personal life as well.

> I said "yes" to everything my first of teaching and took on duties that I
> shouldn't have. I was too intimidated to ask questions. I was unsure of
> my opinion and did not know what to say or not say. Now, I do have an
> opinion and I am thoughtful about what I will commit to.

**A new definition of teaching.** Julia's thoughts of the responsibility a teacher has

deepened from her initial experiences. She describes the role of a teacher in the

following manner:

> As a teacher it is important to instruct, and to constantly think what I can
> add to my instruction. For example with writing lessons, I think about
> what I will assess and go in-depth to see if students really understand. I do
> not just grade every little thing like I did in my first year. I use a specific
> rubric and give students feedback on that (objective).Using a rubric has
> been helpful in seeing what I needed to teach or explain in further detail.

> A teacher's role is to help students learn the curriculum and provide a safe
> environment, especially for struggling students. I want to ensure students'
> confidence by providing activities for their success.

**Engagement with others in the school community.** Julia stated how important

it is for her to have positive relationships with others, including students, in her school

community. By her own admission, experience in the middle school has helped shape

how she thinks about her presence, and how to be more effective in her interactions with

her students.

> I am not a strong disciplinarian. She (mentor) helped me change my
> approach of trying to be the students' friend and to be more confident and
> not emotionally attached to the consequences that students earned. I used
> to look for others to like me. I still want to be a teacher who is enjoyable,
> but I also must show authority. There is a lot less emotion attached to
> discipline. I tell students the consequences and speak calmly and keep
> moving on. During my first year I allowed my own emotions get in the
> way of student misbehaviors. I would renegotiate consequences.

Teaching 8$^{th}$ grade was a big eye opener that I needed to demonstrate authority to get respect. I taught 8$^{th}$ grade my second year and that was a tough year for me. Once I gave them an inch, they would take advantage of the situation. When I came back to the elementary building and I disciplined a student and they began to cry, I would change the consequence. I would negotiate with them and tell students if they would behave for the remainder of the afternoon, I would take away the consequence. I have since changed that.

## Cydra's Story

Cydra began her teaching career three years ago. She has been in the field of education for many years. Prior to teaching 1$^{st}$ grade, Cydra provided academic support for students as a paraprofessional in another local rural school community. She proudly boasts working as a support staff for many years has helped with her approach as the lead teacher in her own classroom.

**The road to teaching.** The impetus behind Cydra's motivation to complete her teaching degree began in 2006, when President Bush made it mandatory for all paraprofessionals and teacher assistants to have a minimum number of college credits to work in the school setting, and her school district offered financial assistance to make sure the support staff was highly qualified under the guidelines of NCLB.

I had spent seven years as a teacher's aide, and I was so close to completing my degree. I decided to return to school. It was easier and I was working for a district where they would pay for certain classes, so I took advantage of that and I went back (to school). I hustled, and I got my degree and here I am now.

**The role of a teacher.** Cydra's experiences as both the classroom teacher and as a paraprofessional provides a different lens, a broader perspective of the different roles a teacher should take on in the classroom setting. When asked how she has evolved from her initial experiences to her current teacher-self, she described teaching from very technical terms.

Initially I thought of teaching in terms of the manager of the curriculum. My first goals were to learn the curriculum. I was working for another district (as a paraprofessional) when I was hired as a teacher in my current district. It was summer, and I did not have a lot of time to digest (things). Although the state standards are the same (from one district to the next), I had no classroom experience in first grade. Being the person that I am, I am very well organized. I just wanted to get in there and learn the curriculum. My goal was to get organized, have theme-based activities, and make sure everything is filed systematically.

My first few months, I was all about organization, systems and structure. I was concerned and wanted to improve my pacing (of the curriculum). I think some of the challenges that I had to learn to accept, that you never get it all done. My effort to try to get it all done on any given day was frustrating. I'd come to work early, I'd stay late, I was correcting papers everywhere (at school, at home, at my kids' games). They were saying to me "Mom...that's enough. You need to spend time with us."

I was losing sleep (at home) trying to figure out what else I had to do…there is always something new to learn. My mentor kept saying to me "Oh no...you'll be fine," but it was at the point that I was not sleeping at night. My mind was still going…I had a pad by the bed and I would wake up and write down more stuff that I needed to do the next day.

**Teaching with new dimensions.** Cydra did not feel that her mentor teacher demonstrated great organizational skills, yet she did learn to lean on her mentor for help in other ways. Cydra's first year of teaching was about being organized, having systems and structures in place as well as ensuring her classroom had structure for her systems. By her own admission, Cydra's focus on organization did not help to broaden the definition of what a teacher does, nor did it help to build relationships with students or others in the school setting. Cydra's experience, however, did have an effect on her psyche and the role a teacher plays in the classroom environment.

My mentor helped me focus on pacing. Pacing and to work on a couple of standards at the same time. To slow down and to see what is important and to look at what the children are learning. That made a big difference. I had not really thought to see what the kids were learning.

My mentor would ask me questions that made me think about my students

differently.  My mentor taught me to be more of a nurturer.  In my first
year of teaching, I only dealt with the curriculum.  I looked at children
from a clinical perspective: Did they have support at home?  And my job
is to get them the basics. I wanted them reading.  I did not consider if they
had (my) support at school.  I would share situations with my mentor, and
she would talk me through it, offering perspectives I had not considered.
In typical situations, she would ask me about (student's) motives instead
of their behaviors.

My mentor helped me become introspective and more of a nurturer,
someone who "detects" needs of the children.  My first experiences were
all about organization and having systems and structures in place.  I
wanted things to look perfect...so everything had to be done by the
teacher.  I now look at things differently.  Learning is a process and the
parts of that process are the activities that I have prepared.  I have learned
(from my mentor) to make my evaluation of what students are learning
through observations of the children, not just be the finished product.  I
have also learned that assessments are not just by the end product, but
assessments tell me what I need to know about each child—if they are
really ready.

## Skyler's Story

Skyler worked many years in the corporate sector in the southern United States,

and after moving to Michigan, she entered the field of education, working as a teacher's

aide.  After one school year Skyler decided that she wanted to teach, and pursued

teaching as a second career after leaving the corporate sector.

In my heart, I always wanted to be a teacher. I worked in corporate for
many years, and after moving from North Carolina is when I decided I
wanted to pursue a teaching certificate.  So many students in my program
got into their senior year and decided that they did not want to teach.  I
had been a teacher's assistant while completing my (teaching) certification
and because this was a second career for me, I wanted to make sure this
was something that I really wanted to do.  This was important to me.  One
of my mentors was really more of an advisor.  I was just able to bounce
ideas across to her, including what to do about being placed at a different
school versus the school I preferred to work.  She did not sugarcoat
anything.

Skyler stated that her needs were different than most new teachers' needs were

during the initial teaching experiences.  How she accepted support and her reception to

the mentoring support was more about advising her and using the mentor as a sounding

board.

> I view the person who was my lead teacher during my student teaching
> experience as more of a mentor, than my actual, officially assigned
> mentor.  I viewed my college advisors as mentors because they were in the
> field of education.  I would bounce ideas off of them, vent to them and
> they would listen and offer advice.  Our conversations were more about
> "dialoguing" a situation.  My district mentor would say "what can I do?"
> Or she would ask "have you tried this?"  To me, mentoring comes from a
> whole body of people, a team of teachers and friends who are
> colleagues…you just bounce ideas off of them and they come back with
> some great ideas as well.

> **Role expectations of teachers.**  Skyler describes the teaching profession from

how she initially viewed the profession, her musings of how others view the role of a

teacher, and how her understanding of what and who a teacher is, has changed.

> When I first began teaching I had a lot of ideas of about being a great
> teacher that everyone else would describe as "…she is a great teacher,
> because she is saving kids…the teacher gives kids something to look
> forward to because they (students) have had a great (educational
> experience) because of that teacher."  But I realized that my outlook on
> teaching is not so much as to save kids, but it is more to equip them for
> society…I never expected to have the job that would be part mother, part
> psychologist, and I never expected to be the "punching bag" for kids that
> may not feel like being here (at school) because of their circumstances.  I
> never thought I would be the social worker…there are so many roles that I
> did not expect to have as a teacher.

> I just want to teach.  I want to teach.  That was it.  That is it.  I expected
> that when I became a teacher, I would come in and teach.  Have vacations,
> you know…Christmas holiday, have summers off, not think about
> anybody and that's it.  Just teach.

> Every year is so different.  I realize if I have the sibling of a previous
> student, the dynamics of each child is very different.  Their attitude toward
> learning is different, so I have to approach what I do differently.  I cannot
> ever say that this is what I am going to plan for the year.  I still have high
> expectations.  My expectation of each student does not change because of
> the circumstance. I still teach the same way…I really DO teach
> differently, but I still expect students to learn.

During my first two years, I was not very involved in my community. I basically was just teaching. I saw the need. I had a very selfish class, and I felt like they needed to give back, so we did a service learning project…it was a good experience. Now I know what goes on in each student's little area where they live. It is good for me and it is good for them.

**Mentors as colleagues.** Skyler reiterated that her mentoring relationship was a more collaborative and described her college mentor as one who held her accountable to the professional responsibilities and development as a teacher, including conversations which focused on Skyler's reflections, communication, and the culture she established with others in the classroom and larger school community.

My mentor was very bold, very verbal. She would always seem to say, "You gotta do it….you just gotta do it." My mentor helped me grow in my confidence. She was always encouraging me about my ideas and telling me to go for it…be the trend setter. She helped me analyze and gave me suggestions. She became my friend.

## Olivia's Story

Olivia is a second year teacher. Olivia described teaching as a lifelong goal, and she shared that she chose teaching when she was a kindergarten student. She recalled many days of "practicing" school in her parent's living room by instructing her dolls and teddy bears. Olivia completed college six years ago, and she worked as a substitute teacher for four years. During the 2009-2010 schoolyear, she was hired as a classroom teacher for the first time in her current school district.

