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Sharon Renea Colson

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ELEMENTARY TEACHER MENTORING IN A RURAL GEORGIA SCHOOL
SYSTEM: THE IMPACT ON TEACHER RETENTION AND THE IMPLICATION
FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

by

RENEA COLSON

(Under the Direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore beginning teachers' beliefs on their mentoring programs and to explain their perspectives. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with three beginning teacher participants and three principal participants in a rural Georgia school system. Constant comparative analysis was used to collect, code, and analyze the data, which included interview responses and researcher's memos.

Mentoring programs were found to be supportive practices which involved the beginning teachers and mentors. Beginning teachers formed open, positive relationships with their mentors and interacted with them on a regular basis through their mentoring experiences in their respective schools. These interactions included the mentors providing support for the beginning teachers in the areas of curriculum, instruction, classroom management, and parent interactions. Personal and emotional support was also found to be an area in which beginning teachers received support. The relationships formed by the beginning teachers and their mentors and the outcomes of this study affected teacher

morale, teacher retention, classroom instruction, management, and teacher self-confidence.

INDEX WORDS: Rural school system, Mentoring programs, Mentors

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, mentoring programs that provide support for teachers during their first year of teaching have developed rapidly across the United States (Feiman-Nemser, 2000). Currently, over 40% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Grant, 2003). There is an increased interest in mentoring programs due to the current problem of teacher retention and the high rates of attrition (Mandel, 2006). Mentoring has been defined as a “nurturing process in which a skilled or veteran teacher, serving as a mentor, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (Lee, Theoharis, Fitzpatrick, Kim, Liss, Nix-Williams, Griswold, & Walther-Thomas, 2006, p. 236.). Helping to increase teacher satisfaction and self-confidence early in teaching, mentoring can aid in the retention of good teachers and can launch new teachers successfully into this profession (Grant, 2003).

This study will examine the beliefs and attitudes of beginning elementary teachers in mentoring programs, as well as principals’ beliefs on mentoring in rural elementary schools. Areas to be examined include how mentoring impacts teacher retention, attrition, teacher development, and its implications for school administrators. Obviously, there are other factors besides the quality of mentoring programs that contribute to a teacher’s decision to leave the profession. However, the retention, attrition, and development of promising beginning teachers during the first year is an important goal of every school and school principal.

This study will assess beginning teachers' and administrators' beliefs about mentoring to provide insight as to how schools can address the challenges of job stress, anxiety, isolation, and frustration, (David, 2000) especially in rural elementary schools. Nationwide, mentoring programs are receiving a great deal of energy and are thought to be a source of hope for solving the problems beginning teachers face and for reducing the attrition rate of new teachers in our schools (Certo & Fox, 2001). In this study, the terms "administrators" and "principals" will be used interchangeably, as well as the terms "first-year teacher" and "beginning teacher."

Statement of the Problem

The increasingly high attrition rate of beginning teachers to the teaching profession has become a point of contention for schools across the nation as efforts are made to ensure that the most highly qualified teachers are filling classrooms. The retention of beginning teachers during the first year of teaching is an important goal for school principals. Problems and issues faced by beginning teachers have been topics of study for more than half a century. Findings from these studies indicate that mentoring is crucial to address these issues. The challenge for school principals to provide mentoring to beginning teachers is a critical one if the goal is to influence beginning teachers' beliefs and practices, to improve the instruction of beginning teachers, and to increase teacher retention.

The purpose of this study will be to explore beginning teachers' and principals' beliefs on mentoring programs in rural elementary schools to understand how mentoring aids in beginning teacher development. More than two million new teachers will be needed in classrooms across the United States by the year 2010, and careful attention and

planning are necessary to keep these new teachers in classrooms. The findings of this study will broaden the current understanding of beginning teacher mentoring programs, their impact on teacher retention in rural settings, and the implications it will have for elementary principals.

Significance of the Study

A review of the literature revealed that, while mentoring studies usually provide overviews of mentoring and its management, only one study examined and analyzed mentoring programs implemented in rural areas. Due to the limited amount of research on mentoring programs for beginning teachers in rural areas, the results of this study have practical, professional, policy, population, and personal significance. On a practical level, the results will have significance for teachers and administrators in rural schools by providing them with knowledge concerning existing mentoring programs. On a professional level, the results will provide educators with knowledge to assist in designing new mentoring programs in rural elementary settings. The results of the study will be significant to policy, by contributing to the knowledge base of mentoring programs designed for beginning teachers. The results of the study will be significant to the population by providing unique findings as it explores in-depth the experiences of beginning teachers in rural elementary schools. Lastly, on a personal level, the study will develop my interest and increase my understanding as I work with beginning teachers at the college level.

Autobiographical Roots of Study

Education has long been “dubbed” as the profession that eats its young. As a teacher mentor in an elementary school, the researcher has worked with many first-year

teachers and has seen first hand the challenges and difficulties they each face their first year of teaching. Most of these teachers come to the classroom with high expectations, and they experience the “true” reality quickly. The role of a mentor is to be a supporter, not a formal evaluator. A mentor’s role is to help support the teacher in the classroom and assist with classroom discipline, management, instruction, and other duties in which assistance is required.

An administrator’s role is just as important as the mentor’s role to first-year teachers and their success in the classroom. Mentors do not replace administrators in the mentoring of first-year teachers. Therefore, it is imperative that administrators be involved in the mentoring process. All levels of administration, from the school board to principals, need to be involved. Even though administrators can’t be involved day to day, they must be able to allocate resources and publicly promote the importance of mentoring. This study is of particular interest to the researcher because the researcher does not believe many first-year teachers are given the support and assistance needed from mentors and administrators. The researcher hopes, through this study, new insight will be gained to aid in understanding administrators’ role in goal setting and guidance and the mentors’ role in supporting beginning teachers and encouraging them to remain in the profession.

Background of Study

Challenges of beginning teachers are even greater today than they were many years ago (Mandel, 2006). Beginning teachers too often go from the highly supervised situation of student teaching to one with little or no supervision. This change, coupled with the shock of facing their first job, adds stress, anxiety, isolation, and frustration to

the new teacher's professional and personal lives (David, 2000). Many beginning teachers report that they received little support or supervision other than what they obtained themselves (Mandel, 2006). It seems, then, that helping beginning teachers make it through the first few most challenging years is the most crucial. According to Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998), "Teaching has been a career in which the greatest challenge and most difficult responsibilities are faced by those with the least experience" (p. 21). With nearly two million teachers expected to enter schools in the United States in the next decade, the challenge of supporting them effectively has become a critical issue (Halford, 1998). The retention of promising beginning teachers during the first year is an important goal. According to Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin (1989), "Support for and assistance to beginning teachers are needed to change the tradition of isolation, survival, and trial-and-error learning" (p. 210). New teachers tend to work in isolation; they often resort to learning by trial and error (Lortie, 1975) and to developing coping strategies that help one to survive in the classroom.

A case study by Huling-Austin, Barnes, and Smith (1985) described a coping strategy used by a beginning teacher who was experiencing difficulty with classroom management particularly during class discussions. Their findings indicate that the teacher's method of confronting the situation was to eliminate class discussions from her repertoire of teaching strategies altogether. The case study provides insight into the need for providing beginning teachers support during the first few years. This assistance is critical in helping a beginning teacher develop coping strategies that can be used throughout one's teaching career (Huling-Austin et al., 1985).

Problems faced by beginning teachers have been a topic of study for more than half a century (Halford, 1998). Beginning teachers too often go from the highly supervised situation of student teaching with an experienced teacher to a situation with little or no supervision or support (Wildman, Wiles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1989). Providing support to beginning teachers is essential for two reasons: the need to retain qualified beginning teachers and the need for beginning teachers to become effective practitioners as soon as possible (Andrews & Quinn, 2005). Mentoring has become increasingly important since nearly 40 percent of beginning teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching (Grant, 2003). Providing mentoring programs for beginning teachers is one way to address the problems of producing quality classroom teachers and teacher retention (Lee, Theoharis, Fitzpatrick, Kim, Liss, Nix-Williams, Griswold, & Walther-Thomas, 2006). Some of the reasons why teachers are leaving the profession include: inadequate salary, lack of support from administrator, colleagues, parents and community, stress, inadequate training, lack of resources, discipline, and class size (Grant, 2003). Over half of the states in the nation mandate some level of mentoring for first year and beginning teachers, but the rapidly increasing turnover rate and the increased pressure to retain competent teachers is still a concern (Feiman-Nemser, 2000).

While mentoring programs are only one area of a successful induction program for beginning teachers, it is by far the most popular (Grant, 2003). Mentoring is intended to influence the beliefs and perceptions of beginning teachers, their instruction, and to increase teacher retention (Odell, 1986, 1990; Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992). Nationwide, mentoring programs are receiving widespread attention and are thought to be

a promising answer to solving the problems of beginning teachers and attrition (Certo & Fox, 2001).

Despite the increased focus and popularity of mentoring programs for beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Huling-Austin, 1989; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2000; Sweeny, 2001; Zepeda & Ponticell, 1997), only one doctoral study exists that focuses on mentoring programs in rural schools. In that study, Simon (1991) looked at the effectiveness of a mentoring program for beginning vocational agriculture teachers in rural schools. He utilized quantitative and qualitative research techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of a mentor program developed to provide experienced teachers as mentors to help beginning teachers transition into the first year of teaching. Simon found mentored teachers experienced significantly fewer problems in classroom management and instruction, developing rules and procedures, and monitoring and managing student discipline than did the nonmentored teachers in the study. At the end of the first year of teaching, the mentored teachers in the study had significantly better attitudes and personal perceptions toward teaching. Following the first year of teaching, four of the nonmentored teachers either quit teaching or accepted positions teaching in other schools. While two of the mentored teachers accepted other teaching positions, none quit teaching altogether. Both the mentored and nonmentored teachers in the study, however, expressed low levels of satisfaction toward teaching (Simon, 1991).

A major goal of principals and mentor teachers should be to help teachers entering the profession to remain in the profession. That goal can best be achieved through principals, experienced teachers, and first-year teachers all working together (Johnson, 2001). Most often, the principal is the key figure in planning and implementing

a mentoring program (Brock & Grady, 2001). The principal must participate in every aspect of designing the mentoring program and overseeing the program by selecting quality mentors as well as defining the role and responsibilities of mentor teachers.

Research Questions

The overarching question is: What is the impact of mentoring on first year teachers?

The sub-questions are: (1) How does mentoring influence the teaching by first year teachers?,

(2) How is mentoring perceived by school administrators?, (3) How do mentoring relationships with beginning teachers help contribute to teacher retention and teacher development?, and (4) How do mentoring relationships with beginning teachers help contribute to job satisfaction?

Methodology

Research Design

Beginning teacher and school principals' beliefs on mentoring in rural elementary schools will be the focus of this qualitative study. Grounded theory methods will guide the entire research process from the initial collection of data to the final writing (Glaser, 1978). A key component of a grounded theory study is that theory evolves during actual research. This evolution occurs through an ongoing interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory can be viewed as a special form of ethnographic inquiry (Merriam, 2002). Through a series of carefully planned steps, grounded theory develops theoretical ideas. Throughout this process, it seeks to ensure that the emerging theory arises from the data and not from some other source, making

grounded theory the best method for conducting this research. Grounded theory is a process of inductive theory building based totally on observation of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). In a grounded theory study, the researcher is continually involved in the process of data collection, data coding, and data analysis. Through the ongoing process of analyzing data, the researcher can discover gaps in the data that need to be filled. This process, known as constant comparative analysis, will be used to collect data, analyze data, and to generate theory concerning beginning teachers' beliefs about mentoring.

The specific data collection instrument used in this study will be the interview. Interviews will be audio taped with the participants' permission so that the contents can be transcribed. A researcher journal will also be maintained to record researcher notes, memos, and reflections.

Participants

The site for the study will be rural Northeast Georgia. Participants will be three beginning teachers, two first grade teachers and one second grade teacher from each of the three elementary schools in the county where the study will take place. The beginning teachers will either have been assigned a mentor or are a part of a mentoring program. Participants will also include three administrators from each of the three elementary schools. The administrators will give insight on mentoring and mentoring programs.

The study will be conducted in three rural elementary schools, and the following specific criteria will be used to identify the appropriate schools:

1. The three elementary schools will be located in a rural area in Northeast Georgia.
2. The schools provide mentors/mentoring programs for beginning teachers.

3. One beginning teacher will be chosen from each of the three elementary schools.
4. A school administrator will be chosen from each of the three elementary schools.

