Broadening Landscapes and Affirming Professional Capacity: A Metacognitive Approach to Teacher Induction

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Abstract

The Faculty of Education at Brock University and an Ontario, Canada, self-regulatory body for the teaching profession partnered to create an innovative teacher induction project conceptualized to enable new and mentor teachers to self-affirm their professional capacities as autonomous and collaborative professionals. A distinguishing feature of the project is its focus on participants’ metacognition throughout the inquiry process. Participants engaged in critical thinking and retrospective analysis with new and experienced colleagues. The resulting data confirmed that the induction model engaged participants in the broadening of their teacher landscapes and provided a heightened sense of self-affirmation.

Teacher induction continues to be a topic that has profound relevancy across North America. Darling-Hammond (2006), among other researchers, underscores the fact that teachers’ abilities contribute most significantly to student achievement and educational improvement (see also Cochran-Smith, 2006). Effective teacher induction programs are instrumental in terms of both new teacher retention and in strengthening pedagogical practice (Fulton et al., 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The literature, however, suggests that new teachers too often lack the professional support and constructive dialogue necessary to make the successful transition from pre- to in-service teaching (Brock & Grady, 1997; Danielson, 2002). The result is a staggering number of new teachers who abandon the profession in the first three to five years – 46% in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Further, research shows that teacher retention is more aligned to the nature of the first teaching experience than to an individual’s academic proficiency or to the quality of his or her professional teacher education program (see Nielsen et al., 2006; Odell & Ferraro, 1992); therefore, the necessity to support new teachers is strikingly clear (National Commission on Teaching, 2003; Wilkins & Clift, 2006).

The Ontario Context

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) is considered “the second step in a continuum of professional development for teachers to support effecting teaching, learning, and assessment practices, building on and complementing preservice education programs” (NTIP, 2006, p. 5). New teachers need to attain two satisfactory ratings on their performance appraisals within the first twelve months of practice to mark their successful completion in the NTIP program. A third and possibly fourth appraisal is required if either of the first two evaluations resulted in a “Development Needed” outcome. Among the objectives of NTIP is to provide sustained and full-year support for new teachers to
complement the learning from their professional teacher education programs and to further develop the essential aptitudes and knowledge that will contribute to their effectiveness as a classroom teacher in Ontario schools.

Additionally, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) allows teachers to govern their own profession in the name of public interest and accountability. The OCT issues official certificates of qualification to those interested in teaching in Ontario public schools. Among its mandates, the OCT establishes the standards of professional practice for all educators, is the accrediting body for teacher education programs, and contributes to the professional learning and development of its members. As the body that investigates instances of teacher misconduct and incompetence, the OCT also has the authority to suspend or revoke teaching certificates.

There has been a commendable focus on teacher induction practices in Ontario. This focus has been fueled in part by the realization that beginning teachers function more efficiently and effectively when they are supported during their induction into the profession. Equally noteworthy, teacher mentors also significantly benefit from participation in professional learning initiatives that enhance their roles as teacher leaders. As the literature attests, successful mentoring practices contribute directly to improving teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and, in turn, better equip them to cope with the expectations of being professional educators. Teacher professional development, regardless of a teacher’s years of experience in the classroom, is meant to improve teaching practice in an effort to improve student learning (Ganser, Marchione, & Fleishmann, 1999). This research project and the subsequent induction model under discussion underscores the significance of nurturing self-critical and adaptive educators (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

This research endeavor involves a strategic partnership between key educational stakeholders (including a faculty of education, the Ontario College of Teachers, and 6 district school boards) to deliver an innovative model of teacher induction. The project addresses the pressing need to situate teachers’ knowledge, regardless of their status as either protégés or mentors, in a context-based and reflective environment (see Wang, Odell, & Strong, 2006), whereby their inquiry skills and constructive responses illuminate their potential as teachers. In this view, the purpose of the study was to examine participants’ reflections to determine the success of the induction model as an effective means of nurturing new and mentor teachers’ critical inquiry.

The Teacher Induction Project: Theoretical and Pragmatic Contexts

The Faculty of Education at City Center University and the Ontario College of Teachers (the provincial self-regulatory body for the teaching profession) partnered to create a teacher induction project as an innovative and effective means to support beginning teachers. The teacher induction project, involving 6 district school boards in Ontario, Canada, identified the following specific objectives:

- To enhance teacher induction and mentorship practices in Ontario
- To model a strategic partnership approach to induction with district school boards
- To support the induction of beginning teachers by using professional learning processes that include dialogue, reflection, inquiry, and collaboration
Although teacher induction programs vary in their composition given the unique contexts of each province and state, the fundamental components of effective programs include a formally established mentor/beginning teacher pairing (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004), consistent professional development that is relevant to the needs of new teachers (Cherubini, 2009a), release time for mentors and protégés, and opportunities for novice teachers to network with other new and experienced colleagues (Hirsch, 2006; Wilbur & Zepeda, 2004). Facilitating time for novice teachers to collaborate with veteran colleagues has a significant positive impact on new teachers’ enculturation into the profession (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Fulton et al.’s (2005) qualification is especially timely:

If teachers are to meet the needs of their students in the 21st Century, we must think about planning and then studying induction programs based on multiple goals, including building teacher knowledge and professional skills; integrating new teachers in the teaching community … and encouraging dialogue that supports best practice (p. 22, as cited in Nielsen et al., 2006).

The teacher induction model was responsive to the respective research literature, NTIP, and the voices of the partner-school board officials responsible for inducting new teachers. In forming a strategic partnership, the Ontario College of Teachers, the Faculty of Education at Brock University, and the 6 participating school boards collaborated to create professional learning sessions. The triumvirate of a faculty of education, a self-regulatory governing body, and regional school boards across the Golden Horseshoe Learning Consortium in southern Ontario collaborated to investigate the following research questions: First, is the model conceptualized by this strategic partnership of educational stakeholders supportive of induction practices for both new and mentor teachers? Second, is the case pedagogy approach adopted by the model an effective means of nurturing participants’ critical inquiry?

The project is firmly grounded in the research literature. To begin, a collegial and trustworthy relationship was established between university-based teacher educators and the 6 public school boards that facilitated an effective working alliance based on mutual goals and a shared vision of new teacher needs and mentor practices (see, for example, Dallmer, 2004; Lefever-Davis et al., Lieberman & Miller, 2001). The impetus for this professional alliance between a faculty of education and schools is a logical extension of professional education teacher programs graduating the teachers whom school boards are responsible for inducting into the profession (Shroyer, Yahinke, & Heller, 2007). Timely professional support for new teachers, including being paired with a mentor, is cited as a significant factor in not only retaining teachers (Cherubini, 2009b; Johnson, 2004; Wilkins & Clift, 2007), but in facilitating their emotional development (Bullough & Draper, 2004), enhancing their satisfaction with the role of teacher, and most significantly, in improving pedagogical practice to improve student learning (Howe, 2006).

To build an innovative approach to teacher induction embedded in the research and also responsive to the Ontario context, the objective of the model was to introduce new and mentor teachers to critical inquiry while providing ample opportunity to foster what Feinman-Nemser (2001) refers to as ‘the habits of critical collegueship.’ In a nonthreatening forum, professional interactions were facilitated between teacher colleagues where key issues regarding new
teacher concerns were identified, discussed, and reflected upon to enhance not only the participants’ development as new and mentor teachers, but their understanding of themselves as professional teachers (see also Flores, 2006). This project reconceptualized teacher induction practices by underscoring new and mentor teachers’ potential to self-affirm their respective roles as critically conscious practitioners. As Tickle (2000) suggests, induction is more than a socialization process and needs to incorporate “opportunities for self-questioning and reflection not only upon teachers’ own actions, but also upon the values and norms underlying the educational settings in which they work” (p. 63).