**The first days with real students.** When the real experience of day-to-day teaching came into play, Olivia reflects how she felt beleaguered by the misbehaviors of her first graders and underprepared on how to teach them.

I subbed before getting my first position and during the years that I subbed I developed perfect ideas of how a classroom is supposed to look. You are changing things and your ideas of what teaching actually is, is totally

different. It is not about just sitting down, with everyone working quietly. You have kids coming up to you with problems at their home. There are minor behaviors. There are kids on behavior plans. You have kids with behavior problems. You are dealing with how to contact parents about behaviors. There are so many different things and within all of that you are still teaching curriculum and still trying to touch every student. My goal as a first year teacher was really just to learn the curriculum.

I felt the need to have a perfect classroom, where students would sit quietly. I thought they would come to class ready to learn and do the work. And when I got here (at current school), it was not like that.

**How impact of mentoring.** The dissonance between Olivia's expectations and the reality of her teaching assignment left Olivia feeling overwhelmed during her initial year of teaching. She describes the difference between teaching with and without mentor support.

I did not have an assigned mentor my first year. I was hired after school started and they (district) had already assigned mentors. Once the principal realized that a mentor would not be assigned, she asked another teacher colleague to work with me. During my first year I received so much professional development (PD) and I attended so many PD sessions on literacy, math and science that I almost felt like I was on overload with information. Some days the PD sessions would overlap on the same day and I could not go to everything. It was all about reading, running records and the curriculum.

During my first year it was just about knowledge. Just to get an idea and be able to store it in my brain, so I would know what I am teaching. This year I have a mentor. She is a reading specialist. This year it is more about instruction and planning. Just to get an idea of what I am teaching. It has been nice to get feedback from my mentor. I know that I need more curriculum support. The mentor has helped me review instructional materials and go over and over procedures of what evidence I should see in students work…to hold myself and kids accountable (what is taught and learned).

**Relationships matter.** Olivia described the difference mentoring has had on her in terms of relationships with others in the school community. She shared her thoughts of what mentoring has offered her in relation to her belief systems concerning teacher,

colleague and parent interactions.

> I do not think mentoring has had any influence on my relationships. I think individual personalities really have a lot of play when working with adults. I don't know if it is something that can be mentored…I think it's something that is instilled in you. I think work is like family…you have different approaches, and we have to consider what others have to offer. My mom taught me to treat everybody equally.

> In terms of the students' parents; I don't think it (mentoring) really has changed my approach from one year to the next. I welcome parents into my room. I send notes home for good behavior. I inform parents of bullying. I really think you have to have a relationship with parents, so they know that they can trust you. I would not want my daughter in a classroom where I felt weird about the teacher…so I think it is important to have good relationships with your (students) parents. I don't think that (mentoring) has influenced that and I don't think that is something that can be taught. This is who I am.

**Laurel's Story**

Laurel was initially undecided about her professional goals. After spending the summer babysitting and really enjoying the experience, she decided to enroll at Western Michigan University because it was known as a "teacher's college." In sharing her dreams for her future, Laurel reported that that teaching was her career choice because, a career in teaching would allow her the flexibility needed once she decided to have her own children. She would have the same breaks and be able to spend summers at home with her future children.

Laurel teaches in an urban district, and has spent her entire teaching career at the same school. She has six years of teaching experience, and has always taught second graders.

**Career choices.** Laurel reflected back on her 19 year old self, and acknowledged that it was naïve to pursue teaching as a career based upon future vacations and "imagined," not-yet-conceived children. She described her initial experience as "awful

and scary."

> I really am not one of those teachers that does it for the (summer) breaks now (laughing)!  But as a 19 year-old girl, I did not know my future and I really wanted and expected to have a family someday.  That was what I based my career choice on—having children one day.  When I look back…I think I wish I had chosen something else with more money.  It may not be the most lucrative job, but I like what I do…so I chose the right thing to fulfill me personally…you know?

**Feeling lost.**  Laurel conceded her idealistic notions of what teachers did on a daily basis did not match the reality of her initial teaching experiences.

> I struggled.  I did have an assigned mentor, but I did not feel a lot of mentoring from that person.  I felt lost.  I had a complete lack of mentoring.  My mentor said to me "Yes…I'm your mentor.  Come to me if you need anything"…but was never available, so I figured it out myself.

> My first year was awful.  It was scary.  I did not receive a lot guidance….I just received some teaching guides and was told, "Here you go."  I did not know what to do….or how to do it. I was lost…I worked hard; I did every single professional development opportunity that came my way.  I burned the candle at both ends….going to bed at 7:30 pm every night for the entire year so that I could get up early, and feel prepared for my students.

> After the first year, surprisingly, I did not hate my job…I wanted to figure out how to be better.  It was hard.  I had expectations of myself and had committed myself to being a teacher.  Although it was difficult there were rewards…I knew a lot of my frustrations were because I was a new teacher.  I did not know what the heck I was doing…..I just thought, 'this is my responsibility…I had chosen this….I could have quit, but I never really considered (quitting).  It was hard, but I knew it would get better.

**Adopt-a-mentor.**   Will-power and resilience are words that Laurel used to describe herself.  Disappointed by the lack of mentoring received, she stated that she had too high expectations of others, and if she was going to be a good teacher, she had to accept responsibility, and take charge of her own development.  Laurel was determined to create her own mentor-mentee relationship.  She approached a teacher-colleague to mentor her.

I did not know who my official mentor was…I had a non-mentor my first year… (Laughing).  During the summer between my first and second year of teaching, I was determined that if this experience was going to get any better, then *I* would have to adapt and change.  I began thinking about how I could improve.   I kept saying to myself "I don't want to be broken...I will figure this out...breathe!"  I was committed to trying.

My second year was very different than the first year.  The first year I was too wrapped up in my own needs.  I did not ask my (official) mentor questions or ask for help.  I did not know how.  The fall of the second year, I asked another teacher in the building to mentor me.

**The new mentor.**  Laurel resolved to not be so independent or too proud to ask

questions.  She wanted to feel comfortable.

My adopted mentor we talked a lot.  We still do.  We had attended several math and literacy workshops together and she had been teaching for quite some time.   Although she taught a different grade level than me and did not know the (2$^{nd}$ grade) curriculum as well, I still approached her. adopted myself a mentor.

My mentor helped me with management and that's important.  She was able to help me with how to structure the day.  She was a great teaching partner and…someone who I can bounce ideas off of…because she had taught for a long time.  Having a mentor built my confidence.  The first year I felt terrible…I couldn't do what seasoned teachers were doing.  My teaching was all trial and error…I was trying to survive, trying not to have chaos for 7 ½ hours.

**Lessons for Laurel.**  Laurel looked back on her experiences gained during her

initial teaching years with nostalgia, appreciation, and a sense of accomplishment in her

ability to persevere.

I feel bad that I had a bad experience.  That first year was like throwing me in the deep end without floaties (laughter)…it was like someone asking "Are you going to sink or swim?" and I swam…and I am a good swimmer!  I could be a mentor.  I know what my experiences were like…hard and difficult.  But I had the kind of personality to persevere through it.

**Laurel's call for structure.**  Laurel had advice for both mentors and mentees.

Laurel opined that mentor's roles must be clearly defined, and the support that is offered

(and needed) should be clear to both the mentor and the new teacher that needs guidance.

> I think experienced teachers can come off as arrogant.  As a newer
> teacher; it isn't easy asking questions from someone like that.  It is
> difficult to make yourself vulnerable, you know?  We're expected to know
> it all, because we went to college and we read it in a book….but it is *not*
> easy.  There is nothing, not even in your internship that can prepare you
> for what it is like as a first year teacher in my opinion.

> Mentors, reach out to the (new) teacher.  As a mentor, I would make
> myself available frequently.  I know that we are all busy…and have a lot
> going on.  We may think that we do not want to bother other
> people…even if I thought the  (newer) teacher was doing fine, I would
> want her to feel part of the staff.  That is really important.

> There is a newer teacher in my building; I have reached out to her.  I
> wanted her to feel part of the staff.  She is doing a project and is creating a
> mentor folder, which is an excellent idea.  We *should* have a mentoring
> folder where things are in the building…resources, you know?

> I would tell a new teacher to not be afraid to ask questions. Even if they
> think they might sound dumb; do not be afraid to ask for help.  It is hard
> and I probably should have asked for help, but I didn't know how.  I didn't
> know who (to ask).

> My (original) mentor teacher was a teacher who had been here so long.
> She gave this attitude that "I know everything." Well, she didn't know
> everything…she was not feeling my needs.  She was just too wrapped up
> in her own stuff…she probably doesn't even remember that she was my
> mentor!  I mean we talked twice!  Aren't you supposed to have a mentor
> four years before you are tenured?

> I don't know anyone else's experience with mentors in this building…but
> I don't think it's a big push.  This building is a difficult place to
> work…perhaps, even this district.  I know many teachers do not make it
> past five years, so I do think (mentoring) should be more structured.
> There should be some training for the mentors.  Teach people how to be a
> mentor; and teach mentors how to keep new teachers here.

## Jeniece's Story

Teaching as a career is a natural, almost expected career choice for fourth year

teacher, Jeniece.  She has a historical bloodline in teaching.  Both her parents and older

sister are educators.  She proudly boasts that George Washington Carver hand selecting

her great-great-great-great grandmother to be a teacher at Tuskegee Normal College (in Tuskegee, Alabama). Teaching is part of Jeniece's DNA, and she stated that teaching gives her "a warm fuzzy feeling."

Before moving to Michigan, Jeniece was an undergraduate student at a teacher preparation program in the south. She was recruited to teach in her current urban school district in January 2008, after graduating from college the previous month.