Six research participants will be chosen for the study from the three schools in accordance with grounded theory methodology, using theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Glaser and Strauss (1999) described theoretical sampling as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p.45). The participants in the study will be first-year elementary teachers and elementary administrators in Northeast Georgia. Each of the first-year teacher participants will have been assigned a mentor or will have been in a mentoring program in their respective schools. Participants in the study will be provided information about the study, including information about informed consent, purpose, duration, researcher responsibilities, and participant anonymity issues. Participation is voluntary and this will be expressed to prospective participants. Those who agree to participate will be given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and their role in it. All participants will be required to give informed written consent.

Instrumentation

Interviews

The specific data collection instrument for the study will be the interview. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described an interview as “a purposeful conversation” (p.95) used to generate descriptive data about how participants perceive and interpret the world.

All interviews and interview questions will be audio taped, with the participants' permission, for later transcription, with the participants' permission to record. Follow-up interviews will be possible to gather additional information. A research journal will be maintained by the researcher to record notes, memos, and reflections. The researcher's journal will also be a record of interview questions asked during the interview sessions.

Limitations

The strength of this study will be its focus on beginning teachers and elementary school principals and their beliefs about mentoring in a rural elementary school setting. This study will be limited in that the findings will represent the beliefs of beginning teachers and elementary school principals in one rural Georgia school system.

Summary

Since the 1980s, mentoring programs that provide support for teachers during the first year of teaching have developed rapidly across the United States. Research indicates over 40 % of new teachers are leaving the profession within the first five years, thus causing teacher retention to be a major problem facing education today. Mentoring programs for beginning teachers is one way to address the problems of producing quality classroom teachers, teacher retention, attrition, and teacher development. Beginning teachers need the support and supervision that a good mentor provides in order to gain the self-confidence needed to stay in the teaching profession. Mentoring is also crucial to principals in the retention and attrition of first year teachers. A principal's role in the mentoring process is as important as that of the mentor. Principals and mentors should work together to best support first-year teachers in the classroom, and to ensure they remain in the teaching profession.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter 2 reviews literature addressing mentoring programs for beginning teachers and describes research findings that build a foundation for this study of elementary teacher mentoring and its implications for school principals. The first section of this chapter summarizes the historical and theoretical development of mentoring programs. The second section focuses on the increasing demand for first-year teachers in schools in the United States today. The third section addresses the challenges faced by beginning teachers. The fourth section discusses the emergence of mentoring programs in the United States designed for beginning teachers and examines the characteristics of both effective mentoring programs and mentors, criteria for matching mentors with beginning teachers, and methods of mentor preparation. The fifth section describes the implications for school principals in mentoring first-year teachers. The sixth section discusses related studies on mentoring programs in rural schools.

Historical and Theoretical Development of Mentoring Programs

Historically, little attention has been paid to the need to provide assistance, especially the need to provide mentoring, for new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2000). It has traditionally been assumed that a first-year teacher's preparedness for the classroom depended on the teacher preparation program in which the teacher was enrolled. In spite of the adequacy of teacher preparation programs, first-year teachers are faced with enormous challenges and overwhelming problems. When faced with a multitude of problems and a lack of support, too many new teachers become disillusioned (Feiman-Nemser, 2000).

Every school year, first-year teachers in rural schools across the country begin their first year of teaching. Full of excitement and enthusiasm, these first-year teachers spend countless hours preparing lesson plans, setting up a classroom, developing classroom management plans, making sure all is well planned for the first day of school. During this time, these beginning teachers are in the stage of early idealism (Maynard & Furlong, 1995). However, when the first day of school arrives, expectations fall short of the true reality, and these teachers realize the rigors of the day-to-day routine demands of teaching. By December, many of these teachers are in the stage in which Maynard and Furlong (1995) refer to as the stage of survival. As spring break and test time approaches, these once enthusiastic teachers most often experience great anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed as they realize they will be evaluated based on students' test scores and performance.

Many first-year teachers, by June, will begin to rethink the decision of whether or not to return to the classroom the next school year. Some will submit letters of resignation to principals and boards of education. In a study of first-year teachers in rural South Carolina, Gratch (2001) wrote of one teacher who described her first year of teaching as a roller coaster ride filled with terror. While the roller coaster ride did allow her to get off at the end, she chose not to take another ride and left teaching after one year. Many, who decide to remain in the teaching profession, do so because they are limited in their career options. Most often in these cases, very little support was provided to assist these first-year teachers during their first critical year of teaching.

Demand for First-Year Teachers

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that more than two million new teachers will be needed in classrooms in the United States by the year 2010 (Moir & Gless, 2001). The lack of support first-year teachers are receiving makes this an increasing concern. In addition to the increasing enrollment of students in schools across the United States and normal teacher attrition, three factors attribute to the tremendous demand for more teachers in our classrooms. These three factors include the reduction of class sizes, the increasing number of teachers approaching retirement, and an attrition rate among beginning teachers that ranges from 35 to 50% nationwide during their first five years of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2000). The increasing need for teachers in our classrooms over the next decade is raising questions of what can be done to retain teachers in the teaching profession. Moreover, what can be done to ensure first-year teachers are receiving the support they need to enhance professional growth and development?

Challenges Faced by Beginning Teachers

Challenges faced by first-year teachers are greater than those of experienced teachers. Many first-year teachers enter a classroom after only one semester of student teaching. Little or no support is provided except for what they obtain themselves. Little supervision is given and, in most cases, first-year teachers are evaluated according to the same criteria as experienced teachers (Van Zant, Razska, & Kutzner, 2001).

Often, first-year teachers begin their careers equipped with “book” knowledge of their subject matter, a few teaching strategies that have been practiced, and limited planning skills. These limited resources provide them with emotions that include

exhilaration, frustration, uncertainty, confusion, and isolation (Zepeda & Mayers, 2001). It is not uncommon to find that, in some instances, first-year teachers are assigned heavier workloads than their veteran colleagues (Glickman et al., 1998). However, new teachers are limited when it comes to instructional strategies to implement in the classroom. Many first-year teachers enter the teaching profession directly from college teacher preparation programs with minimal pedagogical knowledge or skills (Freiberg, 2002).

Among the greatest challenges perceived by first-year teachers are motivating students, classroom management, student diversity, assessment of student work, and maintaining relationships with parents. First-year teachers also need help setting up a classroom for the first time, teaching with limited resources (DePaul, 2000), understanding new state and district standards and assessments, and seeing how those standards affect teaching strategies. The development of organizational and time management skills and connecting theories and teaching methods learned in college to classroom practice are also critical areas of need for first-year teachers (Brock & Grady, 1998).

Morgan and Ashbaker (2000) state that in order to provide effective support for first-year teachers entering the teaching profession, principals, teachers, and others must recognize the importance of three key issues. The first issue includes providing basic organizational information for the new teacher. This information could be provided in a small handbook that could be updated on a regular basis. Included should be a map of the school; where and how to get supplies; policies and procedures with regard to school wide discipline or sending home a student who is sick; a list of the names and phone

numbers of faculty and staff; the daily schedule; and a list of the school's pullout programs and the persons responsible for each program. A second issue supports facilitating effective communication among principals and teachers, the new teacher, and other faculty and staff. A principal can choose someone to introduce the new teacher to the faculty and staff, especially to those who will be working in the teacher's classroom or with his or her students. Written notes and memos, along with other faculty members, can remind the first-year teacher of scheduled events or procedures. The last issue includes providing time for the new teacher and any other adults working in the classroom to become acquainted, to clarify roles and expectations, and to plan together. Essential to teambuilding and requiring as little as 30 minutes per week, this collaboration will improve the effectiveness of this instructional team. Focusing on the same curricular and behavioral goals, they will be more likely to consider themselves as a classroom team.

Unfortunately, first-year teachers generally do not seek help from other teachers except through general conversation. Huling-Austin (1989) described the first year of teaching as a "sink or swim" experience and also stated that novice teachers must be taken out of this predicament and inducted into the profession in a responsible manner (p.5). At a time when education reform has the attention of every district and state across the nation, the quality of staff-development-especially for first-year teachers-is a great concern. Staff-development programs for first-year teachers are most effective when the new teacher is assigned a mentor who will help guide them through the first challenging year (Huling-Austin, 1989).

The challenges faced by beginning teachers are often overwhelming, and yet little support has been offered to them. A review of the literature on the growth of first-year teacher mentoring programs provides a context for examining the impact of these programs on the professional growth and development of first-year teachers, for whom they are designed.

Emergence of First-Year Mentoring Programs

A few years ago, mentoring was not a common educational practice in the United States (Davis, 2001). In most cases, educators recognize mentoring as a special, personal, and usually unproductive relationship established between an experienced teacher and one new to the profession or the individual school (Davis, 2001). Davis wrote that when first-year teachers joined a school's faculty, the principal and the experienced teachers would welcome the first-year teacher with introductions at the first faculty meeting of pre-planning. In a few cases, a social gathering would be held to welcome the new teacher. Then, as Davis points out, in isolation, the new teachers would begin working. Experienced teachers would smile and greet the new teacher, and sometimes even mention those unstated but important rules that existed within the school and school system. Typically, first-year teachers found themselves alone and isolated from significant information and understandings about their school, the system as a whole, and most unfortunately, their profession (Davis, 2001, p.1).

Times have changed since policies to establish teacher-mentoring programs have become increasingly popular. Today, twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have instituted some type of mentoring program. Mentoring programs offered by these states vary in both the level of financial support for new teachers and the percentage of

new teachers served (Halford, 1998). Some states have taken their mentoring programs to a higher level by having the state department of education specify the services of a mentor as part of licensing requirements for first-year teachers.

Data from the U.S. Department of Education confirm there is an increased national interest in providing mentoring programs for first-year teachers. The findings show that 58% of public schoolteachers with three or fewer years of experience report that they haven't been mentored by another teacher in a formal mentoring relationship. Among those who participated in a mentoring relationship, at least once a week, 70% indicated that the mentoring relationship had a considerable impact on their teaching (Certo, 2002).

Characteristics of Effective Mentoring Programs

Naturally, no single mentoring program meets the needs of every school in every situation. Rural schools, for example, often encounter challenges different from those faced by urban schools. School districts with a large number of newly hired first-year teachers or those experiencing difficulty in recruiting new teachers may wish to structure their mentor program differently from school districts where widespread turnover is less of an issue.

Moir and Gless (2001) state that the goal of induction programs must be not only to retain teachers, but, also, to encourage higher levels of classroom instruction that will help all students achieve success. The induction experiences of the new teachers of today have the potential to frame the future of the teaching profession as it will be practiced for the next thirty years (Moir & Gless, 2001). As the classroom teacher is considered to be the primary vehicle which drives student learning and educational reform, so, too is, the

new teacher mentor widely considered to be the most important feature of any high quality induction program. No technology, curriculum, or standardized structures can take the place of a knowledgeable and skillful veteran in providing the support to move a novice teacher to a high level of teaching. Quality mentoring, therefore, requires careful selection, training, and on-going support (Moir-Gless, 2001).

Characteristics of Effective Mentors

Denmark and Podsen (2000) stated that in order for a first-year teacher to feel success and for the teaching mentor to grow professionally, the mentor should be able to perform competently in seven ways. These seven areas include: (1) Understanding the mentoring role: Teacher mentors must have an understanding of the mentoring role and be committed to acquiring the appropriate knowledge and skills necessary. (2) Initiating the relationship: Mentors need to take the first step in developing a collaborative, colleague-to-colleague learning relationship. (3) Establish a climate of peer support: Mentors can assist first-year teachers in gaining a better understanding of what is expected of them as professionals and as faculty members and offer insight into how to meet those expectations. (4) Modeling reflective teaching practices: Mentors can assist first-year teachers in translating content knowledge and skills into successful classroom practices. The mentor can most effectively accomplish this goal by demonstrating a reflective approach to teaching, self-evaluation, and implementation of new ideas. (5) Applying and sharing effective classroom management strategies: Mentors can help reduce the high level of dread and anxiety many new teachers associate with classroom management. This goal can be accomplished by encouraging ongoing dialogue, sharing classroom management strategies, and modeling appropriate student-teacher

relationships. (6) Encouraging and nurturing an appreciation of diversity: Mentors can help first-year teachers, as well as themselves, develop in this area by sharing in the effort to examine their personal beliefs and biases concerning diversity issues., and (7) Embracing mentoring as an investment in professional development: In order for the mentoring relationship to be effective, mentors need to possess an attitude of being lifelong learners and must understand that mentoring is an opportunity to develop leadership skills in themselves and in those they mentor.