Methodology

Participants

The researchers established a partnership with each school board and, in some cases, served on their NTIP steering committees. In these instances, the university faculty researchers provided insight into the content of teacher-preparation programs and how this learning could most naturally be bridged with school board induction initiatives. In turn, the faculty representatives shared the process by which the collaborative teacher induction project under discussion complemented the support services offered by the school board NTIP providers. The dialogue between all stakeholder participants was sustaining and mutually beneficial.

Two new teachers from each of the 6 boards of education, as well as 2 mentor-teachers from the same school boards, voluntarily participated in the project. Each school board NTIP coordinator recommended potential participants. New teacher participants’ teaching experience ranged between one and three years, with a mean of 1.8 years. Their teaching responsibilities ranged from grades 1 to 8. New teacher participants taught in different schools across their school boards, and represented varied socioeconomic student demographics. Four of the new teacher participants were male and seven female. The mentor teacher participants served in the capacity as mentor between one and two years, with the mean mentoring experience being 1.2 years. The three male and nine female mentors did not teach in the same school as the new teacher participants, nor did they serve as their mentor. The purposeful sampling approach was taken to ensure that participants had not previously worked together and, as a result, were not influenced by prior opinions. Mentors, like the new teacher participants, taught in schools that represented varied socioeconomic student demographics. The participants served as a cross-representation of school boards in southern Ontario. Each school board is considered mid-sized in the Ontario context serving between 55 and 80 schools. As will be discussed, the new teachers participated in two full-day sessions in November. Mentor teachers attended a one-day session in January, while both new and mentor teachers participated in a joint session in March of the same academic year.

Data Collection

To begin, both the new and mentor teacher project participants engaged in numerous written critical reflections on various issues confronting new teachers and on developing meaningful support for new teachers. Each reflection was prompted by the project facilitators at strategic intervals to encourage independent participant responses and opportunities to share perspectives in light of the larger group. Sample reflection topics included:
What issues do new teachers/mentors face?
Identify a new insight or key learning that occurred as a result of this topic discussion.
What impact did the case-writing process have on you as a new mentor/teacher?
What were the benefits of your reflections on your own practice as a new mentor/teacher?

Second, throughout the four-day project sessions, participants wrote their viewpoints on charts to collectively reflect and discuss the impact of certain topics at pivotal junctures during the work with cases and commentaries. As an example, participants were asked to read a case and respond to the various ethical dilemmas by assuming the role of the case-study teacher. They also had opportunities to reflect in writing their analyses of the case circumstances in view of the professional standards of practice. As a component of the reflections, participants identified underlying values and norms associated to teaching, and in the process, they discussed these implications on their roles as new and experienced teachers.

Lastly, structured virtual interviews of approximately 50 minutes involved a set of scripted questions that were posted in an electronic site and made exclusively available to project participants. Both mentors and new teachers were invited to express their thoughts to the various questions over a three-day period. The virtual interviews were conducted four weeks after the delivery of the final project session. The online interview protocol invited responses to a range of questions related to their participation in the project and its influence on their teaching and learning paradigms, their work with colleagues, and their own professional development as new and mentor teachers. Sample questions included the following:

1. As a new teacher/teacher mentor, what would you identify as your professional development needs?
2. The project presenters stressed community from the first activity (titled “Community Builder”) to the closing activities. How effective were these activities in building community? How important was this to your experience of the workshop?
3. You were often asked to reflect on your teaching experiences and your images of teaching. How valuable were these opportunities for reflection? Compare the value of reflection to the value of teaching strategies or curriculum-oriented professional development.
4. The study of case studies was a critical component of the workshop. How enriching were the case study and follow-up activities? How have they informed your practice?
5. During the joint session with new teachers and teacher mentors, you worked closely with the mentors discussing and crafting some of the cases written during your first two-day session. How valuable was this experience? Did you feel any tensions during this process? Was this process useful in terms of your understanding of teaching and/or mentoring?
6. Looking back on your experience during these sessions—and in the time since—please comment on the value of these sessions in your professional development as a new teacher.
7. How would you compare these sessions to other professional development you have received?
Participants’ responses to the online interviews were posted throughout the three-day life of the virtual site. This virtual site was purposefully designed to allow the new and mentor teacher participants various opportunities to juxtapose their reflections with those of other participants. There was sufficient flexibility for individuals to comment beyond the scope of the questions.

**Data Analysis**

The study’s qualitative methodological approach derived from the principles of grounded theory. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), grounded theory is not predictive about outcomes. It is a methodical approach to data reduction that involves the pertinent codes and categories that emerge from data. Grounded theory is predominantly qualitative and particularly well suited to educational and sociological research due to its practical theory that is grounded in participants’ observations and contributions (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Kennedy & Lingard, 2006). The process of data analysis within this qualitative tradition is significantly different from those methodologies that describe participants’ realities with little input from the researcher (Glaser, 1993; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). The research design that evolved as part of this process considered both Eaves’s (2001) synthesis of various grounded theorists (including Charmaz, 1983; Chesler, 1987) and the work of Glaser (2001; 2003) and Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Data derived from this study were coded and constantly compared. Initially, the open coding process distinguished discrete concepts (basic units of analysis) and the properties respective to each concept. Key phrases were captured in the participants’ own words and used in the line-by-line examination of each participant’s responses (Chesler, 1987). The concepts were translated into a discussion of observations, which resulted in an analysis of the data on a higher conceptual level (Orona, 1997). In this light, data analysis resembled “a discussion between the actual data, the created theory, memos and the researcher” (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, p. 149; see also Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

To continue, the axial coding process grouped codes into code phrases and, subsequently, into concepts (Eaves, 2001). The various concepts were grouped to create the preliminary categories. Categories were distinguished as concepts that emerged when codes relating to similar phenomenon were continuously juxtaposed with one another. Using the constant comparison technique, categories were then developed and tested against the collected data. The technique also provided the opportunity to use the categories to examine additional data in subsequent reflections, scripted charts, and interviews as they were collected. Therefore, categories were revamped throughout the data collection to reflect the emerging details. As Taber (2000) suggests, it is a “constant process of reviewing the emergent model against the data” (p. 471). The grounded theory analysis was not a structured and linear process; rather it fluctuated among lateral, vertical, and cyclical transitions. The process of theoretical sampling after the analyses of participants’ reflections and scripted chart notes identified various preliminary hypotheses that emerged in the data. The virtual focus group interviews allowed for additional probing and for the conceptual saturation of the core categories being presented.

Critical to grounded theory is the ability of the researcher to engage in such a conceptual discussion without manipulating the data into predetermined paradigms. Of further import to the process is the understanding that the data themselves enable the pattern. Therefore, the researcher,
Must exercise the patience to *enable that which enables* and hence allow the voices of the participants to materialize. Having said this, the researcher is obligated to resist all temptations to shape the findings and lean towards more traditional forms of qualitative research methodologies (Cherubini, 2007, p. 112).

The researcher is certainly active in the process of tracking and recording procedural modifications and detailed descriptions as the findings emerge, but the researcher must resist controlling the direction of the analyses into predetermined conclusions (Charmaz, 1983; Jeon, 2004).

The study accounted for the rhetorical construction and frames of reference employed by the participants in terms of the manner whereby language impacts perception to create versions of reality (Avdi, 2005; Johnstone & Frith, 2005). The research team, well versed in qualitative measures, crosschecked the data and triangulated the results by completing both individual and collective coding sessions. This process was intended to increase the study’s validity and reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This paper cites the discourse that was representational of the codes, properties, and categories emerging from the data.