**The first days of school.** Jeniece's teaching roots and experiences as a coach did not fully prepare her for what she describes as the "aha" moments as a first-year teacher.

> I graduated in December, moved to Michigan in January and was thrown in! The kids had another teacher who had quit over the Christmas break. They were a challenging group. After the first day…I went home crying because it was harder than I thought. Crying! I thought that I was really prepared to be a teacher in the classroom. Even with my experiences…I was actually alone in the classroom to teach the kids by myself. I had to know the curriculum…I had to keep order and get through all of the materials. It was a new ball game.

> They were first graders. Initially I thought, "They do not know how to do anything." I would structure their sentences…I would use sentence starters, and have them finish the sentences. I felt overwhelmed…I mean I was able to survive. From January until June, I stayed at school until 7pm, so that I would have everything ready and prepared.

> I stayed at school late to get everything in order. What I noticed, in order to survive; I ended up giving busy work…to have classroom management and to get control of the classroom.

**The pre-service teacher program versus the district's mentoring program.**

Jeniece's college program included a formal mentoring component for pre-service teachers. Jeniece recounts her experience and compares it to the mentoring support she received as a new teacher in her district.

> In the (pre-service) program it was like we were attached to the mentors' hip. I was blessed to have several teachers who took me under their wing. They continually talked to me; asked how I was doing, asked me what was

new.  I never felt alone.

> When I first came here, I kind of did it alone.  I relied a lot on my own knowledge.  They did (and do) have a new teacher program here, but it can be tweaked a little.  The mentoring program included getting to know the school system, the curriculum.  It's "You got to do *this, this, this*…"  You review the same things for four years.  I wanted something a little more challenging…ideas on enhancing the curriculum…and support to give a richer classroom experience to the kids.

> I did not want to feel so restricted.  Because I am self-driven, I pushed myself to get more out of the people that I know I can trust in the building.  The literacy coach took me under her wing.  I could talk to her as a colleague and really pick her brain.  I was not afraid to ask her for help or share with her what wasn't working.  I knew that she was not going to judge me; or I did not think that she was not spying on me for the principal.

> She comes into my classroom, observes me, writes a quick note and tells me how I'm doing…or what I can do better.  She is encouraging.  I am proud to share my students' accomplishments with her.

**A mentor through the mentees eyes.**  Jeniece's description of the mentoring role is similar to her definition of a teacher.  Jeniece defined a mentor as a person who provides a safe environment; the mentor allows their charges to take risks, yet feel safe enough to fail and learn from their experiences.

Jeniece attributes being mentored in strengthening her rigor and providing guidance and more effective curricular management strategies.

> My mentor is awesome.  She is the reading recovery specialist.  I have observed her reading lessons.  Literacy is still my weak point, and I am still trying to make it my strength.  I am stronger (teaching) mathematics and science and she has helped me work on literacy.  She has helped with lesson development…teaching simple strategies to get me to think about how and why to form guided reading groups.  She is constantly challenging me, questioning the interventions used and what is my (evidence) that students are benefitting from specific interventions.

> I would describe a mentor as basically a teacher of the teacher.  I have learned how to stay focused and students benefit.  I have learned better time management, how to get more work out of the students…and not

busy work. I have learned to take teachable moments and balance them with structured teaching. Mentoring has shown me how I can make lessons rigorous. She models that…it is that aspect that really helps. My mentor has confidence in me, letting me do it on my own.

Mentoring is about leading the adult in the right direction and letting them feel safe to do it.

**Personal and professional relationships.** In four years that Jeniece has taught,

she describes colleagues and others within the school community as extended family.

> I did not know anybody when I moved. But this building is special. It's because we're a younger crowd…when we need each other, we support one another. Last year both my parents were hospitalized…I was so stressed. The staff came out in spades. They offered to help with lesson plans and take care of my class…all so that I could focus on my parents. Every day, someone checked in and asked about my parents…we are all concerned about each other.

> *With colleagues.* Our staff gets to know one another. We know what each other strengths are. We go into each other's classrooms, observe one another, share materials and share ideas. Other teachers come to me and ask me for take-home ideas for reading. It makes me feel like they are invested in me, like I am invested in them.

> *With students.* My first year was a rough crowd. Now as fifth graders, they come down to see me and ask to have lunch with me. I remember asking a former student recently "You didn't like me much my first year…you're talking to me now?" (Laughs). They (former students) come back to see me and they are a little older, a little prouder and when I talk to them, it is a conversation….not in my first grade teacher voice, but a conversation, with a lot of back and forth.

> *With parents.* I did not know how to build connections. In the beginning, it was *very* textbook…"Yes ma'am, no ma'am." I did not know how to work with parents or how to build relationships, so I just relied on what I was told.

> A parent of one of my special education students verbally attacked me. She did not care for my teaching practices. Her child was a new student to the school, and had negative experiences at a previous school. My mentor did not really help me with this…I had to learn it on my own. I killed the parent with kindness and worked hard to build her trust. I invited her to come and observe the classroom…while she was there, the student was off-task and I corrected her…immediately I was worried that the mother

would think I was too hard on her daughter, but the mother actually thanked and complimented me for holding to my behavior standards.

I have learned it is important to make parents a resource….use them (parents) as the experts of their own children, because they know their child better than I do.  I see them 180 school days, but they *know* them!  I reach out to parents, I ask them to volunteer in the classroom, read to kids…I try to keep a connection.  If school and home are disconnected, how else can I make sure that learning happens?

**Tyler's Story**

Tyler has taught a total of eight years, with four of the years in a charter school while working on his teacher's certification.  He is beginning his fourth year as a certified teacher in a second grade teacher in an urban, public school district.  Prior to teaching, Tyler was an insurance claims adjuster.  He spoke of his desire to do something different.

**Inspired to make a difference.**  Tyler's decision to enter the teaching profession full-time was just weeks before the events of September 11, 2001.  Tyler described being profoundly affected by the attacks in New York City, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania.  He shared his sense to protect students (and himself) and the extremes of students' responses as part of the after-math.

I decided I really just wanted to work with kids.  I used to work as a claims adjuster and that was not my cup of tea.   My cousin was in the district and suggested I try teaching.  My parents are both educators, my mom was a teacher, my dad a teacher principal.  So I couldn't really avoid it, I just jumped in.

Three weeks after September 11th, I left the insurance company for good.  I went from being an insurance adjuster, to a 6th grade bilingual teacher (in a charter school) in a short period of time.  The charter school hired me because I could speak Spanish and had a four-year degree.  They assumed because I spoke Spanish and had a college degree that I could relate and communicate better with students.

My second week of teaching, the September 11th attacks happened.  Wow.  It blew my expectations of what was required as a teacher.  It was what I perceived to be world chaos.  I attempted to hold it together for my

students.  But, I was extremely disorganized you know.  As a first year teacher, I did my best to respond to this situation. (Note: Mid to late September 2001, Tyler was still working part-time at the insurance company processing and assisting families with claims directly related to 09/11/01).

On a personal level…I was someone trying to protect my own sanity…through the extremes of the others personal lives.  I was trying to handle emergency situations…it was a lot of pressure.  I was disorganized, always responding to situations.  I began questioning "Is this (teaching) for me?"  My mentor threw back to me "I don't know. You have to answer that for yourself."

**Tyler's evolution.**  Tyler described his positive mentoring relationships with other stakeholders as being the key to his professional growth.  He stated that his overall experiences have been impacted by the first few years in the classroom.

The first year it is just organizing my thoughts, getting control, socially and of my emotions.  The positive relationships mentoring has had has been a key part of my professional development.  I have had many mentors during the years, but during the first few years (in my current district) that mentors have said "…you really need to work on *xyz* now."  I have had to develop a more academic focus.  I had a literacy coach, a union rep, a couple of grade level teachers, who all have shown me the ropes.  Now after eight years of teaching, I think of all my mentors…I see my principal, union reps, grade level teachers, literacy and math coaches, curriculum, and district coaches.  They all are my mentors.

I admire my mentors.  I look to them, dissect the parts of them that I aspire to be like.  One mentor is very detailed in her lesson plans…I love that about her. Another mentor has creative ideas for math.  Another mentor is really good at guided reading…it is impressive…if I want similar results for my students, then I have to learn from her.  I hold on to my professional aspirations and develop my skills as I study (the mentors).

I have more of a working definition of mentoring.  It is defined and planned.  Mentoring really is focusing more on the preparation versus my insecurity or my professional commitment.  Whether or not you know professional role, mentoring is having someone being real with you.  It's just good role models and that's how I have developed.

**Lessons learned.**  Tyler credits his mentoring for having a direct impact on his professional voice.  His respect for mentors is due in part, to a heavy reliance on the

directives and guidance he has received from seasoned teachers during his transition from

an insurance adjuster, to a non-certified teacher, to a certified teacher.

> The development of my teaching practices has been ongoing. I am always shaping and redefining who I am in the classroom. For example, the literacy coach came today to work with me on guided reading. She will follow-up and observe me and offer feedback and next steps. Whatever she advises, I plan to implement immediately. I will do it…not because it is a directive, but because I respect her work.

> **Connecting to students.** Initially Tyler thought getting students to like him

would earn respect.

> I think I wanted them to like me. I had more of a "we're friends" approach. Looking back, I think that was ridiculous. I was trying to please them too much. Now…I am more secure professionally. I am secure and confident in my position and career. Students can have their opinion…I can have my opinions; I set those aside…we work and we move on.

> **The influence on other relationships.** When probed further, Tyler responded:

> You live and learn through the process (of mentoring). I recognize that my communication was inconsistent. It was random…sometimes emotional. Before it was all about me….After September 11th, I was all over the place. I learned a lot through observation and communicating with others. I learned what my professional voice was.