In a review of the literature and research on mentoring, Feiman-Nemser (1996) notes that in effective mentoring programs, the mentor teacher should have classroom competence and have a minimum of three to five years experience. Willingness on the part of the teacher to be a mentor and to put forth the extra time and energy commitment is also considered a key component. Other characteristics that Feiman-Nemser (1996) felt a mentor should possess include confidence, integrity, and the ability to establish empathetic relationships with other teachers.

Rowley (1999), after years of assisting school districts in designing mentoring programs, identified six basic qualities a “good mentor” should possess. The first quality is commitment to the role of mentoring. Rowley (1999) describes this quality simply by saying that committed mentors “show up for, and stay on, the job” (p.22). Persistence is also an important quality to mentoring as it is in classroom teaching. Rowley also adds that a good mentor recognizes the power of accepting the first-year teacher as a developing professional. A third quality of a good mentor is the ability to provide instructional support. A good mentor should be willing to offer assistance to first-year teachers to help them improve their performance in the classroom regardless of their skill

level. A fourth quality as described by Rowley is the ability to be effective in different interpersonal contexts by recognizing that each mentoring relationship is unique. A good mentor communicates hope and optimism by capitalizing on opportunities to build the self-confidence in first-year teachers both in private conversations and in public.

Matching Mentors with Beginning Teachers

Fideler and Haselkorn (1999) stress the importance of the mentor and first-year teacher teaching the same subject and sharing similar beliefs about teaching, classroom management, and discipline. Another consideration is that they should possess similar personalities and educational philosophies (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). The need for personal and philosophical compatibility suggests that opportunities for informal interaction between mentors and first-year teachers should be provided before mentoring assignments are made. Gordon and Maxey also suggested that the preferences of mentors and first-year teachers should be considered (p.45).

When pairing mentors with first-year teachers, other considerations to make include the following: (1) Matching new teachers with mentors who have similar interests and outlooks on teaching (DePaul, 2000). Pairing a new teacher with a mentor who has dramatically different beliefs is unlikely to produce an effective match., and (2) Proximity will enable the mentor teacher and the new teacher to maintain contact on a more frequent and less structured basis (Janas, 1996). However, this informal contact should not replace the scheduled meetings and discussions between the mentor and first-year teacher.

Other areas of consideration include sex, age, and teaching assignment. Typically, the most effective matches between first-year teachers and mentors are made when both

are of the same sex, teach the same grade or subject matter, and have an age difference of 8 to 15 years (Gordon, 1990).

Mentor Preparation

Once the mentors have been selected, the next step is to prepare them to be effective. In study conducted by Smithey and Evertson (as cited in Wang & Odell, 2002), the effects of a mentor preparation workshop on mentors' skills and techniques were documented. Data from 20 post-baccalaureate preservice teachers and 35 mentor teachers from 2 teacher certification programs were collected using paper-and-pencil tests, observations, and interviews. Each of the mentor teachers was involved in a mentor preparation workshop. The data in Smithey and Evertson's study were collected over a one-year period, and assessed both the short-term and the long-term effects of the workshop. The focus of the mentor training in the workshops was to assist the mentors in identifying the first-year teachers' needs and problems, to develop trusting relationships with the first-year teachers, and to observe and analyze the first-year teachers' teaching. On paper-and-pencil tests administered to the mentors immediately after the workshops, the researchers found that the mentor preparation substantially increased the mentors' scores. The workshops also assisted the mentors in using those skills in their mentoring practice.

Implications for School Principals

Brock and Grady (2001) wrote that a supportive administration is an essential element of a successful teacher-mentor program. Frequently, principals are the first to recognize the need for a support system for first-year teachers. They realize that no matter how effective the new teacher has been in their teacher preparation program and

student teaching experiences, the first year of teaching can still leave the first-year teacher feeling overwhelmed and isolated, as well as unequipped to handle the many unexpected issues that arise both inside and outside of the classroom (Monsour, 2000). Many principals reflect on their own first years of teaching and recall them as being some of the most stressful times of their professional lives. Placing themselves in a place for empathy and support for new teachers, school principals can help new teachers both survive and thrive through these challenging and often quite lonely times (Davis & Brock, 1998).

School administrators can provide support for the mentoring program by making a clear distinction between a mentor's function to provide the new teacher with descriptive, non-judgmental feedback on the aspects of the new teacher's performance and the administrator's responsibility to draw conclusions about the world of that teacher's performance (Zuckerman, 2001). If these two conceptions of evaluation remain separate, trust between the mentor and first-year teacher can develop more easily. When a mentoring program has been implemented, new relationships between mentors, principals, and first-year teachers are created. Setting clear, defined guidelines should map out the responsibilities of each and should address the nature of communication between them.

School administrators can promote collaborative relationships (a) by giving beginning teachers a reasonable teaching assignment instead of assigning them the most undesirable teaching situations (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1997) and (b) by matching them with an accessible mentor who shares a similar teaching assignment and schedule. This consideration would allow the mentor and the first-year teacher opportunities and

common ground for frequent informal kinds of communication (Zuckerman, 2001).

Principals also need to recruit mentor teachers who have the ability to establish positive working relationships with first-year teachers. These mentor teachers need to possess the ability to demonstrate open communication effectively (Zuckerman, 2001), the personal confidence to accept the challenges of mentoring (Halford, 1998), and the belief that knowledge and teaching skills can be shared.

Sweeny (2001) cautions principals to be aware of key lessons when supporting mentors in schools. Through his experiences, he has learned that “some support activities always work well, some work well only when done in certain ways, and some activities are not really supportive at all” (p.53). The challenge is found in the fact that mentor support is usually provided by non-mentors and is usually based on the principal’s idea of what mentors seem to need.

Other factors, according to Sweeny (2001), that should be considered by principals when providing support for mentors include the following: (1) Initial mentor training, consisting of two or three days that focuses primarily on effective mentoring strategies which would require only one additional full training session to focus on coaching models and skills. Peer support groups for mentors could probably address other mentor learning needs. (2) Assuming the initial and ongoing mentoring training was extensive, periodic mentor support groups designed for mentors could be held once a quarter. Sweeny (2001) stated that more frequent meetings are “really not all that helpful and can even interfere with mentoring time to some extent” (p. 53). (3) The practices of periodic mentor support group meetings could prove to be helpful not only for developing the mentors but also for serving important organizational needs. These

meetings would hold mentors accountable for their commitment to the mentoring program., and (4) Training and support activities for both first-year teachers and the mentor should make way for numerous opportunities for teachers to develop nurturing relationships with their peers.

Principals need to build into the school schedule time for mentors and mentees to meet (Brewster & Railsback, 2001). The issues of proximity and time are crucial to creating a close, positive working relationship with the mentor and first-year teacher (Brock & Grady, 2001). Principals can encourage close relationships by allowing the mentor and first-year teacher to have classrooms close in proximity or to have common planning or lunch periods. Scheduling release time for mentors and first-year teachers to work together would be the ideal solution (Brock & Grady, 2001). At Pottstown Senior High School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, the principal meets once a month with first-year teachers for them to be able to openly discuss problems and issues and seek guidance (Allen, 2000). The visible and attentive principal can promote success in the classroom and help to correct small problems before they have the chance to become destructive to the mentoring program (Heller & Sindelar, 1991).

While the future for mentoring programs in the United States seems bright, effective principals still need to be aware of their commitment to support first-year teachers through the teacher mentoring programs. They can anticipate the following challenges (Monsour, 2000): (1) Recruitment can prove difficult. The increased responsibility of mentors to be available both inside and outside the classroom can overextend many experienced teachers. (2) Time and money in establishing and supporting mentoring relationships can be major factors. The demands placed on

classroom teachers will make it necessary for principals to arrange release time or some type of compensation for both mentors and the first-year teachers. (3) Unexpected changes in the mentoring schedule will require flexibility and adaptability from principals. (4) The development of philosophy that supports mentoring can prove to be challenging. In order for a working relationship to succeed, both the mentor and the first-year teacher must be committed to the mentoring relationship. (5) Expect personality conflicts when matching mentors with first-year teachers., and (6) Role confusion can present problems for the mentoring program when mentors confuse their role with that of an evaluator or when schools place the mentors in dual roles of being a mentor as well as an evaluator, which is not their purpose.

Principals need to provide mentors with the appropriate training they need to build their own useful models of a collaborative professional relationship and the ongoing support to deal with the stress of their continually changing but ill-defined role as a mentor (Zuckerman, 2001). Principals need to understand that providing support to a mentoring program that allows experienced teachers to work with first-year teachers will benefit the students of both the mentor and the first-year teacher. As a result, the overall organization will be stronger through the increased capacity of experienced teachers serving as mentors (Huling & Resta, 2001).

Related Studies on Mentoring Programs in Rural Schools

Despite the increased focus on mentoring programs for beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Huling-Austin, 1989; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2000; Sweeny, 2001; Zepeda & Ponticell, 1997), only one doctoral study exists that focuses on mentoring programs in rural schools. In this study, Simon (1991) looked at the effectiveness of a

mentoring program for beginning vocational agriculture teachers in rural schools. He utilized qualitative and quantitative research techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of a mentor program developed to provide experienced teachers as mentors to help beginning teachers transition into the first year of teaching. The mentors in this study provided personal and psychological support (Simon, 1991). Areas in which they provided help for the beginning teacher included dealing with discipline, learning professional responsibilities, and communicating with administrators.

Simon found that the mentored teachers in this study experienced significantly fewer problems in classroom management and instruction, developing rules and procedures, and monitoring and managing student discipline than did the nonmentored teachers in the study. At the end of their first year of teaching, the mentored teachers in the study had significantly better attitudes and personal perceptions toward teaching. Following their first year of teaching, four of the nonmentored teachers either quit teaching or accepted positions teaching in other schools. While two of the mentored teachers accepted other teaching positions, none quit teaching altogether. Both the mentored and nonmentored teachers in this study, however, expressed low levels of satisfaction toward teaching (Simon, 1991).

A more recent study conducted in Canada by Goddard and Habermann (2001) focuses on the establishment of a formal mentoring program within a rural school district in Alberta. In the study, five beginning teachers were paired with five experienced teachers in a rural school district in Alberta, Canada. Goddard and Habermann argue that working in a totally rural district in Canada created certain stresses and influenced the professional practices of beginning teachers. They also state the importance of

understanding that educators in rural schools experienced a more intensively scrutinized professional life than their urban counterparts. Rural teachers seldom experienced the urban anonymity of living in an area distant from the school in which they taught, nor did they have access to a wider social group of professional colleagues with whom concerns might be shared.

Summary

This review of literature clearly indicates the importance of providing support for first-year teachers. While more than two million new teachers will be needed in classrooms across the United States by the year 2010 and the new teacher attrition rate hovers between 35 and 50% across the country, necessary steps must be taken to keep these teachers in the classrooms (Feiman-Nemser, 2000). Across the country, mentoring programs are being viewed as a helpful way to assist new teachers in solving the problems they face and reduce their attrition rate (Certo & Fox, 2001).

A supportive administration is an essential element of a successful teacher-mentor program (Grady, 2001). Principals recognize the need for a support system for first-year teachers. By grounding themselves in a place of empathy and support for new teachers, principals can help first-year teachers both survive and thrive through these challenging and lonely times (Davis & Brock, 1998).

The present study broadens the knowledge base on mentoring programs for first-year teachers. The study emphasizes the importance of mentoring programs in schools that are committed to supporting and retaining first-year teachers. Due to the limited amount of research available on mentoring programs for beginning teachers in rural

settings, the study expands the body of literature on this form of beginning teacher support.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The increasingly high attrition rate of beginning teachers to the teaching profession has become a point of contention for schools across the nation as efforts are made to ensure that the most highly qualified teachers are filling classrooms. The retention of beginning teachers during the first year of teaching is an important goal. Problems and issues faced by beginning teachers have been a topic of study for more than half a century. Findings from these studies indicate that mentoring is crucial to addressing these issues. This challenge of mentoring beginning teachers is a critical one if the goal is to influence beginning teachers' beliefs and practices, to improve the instruction of beginning teachers, and to increase teacher retention.

The purpose of this study will be to explore beginning teachers' and principals' beliefs on mentoring programs in rural elementary schools to understand how mentoring aids in beginning teacher development. More than two million new teachers will be needed in classrooms across the United States by the year 2010, and careful attention and planning are necessary to keep these new teachers in classrooms. The findings of this study will broaden the current understanding of beginning teacher mentoring programs, their impact on teacher retention in rural settings, and the implications mentoring will have for elementary principals.