**Results**

The results of this research shed light on the critical thinking processes that “actually go on in the minds of teachers” that, according to Grant and Zeichner (1995), has gone largely unexplained in the research. The inductive approach adopted throughout the analysis resulted in the emergence of four codes identified as “opportunities for participants to voice their contributions,” “relevant professional development,” “collegial partnerships,” and “constructive and positive self-growth.” In the tradition of grounded theory, the codes were collapsed during axial coding into two core categories: “reflecting on a new landscape for teachers,” and “a heightened sense of self-affirmation as new and mentor teachers.”

(1) **Reflecting on a new landscape for teachers.** Although participants acknowledged the significance of what one new teacher described as colleagues and principals who are “very supportive [and] provide positive re-enforcements,” other participants admitted that in many instances they felt neither prepared nor properly inducted for their role as teacher. Typical of others, another participant stated, “Teaching has not been what I expected. I knew teaching would be a lot of work, but I did not know it would be quite this much.” Participants were candid in stating their retrospective needs as new teachers. One participant wrote, “I would have appreciated more guidance from the board.” Similarly, another suggested, “I thought I would have greater guidance from the other same-grade teachers.” Another new teacher shared her discovery that “I really have to search out information on my own … support is scarce.” The new teachers consistently cited their appreciation for the support that their school boards were able to offer, but they often admitted to it being insufficient. Characteristic of others, this new teacher stated, “the school board did the best they could with NTIP, but it was backwards. There was an in-service on classroom management in June.” Although the board-led programs seemed to be lacking in some instances, the participants credited the mentors from their respective schools who knew, as this new teacher described, “exactly what I need to get through this first year alive and be effective.” Others referred to the positive impact of the “constructive criticism” from their mentors who, as another new teacher referred to, “really helped [with] curriculum, routines, [and] union issues.”
In this light, new teachers attested to the fact that their participation in the induction project enhanced their understandings of their respective roles as new and experienced teachers given the fact that they were privy to a broader vision of the educational landscape. Their involvement resulted in a realization that their teacher landscape has been for the most part marked by relative isolation. By engaging in case inquiry with this collaborative partnership, participants were able to perceive and make sense of their role as novice teachers from more inclusive and invitational educational perspectives. New teachers especially appreciated the discussions emanating throughout the project for, as many described, “offering another perspective, especially from outside of your own community.” The conversations were consistently framed in references that captured new teachers “opening [their] eyes to new perspectives,” providing “constructive ways of revising and connecting things,” and as even another wrote, “recharging my mental faculties.”

In turn, the case-based process employed in this induction project not only increased new teachers’ awareness of the OCT’s standards of professional practice, but embedded their understanding of these in contextually relevant circumstances. Similar to other new teachers, this participant declared that the sessions “made [me] aware of the standards [and] showed me that I was living up to these standards without knowing it.” New teachers harbored a greater appreciation of the standards as they re-envisioned their role at the center of the educational landscape. One teacher reflected, “Finally there is some relevance to the standards.” Another stated, “I can see how the standards are reflected in our universal cases.” Still another concluded, “I will be a better teacher because of this opportunity. I will use this experience to further my development and understanding of ethical and professional standards of practice.”

Surprisingly, however, this broadening of the educational landscape was not limited to only the new teacher participants. Mentors, too, concluded that the case process allowed them “to reflect on various points of view,” to be attentive and “open-minded” of new teachers’ needs, and as yet another individual stated, “to look at a variety of perspectives.” Mentors, like beginning teachers, cited how “great it was to open our minds to more than one viewpoint.” Particularly insightful was this comment shared by a mentor participant:

“It is through this discussion that I learn and gain ideas to shape my own practice, which I feel will make me a better mentor who has much to offer. I learned that we all face the same issues, feel the same joys, have the same worries, [and] without sharing, discussing, and listening we would not have this opportunity.

Mentor teacher participants reflected on the various insights and interpretations into the case dilemmas, as well as those others posed by new teachers. These mentor teachers concluded that the “great dialogue with colleagues from other boards” provided alternate and enlightened understandings.” On numerous occasions, mentors recorded their “amazement” that they “miss[ed] important facts or neglect[ed] to see all the angles” of situations. They typically concluded that the dialogue stemming from the cases induced their critical thinking capacities and “forced [them] to dissect a situation and view the perspectives to identify the real issue versus the imposed emotional response.”

For both new and mentor teacher participants, the broadening of their respective teacher landscapes represented a retrospective critical thinking process. Participants admitted to be
intrigued by the process of interrogating the facts, considerations, and competing perspectives under discussion. As a result, the discussion “provided a new means to communicate ideas and thoughts.” Participants acknowledged that their thinking processes kept them “focused” and that the process of “reading, recording, discussing, and reflecting” engaged them in constructivist-driven insights. Common throughout the reflections were participants’ comments about “benefiting from talking through” the various perspectives and how “reflection helps to see and review one’s own actions.” All participants made reference to the critical capacities of observation, introspection, and reflection as landmarks of their thinking processes. One new teacher stated, “There is a need for understanding the world of a beginning teacher.” The induction project broadened their conceptualizations beyond their roles as new and mentor teachers by cultivating their thinking in a manner that transcended self-interests. The case-inquiry process provided a professional development intervention that allowed participants to engage in introspective and communal analyses in a spirit of intense reflection. Many participants determined the success of the project by the opportunities they were afforded to reflect in light of their teacher landscapes. Typical of others, this participant noted, “The most useful component was the reflection. I have not had a chance to reflect on my career as a teacher.”

(2) A heightened sense of self-affirmation. The properties of this discourse with new teachers and mentors focused on their observations of personal growth during what they described as meaningful professional development. New teachers in particular commented on the dynamic process throughout the induction project that fostered critical thought where “ideas flowed freely.” One participant in the project wrote that s/he benefited from the “collaboration with others who are at different stages of their careers.” New teachers described the project as a means of reducing their isolation since they were consoled by the fact that the feelings of being overwhelmed were not theirs alone. “To hear common problems of new teachers,” as one new teacher shared, made them realize that they “didn’t know how common they were.” Therefore, new teachers felt affirmed that the experiences of their peers and the insight of their mentor colleagues were aligned with their own paradigms and experiences. Particularly captivating were participants’ comments characteristic of the following new teacher’s description of participating in the project, which resulted in the “validation that I am on the right track and that there is support always available ... it recharged my batteries.” Their heightened sense of self-affirmation inspired new teachers’ energy.

Of further significance, the self-affirmation gleaned from these sessions provided the new teacher participants with a more relative perspective of their own professional development as novice educators. In many instances, new teachers reflected that the experience of engaging in critical reflection throughout the process led to an understanding that, as this individual’s summary amply represents, “it is a learning process.” New teachers identified their professional growth as positioned on a continuum of learning. There existed a greater acceptance of the fact that being a novice educator implies certain challenges. Feeling validated in their role as novice teachers, participants admitted that “there is so much to learn” from, what another new participant teacher described as, “such meaningful discussion.” In a constructive, positive, and self-affirming teacher induction process, participants distinguished “the bond existing between all teachers that is difficult to define but is inexplicably beautiful.” The process of critical inquiry illuminated for new teacher participants a connection of sorts between new and experienced educators, the landscape they share, and the ones more private.
Participants were intrigued by the experiences of their colleagues from across the regions and distinguished the existence of an intimate conceptual relationship they shared with all teachers that was made evident by “talking through” and thinking critically of issues most relevant to their professional development.