> (Now) I define and share what we are doing through newsletters. I have grown in my communication with parents. My communication is more focused and grounded. It is about individual student assessments and portfolios.

## Brooke's Story

Brooke teaches 5th grade in an urban school district. This is her fourth year

teaching. Brooke described making the decision to teach an innate calling. She is the

only child, raised by a single parent, who also happens to be a teacher.

> I grew up in a single-family household. My mom is a teacher, so teaching was all I considered. I always played school when I was younger…I always wanted to be a teacher.

**Initial goals.** Brooke described feeling supported during her initial teaching experience. She recognized early on that teaching and being effective included teaching students how to interact appropriately in the school setting. As a new teacher, her goals were to be effective in teaching the curriculum, yet she also felt a need to provide direct teaching of social skills to her students.

> *Relationships and rapport.* My current class is an interesting group. You can talk to any teacher in this building and they would be able to share stories about this group of 5th graders. They (students) are smart…it's just their behavior that gets in the way. The students are defensive…they are used to being labeled as troublemakers…they are very combative. I feel like I am not here to just teach them math, writing, social studies and science; I am also teaching them lots of life skills, social skills…that is how I spend most of my day.
>
> I completed my internship in a 4th grade classroom, so when I began teaching 4th grade, I loved it right away. Later, because of enrollment numbers, I was moved and had to teach kindergarten, for which I had no training.
>
> I knew that my fourth graders had a lot of (academic) gaps in their learning, so I wanted to see how I could help with securing the foundational gaps with the kindergartners, so they were stronger by the time they reached 4th grade. One of my goals was to see how much of a difference, how much I could push the five-year olds…I looked at where students were "benchmarking" so they would be reading at grade level as first and second graders, and beyond.

**Expanding student learning through mentoring.** Brooke credited mentors for increasing her own proficiency in how students learn content.

> We have really good mentors here. I relied heavily on my mentor to increase my own awareness. They helped me create learning activities to support individual learning goals. My favorite teaching strategy is working with small groups…because I am able to recognize individual student needs faster, than when working with 29 students.

**The difference between then and now.** Experience has made Brooke more open and receptive to feedback. She credits colleagues and the mentoring support she received

in deepening her self-reflections, and using feedback in future planning and establishing a

purpose for what she teaches.

> Learning to teach is a continuous process. I'll never know it all. I will
> always have to pull on my co-workers, my coaches and mentors…they are
> all a part of my support system.
>
> I had really good teammates my first year. It was me. I did not want to be
> viewed as not knowing what I was doing. I was nervous…afraid that
> others were judging me. I did not want someone to tell me what I was
> doing wrong. The change?...It came from teaching two different grade
> levels in the same year.
>
> ***The role of a teacher.*** When I teach them real strategies and skills, I
> always try to make it a real life situation. I feel the best way to remember
> things are when you understand it in a real-life context. When you
> understand why you need to know something, then it will stick with you. I
> believe my role is more than to just teach; my role is to make learning real
> for students.

## Summary of Findings

The overarching themes from the mentored teachers' stories were subtle. Each

experience was told to the interviewer, and offered the backdrop of the collective voice of

the participants as illustrated in Table 2. There were four major themes that emerged

from the mentored teachers' experiences. The study's findings are presented in Table 2

and summarized below:

### Theme One: Relationships with Mentors Mattered

The mentored teachers' perspectives were strongly influenced by how they

viewed their relationships with their mentors. Relationships had an impact upon the

mentored teachers' views and attitudes toward the mentoring experiences, and their

professional relationships with others in the school community. Eleven (84%) of the

study's participants discussed the importance of connecting with their mentor, and if not

their appointed mentor, another teacher closely tied to the school. Markow and Martin

Table 2

*Summary of Themes*

| Theme | Kimber | Charize | Jayla | Anesa | Monique | Julia | Cydra | Skyler | Olivia | Laurel* | Jeniece | Tyler | Brooke |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Relationships w/mentor was positive | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | *N/Y | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Mentors met mentees' expectations | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Mentoring responded to needs, allowed for reflection | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Instructional experiences and strategies of mentors and mentees matched | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No |

*Note.* Participant had two mentors. Recorded views of first mentor for the purpose of the study.

(2005) also found similar results wherein 89% of teachers they surveyed stated mentoring

support assisted with their transitions into the school setting.  The NCES study (2004)

found that teachers who felt welcome in a school would develop relationships that would

tie them to the school for years to come.  These sentiments were reiterated by the 76% of

the current study's participants as well.

**Theme Two: Mentored Teachers Entered Teaching With Expectations of What They Want and Need from Their Mentors**

Most participants (76%) expressed their long-held desire to be teachers.  In many

cases, they stated they expected their mentors to have energy and attitudes that matched

the mentees own ideals of education.  This is important because most of the participants

shared that they wanted to be teachers, and may have felt more motivated to make the

experience work for them.  Participants expressed their own preconceived thoughts of

how they envisioned teaching and mentoring to be.  Angelle's (2002) study found 80% of

schools that had been identified as ineffective had mentoring programs that were defined

as poor due to mentees descriptions of poor working relationships with mentors.

The participants in the current study spoke of mostly positive, working, and

collaborative relationships with mentors.  Their mentors had earned their trust by offering

instructional support, emotional support, or both.  Some mentees described mentors in

more familial terms, including friend, confidant, and mother.

**Theme Three: Mentoring and Mentored Teachers Must be Specific to the Mentored Teacher's Needs**

Theme three was defined by the experiences new teachers had when they entered

the teaching profession.  Mentors should be able to relate to mentees in order for

mentoring to be meaningful.  All 13 teachers included in the study recommended that

mentoring programs be tailored to offer support relative to teachers' professional backgrounds and experiences.

Participants could be categorized into two sub-groups: (1) initial-career new teachers, and (2) second-career new teachers. The needs of sub-groups were very distinct. All of the initial-career teachers described wanting and needing their mentor to (a) model and guide them in their relationships with others, and (b) provide instructional support. The literature discussed in Chapter II illustrated that novice teachers want to be provided with leadership, clear expectations, and ongoing coaching (Berliner 1986; NCES, 1997; Voke, 2003; Watkins, 2005). Many initial-career participants shared stories of how mentors assisted in their navigation of social relationships with others. Seven of the 9 initial-career participants have maintained a friendship with their mentors, or have sought mentors' advice in interpersonal matters as well. Of the second-career teachers, three out of four stated that their mentoring relationships were for the purposes of helping them understand their curricular roles within their school. Fifty percent of second-career teachers rejected the idea of needing another adult to guide their interactions with others professionally or personally.

**Theme Four: Mentored Teachers Felt That Mentoring Support Should Match Their Instructional Needs**

Participants indicated that there was often a mismatch between the teaching experiences of mentors and mentees. Just under a third (30.7%) of the participants had mentors who had taught the same content area or grade level (see Table 2). Three participants from the second-career teacher sub-group had mentors who had taught the same subject within the previous two years. The remaining 69% had mentors who had never taught the same grade or content as the teachers they mentored. This was

problematic for many of the participants, with 53% reporting disappointment, and labeling this as an area were mentoring support had fallen short. Participants, however, were resilient and resourceful. Many described reaching out to other grade-level colleagues for guidance when the instructional strategies offered by their mentors were too general. The issues participants reported concerning the mismatch between mentor and mentee content area or grade level has been found to be problematic in other research as well. Two independent studies conducted by Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) and Flynn and Nolan (2008), emphasized that the effectiveness of mentoring was rooted in defined programming, inclusive of good mentor-mentee pairings that were rooted in common content or grade level experiences.

**Chapter Summary**

Thirteen teachers were interviewed for this project. They offered their insight and perspectives on what has influenced their individual teaching experiences. As the demographic profiles in Table 1 illustrate, the participants' road to the teaching profession was as varied as their backgrounds and personalities. Twelve of the participants were female, 8 were white, four black, and one Hispanic; 61.5 % were 30 years or older, and 38.4 % under 30 years of age.

Many of the participants had taught in preschool programs, and private, charter and public school systems. Four of the participants' initial teaching experiences included teaching in classrooms without having formal training or being certified. The participants' experiences ranged from two to 8 years of teaching. All participants had been assigned a mentor or several mentors during their initial induction period. The teachers included in this study represented six school districts, and taught physical

education, kindergarten, and 1$^{st}$, 2$^{nd}$, 4$^{th}$ and 5$^{th}$ grades. Four of the participants (30.7%) began teaching as a second career.

Research has shown that the beginning and ending cycle of a teacher's career may only be separated by a few short years due to new teachers identifying a lack of structured support, feeling isolated, and disconnected from others within the school community. There were four overarching themes derived from participant responses, all of which are summarized in Table 2. Table 3 further elaborates on these themes by describing the initial experiences, goals and beliefs of mentored teachers. The teachers' stories spoke of the value and influence they have placed on being mentored. Many participants spoke of one of the perceived advantages of mentoring was having another adult, with whom they could share, complain and even lean on to receive comfort when they felt isolated, scared and frustrated. Many teachers described utilizing their mentor for moral support and companionship. These teachers developed friendships that have remained intact once the mentoring experience ended. Many teachers indicated that having a mentor helped to develop their own professional voice, and described this as an advantage to participating in a mentoring program. Other advantages to participating in a mentoring program described by participants included gaining the confidence to hold courageous conversations with parents and students; sharing data and student learning goals; and expressing opinions and having professional conversations with others.

School districts have attempted to address new teacher attrition by implementing mentoring support as a strategy to affect teachers' willingness to remain in the profession beyond their initial experience. One observation is that the mentoring experience alone did not influence most teachers who participated in this study to stay in the profession.