This chapter on the methodology of the study includes seven sections. The first section describes the research design of the study which includes the theoretical perspective on which the study is designed and by which interpretations of findings will be guided. The second section discusses the participants involved in the study. The third

section discusses the site selected for this study. The sample population will make up the fourth section. The fifth section describes the instrumentation used in the study. The sixth section will be composed of the data collection and analysis. The seventh and final section will include how the data will be reported in the study.

Research Questions

The overarching question is, What is the impact of mentoring on first year teachers?

The sub-questions are: (1) How does mentoring influence the teaching by first year teachers? (2) How is mentoring perceived by school administrators? (3) How do mentoring relationships with beginning teachers help contribute to teacher retention and teacher development? and (4) How do mentoring relationships with beginning teachers help contribute to job satisfaction?

Research Design

Beginning teachers' and school principals' beliefs on mentoring in rural elementary schools will be the focus of this qualitative study. Grounded theory methods will guide the entire research process from the initial collection of data to the final writing (Glaser, 1978). A key component of a grounded theory study is that theory evolves during actual research. This evolution occurs through an ongoing interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory can be viewed as a special form of ethnographic inquiry (Merriam, 2002). Through a series of carefully planned steps, grounded theory develops theoretical ideas. Throughout this process, it seeks to ensure that the emerging theory arises from the data and not from some other source, making grounded theory the best method for conducting this research.

Grounded theory is a process of inductive theory building based totally on observation of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). In a grounded theory study, the researcher is continually involved in the process of data collection, data coding, and data analysis. Through the ongoing process of analyzing data, the researcher can discover gaps in the data that need to be filled. This process, known as constant comparative analysis, will be used to collect data, analyze data, and to generate theory concerning beginning teachers' beliefs about mentoring.

The specific data collection instrument used in this study will be the interview. All interviews will be audio taped with the participants' permission so that the contents can be transcribed. A research journal will also be maintained to record researcher notes, memos, and reflections.

Participants

The site for the study will be rural Northeast Georgia. Participants will be three beginning teachers, one African American female first grade teacher, one Caucasian female first grade teacher, and one Caucasian female second grade teacher, one from each of the three elementary schools in the county where the study will take place. The county in which this study takes place has a low attrition rate in the elementary school which accounts for the random selection of participants. The beginning teachers will either have been assigned a mentor or have been a part of a mentoring program. Participants will also include three administrators, two Caucasian females and one Caucasian male, one from each of the three elementary schools. The administrators will give insight on mentoring and mentoring programs.

Site Selection

The study will be conducted in three rural elementary schools, and the following specific criteria will be used to identify the appropriate schools:

1. The three elementary schools will be located in a rural area in Northeast Georgia.
2. The schools provide mentors/mentoring programs for beginning teachers.
3. One beginning teacher will be chosen from each of the three elementary schools.
4. A school administrator will be chosen from each of the three elementary schools.

Sample Selection

Six research participants will be chosen for the study from the three schools in accordance with grounded theory methodology, using theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Glaser and Strauss (1999) described theoretical sampling as “the process of data collection for generating theory, whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p. 45). The participants in the study will be first-year, elementary teachers and elementary administrators in Northeast Georgia. Each of the first-year teacher participants will have been assigned a mentor or will have been in a mentoring program in their respective schools. Participants in the study will be provided information about the study, including information about informed consent, purpose, duration, researcher responsibilities, and participant anonymity issues. Participation is voluntary and this will be expressed to prospective participants. Those who agree to

participate will be given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and their role in it. All participants will be required to give informed written consent.

Instrumentation

The specific data collection instrument for the study will be the interview. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described an interview as “a purposeful conversation” (p. 95) used to generate descriptive data about how participants perceive and interpret the world. All interviews and interview questions will be audio taped, with the participant’s permission, for later transcription, with the participants’ permission to record. Follow-up interviews will be possible to gather additional information. A research journal will be maintained by the researcher to record notes, memos, and reflections. The researcher’s journal will also be a record of interview questions asked during the interview sessions.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this section, the rationale for data collection and analysis procedures is given, and specific data collection and analysis procedures are discussed. Due to the type of data required for this study, specifically the mentoring beliefs of beginning elementary teachers and elementary principals in a rural school system in Georgia, interviews will be the primary source of data. A researcher journal, consisting of researcher reflections, memos, and notes will be used as a secondary data source. Constant comparative analysis will be used as the procedure for data analysis because of its link to grounded theory method.

Report of Data

In-depth interviews with three first-year teachers and three elementary principals in rural elementary schools will be the primary source of data for this study and will be

tape-recorded, with participant permission. The recordings will be transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews, and will be labeled with the participants' pseudonyms and the dates of the interviews.

A research journal, including notes and memos, will also be used as a data source. These notes and memos, kept in the researcher's journal, will be used to document connections and relationships between data.

Summary

Chapter 3 presents an overview and discussion of the methodology that will be used in this dissertation study. This qualitative study will involve interviews with six participants: three first-year elementary teachers and three elementary principals in a rural school system in Northeast Georgia. Grounded theory will guide the research from the collection of data to the final writing. Constant comparative analysis will also be used to collect and analyze data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was threefold: (a) to explore beginning teachers' experiences in their respective mentoring programs, (b) to investigate what these experiences meant to beginning teachers, and (c) to understand the implications of mentoring for elementary school principals. To achieve the purposes of this study, the researcher analyzed the interview responses of six participants about their individual perspectives on mentoring programs and identified common themes and categories among them. Using grounded theory methodology, the researcher identified the theoretical ideas that emerged from analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

There are two major sections in this chapter. The first section provides an introduction of the individual participants in the study. The second section provides a review of common themes and categories that existed among the participants interviewed. The topics are organized into three main themes and eleven categories as shown in Table 4.1.

Individual Participants

This section of Chapter 4 provides a description of each participant, three beginning elementary teachers and three elementary school principals. The description introduces the participant and offers general information related to the participant's individual experiences with mentoring. The second section adds details to these individual experiences in order to identify common patterns and themes among the participants.

Beginning Teacher Participants

Michelle

Michelle, a twenty-nine year old Caucasian female, taught a partial year in first grade and later filled the position permanently, at an elementary school in a rural north Georgia school system. Michelle was a nontraditional student who went back to college to earn her teaching degree. A May graduate of a private college, Michelle had worked within the school system as a paraprofessional in her mentor's classroom while completing her degree requirements. Michelle and her mentor had developed a friendship during the time they had spent together, and Michelle placed a lot of confidence in her mentor. Michelle described the experiences they shared in the following way:

I had enough confidence in this particular teacher that I felt that I could go ask her questions, and as the year progressed, I seemed to have more questions about things I wasn't sure about, and she just was there, always there, and gave me good clear answers. Not anything that I didn't need and was always helpful and wasn't critical of me needing help. I felt that I could approach her and not feel like I was needy. She was very helpful.

Michelle chose to stay in the teaching profession after her first year not only because of her love of children and of teaching, but also because of her mentoring experiences with her mentor. Michelle added that her experiences with a mentor helped make her a better classroom teacher, and one day her hope is to be an effective mentor to another beginning teacher. Michelle also feels satisfaction in teaching despite the everyday challenges of dealing with student discipline, curriculum requirements, parents, and the never-ending paperwork challenges. Michelle sees herself staying in the teaching profession for a long time.

Claudia

Claudia, a twenty-four year old African-American female, taught first grade in an elementary school in a rural north Georgia school system and commuted each day from a nearby suburban area where she lived. Claudia described herself as a “nontraditional college student” who had worked as a waitress in the evenings to supplement her family’s income while enrolled in educational classes during the day at a nearby private college. She received her degree in education in May before beginning her teaching career in August. Claudia shared these feelings about her experiences with her mentor:

I have always felt comfortable with my mentor and that my opinion was valued. I don’t feel like I was looked upon by anybody that I was new and didn’t know what I was doing, especially with my mentor. It has always been a very warm feeling that I have for her.

Claudia sees herself staying in the teaching profession for a long time. She feels she “is making a difference in the lives of students” and has decided to further her degree in education in the Spring. Claudia describes her experience with mentoring as being “a lifesaver.” She admits that the overwhelming feelings she had before beginning teaching were “laid to rest by her mentoring relationship with her mentor”. Claudia feels that she would have had a difficult first year without the help of her mentor and feels thankful for the relationship they have formed.

Leanne

Leanne, a thirty year old Caucasian female, taught second grade in an elementary school in a rural north Georgia school system that she had attended as a child, and seemed pleased her two elementary-age sons also attended the same school. A native of the community, Leanne had recently moved back “home” after living away for ten years. Leanne attended a state university and graduated with a degree in business in 1990.

While working in the banking industry, Leanne began tutoring elementary students through a community involvement program sponsored by her bank. Leanne felt she was “making a difference” in students and decided to enroll in classes at a nearby private college to work toward a degree in education. Leanne’s initial mentor was a school administrator whose job demands allowed little time to devote to Leanne in a mentoring role. Leanne described her experiences with her mentor by saying,

She was just very, very busy with all that she had to do. There just wasn’t time for her to spend with me. It wasn’t her fault that she couldn’t make it to meetings we had scheduled. As an administrator, one never knows what problems can arise at any given time. She really felt badly about this and finally came to me and said she couldn’t serve as my mentor any longer. So after about three months, I was assigned a new mentor who immediately jumped in and began to instruct me on policies and procedures and a variety of things I’d heard nothing about. I can honestly say I was in “a sink or swim” situation until she came along. At least now I have someone I can depend on to advise me and help me with problems I may have.

Leanne entered the teaching profession later in life, but is enjoying her new career. Leanne loves her students and accepts new challenges with a positive attitude. Leanne and her new mentor have formed an open, honest relationship with good communication. Leanne is comfortable with her mentor and feels her mentoring experience opened her eyes to the demands that new teachers face. Leanne does not have any plans to leave the teaching profession and looks forward to her next school year.

School Principal Participants

Brenda

Brenda, a fifty-one year old Caucasian female, is a twenty-five year veteran in the teaching profession. Brenda has spent twenty-one years as an administrator, sixteen as an assistant principal and five years in her present position as principal in a rural elementary

school with 49 teachers. Brenda is not a native of the county, but was from the northern part of the United States. Brenda is the only principal participant who is pursuing a Doctorate degree in Administration from a state university. Brenda was not mentored early in her career. Brenda shared the following about her experiences:

While working as an assistant principal, I didn't have a mentor at my school. I did have one unofficially at the county office. We met on Fridays to talk about things that were going on and to address any concerns I had. As an assistant principal, one of my duties was working primarily with the beginning teachers in the school. This experience helped me appreciate and understand the challenges beginning teachers face in their careers.

Kim

Kim, a forty-two year old Caucasian female, is an assistant principal with twenty-seven years of experience in education. Kim worked one year as a principal and eight years as an assistant principal. Kim is a native of the county where this study took place and attended school there as a child. Kim was not mentored as a beginning teacher and shared these feelings, "Twenty years ago, we didn't have mentoring programs. Society has changed a lot over time and I can see a difference in things educators deal with now and what we dealt with back then."

Michael

Michael, a fifty-five year old Caucasian male, is new to the school and system used in the study. Michael has thirty-three years of experience in education and seventeen of those years have been spent as an administrator. Michael has retired from education in another state, and came out of retirement to serve as principal in the school in this study. Michael was not mentored formally as a young teacher; however, the guidance counselor in his school did provide him the support he needed:

We became close and formed a relationship. I later became the guidance counselor when he passed away. The help and guidance he gave me really helped me. The assistant principal wasn't really helpful. I didn't feel they were there to assist and support new teachers. I did have an excellent principal who always took time to talk with me and was the type of person you wanted to please because he was such a nice person. That made a difference even though the job was tough and the facilities and materials were limited-he made up for it.

Common Themes and Categories

Four major themes and eleven categories emerged from the data analysis to explicate the participants' perspectives on mentoring programs. According to the participants in this study, relationships and interactions were formed through the experiences they had with mentoring. The beginning teachers experienced many outcomes from these relationships and interactions which are important to the future implications of mentoring and mentoring programs. School principals also expressed feelings on mentoring experiences and the importance of mentoring for the future of education. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the themes and categories discussed by the participants. In the following sections of this chapter, each theme and category significant to the participants' perspectives on mentoring is discussed. Excerpts from the participant transcripts are used to support the findings and to illuminate the participants' perspectives.