Mentor participants also felt validated by their experience in the process. “It was affirming to know,” as this mentor discussed, “that I am doing things to help.” Mentors felt affirmed by the bilateral and contextually meaningful discussion between new and experienced teachers alike. Another individual reflected, “As a mentor, it confirmed that everyone goes through the same challenges as I have,” and as a result, a different participant suggested that a strength of the project was to establish “mutual understandings of some of the issues faced by a beginning teacher and an experienced teacher.” Mentors commented that the process of case-based inquiry affirmed that their contributions both during the sessions and at their own schools were valuable in terms of protégé development. They distinguished the importance of professional development that invites their critical thought as professional teachers to, as was typically described as, “a wide variety of ideas and suggestions.” Common in the feedback were sentiments about the case-inquiry process that enabled them “to discuss open-ended issues and concerns that we all share” and how the sessions represented “insight through communication” as opposed to more traditional means of in-service whereby information is communicated in a passive transition model.

Further, mentor teacher participants reported that they valued the opportunity to not only make direct contributions to new teacher development, but to have their reflections juxtaposed with those of other experienced colleagues. In several instances, mentors reflected, as this individual stated, that the benefit of “writing my commentary and hearing other peoples’ views and perspectives [led to the] realization that my opinions and views are valuable [and that] I like learning from other professionals.” Mentors often commented that the process was “renewing” for them since the conversations between colleagues across the region provided them a better perspective of the “very specific” needs of new teachers and mentors alike. Representative of other mentor teacher participants, this individual stated, “I like listening to my colleagues’ opinions and interpretations of the different cases and commentaries. It’s nice to look at things from a different perspective and also to have my own ideas validated.” For all participants, the case inquiry process enabled them to critically account for the multiplicity inherent in the profession. Consistent in the data were also comments that underpinned the importance of the sessions to, as this mentor participant wrote, “generate the opportunity to talk to other teachers.” Participants reported feeling affirmed by the genuine conversation that resulted between participants. As another participant wrote,

I feel that sharing sessions with your colleagues can rejuvenate and inspire you, because it provides you with a sense of comradery and that basic feeling that comforts you…. What makes us good teachers is that we continue to question our decisions and look to find new and better ways to help our students and support one another.

Discussion
As evidenced in the voices of the participants, this inquiry-base case model of professional learning clearly presents a unique reconceptualization of a teacher induction practice that is supported by the research literature and is relevant to the respective educational policies.
Further, and perhaps more significantly, the case-inquiry process facilitates for new and mentor teachers opportunities to reflect critically on the educational, social, emotional, psychological, and political contexts (as discussed in Grant & Zeichner, 1995; Wang et al., 2006) that have the potential to influence pedagogical practices. Inherent in the findings and emerging from the core themes are the implicit benefits of focusing teacher induction on the processes of critical inquiry in supportive professional communities of practice (see Hargreaves et al., 2001; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 2000). The outcomes, including those already presented, lend themselves to improving teachers’ knowledge and skills, thereby supporting research that declares teacher quality to be “one of, if not the most, significant factor in student achievement and educational improvement” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 106).

Participants distinguished the benefit of the model’s focus on new and mentor teachers’ metacognition throughout the inquiry process. Hamnerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005) suggest that teachers are most effective when they “accurately reflect on what they are doing well and what needs to be improved” (as cited in Heller et al., 2007, p. 229). The participants in the induction model were engaged in knowledge-creation, critical thinking, retrospective analysis, and sustained collaboration with new and experienced colleagues. The research study participants attested to the benefit of having plentiful opportunities to self-reflect on the case dilemmas and implications related to the professional standards of practice; apply retrospective understandings to their own circumstances; and then engage in group discussion within the context of purposeful collegial relationships. Participants felt their contributions throughout the group discussions served as a vehicle for guiding the induction sessions. New and mentor teachers self-reflect, articulated their thinking and thought processes, and offered numerous anecdotes to extend the critical consciousness of the group. What emerged was a rather complex system of interrelated components. The critical consciousness of each new and mentor teacher served as a foundational element that contributed to a group professional consciousness that, in turn, assumed a conceptual force of its own.

Critical to the conceptual momentum of the discussion rooted in a metacognitive paradigm were the inquiries that often had the greatest relevance for the participants themselves. The process reflected a personal service to teacher induction (Cherubini, 2007). It complemented and extended the principles of NTIP by providing new teachers with a network of both their peers and experienced colleagues, while facilitating professional development in a supportive professional learning community (Hirsch, 2006; Martin & Rippon, 2006). The voices of the research participants substantiated the fact that the induction model engaged them in broadening of their teacher landscapes and provided a heightened sense of self-affirmation in the process of reflecting on their knowledge, capacities, and critical thinking (Richardson & Anders, 2005). The model fashioned sustained and focused attention on participants’ reflections, thinking, and actual practice. The ensuing dialogues generated authentic conversation in mutually benefitting capacities. Participants suggested that they benefited from engagement in the case-inquiry design as it enabled them to share their discoveries and insights while often dispelling anxieties of their beginning colleagues in their assurances and considerations. Throughout each session, participants evaluated their individual and collective judgments and their potential to problem solve effectively (see Zambo & Zambo, 2007). For new teacher participants especially, the metacognitive function of this model enlightened their comprehension of complex circumstances. By reconceptualizing induction practices in
light, new and mentor teachers can now better negotiate the unique and common realities of their practice, and the profound and sensitive implications associated with them.

The results of this research point to the benefits of an educational partnership that engages new and experienced teachers in a unique model of professional development. The project honored the voices of the participants—both new teachers and mentor teachers. This model of teacher induction generated sustained, profound, and purposeful professional development. The reflections of the new and mentor teachers, both during and subsequent to the sessions, gave the project its vitality, authenticity, and promise of relevancy.

**Limitations and Recommendations**

This study was based on grounded theory. Thus, emergent concepts are restricted to the context in which the research was conducted, the data examined, and the degree to which any research contextualized within the grounded theory structure is qualified. Given that the sample was exclusive to 4 participants from each of the 6 school boards, the results can only be limited to the population of the study as conclusions are not necessarily generalizable beyond this sample.

Teacher induction could benefit from formal inclusion of case-based professional learning. This research project explicitly demonstrated the significance of integrating a case approach for supporting the development of both beginning teachers and mentors. Professional learning that honors and respects the lived experiences of educators is highly relevant for induction. The written dilemmas encountered by beginning teachers in this project served as highly meaningful resources for both beginning teachers and mentors to inquire into professional practice.

Further, the opportunity for participants to engage in periods of sustained dialogue and critical reflection with colleagues about topics that have personal relevance to their practice is instrumental to their growth as teachers. Induction processes could be enhanced by regularly scheduled meetings between new and experienced teachers who can converse about professional issues away from the distractions of the classroom.

**References**


Mentoring Relationships: Cooperating Teachers’ Perspectives on Mentoring Student Interns

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Abstract
Cooperating teachers play a vital role in the professional development of student interns. Although they serve as mentors, most cooperating teachers do not receive comprehensive or coordinated preparation for their role as effective mentors. This article presents findings from a qualitative research study exploring the perceptions of nine cooperating teachers about mentoring student interns and identifies the salient factors impacting their mentoring relationships: (a) role of the mentor, (b) expectations for the mentoring relationship, and (c) cooperating teachers’ motivation for serving as a mentor. A formal mentoring preparation program was designed for cooperating teachers and implemented at our university. The Summer Mentor Teacher Support Program (SMTSP) consisted of a two-day, 6-hr-per-day workshop, which addressed strategies for effective mentoring and building positive relationships and served as the site for data collection. A brief description of this program is provided.