Table 3

*Thematic Coding Index: Participants' Initial Experiences, Goals, and Beliefs*

| Participants' Initial Experiences, Goals, and Beliefs | Kimber | Charize | Jayla | Anesa | Monique | Julia | Cydra | Skyler | Olivia | Laurel | Jeniece | Tyler | Brooke |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Desire for service/help others | DS | I | I | I | I | I | DS | I | DS | N | DS | DS | I |
| Always wanted to be a teacher | DS | DS | DS | N | I | N | N | DS | DS | I | DS | I | DS/I |
| Inspired by childhood experiences | I | N | DS | N | N | I | N | N | DS | N | DS | N | DS |
| **Mentoring Experiences** | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Develop emotional or social connection(s) | I | I/E | I | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | I | I | I |
| Become more reflective, improve practice/career | E | DS/E | E | I | N | DS/E | E | I | I | I | DS/E | DS/E | DS/E |

*Note.* DS = Stated directly during initial interview; I = Implied/inferred during initial interview or/stated in follow-up conversation; E = provided evidence/sample to support; N = No evidence, data not collected/not applicable

Many study participants reported it was their own resolve, and resilience that has kept them from leaving the profession.  All of the teachers interviewed for this study did have a formal mentor; yet several described feeling disconnected, emotionally and socially from their mentor.

The reflections and reviews of how closely mentors, mentoring, and induction programs further developed the teaching skills of each participant were mixed.  Many teachers had mentors who did not teach the same content, and felt they did not receive a lot of curricular guidance and support.  Several participants shared that much of their presentation of instructional content came from the time spent with professional development and working with grade-level colleagues.  Learning to teach is a process which many participants stated evolves through practice and experience in the classroom.

These findings are the results of in-depth interviews conducted for this research study, and provide descriptive examples of the reflections and connections participants have made from their own mentoring experiences.  While the results do not represent the perceptions of all mentored teachers, the themes that emerged are subtle, offering insight in how teachers view their professional approach, and how mentored teachers engage others based upon their initial teaching experiences.  Chapter IV provides further discussion on these points.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

**Review of the Purpose and Questions**

The primary focus of this study was to explore how new teachers, those who have been formally-mentored, created sense and meaning in their work and how they developed their professional practices. What has been written includes participants' perceptions concerning their teaching roles, reflections of the mentoring experience, and lessons learned; as well as advice or guidance the study's participants received from their participation in a mentoring program.

This study was interested in how teachers translated their mentoring experiences into the decisions, choices and behaviors they have adopted as a result of having been mentored. The research questions which guided this study were:

1. How have teachers used their mentoring experiences to shape their personal sense of what it means to be a teacher?

2. How have mentored teachers used their mentoring experience in developing their instructional practices?

3. How have mentored teachers used their mentoring experience to shape their overall professional orientation and behaviors, i.e. how they work with colleagues; how they shape their classroom community; and how they engage students and work with them?

**Review of Methodology**

In order to answer these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed using an inductive approach.  The commonalities revealed through participants' stories were interpreted by the researcher.  Specific perspectives and experiences of participants' were transformed and meaning extrapolated from the interviews.

Thirteen participants shared their experiences through conversations, and many shared artifacts they felt: (a) illustrated who they are as teachers; (b) and have been directly related to their mentoring experiences; or (c) their instructional practices.  Many of the artifacts provided unobtrusive evidence and supported the verbal recount provided by participants.  Examples of artifacts included written notes, journals, and professional development plans.  In some classrooms, the participants directed the researchers' attention to other artifacts (e.g., positive behavior strategies and charts), which served as references, supporting the conversations (see Table 3).

Table 3 illustrates that 92% of the participants decided to become a teacher from their interpersonal desire to serve children.  Seven participants within this group made the decision to pursue a career in education when they were children themselves.  This may be relevant in developing future mentoring programs.

The interview protocol included questions that were exploratory and descriptive, designed to deepen the understanding of: (a) the phenomenon of how new teachers create sense and meaning in their work; and (b) the perceptions and values they place upon mentoring and the context mentoring has had in defining who they are as teachers.

**Review of Research Findings**

**Mentoring Shapes Teachers' Personal Sense of Teaching**

Many of the participants in the study described themselves as "a facilitator of learning," or "a person who fosters students' independence." Several participants defined themselves in terms of their ability to diagnose the curricular needs of students. Participants described their initial view of the role of a teacher from academic or clinical terminology. As the participants recalled their initial months of teaching, several described relationships that made them feel more connected and aware of students' needs. Nearly half of the participants (46%) reported that developing a better understanding of students' needs and interests caused them to expand their own definitions of a teacher's role to include terms such as nurturer, counselor, and school mom.

A commonality observed among the teachers in this study was an expressed need to find balance, defined as the dichotomy of their envisioned role of a teacher and the contrast of their actual teaching experience. Many of the teachers (53%) shared they pursued a teaching career because of internal motivators (e.g., it had been a life-long dream), or having had a positive external factors, including having positive interactions when working with young children (e.g., daycare, babysitting). Teacher participants expressed some disillusionment within the first few weeks and months of beginning their teaching assignments, as evidenced by statements that indicated feeling overwhelmed by the curricular needs of students (69%), a sense of isolation or abandonment from colleagues (76%), inconsistent classroom management (46%), and uncertainty about their relationships with others (53%). Additionally, the idea of making an effort to "just get

through the day" or "surviving the experience" was stated repeatedly by over half of those interviewed. This sentiment was prevalent when teachers did not have daily or several times-a-week contact with assigned mentors. One teacher stated, "[I] rarely had contact with mentor… a lot of stuff had happened between time we met. I could have been drowning, by the time I saw her again."

Subgroups of teachers included in the study were second-career professionals. These teachers had a career in another field prior to being certified or employed as teachers. The teachers who had entered teaching as second-career (30.7% of study participants, see Table 1) viewed their teaching role and initial goals in terms of practicality of their professional responsibilities; "A teacher's role is to teach; not that of a mother or psychologist." Most were consistent in what they expected from their mentors. This subgroup included four teachers, who described their initial goals for teaching as learning the curriculum, or presenting instructional content based upon the state or district standards. Seventy-five percent of this group reported not having, needing or wanting emotional support from mentors. Three of the four stated that they looked to their mentors to share content knowledge or subject specific instructional strategies only. They shared that they viewed mentors as professional colleagues, or friends with whom they could share ideas. Skyler summarized, "...my colleague and I always dialogued about teaching standards and expectations."

Seventy-five percent of second-career teachers described their expectations of the mentoring experience, which included assistance with: (a) implementing grade-level curriculum, (b) planning and evaluating formative and summative assessments, (c) developing rubrics and incorporating their ideas, and (d) getting advice of how to

encourage other colleagues to work collaboratively with them.  Only one of the second-career teachers stated having reliance upon the mentor for more than planning and assessing student learning.  He specifically mentioned "admiring mentors," and "dissecting and picking up" the characteristics his mentor modeled, which he wanted to emulate within his own teaching practice.  These characteristics included presenting instructional content and motivating students.

**Instructional Practices Developed Through Mentoring**

The support and feedback the new teacher received allowed them to step outside of the experience, self-evaluate, and in some instances, self-correct.  Charize, along with others, stated that "Mentoring made me look at my teaching, dive deeper and reflect what worked, look at what the kids were doing and ask what where my learning goals?"  Other mentored teachers shared similar reflections, including support in selecting instructional goals, lesson pacing, and planning for differentiated instruction based upon student data.

Jeniece advised that mentors should offer more challenges to mentees: "Challenge us!  We do not need a review of our teaching programs."  She freely admitted that the mentoring support she received allowed her to move her instruction past giving students busy work to more rigorous learning activities.  Seven participants shared that their mentors challenged them to refine routines, experiment, and take more risks in their respective content areas.

For most, relationships mattered, at least with respect to mentoring.  The rapport that was established between new teacher and mentor had an impact on the receptiveness to feedback and support provided.  Nearly all of respondents (84%) credited their colleagues and mentors with providing instructional and emotional guidance and support.

Twenty-three percent of participants solely credited their colleagues, and not their mentor for guiding their instructional practices.

Instructional strategies must match the content to be most effective (Gagen & Bowie, 2005). Seven teachers in this study stated that it was important their mentor had experience in teaching the same content. Often during the mentoring experience, mentors are not acquainted with new instructional delivery methods which have developed due to new technology and research (Gagen & Bowie). This had proven problematic for several of the participants interviewed, leading them to seek out others for support. Kimber made the point clearly "[My] mentor had never taught in my grade…it was my teammate who walked me through everything. She helped me the most." Other teachers completely dismissed their mentor as a credible source for instructional guidance if they had not taught in the new teachers' grade or subject area. As an example, Monique plainly stated, "It [mentoring] was a joke….classroom teachers stick together…my mentor was a sounding board, a person where I could vent my frustrations. I used another PE teacher for support with my pedagogy."

**Professional Behaviors and Relationships Shaped by Mentoring**

Teachers are busier than ever keeping up with new content, technology, and methodologies. Mentors are expected to work from a broad knowledge base that includes prior teaching experiences, familiarity with research-based principles of learning, and other accepted theories of instructional practices, while at the same time working with novice teachers whose imagined role of a teacher is constructed from a different set of experiences (Agee, 2006). Mentors do provide critical support by establishing an environment of empowerment (Gagen & Bowie, 2005). Several participants provided

examples of how the mentoring experience and their mentors had modeled and role-played scenarios which directly supported building professional relationships with others. Eight of the 13 teachers provided specific examples, crediting their mentors with support in developing a culture of learning, positive mediation strategies, and presenting academic feedback to others.