Table 4.1

*Themes, Categories, and Sub-Categories Related to the Beginning Teachers'**Perspectives of Their Mentoring Programs*

Theme 1: Relationships

Category 1: Having Accessibility to Mentor

Sub-Category 1: Making initial contact

Sub-Category 2: Maintaining frequent contact

Sub-Category 3: Being in close proximity

Category 2: Receiving Personal and Emotional Support from Mentor

Sub-Category 1: Receiving nurturing, acceptance, and caring

Sub-Category 2: Receiving support in times of difficulty

Theme 2: Interactions

Category 1: Receiving Support with Curriculum Planning

Sub-Category 1: Understanding curriculum

Sub-Category 2: Sharing materials and resources

Category 2: Receiving Support with Instruction

Sub-Category 1: Implementation

Sub-Category 2: Learning new instructional strategies

Sub-Category 3: Observing and being observed

Category 3: Receiving Support with Classroom Management

Sub-Category 1: Managing time

Sub-Category 2: Managing student behavior

Table 4.1 (continued)

*Themes, Categories, and Sub-Categories Related to the Beginning Teachers'**Perspectives of Their Mentoring Programs*

Category 4: Receiving Support from Parents

Sub-Category 1: Sharing strategies for parent interactions throughout
school year

Sub-Category 2: Sharing strategies for dealing with parents in difficult
situations

Theme 3: Implications for School Principals

Category 1: Improved Teacher Support and Morale

Sub-Category 1: Pairing mentors with beginning teachers successfully

Sub-Category 2: Time

Category 2: Improved Teacher Retention

Sub-Category 1: Job satisfaction

Sub-Category 2: Salary compensation

Category 3: Improved Classroom Instruction and Management

Sub-Category 1: Better planning

Sub-Category 2: Implementing programs more effectively

Sub-Category 3: Improved conflict resolution management

Category 4: Principal's Role in Mentoring Beginning Teachers

Sub-Category 1: Supporter of mentoring

Sub-Category 2: Advocating importance of mentoring

Table 4.1 (continued)

Themes, Categories, and Sub-Categories Related to the Beginning Teachers'

Perspectives of Their Mentoring Programs

Sub-Category 3: Superintendent and board role in mentoring

Theme 4: Future Implications for Teacher Growth

Category 1: Experiencing self-confidence and growth in beginning teachers
through mentoring

Theme 1: Relationships

Theme 1: Relationships is a broad conceptual theme that captures the participants' perspectives of the experiences they shared with their mentors. As the findings reveal, relationships developed between the beginning teacher and the mentor through their experiences in a variety of ways. All three of the participants in the study described being in a positive relationship with their mentors. Through their interviews, they identified two aspects of these relationships as being most important in developing a positive relationship with their mentors. The participants identified these as *having accessibility to their mentors* and *receiving personal and emotional support from their mentors*. In the following sections, each category is defined and described, and examples are presented to illustrate it.

Category 1: Having Accessibility to Mentor

Having accessibility to mentor refers to the mentor being available to provide support when the beginning teacher needed assistance. In talking about accessibility to

their mentors, participants discussed three sub-categories: (a) *making initial contact*, (b) *maintaining frequent contact*, and (c) *being in close proximity*.

Each beginning teacher in the study felt the relationship they had developed with their mentors was enhanced by the accessibility of their mentors. In this study, the term *accessibility* is defined as being available when needed and is not solely measured in terms of physical proximity. The beginning teachers experienced this accessibility to their mentors when the mentors assisted them with information to help them transition into an established classroom. The participants also experienced accessibility to their mentors when the mentor maintained frequent contact on a regular and consistent basis. While close physical proximity was not a criterion for mentor accessibility, the beginning teachers in the study felt that having classrooms adjacent to, or near, their mentors' classrooms enhanced their relationship.

Sub-Category 1: Making initial contact with mentor.

Making initial contact refers to the moment when the mentor assumed the role by offering support to the beginning teacher. It was through this initial contact that the beginning teacher gained insight into the role her mentor would fill during the course of their relationship.

On her first day in first grade during pre-planning, Claudia met her mentor. As Claudia recalled, she was the first person I met the first day of pre-planning. She was here and showed me around the school to help me become familiar with it. She told me that she would be here for me and that she looked forward to getting to know me and working with me.

When Claudia left school that day, she felt “even more excited” about beginning her first year of teaching. She continued by saying,

I’d heard in college about mentors and how they could help you, but I had no idea that I would have one. It wasn’t mentioned in my job interview, and I didn’t think to ask if I would be assigned one. She was so nice and friendly and made me feel so welcome that I couldn’t wait for school to begin so that I could get to know her better and work with her.

Michelle had been employed as a paraprofessional working alongside her mentor at an elementary school for two years, completed her student teaching at the school, prior to transitioning into the role of teacher. Michelle filled a vacancy in first grade after completing her student teaching experience. In spite of her familiarity with the school system, she still felt overwhelmed by the amount of material covered during the system’s orientation meeting for new teachers. When Michelle brought up the topic of accessibility to her mentor, she emphasized how calming it was when her mentor was with her at the orientation meeting. She sat with me that day and she said, “I’ll explain all this to you if you have a question.” This accessibility to her mentor enabled Michelle to be more relaxed not only during the meeting but also throughout the school year, knowing that her mentor was available to answer her questions and address her concerns: “From my standpoint, I didn’t want to appear like I was dumb, and I knew that she would have never made me feel that way. When you come into a new job that you haven’t done before, you don’t know everything, and so having her to go to was wonderful.” Michelle knew that during her first year in the classroom, questions would arise that her lack of experience would prevent her from answering. Michelle felt assured that her mentor would be available to answer these questions in a manner that would allow her self-esteem to remain intact.

Leanne was offered a teaching position in an elementary school system where she attended as a child. Upon completion of her degree, Leanne made several visits to the school to observe her new students, to learn more about the curriculum, and to determine the availability of learning materials needed to support the curriculum. It was during one of Leanne's visits that her school principal offered to serve as her mentor. "I was flattered that my principal wanted to take the time to work with me and to help me transition into a new career field. She was very warm and was willing to do all she could to help me get off to a good start with my class." Leanne continued by sharing the outcome of a meeting she had with her mentor prior to the first day at school, "Before I started, I met with my mentor and we sat down and looked at the schedule the other teacher had designed and saw things weren't where they should be. So we redesigned the schedule. This allowed for more instructional time for the children." Leanne shared that she felt more "comfortable and confident" when she walked into her second grade classroom to begin her career. Michelle realized after the chaos of beginning school started that time with her mentor was limited. Whenever they planned conferences to meet, something would come up that would require her mentor's attention. After three months of having little time with her mentor, her mentor told her she would have to reassign her to someone else. Michelle is grateful for her new mentor and describes their relationship as being "open, honest, and informal." Michelle doesn't feel any animosity towards her principal, but is happy to have a mentor who is "always there for her."

Sub-Category 2: Maintaining frequent contact

Maintaining frequent contact refers to providing opportunities for the beginning teacher and her mentor to communicate both formally and informally about concerns and issues on a frequent basis. The beginning teachers found this frequent contact beneficial in seeking input from their mentors as well as in sharing with their mentor concerns and issues that developed.

Claudia and her mentor shared lunch in Claudia's classroom almost daily. This one-on-one time between Claudia and her mentor provided Claudia with frequent opportunities to talk about concerns that emerged during her first year of teaching: "She will come in here during lunch and will sit and we'll talk about the day and about what's happening. She'll ask if I need any help or if I have any questions about anything that's going on." In addition to their lunchtime conversations, Claudia would often call her mentor in the middle of the day and ask if they could meet after school or at some other time during the day. Claudia also commented on her mentor's accessibility:

I think it impacted me tremendously for her to be so available, especially as far as getting started and some of the strategies I had trouble with or I needed more knowledge about. Being there and having that experience to share is definitely something that is the key to helping other people and helping the kids to succeed.

Claudia recognized that the potential of her mentor's help was based on her mentor's years of experience in the classroom. She also recognized the benefit of having a mentor who was "so available" to her performance in the classroom.

Michelle and her mentor taught on the same grade level, and their classrooms were located adjacent to each other. As a result, they had frequent opportunities throughout the day to communicate, as Michelle shared:

Even though I saw her a lot throughout the day, we were usually so busy getting our kids where they needed to be or checking on them that we didn't have time to talk about anything else. So she would stop by my classroom if there was something she thought of or if she thought I needed something. She would just stick her head in the door and remind me or check with me. But if there was something I needed help with that would take some time to talk about, we would find a time in the afternoon or during lunch or planning time to talk.

Unlike Michelle and her mentor, Leanne and her mentor taught on different grade levels in different parts of the building. Yet Leanne still had numerous opportunities to seek help from her mentor during the day:

From the start of our relationship (three months into the school year), my mentor was there all the time. She would come by in the morning before school to see how I was or if I needed anything. Then she would drop by during her planning period, during her lunch, and again at the end of the day.

The accessibility of Leanne's mentor was not limited to the school day, and there were several occasions when Leanne phoned her mentor at home in the evenings:

I knew that I could call her anytime at home, and I did call at home with questions and she would help me work through them: maybe about grades, putting grades in the computer, conferencing with parents, student discipline, and classroom management.

Sub-Category 3: Being in close proximity

Being in close proximity refers to the classrooms of the beginning teacher and her mentor being physically located near each other. Claudia, Michelle, and Leanne felt their experiences were enhanced by accessibility to their mentors because their classrooms were located either on the same hall or they had proximity to the mentors' classrooms. These teachers felt comfortable entering their mentors' classrooms and approaching them with questions or concerns as the need arose. This close proximity provided Michelle with several opportunities to seek help from her mentor during the day:

Her room is right across the hall, so we see each other all through the day. As I would need help, I felt that I could go ask her questions. As the year progressed, I seemed to have more questions about things I wasn't sure about. She just was always there and gave me good, clear answers. She was always helpful and wasn't critical of me needing help. She was always available, and I could call her at home. She was fine with that, very gracious and always cordial, which I always made sure that if I did call her at home it was something I felt that merited a call at home. I tried to always talk to her at school, but if there was something that came up in the evening, if a parent had called or something, I didn't mind calling her.

Michelle appreciated knowing her mentor was so accessible, and her questions or concerns would be answered or addressed in a manner that she found to be timely and professional. She also appreciated knowing she could phone her mentor at home and be greeted in a "very gracious and cordial" manner.

Like Michelle, Claudia's classroom was located in close proximity to her mentor's classroom. As a result, Claudia found herself going to her mentor for help frequently, "Any questions that I had that would pop up, and not necessarily important questions, it could be anything that I didn't know because I was new in the school, I would go to her for answers. I felt that if she had not been so close, it might not have been so easy." Claudia shared that both she and her mentor were "extremely busy," but found time to sit down together during the school day. They also found that they communicated often because of the close proximity of their classrooms.

Leanne also was located in close proximity despite being in different parts of the building. Leanne found that being in different parts of the building still enabled her to seek assistance, "If it's in the middle of the day, I can still count on her to be there if I should call her." This accessibility to her mentor gave Leanne the reassurance of knowing she had someone she could count on when she needed them. In addition to the times Leanne went to her mentor for help, there were other times throughout the day when her

mentor came to her. Leanne's mentor also checked to see whether Leanne needed help during her planning time. Leanne said, "If I had a question or she had an idea that she thought I could benefit from, we would get together at those times, too."

Participants indicated that the accessibility of their mentor enabled them to communicate more openly and more frequently on those issues that required immediate attention. They also expressed a sense of relief knowing their mentor was readily accessible.

Category 2: Receiving Personal and Emotional Support from Mentor

Receiving personal and emotional support from mentor refers to the mentor providing support through nurturing the beginning teacher in her new role, accepting the beginning teacher as a peer regardless of her limited experience and expertise, and caring for the beginning teacher as she faced the challenges of her new role. The three beginning teachers in the study shared their mentors had provided them with personal and emotional support. The teachers also shared experiences in which their mentors had provided them with personal and emotional support when they found themselves in the midst of conflict. It was through these experiences that the beginning teacher and mentor developed a relationship built on the foundation of support. In sharing these experiences, the participants discussed two sub-categories: *receiving nurturing, acceptance, and caring, and receiving support in times of difficulty.*

Sub-Category 1: Receiving nurturing, acceptance, and caring.

Receiving nurturing, acceptance, and caring refers to experiences in which the beginning teacher received support that nurtured her toward personal and professional growth and made her feel accepted as someone capable of making contributions. Another

component of this relationship is the mentor's caring attitude toward the beginning teacher as she experienced her first year in the classroom.