Introduction
Mentoring is one of the major aspects of teacher education programs, often a collaborative effort between university supervisors, teacher educators, school administrators, supervising teachers, and preservice teachers (He, 2010; Schwille, 2008) to prepare better teachers for the increasingly challenging classroom environment. Studies demonstrate that mentors need to be more informed about the needs of the beginning and novice teachers they mentor (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). While much of the research on mentoring focuses on the beginning teacher, little research gives voice to the mentor teacher; yet there is growing research demonstrating that the mentor-protégé relationship enhances the growth and professional development of the mentor or more experienced teacher (Hastings, 2004; Howey, 1988; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009; Tauer, 1998). Additional research has focused on the process of mentoring relative to the mentor and mentee (Achinstein & Villar, 2002, as cited in Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009).

This study is in line with research that gives voice to mentor teachers, exploring their perspectives on the mentor-protégé relationship. According to He (2010), the mentee or preservice teacher needs significant guidance in both pedagogical and content knowledge throughout the mentoring process. In fact, He says, the mentoring experience is one of the primary factors that determine the success of the first-year or beginning teacher’s experience.
Beginning teachers face numerous challenges during the first few years of teaching, including student motivation, planning and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and various other roles and responsibilities (Roehrig, Pressley, & Talotta, 2002). This complexity, coupled with the increasing pressure to ensure that students are excelling, can place a significant amount of stress on the new teacher (Roehrig, Bohn, Turner, & Pressley, 2007) and adversely impact his or her effectiveness in the classroom.

The internship field experience plays a significant role in shaping the beliefs and knowledge of the prospective teacher (Borko, Eisenhart, Brown, Underhill, Jones, & Agard, 1992; Eisenhart, Borko, Underhill, Brown, Jones, & Agard, 1993, as cited in Borko & Mayfield, 1995). The field experience is often considered the culminating capstone event for a teacher education program, as well as a critical milestone toward becoming an effective teacher (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). According to Guyton and McIntyre (1990), surveys of practicing teachers indicate that they overwhelmingly rate their student teaching or internship experience as the most beneficial and critical component of their teacher education program.

The internship provides opportunities for interns (novice teachers) to collaborate and be actively mentored by cooperating teachers (veteran teachers). Typically, university teacher education programs select veteran or more experienced teachers to serve as cooperating teachers and mentors based on factors that may include prior collaboration, credentials, and teacher availability or willingness to work with an intern. Generally, the cooperating teachers are eager and willing to facilitate in this supervisory role, but oftentimes they are ill prepared to serve as effective mentors (Grimmett & Ratzlaff, 1986; He, 2010). The ideal setting for the mentee is one that is welcoming, accepting, and supportive (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O’Brien, 1995; Cain, 2009). Furthermore, mentors are often expected to function in multiple roles and meet an unrealistic standard envisioned by the beginning teacher (He, 2010). When the mentor is unable to meet this standard, the mentor-mentee relationship is often stressed (Bullough & Draper, 2004). Because the beginning teacher is impressionable and the internship experience is pivotal to his or her development, it is critical to investigate methods or strategies that better prepare the cooperating teacher to be an effective mentor.

According to Martin (2002), the most neglected characteristic of a mentoring relationship is the failure to adequately support the prospective mentor (cooperating teacher) with the skills necessary to be an effective mentor. In recent years, effectively designing, implementing, and evaluating mentoring programs specifically targeting beginning and novice teachers (who often serve as cooperating teachers) has become critical to the development of preservice teachers (He, 2010; Schwille, 2008). Unfortunately, there has been little attention focused on developing and implementing effective mentoring models for teacher education programs (Giebelhaus, Carmen, & Bowman, 2002). As a result, the mentoring that a preservice teacher encounters is often considered “hit or miss,” and teacher education programs must rely on the schools or districts to provide professional development to prepare teachers to be effective mentors. Without adequate preparation for mentors, a number of preservice teachers or
Interns may have experiences that do not adequately prepare them for the very challenging first years of teaching (He, 2010).

Research has shown that the more formal preparation the mentor receives, the more effective they become (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009; Kennedy, 1991). Subsequently, promoting successful mentoring relationships is a very important step toward developing student interns into effective practitioners. Some researchers have proposed the development of practical mentoring models (Giebelhaus et al., 2002; He, 2010) that would include the primary tenets of traditional mentoring programs. These mentoring models would extend beyond teacher education programs and also serve as professional development for the mentor teachers (He, 2010). Any efforts toward teacher retention or reducing attrition rates must acknowledge and examine the impact effective mentoring during the internship experience may have on the longevity and effectiveness of a beginning or novice teacher.

The purpose of this article is to present findings from a qualitative research study exploring the perceptions of nine cooperating teachers about mentoring student interns. This research identifies three salient factors impacting the mentoring relationships of these cooperating teachers: (a) role of the mentor, (b) expectations for the mentoring relationship, and (c) cooperating teachers' motivation for serving as a mentor.

A formal mentoring preparation program, designed for cooperating teachers and implemented at our university, served as the data collection site. This program, the Summer Mentor Teacher Support Program (SMTSP), consisted of a two-day, 6-hr-per-day workshop, which addressed strategies for effective mentoring and building positive relationships. A brief description of this program is provided.

**Review of the Related Literature**

*Mentoring Relationships*

The art of mentoring dates back as far as Greek mythology (Harris, 2003) and can be considered informal or formal. The most prevailing theme regarding mentoring describes a relationship between an experienced person and someone who is not as experienced, or the process of nurturing and providing varying degrees of mental, emotional, and pedagogical support (Bierema, 1996; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). However, Kochan and Trimble (2000) assert that this view implies a relationship where the mentee is viewed as subservient to the mentor, implying a one-way relationship. In the classroom setting, the mentor is typically an experienced or veteran teacher who allows a preservice teacher in the classroom or actively facilitates a beginning teacher in becoming acclimated to the school setting (Cornell, 2003). A number of research studies on mentoring relationships have focused on higher education (Campbell & Campbell, 2002; Harris, 2003), people of color and women (Enomoto, Gardner, & Grogan, 2003; Mertz & Pfleeger, 2002; Wilcox, 2002), parents (Avani, 2002), school-age children (Watts, Erevelles, & King, 2003), and administrators and educators (Martin, 2002; Tauer, 2003; Zellner & Erlandson, 2002). Researchers have focused on all of these areas in hopes of studying and gaining insight into the effectiveness of mentoring.
There is a lack of consensus on one single or standard definition of mentoring (Halai, 2006; Wunsch, 1994). However, the literature on mentoring identifies a number of key roles of mentors, such as serving as a guide, offering support (Ganser, 1996), and acting as adviser, trainer, or partner (Jones, 2001), as well as nurturer to the mentee. Mentoring is also defined as a nurturing relationship that is based on mutual trust that leads to the development and professional growth of both the mentor and mentee (Halai, 2006). Simply put, mentoring provides benefits to both the mentor and the mentee, and there is a sense of satisfaction as the mentor watches the mentee grow (Reed, Phillips, Parrish, & Shaw, 2002).

Much of the research on mentoring has focused primarily on the perspectives and role of the mentor (Harris, 2003). More specifically, research has examined the type of support mentors provide, which can be characterized as emotional or psychological (Bruce, 1995; Haring, 1999; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). Research by Jacobi (1991) examined mentoring in the educational setting and defined three major categories of the mentor’s role, which include personal support, role modeling, and professional development. Moreover, this relationship is often characterized by the mentor as providing guidance, support, and advice (Bierema, 1996; Harris, 2003). The word mentor, according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, is defined as “a trusted counselor or guide”; mentee is defined as “one who is being mentored” or “protégé.” Reed et al. (2002) define mentoring as “a process of coaching a person both personally and professionally” (p. 103). Although there are multiple definitions for mentoring, there are commonalities when contemplating the necessary qualities for effective mentors and the types of activities that facilitate effective mentoring.