**Teacher's Ability to Persevere**

Research (e.g., Markow & Martin, 2005; The NTC Study, 2008) has shown that a lack of support, both professional and collegial, contribute to teachers' uneasiness in their professional competence. Mentoring programs are designed to be interactive, circuitous, and personal. Studies have suggested that teacher learning occurs in at least two realms: (1) the individual, and (2) the interpersonal. When schools make so many demands of new teachers without offering a means to accomplish these tasks, they set them up to fail (Gagen & Bowie, 2006). As stated by multiple participants during their interviews "…some (mentoring) activities are overkill; they add more stress because of all the little things that they want us to do." The teachers interviewed described their frustrations when the support they were expecting did not meet their needs; needs that included: (a) creating interdisciplinary and extended learning experiences and (b) designing activities to support construction of knowledge or establishing academic goals informed by student data. Several participants described how they persevered when official mentoring support was lacking, including, seeking-out alternative mentors, asking grade-level colleagues for advice, and attending professional development sessions to network with other teacher colleagues.

Individually, teacher participants stated that gains made in content-knowledge and

pedagogy, and the ability make decisions impacting classroom practices were sometimes due to the mentors support; but were also made nevertheless, when support from the mentor was not available or offered. From the interpersonal realm, teachers engage in dialogue and collaborate with others to further their own development (Huebner, 2009). This was true of the teachers included in this study. Most of them acknowledged that they had worked closely with other colleagues to discuss such practical matters as how to engage learners and affect student achievement. The investment of time, and the two-way exchange of listening, sharing, and questioning ideas allowed professional collegiality among teachers interviewed. This was stated in 92% of interviews. New teachers appreciated the input and opportunity to work with others, whether the mentor was involved in facilitating the collaboration, or if the new teachers took the initiative to collaborate upon themselves.

**Mismatched Mentors and Mentees**

There have been numerous studies conducted on the career trajectory of new teachers, including the external and internal influences resulting in a teacher's decision to remain or vacate the profession. Teacher isolation, and not feeling adequately prepared or supported are often-listed reasons stated for new teacher departures. Unfortunately, many schools have limited choices of colleagues in the same building that are appropriate mentors for the new teacher (Gagen & Bowie, 2006). This bore true for a small percentage of teachers interviewed in this study as well. This was most apparent of the new teachers who had entered teaching as a second-career. These interviews revealed an interesting trend; second-career teachers were frustrated and described being mismatched with mentors three-to-one times more often than initial-career teachers. In fact, only one

of the 10 initial-career teachers interviewed directly expressed feelings of not having a mentor who met her needs.

The stated needs and expectations of second-career teachers were vastly different than the expressed needs of their initial-career novice counterparts. The average age of the second-career teachers was 41 years. This group of teachers shared views of teaching as a profession, their individual career goals and experiences, and their impressions of mentors and co-workers during individual interviews. Three of the second-career teachers decided to pursue a career in education after relocating to a new area, or because they felt dissatisfied within their initial careers. Commonalities that were evidenced in the stories included: (a) each teacher expressed a desire to have more directed, job specific strategies for teaching and learning from their mentors; and (b) all, except one, felt that they did not receive specific support to enhance their professional teaching practices. Their reason was the perception that assigned mentors was more of a consultant, instead of a mentor; due to mentor's lack of experience in teaching the same content. They expected to have mentors who would provide specific curricular support, and did not seek mentors advice to confer on sensitive parent-to-teacher or teacher-to-student interactions. Several mentioned when they sought mentors for moral support by providing guidance on managing teacher-to-teacher conflict, specifically, support with getting other colleagues to accept their ideas. Two of the second-career teachers stated they did not need their mentor to guide them through nuances of 'how to be professional in the work environment" or "how to speak up or advocate for self." The views shared by this sub-group were that their mentors had provided moral support were friends with whom they called upon as sounding boards, and not to seek advice on curricular choices,

and parent and/or student concerns.  This suggests that the mentoring support needed for experienced career professionals, looks different than mentoring support needed for first-career new-teacher colleagues.  One of the second-career teachers summarized her needs by saying, "This is work. I enjoy it, but I have a family and friends of my own."  The implication as her statement is that some teachers are seeking support from in a professional performance capacity only.

Teachers confided that preparing for the work done within the classroom can be frustrating.  This is especially true when specific conflicts and resistance emerge.  New teachers struggle with thinking about teaching and learning strategies (Agee, 2006).  Nine of the 10 new, initial-career teachers stated that they looked to their mentors to guide their professional and social relationships within the school community.  Several participants (38%), both initial and second-career teachers' confided feeling disconnected from their mentors.  Why was there a feeling of disconnectedness for mentored teachers?  According to participants, whether it was academic, philosophical or social, teachers stated or implied the mismatch between their mentor and themselves affected their ability or willingness to work collaboratively with assigned mentors.  Similarly, in the Algozzine et al. (2007) study, third-year teachers listed the reasons they were not willing to remain in the profession as time, lack of support, accountability, unnecessary paperwork, unprofessional treatment, and changing careers.

### Conclusions and Discussion

Numerous studies have discussed the impact of mentoring on teacher retention.  The reflections of the participants interviewed in this study illustrated that social influences (i.e., the needs of the mentored teacher) guide how they will respond or

process their mentoring experience. It is important to note that as the participants in the research study have illustrated, there is little agreement about what constitutes good mentoring support, at least from the perspective of the mentored teachers. The quality of mentoring support is subjective, and relationship-driven, as evidenced from the participants' responses of what they expected and received as part of their mentoring experiences.

The findings of this study suggest that new teachers' individual experiences made an impression upon the personal approach that each has taken towards defining themselves and the context of their professional relationships. The conclusions presented are the results of the interviews conducted for this research study and provide examples of the value, respect, perseverance, and appreciation new teacher's hold of their mentors' experience, as well as how mentors' expertise, when matched to the needs of the new teacher, influenced the new teacher's overall reflections of having been mentored. The participants' reflections of the mentoring experiences weighed heavily on their willingness to carry forward lessons learned at the completion of the induction cycle.

Perhaps the most significant finding in this study was that teachers responded to mentoring based upon their expectations, personal histories, and motivations. Previous research has identified new teachers as singular group, and has not identified by them by their professional histories or backgrounds. Other research has not made a distinction between the needs of initial-career and second-career teachers, all of whom are still new teachers, nor has previous research assessed how second-career teachers reflected on their experiences, or compared the experiences between initial and second-career participants relative to their backgrounds. This study found that the needs and expectations of

participants were divided based upon their personal and professional histories, experiences and backgrounds including, initial-career and second-career teachers who had very different expectations of their mentors and of their mentoring experiences.

The findings in this study also revealed that participants felt better prepared for their teaching assignments and gained confidence in their ability address interpersonal interactions with others as a result of being coached by mentors, with 61% of participants providing specific examples that included role-playing, support with facilitating discussions, and feeling empowered to participate in the school community.  Previous research affirms the importance of mentors leading and offering direction to others as well (Fluckiger, McGlamery & Edick, 2006; Ingersoll and Y.M. Smith, 2004; Merryman, 2006).

The most valuable aspect of mentoring programs is helping beginning teachers develop effective teaching practices using "just-in-time" assistance provided by the experienced, on-site mentor (Davis & Higdon, 2008).  This sentiment was echoed throughout the 13 interviews.  New teachers desired frequent feedback, specific to their needs and concerns.  Ten of the 13 respondents stated the importance they placed on having feedback which was specific to their content.  This researcher would suggest that the mentoring experiences must be tailor-made to fit the specific desires and needs of individual teachers.  From a resource perspective, this may not be a fiscally sound option for many school communities.  Martin (2008) argued for a responsibility to guide teachers up the "experience curve" in a comprehensive and efficient manner.  This researcher would agree based upon the interviews conducted.  Each of the thirteen teachers reflected on specific support they could have benefitted from, including being

allowed to observe the mentor; team teaching with mentor or another teacher for a period of time; and having planned, specific times to ask detailed questions and seek explicit advice.

Researchers have asserted the period of growth for beginning teachers goes far beyond their first year; yet most state-supported programs for new teachers are aligned to short-term induction procedures geared towards district protocols and rules rather than on-going mentoring over an extended period of time.  Structured mentoring only provides some support that new teachers need.  Unfortunately, when new teachers need more than what their school districts offer, there does not appear to be another mentoring avenue available for those who need something different than what their mentor or mentoring program offers.  That was expressed by several participants included in this research study.  Nearly half of participants shared frustrations with either having mentors who only informally supported them, including quick "check-in chats" or conversations which were so informal that mentees described them as "venting" sessions.  This suggests that school districts need to assess the teaching experiences and skill-sets of mentors and compare that to the new teachers they are supposed to support; including matching non-tenured teachers to mentors who have similar academic backgrounds to make mentoring more effective.

Olebe (2005) suggested induction experiences should be job-embedded, and should be measured through the exploration of capacity-building activities and emotional support, which are effective components of mentoring.  It is equally important that mentors be trained.  Formal training for mentors is essential to positively influence the meaning that both mentor and mentored teacher will take away from the experience.  The

level of mentoring support received by novices clearly has influenced their experiences and intentions ([CCSR], Kapadia et al., 2007).

To affect teacher attrition, the NCTAF (2007) recommends a three-part strategy: (1) creating learning environments; (2) building and maintaining quality preparation, accreditation, and licensure programs; and (3) making teaching a professionally rewarding career (p. 137, Algozzine et al., 2007; see also NTCAF, 2003). Although several participants mentioned negative mentoring experiences, only three teachers indicated they had considered leaving the profession. None said they had thought of leaving because of their mentoring experience. Ironically, one teacher stated, in her opinion, other teacher colleagues had vacated their positions due to the school environment. The same environment that she described as toxic, yet when the researcher asked why she stayed, she stated it was her "personal resolve" to not be broken by her initial teaching experiences.