Claudia was the only beginning teacher in this study who did not live in the county in which she taught. As a result, she was unfamiliar with the school system as well as with the county, and prior to being hired for her position, had experienced contact with only the principal who hired her. While her mentor was not a native of the county, she had spent most of her adult life there and had formed positive relationships with many people throughout both the county and the school system. Claudia's mentor worked closely with her to assist her in becoming acclimated to the county and in feeling welcomed and accepted in her school. This comfortable, personal relationship shared by Claudia and her mentor enabled Claudia to feel "at home" in both a new school and county in which she had previously known no one:

It was very good, very comfortable, and very open. We formed a parent-child relationship to a degree. We weren't just coworkers. We were able to get on a personal level. It was definitely more personal and very comfortable. Thanks to her, I felt like I belonged here and that my opinion was valued.

Michelle's situation was much different from Claudia's in that she and her mentor had already developed a positive relationship when Michelle began her first year of teaching:

She was the last teacher I worked with as a parapro before I came into the classroom, so we had developed a friendship. She brings things down on my level. She makes me feel comfortable because she doesn't try to talk above my head or anything like that. She was good that way and always made me feel comfortable. She was always there and was consistent and sincere. She always gave me enough information, but she wasn't in my face everyday. She was there for me when I needed her.

According to Michelle, the fact that she and her mentor had previously worked together enabled her mentor to communicate with her in a manner that was comfortable. As a

result, Michelle did not feel intimidated by her mentor but felt accepted and at ease approaching her about issues or concerns with which she felt she needed assistance.

Leanne's mentor, though their relationship formed three months after school started, had valuable insight into how to make Leanne feel accepted and how to maximize the effectiveness of the mentoring assistance she offered her. Leanne shared the following about their "successful" relationship:

When you have someone that you can go to, talk with, and help you, then if you are really wanting to do well, you're going to be successful. I feel this way because of the way she helped me. It helped me do a better job because I knew what I was expected to do and was helped and encouraged along the way. She was very approachable and took the initiative to keep me aware of things that would be more useful for me to know about.

While Michelle has known her mentor for a number of years, Leanne had met her newly assigned mentor in October. The mentor that had been assigned to work with Leanne asked to be relieved of her mentoring role when the responsibilities of her administrative position caused her to be unable to fulfill her commitment. Leanne's new mentor "immediately jumped in and began to instruct me on policies and other things she felt I needed to know." Even though Leanne and her mentor worked together for a shorter period than the other beginning teachers worked with their mentors, they still developed what Leanne described as "a trusting relationship" in which she felt accepted, "It wasn't personal enough to be a close friend, but she is someone that I can trust. Someone that I can go to and ask a question to and know that they are going to give me an honest answer."

Sub-Category 2: Receiving support in times of difficulty.

Receiving support in times of difficulty refers to the beginning teacher receiving personal and emotional support from her mentor when the beginning teacher is involved

in a situation of difficulty. As the data revealed, the beginning teachers received ongoing personal and emotional support from their mentors on a frequent basis. Especially in times of difficulty, this support became more valuable to the beginning teachers who shared these experiences.

Conflict between the teachers on her grade level prompted Michelle to seek the support of her mentor. The year before, Michelle had worked as a paraprofessional on the same grade level in which she was now a teacher. Michelle described this transition as “kind of awkward in being a teacher after being a parapro.” Michelle shared her feelings about being in that “awkward” transitional period:

There were a couple of times that within our grade level, there were little issues that came up, and being a first year teacher, I didn't feel comfortable saying anything to the rest of my grade level. I was able to go to her and know with confidence she wouldn't go running and telling anyone. I knew if I was frustrated with something, I could go to her.

Frustration was also the impetus for Claudia seeking support from her mentor when she was “a little flustered” in maintaining balance in her professional and personal life:

There were a couple of times I went to her a little flustered because I felt like when I was at home, all I was doing was work. She told me you have to remember, “Work is work, and home is home.” She also told me she understood how I felt, and she sometimes felt the same way I did.

Claudia went on to say that after talking with her mentor about this concern, she felt “relieved knowing my mentor felt the same way sometimes.” Claudia also shared that because of the support she received from her mentor during their conversations, she could now “leave work at work on most days.”

Leanne sought the support of her mentor about her concern for students in her class. Leanne had several students who chose to display chronically inappropriate behavior, and she and her mentor had developed strategies to promote appropriate behavior from these students. However, when the strategies failed to work, Leanne expressed to her mentor the sense of hopelessness she was feeling:

My class had several continuous behavior problems that I worked with, and she helped me on. One time, I just broke down, and I was just like, “I don’t know what to do!” and she just lifted me up and helped me to think positively about different items or aspects that we can do so that it would not be so overwhelming for me.

Because of the support she received from her mentor in dealing with this conflict, Leanne was able to reexamine the situation with her students and to generate additional strategies to assist her in working with them.

In summary, the participants were provided with personal and emotional support as they encountered experiences during their first year of teaching. This support included the mentor enabling the beginning teacher to feel accepted. By working closely with the beginning teachers to provide this type of support, even when the teachers were involved in conflict, the mentors strengthened the closeness of the relationship that was forming between themselves and the teachers.

Theme 2: Interactions

Theme 2: Interactions is a conceptual theme that encompasses the participants’ perspectives on what “getting help from their mentors” meant. As the findings show, the participants shared many interactions with their mentors and through these interactions, information, ideas, and opinions were shared. According to the data, the beginning teachers discussed those activities in relation to their classroom instruction, including the

need for support in the areas of curriculum, instruction, classroom management, and parent interactions. Through their interviews, the participants identified four areas in which they received support through interactions with their mentors: (a) *receiving support with curriculum planning*, (b) *receiving support with instruction*, (c) *receiving support with classroom management*, and (d) *receiving support with parents*. In the following sections, these categories are defined and described, and examples are presented to illustrate each of them.

Category 1: Receiving Support with Curriculum

Receiving support with curriculum refers to the beginning teacher receiving mentor support with performing the necessary function of preparing the curriculum and support materials for students. The beginning teachers in the study received curriculum support from their mentors, including assistance in understanding the curriculum and gathering materials and resources designed to enhance the curriculum.

Sub-Category 1: Understanding the curriculum.

Understanding the curriculum refers to the mentor working with the beginning teacher to learn ways to present the curriculum as it was designed to be presented. Understanding the curriculum requires a better understanding of the standards associated with the curriculum as well as teaching strategies to enhance implementation.

Leanne received support from her mentor with understanding the new math standards in her second grade classroom. Leanne described the support given by her mentor:

We are all facing challenges with the new math standards. It's a bigger challenge coming up with teaching strategies to meet the needs of each student in the classroom. Just being able to talk with her about different

ways to implement the new standards and how to pull in different ideas has definitely helped my students.

Like Leanne, Claudia reached out to her mentor for support with understanding the new writing program she was required to teach to her first graders. Claudia's mentor, a former first grade teacher, shared with Claudia the writing techniques and procedures she had used and implemented as a result of her own experience with the writing program. Claudia said, "I think her help impacted me tremendously as far as getting started. I used some of her techniques with my students, and they worked really well. I'm still not completely comfortable with the writing program, but I do feel like I understand it better now, thanks to her."

Michelle shared that when she first examined the math standards for her first graders, she "wondered how I would even begin to teach all of it to my students." The terminology used in the math curriculum was hard for her students who were already performing at lower ability levels. When she approached her mentor with her concerns, Michelle "felt much better,"

Well, for one thing she had worked on the new math standards for first grade and was familiar with the new curriculum. She assured me that the kids would quickly pick up the math terminology with intense instruction. She also shared with me a curriculum map for math the grade level had created to show exactly when a certain math standard was to be taught.

Sub-Category 2: Sharing materials and resources.

Sharing materials and resources refers to assisting the beginning teacher with the curriculum by making available to her materials and resources designed to enhance

the curriculum. Several of the mentors of beginning teachers in the study shared from their personal stores of materials and resources, while others provided the participants with materials and resources purchased by the school.

Michelle's mentor assisted her by sharing with her many of her own materials designed to support the curriculum:

We would just get together when we would plan our lessons. Not just she and I but the whole group of teachers in the grade level. Each person would bring things they had used the year before to share with me. That helped me get files of activities together. That was a big help.

Claudia's mentor, as well, shared with Claudia her own materials designed to support the curriculum. As Claudia explained, "Being a first year teacher, I don't have much of the materials that I need, so I'll go and ask her if I can borrow hers." Claudia continued by saying, "She always lets me borrow her things. She's loaned me her manipulatives for helping my kids with math. She's also given me copies of worksheets she has to go along with our first grade curriculum."

Leanne's mentor like Claudia's, also helped Leanne find materials she needed for her classroom instruction. Despite not being in the same grade level, Claudia's mentor was able to locate resources she needed for her second graders. Leanne shared, "She was like a magician. Anything that I needed or needed help with finding, she was able to get it for me. It saved me a lot of time."

In summary, the beginning teachers in the study interacted with their mentors by receiving information and ideas designed to support the curriculum. This support enhanced the beginning teachers' understanding of the curriculum and provided them with materials and resources to reinforce the curriculum. It also added another element to the relationship between the beginning teacher and her mentor.

Category 2: Receiving Support with Instruction

Receiving support with instruction refers to the mentor and beginning teacher engaging in interactions for purposes related to instruction. Throughout the participants' discussions of the instructional support they received from their mentors, there were three sub-categories that emerged: (a) *implementation*, (b) *learning new instructional strategies*, (c) *observing and being observed*. According to the data, the beginning teachers in the study received mentor support with ways to implement and enhance student instruction, as well as to understand the connection between instruction and student achievement. The participants often initiated the interactions by asking questions.

Sub-category 1: Implementation

Implementation refers to the assistance provided the participants in carrying out the instructional programs selected for their students. According to the beginning teachers in the study, their mentors provided assistance in accessing and utilizing the various components of the instructional programs, managing the record keeping of students' progress through the instructional programs, and motivating the students to reach higher levels of achievement.

Claudia sought assistance from her mentor in the area of reading. Claudia was concerned about how to teach reading to students who, as she described them, "were still learning to read." Her mentor provided a great deal of instructional support for her.

Claudia described this support:

In regards to reading, I was totally new to teaching reading to first graders. I had many questions about how to manage my groups, how to manage my guided reading groups, how to manage the paper work, and how to really motivate the kids so that they would want to participate more. I just had so many questions about that. I would email her, and she was great about

giving me responses about reading. She knew that forward and backwards. She had all these different strategies that I could use.

Claudia incorporated much of the information and ideas recommended by her mentor into the reading instruction she planned for her students. According to Claudia, using these ideas “helped to alleviate some of the stress that I was feeling in the beginning of the year in reading.”

The math program presented a challenge for Leanne, who was not familiar with the new math standards for second grade. As she said, “Teaching math and how to incorporate other ways to teach math was a big challenge.” Leanne’s mentor was able to share her insight into how Leanne could accomplish her goal. Leanne continued by saying, “In math, my students have definitely benefited because I’ve been able to work with her about different ways to teach math.”

Michelle also sought advice from her mentor, a first grade teacher, on how to manage guided reading groups. Michelle’s mentor recommended ideas for her to use to help plan guided reading lessons that would benefit her students. As Michelle added, “She is a pro when it comes to ways to help kids learn. She’s been doing it for so long, I’m sure she knows every trick in the book.”

Sub-category 2: Learning new instructional strategies.

Learning new instructional strategies refers to learning new ways to enhance opportunities for the students to reach the goals of the instructional program. The beginning teachers most often sought the support of their mentors to learn new instructional strategies in the areas of reading and math.

The math program was an area in which Leanne became concerned when her students were mastering the math standards when taught in isolation but were experiencing difficulty in transferring the concepts when in skills groups. Leanne shared with her mentor her concerns, “I felt like I needed to extend the math lessons because it seemed my students weren’t retaining the skills. They can redeliver concepts but when you go to do something else, they just weren’t doing as well as I wanted them to do.” Her mentor had experienced the same concerns with her students in the past and had developed a series of lessons designed to foster the transfer of concepts. She shared these lessons with Leanne, who used them to support the math instruction in her classroom. As a result, Leanne’s students began to demonstrate the math concepts in skills groups and other areas.

Claudia approached her mentor for instructional support in writing when some of her first graders were experiencing problems in writing short sentences. Her mentor suggested some strategies to use to guide students to writing better sentences. “That was very helpful at the beginning of the year when I was trying to figure out how to teach them to write sentences.” Because of this experience, Claudia realized that her students learned in a number of different ways and, that to promote student achievement, she had to be willing to use different teaching strategies.