Knox and McGovern (1988) assert that there are six critical characteristics of mentors: (a) willingness to share knowledge, (b) competency, (c) willingness to facilitate growth, (d) honesty, (e) willingness to give critical, positive, and constructive feedback, and (f) ability to deal directly with the protégé. Some of the primary aspects of effective mentoring models include making observations, providing feedback, and having time for the mentor and mentee to discuss feedback and engage in reflection (Giebelhaus et al., 2002). According to Giebelhaus (1999), effective mentoring models should include a method for selection and preparation of mentors and their mentees that promote collaboration as well as opportunities for direct observation of their teaching. Moreover, factors such as personality, ability to communicate tenets of effective teaching, and similarities between grade level and content area facilitate effective mentoring (Giebelhaus et al., 2002).

Researchers and scholars in the field of mentoring agree that the primary role of the mentor is to provide guidance and emotional support to the novice teacher who is in need of significant support (Halai, 2006). According to Ganser (1996), the mentor should optimally have anywhere from 8–15 years of teaching experience, including several years in the school in which they are currently working. Additionally, they should exhibit the following characteristics: (a) willingness, commitment, and enthusiasm; (b) the ability to collaborate with adults; and (c) the perception of teaching as a job they enjoy. In 1978, Schein proposed that the mentor has eight roles: teacher, sponsor, confidant, door-opener, role model, talent-developer,
proctor, and leader. Regardless of the varying definitions and perspectives on what constitutes mentoring, it has been shown that the more experienced a mentor is, the more likely he or she is to be an effective mentor (Roehrig et al., 2007).

The Nature of the Field Experience

The internship or field experience is considered one of the most significant milestones of the teacher preparation program (Brimfield & Leonard, 1983). Careful consideration must be taken when assigning student interns to mentors or cooperating teachers to ensure that the field experience is productive for all involved. The most successful mentoring relationships are based on shared and common values, goals, and understandings (Tauer, 2002). It is important to gain the mentor’s perspective on the mentoring relationship to fully understand the dynamics of mentoring.

Research investigating strategies for promoting effective mentoring relationships may facilitate positive internship experiences for cooperating teachers, student interns, and university supervisors. For example, research by Roehrig et al. (2007) demonstrates the importance of appropriate mentor modeling (e.g., effective instructional strategies for the mentee to observe), as well as the need for a clear and open line of communication throughout the mentoring experience between the mentor and mentee.

The development and implementation of formal mentoring programs and mentoring models in the context of teacher preparation programs can better prepare the prospective teacher for success during the challenging beginning years of teaching (He, 2010). It is critical that mentors get the experience and support they need to be effective mentors for beginning teachers. Organized, formal mentoring programs can provide both structure and rationale for the need for effective mentors for beginning or novice teachers. Research demonstrates that mentors who are considered “effective” tend to have more experience as mentors than those who are not (Roehrig et al., 2007). Some studies also show that quality mentors need to have both expertise and competence (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Stallion & Zimpher, 1991; Wang & Odell, 2002) in the realm of mentoring if they are to help their beginning teachers be more effective. Mentors who have had adequate preparation, research shows, are better able to assist their mentees with classroom management, problem solving, and lesson planning expertise (Evertson & Smithey, 2000).

Significance of the Study

It is important to develop deeper understandings about how cooperating teachers perceive their important role as mentor to student interns and to explore the factors deemed necessary for effective mentoring to occur. This qualitative study included nine cooperating teachers who shared their perspectives and described their experiences as mentors to student interns. In an attempt to add to the existing literature base, conversing with this group of cooperating teachers provided a model for the further development and implementation of effective mentoring programs. Research questions guiding this investigation were:
1. What are cooperating teachers’ perspectives on mentoring student interns during their internship experience?

2. What are cooperating teachers’ perspectives on factors that impact the mentoring relationship?

**Methods**

This study investigated the role of cooperating teachers as mentors to student interns, including how the cooperating teachers can shed light on ways to enhance the student internship experience for both the student interns and themselves. A qualitative lens offered advantages and insights that were richer and more context-specific than what might have been possible with a quantitative study. As researchers, we believe the most appropriate qualitative approach for this investigation was to use a phenomenological perspective. We used patterns of various experiences, as expressed through the voices of the cooperating teachers, as a framework to provide insight and understanding into individual experiences while investigating the underlying meanings behind participants’ experiences (Watson et al., 2002). Similarly, we looked at the phenomenon of cooperating teachers who have mentored student interns during their student teaching or field experiences as a framework to gain insight into their perspectives on the internship experience as well as the mentoring experience.

We thought it was more appropriate to understand the experiences and perspectives of cooperating teachers about mentoring in their own words as opposed to using quantitative measures (Kuh & Andreas, 1991). The intent of this study was not to generalize to all cooperating teachers, but to provide insight into how the teachers participating in this research viewed their role as mentor and described their experiences with student interns. Furthermore, we believe that insight into cooperating teachers’ experiences and perspectives can better provide information on how to facilitate and enhance the internship experience for the cooperating teacher, mentor teacher, and even the university supervisor.

As described by Merriam (2002), all qualitative research is to some extent phenomenological since research from the qualitative paradigm focuses on the individual’s experience; phenomenological studies are designed to gain an understanding into the essence of the experience. More specifically, qualitative research is designed to answer questions about lived or social experiences and gives meaning to these experiences (Merriam, 1998).

The primary sources of data in this study came from responses to a demographic survey and open-ended questionnaires designed to elicit participants’ lived experiences. Another source of data included observations made during a summer workshop designed to identify cooperating teachers’ perspectives on how to better prepare them to effectively mentor student interns. As part of this workshop, we asked cooperating teachers to give insights on how teacher education programs can better prepare student interns and cooperating teachers for the field experience. By collecting and then using these data, efforts will be made by the host teacher education program to make the student internship experience more rewarding and productive for all involved.
**Summer Mentor Teacher Workshop**

This study included observations collected during a two-day, 6-hr-per-day workshop designed to prepare cooperating teachers for their mentoring roles. The general topics and themes of the workshop were the role of the mentor, relationship building, and promoting cooperative and collaborative relationships. This workshop was considered a single-session training experience on mentoring, similar to the one described in research by Campbell and Campbell (2002). According to their research, extensive, multisession workshops often result in a loss of attendance over time; therefore, a “one-shot” model for the summer workshop was more practical than an ongoing workshop.

**Incentives**

A total of nine cooperating teachers completed the two-day workshop, and each received a stipend in the amount of $250.00 and a gift bag of educational supplies (i.e., pens, paper, notebooks, and a coffee mug) worth more than $25.00. During the two-day workshop, we provided meals and snacks, including a continental-style breakfast and a midday lunch. According to Campbell and Campbell (2002), these are essential elements of an effective workshop series; having food available encourages participation.