The findings in this study contradicted previous research, respective to a negative teaching or mentoring experience made new teachers more likely to leave the profession. Novice teachers often leave the profession because they feel overwhelmed and frustrated by the other "jobs" hidden within the profession (Kaplan & Owens, 2004). All participants expressed feeling frustrated with their mentors, the mentoring process, and teaching, in general; yet it is important to note that several participants also expressed their personal resolve to make their teaching experience successful by going as far as to seek other mentors, participate in professional development experiences on their own, or ask for outside help. There was a sense of resilience among participants. Seventy-six percent of the study's participants expressed a long-held desire to teach. Many stated

they were not willing to let go of their dream of being successful in the profession, including four who aggressively sought other mentors to help ensure their needs were met when the energy, knowledge-base, and idealism that was lacking in their assigned mentors.

A single mentoring program cannot meet the demands of all new teachers. There needs to be a full system response to new teachers mentoring needs. Mentoring should be differentiated by the experiences of new teachers upon their entrance into the profession. New teachers would benefit from mentoring support that was rooted in foundational components described as: (a) interpreting data to inform instruction, (b) classroom management, and (c) lesson design and integration. Other mentoring topics should be selected based upon a triangulation of new teachers' interests, feedback from formal observations, and by considering the previous history or experience of the teacher in a professional working environment. Providing a mentoring structure that is grounded in selected topics (e.g., assessment and planning) and the opportunity for new teachers to self-select other mentoring topics (e.g., peer mediation, conducting conferences) would make the mentoring experience applicable, realistic, and meaningful for teachers' individual growth.

## Implications

This study adds to the research with respect to the influence mentoring has on teacher's sense of themselves, how they view the profession, and what professional behaviors are adopted as a result of having been mentored. The implications are subtle, yet extensive. The challenge for researchers, school districts and educators is to find opportunities which make the mentoring experience meaningful for all new teachers.

This study provides an argument that mentoring support is needed for new teachers. The level of support which is offered appears to be subjective; mentoring support should be based upon the professional background and prior experiences of the teachers and their mentors. If mentoring is going have importance and positively influence teachers' effectiveness, career stamina, and professional practices, then detailed efforts by school districts are needed to ensure that mentoring is meaningful and includes activities that will support the specific and individual needs of new teachers.

**Recommendations for Practitioners**

There is a need for differentiated mentoring programs for beginning teachers versus experienced, working professionals, who also are new teachers, but are described as a second-career teachers. This study's research findings suggest that practitioners must begin discussions for effective planning of mentoring programs that will create a systematic approach for school districts. This is needed in order to create programs that fit the often nuanced, distinctive needs of new teachers. To be included in this dialogue is a review of the length of mentoring support for individuals, quality metrics for mentoring programs (e.g., opportunities for development of content pedagogy), use of technology, cognitive student engagement, and assessments. At the school level there must be required structured topics included in mentoring, as well as the opportunity for new teachers to self-select mentoring topics based upon formal observations, student data, and their personal interests.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research is needed to structure mentoring programs based upon the needs and experience of mentees. This includes an evaluation and comparison of the

differences between initial-career and second-career teachers, and how each group

identifies the importance of the various mentoring strands (e.g., technical, social, etc.)

and connections that be made from their experiences in creating a culture of learning.  In

order to develop focused mentoring support, it is also recommended that this study be

replicated on a larger scale.  It is suggested the sample size in future studies be increased

to more accurately determine the extent that mentoring experiences can be generalized to

the larger population of new educators; including the sub-groups of initial-career and

second-career teachers, and new-to-teaching teachers, as each sub-group of non-tenured

teachers has a varied professional skills, backgrounds, needs, and expectations.

   While these findings are important, it is also recommended that a longitudinal

study comparing formal and informal mentoring experiences be conducted to assess the

preparedness, professional growth, and overall contributions that mentored teachers make

to a schools' academic climate.

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Appendix A

Mentored Teachers Conceptual Framework

Mentored Teachers Conceptual Framework

**What is Known**

New teacher mentoring was initially a response to high teacher turnover.
Upwards of 50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years.
Researchers have been predicting teacher shortage for past 20 years. Lack of
mentoring support has resulted in new teachers leaving profession at a high/cost
to districts—between 2 and 7 million dollars annually.

New teachers who complain of feeling overwhelmed/ not supported—defined by
isolation, unclear expectations, and difficulty meeting students' needs.

Later, mentoring concepts were expanded to address teacher competence
(instructional support) and confidence (isolation).

There is a need for structured mentoring and as stated by educators.

Veteran educators are not always clear on how to appropriately support/mentor new
teachers

**Current Status**

Reauthorization of NCLB speaks to teacher quality, and need for mentoring, but not
specific/prescriptive for individual states.  States left to interpret what needs to be
done to address teacher effectiveness/quality

30 of 50 states have some form of mentoring (mandated), but there are no consistent
structures or parameters for what the "mentoring" should look like

Uneven commitment of mentoring support at the district level

Wide variance of delivery of mentoring for teachers

**What we are Learning-Outcomes/Impact**

Teachers feel the need for more training to prepare for their first year in the
classroom.

Mentored teachers report:
Having a better understanding of teaching expectations and feeling connected
to colleagues

Being mentored and/or working within a mentoring program increased their
likelihood of remaining in profession

Improved curricular knowledge, instructional delivery, and greater sense of
overall effectiveness

**What is Unknown and yet to be Discovered**

What really matters in formal mentoring, including how mentored teachers molded/shaped by mentoring; how do they settle into the profession—how is their sense of what it means to be a teacher formed?

What connections and reflections do mentored teachers attribute to what they do currently as educators?

What experiences resonate and become part of "consciousness" of teacher's instructional practices?

**Overarching Questions**

1. How has the mentored teacher used their mentoring experience to shape their overall professional orientation and behaviors, e.g., how they work with colleagues; how they shape their classroom community; and how they engage students and work with them?

2. How do teachers use their mentoring experiences to shape their personal sense of what it means to be a teacher?

3. How has the mentored teacher used his/her mentoring experience in developing their instructional practices?

Appendix B

Illustration of Mentored Teachers' Conceptual Framework

*Figure 1.* Illustration of mentored teachers conceptual framework.



Mentored
Teachers
↓

Accepted, Known

Mentoring came about to positively
impact teacher attrition by providing
support for new teachers.

↓

Mentoring support—designed to
address competence, confidence, and build
instructional capacity in new teachers

↓

What are the implications of having
been mentored? What happens?

Unknown

↓

Gaps in Literature

How teachers assimilate into their
approach to teaching as a result of an
early mentoring experience?

How does mentoring
shape personal sense
of what it means to be
a teacher ?

How mentoring
shapes the overall behaviors
& practices of teachers?

How mentoring is
used to develop
instructional
practices?

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Cover Letter

Teacher Interview Cover Letter

DATE:

TO:

FROM:         Leadriane Roby

Re:           Teacher Interview

We have an interview scheduled at _____

The general questions will focus on the following areas:

1.  How have you used your mentoring experiences to shape your personal sense of what it means to be a teacher?
2.  How have your mentoring experiences guided the development of your instructional practices?
3.  How have your mentoring experience shaped your overall professional orientation and behaviors:
    a.   How you work with colleagues?
    b.   The direction/shaping of your classroom community?
    c.   How you relate to the overall school community, including how you engage students and their parents and the overall broader community?

The purpose of this study is to develop a clearer understanding of the relevance mentoring has for teachers; examining how mentored teachers reflect upon the mentoring support they received through dialogue with interviewer.

Your willingness to assist with this project is appreciated.  I believe the interview should take no longer than one hour.  If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (269)366-5084 (C), (612)668-2931 (W) or email leadriane.l.roby@wmich.edu.  I have enclosed the consent form that I will collect at our scheduled interview.  Thank you again for your assistance.

Appendix D

Interview Questions and Researcher Script

Interview Questions and Researcher Script

**Opening prompt for teacher interview:**

You are in your ___ year of teaching.  Please tell the story of how you developed as a teacher starting with your first days of your first year up to this point.  Please describe your experiences in the mentoring program and reflect how your experiences have impacted your first years as a teacher.

**Probes:** What did you set out to accomplish/goals?  What were your concerns?

**Questions:**

1. How do you define your role as a teacher?

   (Probe: Has your definition evolved/ how have your mentoring experiences been a factor in that change?)

2. How are you different now than you were as a first year teacher? What has experience taught you?

   (Probe: How are your mentoring experiences related to your instructional practices and/or applicable to what you have experienced)?

3. How have you shaped your instructional practices to align with or support ideas about your role of teacher?

   (Probe: How are your mentoring experiences related to your instructional practices and/or applicable to what you have experienced)?

4. Think about your relationships with students and others (colleagues, mentors, etc.) within your school.  Describe how your professional relationships have evolved since your first day/month/year of teaching.   Please describe how you

engage others within your school community:

    a.  Describe your relationship with students

       (Probe: Has your relationship evolved/how has mentoring been a factor in

       that change?)

    b.  Describe your relationship with your mentor

       (Probe: Has your relationship evolved/ how has mentoring been a factor in

       that change?)

    c.  Describe your relationship with colleagues

       (Probe: Has your relationship evolved/how has mentoring been a factor in

       that change?)

    d.  Describe your relationship with others

       (Probe: Has your relationship changed and how has mentoring been a

       factor in that change?)