Like Leanne, Michelle sought her mentor’s help in teaching math to her students. Her mentor shared with Michelle an instructional strategy used in teaching a challenging math concept to her first grade students. Michelle explained, “I went to her about making patterns. My students benefited from her explanation.” Michelle later shared that the majority of her students continued to show mastery of this concept throughout the school

year. “Whenever there was a skill practice in the math book on making patterns my kids would do really well. Now, if they will only remember this when the CRCT rolls around.”

Sub-category 3: Observing and being observed.

Observing and being observed refers to the beginning teacher observing the mentor present an instructional lesson to understand better how the lesson is designed to be taught as well as how the materials contained in the lesson are to be utilized. The *being observed* component of this sub-category refers to the mentor observing the beginning teacher as she teaches a lesson and providing feedback following the observation.

Reading instruction prompted Michelle to seek the help of her mentor, who came into Michelle’s classroom to model a guided reading group lesson while Michelle observed. As Michelle explained,

We decided since she taught the same grade, it would be best if she came in and taught my guided reading groups for me so that I could observe her, because I was still having such a problem with it. That really helped me a lot because I was very frustrated with the whole guided reading concept and reaching the kids in the groups that I had. She came in and taught a group for me, and I sat back and watched. She was amazing.

Claudia also observed her mentor, a former first grade teacher, model a reading lesson using instructional materials and strategies she had located for her. After observing her mentor instruct her students, Claudia expressed reassurance at “knowing how it worked” and gained confidence in moving ahead with her reading lessons.

Leanne invited her mentor to observe her teaching a math lesson and to provide feedback. After the observation, Leanne’s mentor discussed with Leanne her “strengths” and “growths” as observed in the math lesson:

One of my growths was I needed to verify when I modeled a problem that the kids were following along and were able to work the problem out on their paper as well. So the things she was telling me in my growths were beneficial. She also showed me some new techniques and ideas that will further the children's learning.

The discussion of Category 2 focused on the beginning teachers in the study engaged in interactions with their mentors for purposes related to instruction. As a result of instructional support from their mentors, the participants in the study improved implementation of instruction, learned new instructional strategies, and benefited from observing and being observed. Through these interactions, the beginning teacher and her mentor worked toward a common goal of enhancing instruction for students and, ultimately, improving student achievement.

Category 3: Receiving Support with Classroom Management

Receiving support with classroom management refers to receiving help through suggestions and strategies offered by the mentor to improve management of time and student behavior. The participants' discussion centered on two sub-categories: (a) *managing time* and (b) *managing student behavior*. Two of the beginning teacher participants shared experiences in which they had received mentor support with classroom management.

Sub-Category 1: Managing time.

Managing time refers to the challenges of incorporating instructional time into the daily schedule that also includes lunch, recess, restroom/water breaks, and activity classes. The beginning teachers in the study approached their mentors to learn ways to manage all the demands placed on them.

Michelle's mentor assisted her in managing the instructional time in her classroom by helping to structure classroom centers around math, handwriting, and reading:

Before I came in, I met with my mentor, and we sat down, looked at the schedule, and saw things weren't going the way I wanted them to, and we redesigned the schedule. She showed me how to manage my time to incorporate learning centers into my instructional time.

As a result of working with her mentor, Michelle maximized the instructional time in her classroom by planning activities related to the curriculum into learning centers.

Soon after the school year started, Leanne began to feel overwhelmed by the amount of time spent daily in collecting and grading her students' work, so she went to her mentor for some advice on how to manage these classroom procedures more efficiently:

I would say her advice has definitely been a godsend just in the way that I run my classroom in ways of how to collect and grade papers in a timely manner. She's really helped me with those types of procedures or drills on how to do things in a quick, efficient manner.

This advice enabled Leanne to minimize the amount of time spent each day on collecting and grading student work and proved "beneficial" in allowing Leanne to provide her students with timely feedback on their work.

Sub-Category 2: Managing student behavior.

Managing student behavior refers to developing strategies to encourage appropriate behavior from all students. Another aspect of this sub-category is developing strategies to use when a student chooses to display inappropriate behavior.

When Claudia approached her mentor with concerns about one student who was disrupting her classroom, her mentor shared with her some behavior intervention

strategies Claudia was using and helped her to understand why they were not working with this particular student, “She said to me, ‘What are you doing?’ After I explained to her what I was doing with this student and their behavior, she asked me, ‘Why do you think this isn’t working?’” They would analyze the strategies being used and discuss alternative behavior intervention strategies. Claudia would leave the conference with several new strategies to try with this student.

Like Claudia, Michelle had concerns about a behavior issue with one of her students, so her mentor offered to come into her classroom to observe:

I have some behavioral issues in my classroom, and some of them I wasn’t sure how to deal with, so she helped me a lot in that area. For instance, one time she came in and just observed how my kids were reacting to me and how I worked with my kids to keep them on task without any distractions. She came in and gave me suggestions and helped me with giving a small incentive chart to one child that no other child would know about and having a small reward for them to keep them on task without disrupting others.

Michelle’s mentor helped her recognize that an important component of managing classroom behavior was being able to implement behavior incentive plans for students who require additional assistance in behaving appropriately.

Leanne approached her mentor for assistance in managing the behavior of two particular students. She described her class as “a really good class, with the exception of two students.” Leanne’s mentor assisted her in developing strategies to encourage appropriate behavior from these two students:

She helped me to place them in alternative seating arrangements in which they would be separated from one another. I also had several parent conferences with the children present and let the parents know my concerns. My mentor suggested that I make sure that they understood that their academic success was dependent on their behavior.

Category 3 focused on ways in which the mentors assisted the beginning teachers in creating strategies to manage the demands of time. The mentors also provided the beginning teachers with strategies designed for managing student behavior and for dealing with inappropriate behavior in the classroom.

Category 4: Receiving Support from Parents.

Receiving support from parents refers to the assistance with communication between the beginning teacher and the parents of her students. The beginning teachers in the study shared experiences in which their mentors had provided support in this area. This category has two sub-categories: *sharing strategies for parent interactions throughout the school year* and *sharing strategies for dealing with parents in difficult situations*.

Sub-Category 1: Sharing strategies for parent interactions throughout school year.

Sharing strategies for parent interactions throughout the school year refers to assisting the beginning teacher in planning for parent conferences by first helping her determine what she hopes to accomplish through the conference. The mentor then helps her determine what information she wants to share with the parent and problems she hopes to solve.

When one of Michelle's students was having problems in reading, she sought the help of her mentor for assistance in communicating with the student's parent:

We take timed reading tests, and this particular student was taking home 100's every week. He was failing the story tests and his timed readings. The mother came in a few times. I went to my mentor and asked her what she would advise me to do. I did go into the meeting and explain the reading instruction and grading outline to the parent and let her look at it,

and then from there, I sent home the timed reading scores so the parent would know how to work with the student at home.

Michelle went on to say, “My mentor gave me the advice I needed to relay to the parent as well as information on justifying the grade and the reason for the child doing poorly in class.” Michelle learned the importance of keeping parents informed of what is happening in the classroom. The advice of her mentor to send home the timed reading scores, allowed the parent to better understand how they could help their child at home.

Claudia’s mentor provided support when a parent was concerned about her child not being challenged in the classroom. The student had transferred from a larger school system, which “was different from our school system,” and the parent was “having difficulties understanding why her child wasn’t being challenged.” When Claudia approached her mentor about the situation,

She seemed very understanding. She helped me understand that I wasn’t doing anything wrong. The parent had just come from a different school system, and it was very different from ours. She just helped me tell the parent that we can only do so much and that we can try and gave some ideas on how to challenge the child more. This was something I had never dealt with before. I wasn’t familiar with people being this forward. We worked out some things for the child to do. She really helped me in a tough spot.

Sub-Category 2: Sharing strategies for dealing with parents in difficult situations.

Sharing strategies for dealing with parents in difficult situations refers to assisting the beginning teacher with ways to communicate with parents when either they or the parent have an issue or concern. These strategies included encouraging the participant to remain objective when discussing difficult situations with parents.

A disturbing parent conference in which a parent discussed some disturbing behavior that her child was exhibiting had compelled Claudia to seek her mentor's help in handling future interactions with the parent:

Following the parent conference, this parent would call me several times a week and go on and on for thirty to forty-five minutes in detail about the alleged behavior of her son, Thomas. I would then get all upset worrying about Thomas and wouldn't be able to go to sleep. While I was concerned about Thomas, I also knew nothing about how to help address these behaviors and I began to feel like I was just a "source of venting" for the parent.

Claudia's mentor advised her to meet with the parent and share with the parent that she, too, was very concerned about Thomas and would be willing to do all she could to help him feel supported and encouraged at school. The mentor advised her to say that because she lacked experience in dealing with the behaviors the parent was describing, she did not feel comfortable to offer advice in dealing with his behaviors. She also advised that she contact the school counselor for further counseling concerning Thomas.

Just as Claudia's mentor helped her with a difficult parent situation, Leanne's mentor also helped her in dealing with another difficult parent situation that occurred when Leanne felt one of her second graders should be retained:

I had a student that really needed to be retained. His mother would come in every single day and we would read and decode words, and he wouldn't be able to do it. And then one morning, she would say he knows this and he worked on it last night. I would sit down with him during our lesson time, and he wouldn't know it. I just felt like I was hitting my head against the wall because I couldn't get through to her and I couldn't get through to him.

Leanne continued her efforts to convince the parent that it would be best for Thomas to repeat second grade. She also continued to share her concerns with her mentor about Thomas' progress, "I just kept talking to my mentor and she kept saying, 'You can't save

all of them. You can just do the best you can. We are not magicians. If the parent is set about not retaining him, then there is nothing you can really do to keep him back.”

Category 4 focused on the support mentors provided the beginning teacher participants in the study concerning the area of parent interactions. This support included sharing strategies for implementing successful parent conferences as well as for dealing with parents in difficult situations. As shown by the data in the study, the support provided by the mentors enabled the beginning teachers to interact with their students’ parents in an effective and professional manner. They were able to communicate with their students’ parents in this manner even in situations in which the parent chose not to accept the teacher’s suggestions.

Theme 2 addressed how the mentors interacted with the beginning teachers in providing support with the curriculum and instruction as well as support with classroom management and parent communication. The relationships that had developed between the participants and their mentors provided the foundation for these interactions to occur.

Theme 3: Implications for School Principals

Theme 3: Implications for School Principals addresses the principal participants’ perspectives on the outcome of mentoring for education. The participants described their relationships and interactions with mentoring. These perspectives of mentoring provide evidence of what the three principal participants valued and what they found to be most significant. Through their conversations, four categories emerged: (a) *improved teacher support and morale*, (b) *improved teacher retention*, (c) *improved classroom instruction and management*, and (d) *principal’s role in mentoring beginning teachers*. Each of these areas are discussed in detail using the words of the principal participants.

Category 1: Improved Teacher Support and Morale

Improved teacher support was an implication for principals in that beginning teachers experienced many challenges that accompany the first year of teaching. The three principal participants shared experiences in which this type of encouragement provided by the mentors in the school had positively affected the beginning teachers they were assigned. Through ongoing encouragement and support, the teachers experienced improved teacher morale.

Sub-Category 1: Pairing mentors with beginning teachers successfully.

Pairing mentors with beginning teachers successfully refers to the successful relationship formed between a mentor and beginning teacher. As a result of this relationship, the participants felt more comfortable and supported in their positions within the school.

Kim described her mentor teachers as “experienced teachers and being enthusiastic and upbeat.” She continued by saying that mentor teachers are paired with beginning teachers based on mentor teachers “need to love teaching and have a positive attitude as they are there to help and advise not to evaluate.”

“Upbeat” was also how Michael described mentors he assigns to beginning teachers. He described his teacher mentors, “They have to be willing to do it and be supportive of mentoring instead of someone that just does it.” Michael added that many times teachers are reluctant to serve as mentors:

Pairing mentors with beginning teacher isn’t an easy job. Common planning, and time is essential when committing to serve as a mentor. Mentoring is a “relationship” not a job or duty. I have to be careful matching personalities. Often I pair up teachers by subject areas they teach or by grade level. I also think it is beneficial to pair teachers up on different grade levels.