**Participant Selection**

Participants for this study were nine female, public schoolteachers who had served previous semesters as cooperating teachers for a Southern regional university. The participants had a range of discipline areas and teaching experience; participants included one grade 8 science teacher, two grade 8 math teachers, three grade 8 English/language arts teachers, and three high school English teachers (see Table 1). We used purposive sampling in this study. This sampling strategy involved selecting a population across grade levels and content areas that would provide “information rich” cases. This purposive sampling strategy allowed us to learn about the issues important to the purpose of the research and to gain insight into the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>English/language arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>English/language arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsten</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnolia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>English/speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>English/language arts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the context of this study, criterion-based sampling was also used, which is, in essence, the same as purposive sampling (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Several researchers have discussed the use of criterion-based selection methods (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 2002). We chose to employ this method because all participants in this study had to meet a “predetermined criterion” (Patton, 1990). Ultimately, we selected the teachers in this study based on a list of recommendations from district administrators, school principals, and university supervisors who considered them suitable candidates (based on the criteria they were provided). The primary characteristics that were described as criteria included the following: (a) The candidates had to have previous experience mentoring student interns and/or practicum students; (b) they had to be tenured faculty; and (c) their previous mentoring experiences had to indicate a willingness to participate in a research study of this nature. We contacted the teachers who fit the criteria, and we selected for the study teachers who were eager to be a part of the study.

Unfortunately, although we contacted both males and females included on the list of potentially interested teachers, only female teachers showed continued interest in participating throughout the duration of the study. It is also important to note that we conducted this study during the summer, which may have impacted the availability of participants as many were likely on summer leave. Additionally, professional development projects may have been mandated by the school system, which could have conflicted with teachers’ ability to participate in this research. All participants for the study met the following criteria:

- Teachers at the junior high or high school grade levels (grades 8–12)
- Between 3–15 years of teaching experience
- Prior experience as a cooperating teacher and/or mentor teacher
- Understood and consented to participate on a voluntary basis
- No prior professional development experience on mentoring student interns

We obtained participant information after approval from a university Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects office. We contacted participants via telephone or e-mail, and all signed consent forms at the onset of the workshop giving permission to be videotaped. Participants selected their own pseudonyms for the purposes of confidentiality.

Demographic Survey

All of the study participants were female public school teachers, and each had prior experience mentoring student interns. One of the participants had previously participated in a formal mentoring program.

We provided each participant an open-ended demographic questionnaire at the onset of the two-day workshop to provide insight and details into their background and school community. The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) addressed content area, years
of teaching experience, demographic information about participants’ classes, number of years supervising interns, and number of interns they had mentored.

**Open-ended Questionnaire**

Additionally, we asked participants to complete open-ended questionnaires (see Appendix B, C, and D) to identify their teaching philosophy, experience as a cooperating teacher, formal preparation in mentoring, and expectations for the student internship experience. Participants also completed questionnaires addressing their perspectives of cooperating teachers mentoring student interns. Participants addressed the following questions in a focus group; responses were recorded as field notes.

- What is a mentor?
- What is the role of a mentor?
- What skills should an effective mentor exhibit?
- What are some benefits of mentoring?
- What does it mean to be mentored?
- What is the role of relationships in mentoring?

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis involves the systematic organization of data in an effort to make meaning and understand data so that it can be presented to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). We analyzed the data obtained from the questionnaires and the demographic survey, and we organized significant units of open-ended responses to questionnaires into various categories and themes. Data analysis also included looking for similar themes and patterns that emerged between participants’ responses in the study. Similar to research by Weasmer and Woods (2003), we analyzed data using the inductive method of analysis, reviewing data in an effort to identify words, phrases, patterns, and events that were noteworthy. Words and phrases that were identified within the data were “coding categories,” and these served as a way of sorting the descriptive data while also making it easier to manage (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The approach to data analysis involved the following: Initially, we analyzed the demographic questionnaire to determine the degree of teaching experience for each participant, content area, as well as additional demographic information. Subsequently, we analyzed participants’ responses to open-ended questionnaires to determine common patterns through the use of various statements, while developing categories and themes. We used the Strauss and Corbin (1990) system for organizing data to classify themes from the textual evidence. This data analysis strategy examines commonalities between the participants’ experiences or perspectives on mentoring. According to Davis, et al. (2004), findings of this nature are valid, and textual evidence is heuristic, allowing the reader to understand participants’ experiences and often shedding new light on the research area under
investigation. Furthermore, quotations and questionnaire responses provide a certain degree of richness and depth to respondents’ experiences and perspectives “in their own words.”

We used triangulation to strengthen the design and rigor of this research study. Triangulation of data facilitates the ability of the qualitative researcher to enhance the “credibility” and “trust-worthiness” of data (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 1990). Triangulation was achieved through the combining of data from the demographic survey and questionnaires throughout the research study (Merriam, 1998). We also conducted peer reviews throughout the data analysis process to enhance the credibility of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Results and Discussion**

The following two themes emerged from the analysis of data:

1. Role of the mentor and expectations for the mentoring relationship
2. Cooperating teachers’ motivation for mentoring

These findings were consistent with findings by Weasmer and Woods (2003) and Anderson and Shannon (1988) that suggest that the major components of mentoring in the field of education are role modeling, nurturing, support, sponsoring, and teaching.

**Role of the Mentor and Expectations for the Mentoring Relationship**

It is important for student interns to have “guided teaching” relationships with their cooperating teachers and university supervisors, because these relationships have a significant impact on learning how to teach (Borko & Mayfield, 1995). Research by Glickman and Bey (1990) suggests that the help and guidance provided by cooperating teachers is directly related to the effectiveness of student interns. Unfortunately, further research by Smith (1990) describes how the potential of guidance from cooperating teachers to facilitate the student internship experience is often unrealized.

The open-ended questionnaire responses offered insights into cooperating teachers’ perspectives on providing guidance and support to the student intern. One participant, Jessica, discussed in the following statement how she viewed herself as a guide. She said, “I provide a stable, secure environment and allow my interns to begin to explore gradually first on an activity, then a class period, then more prolonged experience. I encourage interns to watch their teachers, too.” Ashley, another participant, described how she could best facilitate the internship experience in a similar account: “I can best facilitate the student internship by providing opportunities for my intern to apply what he/she has learned with a net.” Sara, another participant, said, “I will certainly do whatever I am told to do, as well as be a support system for the intern, and I will be cooperative and sensitive to his/her needs.” In the following statement, Wendy described how her years of experience contributed to her perspectives on mentoring: “After 13 years of teaching and four earlier interns, I feel I have helpful guidance to offer a beginning teacher, and I relish the chance to learn from an individual who is eager to
try out the latest trends and practices.” These statements demonstrate a sense of responsibility for providing guidance and support to interns. In addition, these participants allowed interns to gain autonomy in the classroom by gradually giving them an opportunity to build confidence in their own teaching.

Throughout the workshops, the participants defined the role of mentor and described their expectations for the mentoring relationship. Participant responses revealed that in-service teachers viewed their role in mentoring relationships as a resource person, guide, role model, friend, and experienced professional. These findings were consistent with research (Yost, 2002) that described the mentor teacher’s role as effective expert, guide, and support system for the novice teacher. Each of these roles ultimately has an impact on student learning. Moreover, many participants discussed that mentoring student interns enhanced and “recharged” their teaching skills and promoted self-reflection.

Participants expected their mentees to be knowledgeable, professional, flexible, and reflective. In addition, participants discussed the importance of collaboration, patience, good communication skills, trust, honesty, and respect toward the nurturing of effective mentoring relationships. Lastly, participants discussed in great detail the importance of a “code of etiquette” for the intern as a guest in the cooperating teacher’s classroom. This code included the following: respect for the mentor teacher’s private desk space, appropriate dress code, and making sure that the intern’s personal life did not overlap with his or her professional life.

Participants also discussed the significance of role modeling for student interns to facilitate and encourage their growth and success. One participant, Taylor, believed that she was a good role model because she was open-minded and flexible. In the following statement, she described her perspectives on role modeling: “I am willing to be flexible and receptive in working collaboratively. I am not too set in my ways, yet think I can be good for new teachers.” Kirsten simply stated, “I want teachers to be as good as me.” According to these statements, these two respondents believed that they were good models for student interns.