Appendix E

Interview Coding Sheet

Interview Coding Sheet

Teacher ID #_____

Interviewer:  <u>Leadriane Roby</u>

Date of Interview _____
(Interviewer notes/notes from audio-recording)

Opening prompt
        Initial goals:




        Challenges:




Q1—Teacher definition/roles defined:



        Change:




Q2—Initial teaching experiences:



        Change:

Q3—Instructional practices:


Change:




Q4—Relationship with others:
Students/Mentor/Colleagues/Others:



Change:

Appendix F

Observation Form

Observation Form

Teacher ID #_____

Observer:  Leadriane Roby

Date of Observation _____

Evidence/examples of personal sense of what it means to be a teacher

Evidence/examples of instructional practices

Evidence/examples of engagement

Additional/other examples and evidence

Appendix G

Permission Request

**Western Michigan University**
**Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership**

**Teachers Sense of Professional Practices as a Result of Mentoring**

TO:         Superintendent of XYZ School District
FROM:     Leadriane Roby, Student Investigator

I am conducting research on teachers' perceptions of mentoring support they have received at the beginning of their teaching experience. This project will serve as a dissertation research project in part of the requirements for the doctorate of philosophy at Western Michigan University.

The study includes conducting interviews and observations with teachers who have been mentored during the beginning of their teaching experience. Your district was selected to participate because currently have or have had a formal mentoring program in place for teachers. For the purpose of this study, mentoring is defined as a structured program designed to coach new teachers into the school's learning community, over an extended period of time.

It is important to understand how mentored teachers assimilate into their approach to teaching as a result of an early mentoring experience and equally important to understand how the mentoring experience plays into teachers' sense of efficacy, competence and confidence.

I am requesting the following:
- To be allowed permission to approach teachers in your school district and invite them to participate in the study.
- To be allowed permission to come on school-site(s) to observe classrooms of the teacher participants in the study and conduct interviews about their teaching practices and reflections of their mentoring experience.
- A letter stating approval from your district office to conduct research project with mentored teachers in your district.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding participation in this research study either now or at any point in the future, please contact:  Leadriane Roby, 5233 Cranberry Court, Kalamazoo, MI 49009, (269)366-5084, email leadriane.l.roby@wmich.edu.  Should you have additional questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Dr. Patricia Reeves at (269)720-3285 or patricia.reeves@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269)387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at (269)387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

Thank you for your help in this important project.

Appendix H

Screening Questionnaire

**Western Michigan University**
**Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership**
**Teacher Participant Information**

**Title of Study:** Teachers' sense of professional practice as a result of mentoring

**Study focus:** How mentored teachers create sense and meaning of their teaching roles and develop professional practices after participation in a formal mentoring program.

**What teachers:** Eight elementary teachers who have at least one year of teaching experience and are between one to five years beyond completion of their mentoring experience in their school district.

**Study Guarantees**: Teachers names will not be used in the study report, nor will the school district be identified. All data collected will be confidential. Names will not appear on any papers or tapes on which information has been collected or recorded. The audio tapes will be coded and the student researcher will keep a master list with the names of participants and the corresponding codes. This list will only be kept for the purpose of providing transcripts to participants for confirmation and clarification. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All data will be maintained for the duration of the study in a locked cabinet and be destroyed after three years, February 2012.

**Study Data Collection:** There are three parts to the information collected. ALL INTERVIEWS will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. Observations of classroom interactions will be noted in the student researchers' notebook.

**Teacher Commitment:** To be available for a 45 minute to 1 hour interview to discuss mentoring experiences and provide an opportunity for one classroom observation. Additionally, allow for one additional hour (as appropriate) for follow-up interview for discussion of document artifacts, observations and for clarification purposes only. Time of INTERVIWEW AND CLASSROOM OBSERVATION will be arranged at the convenience of the teacher's schedule. Classroom observations are **optional and are NOT required**, but may enrich the discussion around the teacher's mentoring experience.

**Participant Benefit:** There can be no financial reward or remuneration to entice teachers per university regulations. Teacher participants will be adding to the body of knowledge of education. Long range it is hoped that data collected for this study will be useful in guiding the direction school districts take in providing support for new teachers.

If you have additional questions, please contact Leadriane Roby at (269)366-5084 cell, (612)668-2931 work, or email leadriane.l.roby@wmich.edu or the principal investigator, Dr. Patricia Reeves at (269)720-3285 or patricia.reeves@wmich.edu.

If you would like to be considered for this study, please provide the requested information and sign this UNBINDING offer to participate:

Name_____    Years taught_____


Email_____    Phone number(s) _____C

_____H

School District_____


Did you participate in a mentoring program in your school? _____ (yes/no)


If yes, how long was your formal mentoring experience        _____1-5 days

_____1-3 months

_____ 1 year or longer

_____ other time limit

**(please specify)**


When did your mentoring experience end? _____


Would you be interested in participating in the study, *Teachers' Sense of Professional Practices as a Result of Mentoring*? _____


If yes, please list the preferred times to contact you

_____

Appendix I

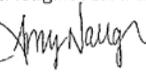Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

# WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date:   March 22, 2010

To:     Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
        Leadriane Roby, Student Investigator for Dissertation

From:   Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re:     Extension and Changes to HSIRB Project Number 09-03-18

This letter will serve as confirmation that the extension and changes to your research project "Teachers' Sense of Professional Practices as a Result of Mentoring" requested in your memos dated 2/26/2010 and clarified 3/18/2010 (modify interview questions and coding sheets; add observation data collection form; revise contact information for student and principal investigators in consent document) have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination:      April 1, 2011

Appendix J

Informed Consent

**Western Michigan University**
**Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership**

**Principal Investigator:**     Patricia Reeves, Ed.D.
**Student Investigator:**       Leadriane Roby
**Title of Study:**             Teachers' sense of professional practice as a result of
                                mentoring

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Teachers' sense of professional practice as a result of mentoring." This project will serve as Leadriane Roby's dissertation, research project for the requirements of the doctorate of philosophy. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project.  Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**
The purpose of this study is to explore how mentored teachers, those beyond the formal mentoring experience, create sense and meaning of their teaching roles and develop professional practices after participation in a mentoring program.

**Who can participate in this study?**
You were selected as a potential-participant in this research study, as you have been identified as a newer teacher (one to 6 years of experience) who has participated in a mentoring program. Because your elementary school and/or district has a formal mentoring program, the researcher contacted your district's superintendent's office for the school sites which have mentoring programs for new teachers.

To be eligible for this study, you must have taught for at least one year.  You will be selected from a pool of 15 elementary teachers with at least one year of teaching experience and who are between one to five years beyond completion of their mentoring experience, prior to invitation to participate in research study.

Teachers who are outside of this criterion will be excluded from participation in the study.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**

You will/have received a copy of the Teacher Participant Information flyer, explaining the study, including how data will be collected and the anticipated time commitment for your participation. As a participant, you will be asked to meet with the researcher for a one hour interview to share your experiences as a mentored teacher. You will also be asked to allow the researcher to observe you in your classroom environment for 1 to 2 hours, and then provide one additional hour for a follow-up interview to discuss or clarify questions that the researcher may have. Your expected time commitment for this study will be approximately four hours.

The in-depth interview will be questions regarding your professional practices and thoughts about your mentoring experience. The researcher will provide a copy of the questions ahead of time for your review. The interview session will be audio-recorded and no longer than one hour. This will allow the researcher to accurately capture and transcribe your experiences.

**Where will this study take place?**

Because the interview will be recorded, the individual interview location should be quiet enough to allow for discussion and free of background noises or distractions. The researcher recommends using an empty classroom, or the library, but is open to whatever location you feel most comfortable.

The other settings for this research study will be public areas of your school (e.g. classrooms, school hallways, and offices) as determined upon mutual agreement between you and the researcher. The purpose of the observation is to explore how you interact in your school community and environment. The observation of you in your school environment would be one to two hours. The researcher will obtain permission from you and your local school before any data is collected. You are also free to share personal items (e.g. personal journals) which you feel illuminate your thoughts and/or feelings of your mentoring experience.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

The interview and observation can occur on the same day, or different days. The researcher will work around your preferred schedule. The overall time that you can expect to spend from beginning to the end of study will be three to four hours over a period of one day or up to different three days. Again, the researcher will work around

your preferred schedule.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

Most teacher preparation programs provide theoretical, technical know-how and the mechanics of curriculum and instruction. This is a foundation, yet there is much more to be accomplished in teaching and learning that more often than not, new teachers are left to discover through trial and error.

Teachers who have developed competence and have a high sense of personal efficacy regarding their work are more likely to stay in the profession. It is important to understand how teachers assimilate into their approach to teaching as a result of an early mentoring experience. Specifically, it is important to know how teachers reflect on their mentoring experiences, connect those experiences with who they are, and how they function as teachers. Additionally, it is important to understand how teachers use their mentoring experiences to develop their professionalism, their fit and role in the school environment. It is equally important to understand how the mentoring experience plays into teachers' sense of efficacy, competence and confidence.

The research questions that will guide this study:
1. How do teachers use their mentoring experiences to shape their personal sense of what it means to be a teacher?
2. How has the mentored teacher used his or her mentoring experience in developing their instructional practices?

3. How has the mentored teacher used their mentoring experience to shape their overall professional orientation and behaviors?

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

There are no known risks for participation in the study.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

Although you will not directly benefit from participation in the study, the information that you provide is very valuable and important. Your participation will have expected benefits for new educators entering the profession of teaching. Research from study may impact how school districts approach the mentoring support provided for newer teachers within their school districts.

**Are there any cost associated with participating in this study?**
There are no costs for participating in the study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There is no compensation for participating in the study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
All data collected will be confidential. Your name will not appear on any papers or tapes on which information has been collected or recorded.  The tapes will be coded and the student researcher will keep a master list with the names of participants and the corresponding codes in a locked file in the researcher's home.  Once the study closes, data must be maintained in a locked file in the principal investigator's office.  All data will be maintained for the duration of the study in a locked file for at least three years.

**What if I want to stop participating in this study?**
You may choose to stop participating at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by the decision to stop participation.  You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.

The investigator can also decide stop your participation in the study at any time in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Dr. Patricia Reeves at (269)720-3285 or patricia.reeves@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at (269)387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner.  Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

_____

Please Print Your Name


_____          _____

Participant's signature                                              Date