Research demonstrates that modeling during the student internship experience can benefit both the cooperating teacher and the intern, and it is essential for novice and beginning teachers to have good models to imitate early on (Weasmer & Woods, 2003).

This theme asserts that mentors understand the critical role they play in the professional development of the prospective teacher and reiterates prior research that describes mentors as guides, support systems, and nurturers toward their mentees (Halai, 2006).

Cooperating Teachers’ Motivation for Mentoring

Motivations for mentoring, as expressed by participants, included that they wanted to share their knowledge, gain knowledge on new trends in teaching, encourage new teachers, and collaborate with beginning teachers. Participants, through open-ended questionnaire responses, expressed their desire to be mentors in a variety of ways. The sincerity regarding their motivation for working with student interns was clear in most cases. For example, when asked to discuss reasons for being a mentor, Kirsten responded, “I want to share my passion
with others. I want to help train effective, efficient educators.” In a similar statement, another participant, Mae, responded, “An opportunity to share my experiences and expertise in the classroom.” She added that mentoring gave her “An opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills from the collaboration between university and student intern. An opportunity to team-teach with an intern, to share ideas, to share responsibilities.”

Magnolia also expressed a desire to share her expertise and gain knowledge: “To share my expertise and gain more knowledge with new methods of teaching. I enjoy helping young adults have a positive experience.” Wendy stated,

Our profession needs well-trained teachers ready to fill teaching positions opening all around the country, and new teachers need to learn from those who enjoy their jobs. Education is precious and so important to me that I don’t want it just left to others to prepare our teachers for tomorrow. I want to offer my help and expertise. I find a student intern rejuvenates me by bringing fresh ideas and fresh energy and fresh perspectives into the classroom. Sometimes he/she reaches the children I haven’t reached as well as I have others.

Other participants identified the primary impetus for mentoring as the desire to encourage a new teacher in the profession. Diane discussed her willingness to collaborate and encourage her interns in the following statement:

I am excited to have the opportunity to encourage and help a prospective teacher grow and develop love and respect for students and teaching. Using hands-on and inquiry learning will allow the intern to see that this is possible. Lots of lab-work in a classroom! I plan to learn from the intern as well—new ideas. Another take on what’s happening in my room.

Other participants, like Jessica, expressed that they were excited to work with an intern: “I enjoy working with new preservice teachers. I want them to have quality experiences.” Diane also stated that she wanted to “encourage a prospective teacher to be a better, more competent teacher.” These statements reiterate the necessity of the cooperating teacher to be motivated and exhibit a desire to make the mentoring process beneficial to the mentee (preservice teacher).

This theme addressed the role that mentor and mentee motivation has on the mentoring relationship. The cooperating teachers all expressed that they were both eager to collaborate and desired to learn and share their knowledge with the student interns. This demonstrates that learning during the mentoring relationship is a two-way street, where both mentee and mentor learn from the collaborative relationship.
Conclusion

This project provides implications for both research and practice to encourage teacher education programs to initiate systemic initiatives in collaboration with local or area schools to provide more formal mentoring programs. These mentoring programs should not just focus on induction programs for new teachers; they should go back even further, preparing cooperating teachers during the internship experience. This research affirms findings in studies by Kyle, More, and Sanders (1999), that describes the importance of providing professional development for the cooperating or mentor teacher in preparation for hosting a student intern.

It is clear that the student intern must have a role model who is skilled and experienced in mentoring, and it is this type of modeling that can foster positive development toward becoming an effective teacher (Weasmer & Mays, 2003). The novice teacher is likely to model what his or her cooperating teacher does (Weasmer & Mays, 2003); if the mentor lacks adequate skills in mentoring, this can significantly impact the student intern’s professional development. In an effort to enhance teacher retention, it is critical that teacher education programs continue to work collaboratively with area schools to develop and implement effective mentoring programs for the in-service teacher and for the student intern and beginning teacher.

Participants in this study expressed that mentoring workshops should be provided for cooperating teachers to better prepare them for the mentoring of their student interns. As mentioned earlier, the internship is a critical milestone for the preservice teacher and may well serve as a primary determinant of how effective the prospective teacher will be in the classroom during the first few years. Many participants in this study recommended that similar workshops on effective mentoring be a part of ongoing, mandatory professional development for cooperating mentor teachers who plan to host a student intern. According to participants, the two-day summer workshops gave them an opportunity to express their concerns about mentoring student interns, raised their awareness of the importance of mentoring relationships, and developed their mentoring skills.

While the findings from this research did not shed any new light on the nature and impact of mentoring on prospective teachers, it reiterated that mentor teachers understand their role in facilitating the internship experience. Specifically, the cooperating teachers in this study were able to describe their roles as guide, support, or critical friend similar to previous research studies (Halai, 2006; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). These mentor teachers understood how critical their roles were to the development of the student intern. This is important information to note when developing and implementing formal mentoring programs.

To extend this research, it is now important to determine if the cooperating teachers or mentor teachers understand their role and the expectations of the mentoring relationship. The acts of mentoring and modeling effective strategies to the prospective teacher are essential. This is important, because even though the teachers know what they are expected to do
relative to mentoring, this does not necessarily mean they know how to mentor or how to be an effective mentor. Therefore, teacher education programs need to ensure that mentor teachers are adequately prepared to model effective strategies to facilitate the internship experience. This will better prepare student interns and prospective teachers for the real world of teaching. Lastly, it is also important to find out student interns’ perspectives on how well their mentor teachers actually mentor them throughout the internship experience.

References


Appendix A
Demographic Questionnaire for Cooperating Teachers

Please provide the following information by checking a blank or writing an answer to the question.

**Biographical Information**

Gender: ☐ Female    ☐ Male

Race/ethnicity: ☐ Asian   ☐ African American   ☐ Latino/a   ☐ White/European   ☐ American Indian

U.S. Citizenship: ☐ U.S. citizen ☐ non-U.S. citizen

1. Identify the town, city, or state you grew up in.

2. Describe the school where you currently teach.

3. How many years have you been teaching at this school?

4. How many years have you been teaching?

5. Are you teaching in your content area?

6. What is your content area?
Appendix B
Open-ended Questionnaire for Mentor Teacher Support Program

Questionnaire to be administered to cooperating teachers during the first workshop in the summer mentor program.

1. Briefly describe your teaching philosophy.

2. What are some of the characteristics of an effective teacher?

3. Briefly describe your prior experiences as a cooperating teacher?

4. How many times have you had an intern in your classroom?

5. What are qualities that you would like in a student intern?

6. How do you feel you can best facilitate the student internship experience?

7. Have you ever had any formal preparation in how to effectively mentor novice teachers or student interns?

8. How do you feel the university supervisor can better facilitate the student internship experience?

9. What are your expectations for the student internship experience?
Appendix C
Open-ended Questionnaire for Mentor Teacher Support Program

Post-questionnaire to be administered to cooperating teachers at the end of the workshop.

1. Briefly describe your views of the summer mentor workshops.

2. What would you do to make the workshops more effective?

3. Would you recommend the summer mentor support program to a colleague interested in becoming a mentor? Why or why not?

4. Do you think this program has better prepared you to become a mentor for your student intern? If so, how?
Appendix D
Open-ended Questionnaire for Mentor Teacher Support Program

Questionnaire to be administered to student interns during the last week of the internship.

1. How has your cooperating teacher helped to prepare you as a prospective teacher?

2. How has your university supervisor helped to prepare you as a prospective teacher?