Brenda, like Michael and Kim, believes mentors and beginning teachers need to be paired based on “common characteristics” and mentors definitely need to be willing to do it. Brenda, like Michael, feels mentors and beginning teachers do not need to be in the same grade. Brenda explains: “Diversity is good in mentoring relationships, and often teacher mentors can offer support in areas of curriculum, instruction, and classroom management that is successful in their grade level that the beginning teacher could possibly implement on their own.” Brenda also feels mentor teachers need to be experienced teachers who are “friendly and open” when working with a beginning teacher.

Sub-Category 2: Time.

Time refers to when a mentor teacher and beginning teacher can talk and interact with one another to help address the concerns of the beginning teacher. This implication directly affects the overall effectiveness of a mentoring relationship. As a result, beginning teachers felt more capable of planning, organizing, and managing their classrooms.

Kim described time as being one of the main reasons many mentor teachers are reluctant to serve as mentors to beginning teachers. She explains: “Mentors and beginning teachers need time where they can sit down and just ‘talk’.” Kim adds that many times even veteran teachers need someone they can come to and ‘vent’. She continues by saying “without release time of some sort it is impossible for a good, quality, mentoring relationship to be established. There has to be a part of the day or week for them to come together without any interruptions.

Michael also believes that time is one of the most critical components of a mentoring relationship. He adds “finding time these days with all of the demands placed on teachers is a challenge. However, if both participants are committed to the relationship, they can always find time to come together.”

Category 1 focused on ways in which the support that mentors provided beginning teachers impacted the support and morale of beginning teachers. This support was provided in a variety of situations and was a positive outcome of the interactions between the beginning teacher and the mentor.

Category 2: Improved Teacher Retention

Improved teacher retention refers to ways in which a mentoring program or experience impacted a beginning teacher in order for them to remain in the teaching profession. Retention of good, high-quality teachers in the teaching profession is important as shared by each of the principal participants in the study. Through discussions, two sub-categories emerged: (a) *job satisfaction* and (b) *salary compensation*.

Sub-Category 1: Job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction refers to the attitude beginning teachers have about teaching as an outcome of their mentoring experience. This was an outcome principal participants believed had resulted from having a positive role model for beginning teachers to work with during their first year of teaching. As a result of this outcome, the principal participants felt their teachers were happier and would stay in the teaching profession.

When Kim was a beginning teacher she didn't have a mentor to help her through her first, most critical year of teaching. She felt uncertain about the way she was planning instruction for her students. Today, as an assistant principal, Kim shares these feelings:

Good mentors are important for our beginning teachers today. Good teams to work with to help these teachers over the "rocky" parts of the year is just as important. Support is the best word to use to describe how we can best keep and retain our most highly-qualified beginning teachers in this profession. If the teachers aren't happy, then they are going to leave and go somewhere else or to another profession.

Brenda is another principal who believes support is essential in keeping and retaining teachers in the teaching profession. Brenda adds, "There's a lot of things we have to do right the first time to be sure our beginning teachers are happy and satisfied in their careers." Brenda talks about a new mentoring program the school system is implementing:

This year we have a new superintendent that has implemented a new formal mentoring program in our school system. We started during preplanning with beginning teachers by talking to them about expectations, routines, curriculum standards, school problems, and looking at the needs of our new beginning teachers. We also had them complete a Needs Assessment for us to better understand how we can better help them during their first year. You might say we gave them a "crash course" to begin the year.

Brenda instills in her teacher mentors the importance of making sure the beginning teachers they are assigned are supported and have the opportunity to ask questions.

Michael sees job satisfaction as one of the reasons beginning teachers leave the teaching profession. He shares his experiences:

It used to be if you got a job, you jumped up and down. Now schools are competing. A rural area is different from a large suburban area. These areas are able to pay differently. Also, new teachers generally get lower level kids to teach, and this isn't fair. I want to involve teachers more in decision-making in the school. This gives them a sense of involvement and makes them happy.

Job satisfaction is about making sure people are happy. Michael describes how he tries to see everyone in some fashion everyday whether to say good morning, hello, or goodbye- this is important. Principals need to be visible to everyone-even kids.

Sub-Category 2: Salary compensation.

Salary compensation refers to how well teachers are compensated, or paid, to perform the duties their jobs entail. Salary compensation not only refers to the salary in which a beginning teacher is paid, but it can also include local supplements, and incentives to earn higher degrees.

Michael believes money is the key to job satisfaction for beginning teachers. He explains, “Counties around us are paying more and have incentives to earn higher degrees. You have to provide incentives for people to stay. As a young person today, you can pick and choose where you want to go.”

Kim feels teachers aren’t paid for the job they do. She adds, “Teaching is probably the only profession that doesn’t pay overtime for grading papers, attending PTO meetings, or working on lesson plans over the weekends and holidays.” Kim continues to share:

We don’t get the kind of respect from parents or the community that teachers used to get a long time ago. Society has changed and we are now dealing with things that we didn’t have to contend with twenty years ago.

In Category 2, the principal participants shared their experiences in how job satisfaction and salary compensation affected the retention of good high-quality beginning teachers. The experiences the principal participants gained through mentoring relationships enabled them to understand how to best work with mentor teachers and beginning teachers to ensure they stay in the teaching profession.

Category 3: Improved Classroom Instruction and Management

Improved classroom instruction and management refers to the way that mentors helped beginning teachers improve the instruction and classroom management they provide to their students in a number of ways. Through discussions of the principal participants and their interactions with mentors and beginning teachers, three sub-categories emerged: (a) *better planning*, (b) *implementing programs more effectively*, and (c) *improved conflict resolution management*.

Sub-Category 1: Better planning.

Better planning was an implication that principal participants believed had resulted from the interactions between teacher mentors and beginning teachers. As a result, the principals reported the beginning teachers felt more capable of planning instructional opportunities for their students.

Kim feels principals need to be sure that mentors are doing the job they have been assigned. She shares these feelings:

Mentoring is a collaborative process between a mentor and beginning teacher. I think it's important to arrange common planning time for the purpose of helping beginning teachers learn how to plan for better instruction for their students. Mentors have a wealth of knowledge to share and can often share insight into strategies and styles that can benefit their classrooms.

As a result of this collaboration, Kim feels the beginning teachers in her school are getting the support they need to plan and provide better quality instruction for their students. Kim feels the mentor teachers in her school have the desire to help the beginning teachers they are assigned to incorporate new strategies into instruction which results in generating student interest in a particular subject area or to implement a different instructional strategy to test its effectiveness.

Michael sees mentoring as often being placed on “the backburner.” He explains, “Teachers often get so busy with their own classrooms that they forget others need help. I think in areas of special education, mentors take mentoring more seriously because of all of the paperwork and regulations.” In spite of the demands placed on teachers, Michael feels mentors and their beginning teachers both benefit in the instruction they are planning.

Sub-Category 2: Implementing programs more effectively.

Implementing programs more effectively refers to how teachers felt they had improved their instruction through better implementation of the instructional programs. This implication was achieved as a result of interactions between the teacher mentors who provided instructional support to the beginning teacher.

Kim feels a positive attitude is an important lesson for mentor teachers to instill in their beginning teachers. She continues by adding, “I never really thought about how much attitude affects everything you do until I was a beginning teacher and administrator. Mentors with good, positive attitudes can ‘filter’ those attitudes down to beginning teachers. They can see that anything is possible and things can be done.

Kim had several conversations with her mentor teachers and beginning teachers about how to implement and maintain the pace of the new curriculum maps the county had prepared over the course of the school year. While she too felt the pressure to adhere to the guidelines set forth by the state and local board of education, she also experienced concern when the mentors and beginning teachers talked about how students were unable to grasp the material being taught. Kim shares these feelings:

As an assistant principal, I often act as a liaison between teachers and the principal in the school. They come to me when there’s a problem with

instruction, scheduling, or discipline. I try to work with them to work out problems. Often even the mentor teachers need suggestions, and I try to help out any way I can.

Michael has had varying levels of experience working with mentor teachers and beginning teachers in planning and implementing new programs. He feels it is all about “collaboration with one another.” Michael shares his experiences about implementing programs more effectively:

In 1990, in another district, we had a formal mentoring training program where veteran teachers were trained and assigned a beginning teacher. The program was very successful, especially with good mentors who would take these new teachers “under their wing” and show them the things colleges don’t teach them. They also show them things such as how to plan and implement the different programs we had in the school to get them through preplanning and the first nine weeks of school.

Sub-Category 3: Improved Conflict Resolution Management.

Improved conflict resolution management was an implication for principals where beginning teachers worked closely with their mentors to develop their skills in resolving and managing conflict. In this study, conflict resolution management involves those skills necessary to deescalate conflict, including disruptive student behavior. Two of the principal participants described improvement in beginning teachers’ skills in dealing with conflict.

Brenda describes a beginning teacher who was experiencing problems on the playground with several of her students who frequently displayed inappropriate behavior:

A student had just come running up to tell the teacher he had heard one student call another student an inappropriate name. As the beginning teacher looked around the playground, she noticed that most of her students were playing together nicely on the swings and monkey bars. The beginning teacher suddenly realized that she was spending most of her time and energy on the kids that misbehaved. It dawned on her that the kids that didn’t misbehave almost felt like they were never noticed because she was constantly looking for the bad behaviors in the room. She

was always calling their names and talking to them, and the kids that were not the problem, it was almost like they weren't in the room.

Brenda continued by saying, "The beginning teacher shared these reflections with her mentor, who guided her to the understanding that sometimes the students who frequently display inappropriate behavior are simply seeking attention." The mentor continued by saying, "Some of these kids don't know how to seek positive attention, so they try to get attention any way they can." Brenda went on to explain the mentor gave the beginning teacher a choice, "She could ignore the inappropriate behavior and give praise when appropriate behavior was displayed or continue giving attention to behaviors that were inappropriate." In the end, Brenda explained, the beginning teacher chose to focus on the appropriate behavior and had begun to feel she was giving all of her students equal amounts of her attention.

Kim shared an experience with one of her mentor teachers about a beginning teacher with a particular student who had very limited social skills. Kim explained the concerns the mentor teacher shared with her about this student:

He wanted to be friends with all the kids in the classroom, but he just didn't have the social skills to really fit in. From their point of view, he was bothering them; he was bugging them, following them around and trying to do things so they would think he was cool.

Kim admits that she had known the student herself for a few years, as his reputation was well known. She continues by adding that the mentor teacher had also observed how this student was treated by other teachers. The mentor teacher listened and observed the beginning teacher as she struggled to select the best strategy to use with this student. Finally, as the mentor teacher tells Kim, "She (the beginning teacher) came to the realization that she had to do something about this situation, so we sat down, and came up

with some things she could use with him.” Kim continues by relating the story told by the mentor teacher:

One of the things the beginning teacher is doing is working with him on his social skills. The beginning teacher is having lunch with him once each week, and she uses that time to work on table manners and what’s appropriate to talk about at the table. The beginning teacher reports that he really seems to enjoy having that one-on-one time with her.

In Category 3, the principal participants shared experiences of their mentor teachers and beginning teachers through which they learned ways to manage conflict involving their students. The strategies learned by the beginning teachers enabled them to deescalate conflict before it became a major issue.

Category 4: Principal’s Role in Mentoring Beginning Teachers

Principal’s role in mentoring beginning teachers refers to how the principal participants interact and see themselves in the mentoring process of beginning teachers. A principal’s role is vital to ensure the success of any mentoring program for beginning teachers. Three sub-categories emerged from the data: (a) *supporter of mentoring*, (b) *advocating importance of mentoring*, and (c) *superintendent and board role in mentoring*.

Sub-Category 1: Supporter of Mentoring.

Supporter of mentoring refers to the amount of support and time a principal gives to the mentoring process involving mentor teachers and beginning teachers. This support is vital to help beginning teachers avoid feelings of “isolation and stress.” Principals have a viable role in maintaining a positive attitude towards the mentoring process.

Michael, an advocate for supporting beginning teachers, has “fought many battles” over making sure beginning teachers are supported as they should be in the

classrooms. Michael shared his feelings about the role he plays in the mentoring process of beginning teachers:

My number one goal is that of a supporter and if you do that you can do everything else. We have to develop a level of consistency and this is often difficult because you have to have the support from the district level. We have a new administration at the district level and I am fortunate that I've been supported. You have to stand firm to support your teachers.

Kim describes her role as "being simple." She explains that her role is to "be available and keep her door open at all times." Kim wants teachers, veteran teachers and beginning teachers, to know that she is there for them to come "vent" or if they need a shoulder to cry on. Kim describes her role from the perspective of a teacher since she works very closely with teachers day to day. She shares these feelings:

I guess I can understand the most how beginning teachers feel coming into a brand new classroom for the first time. Colleges do a good job of explaining what to expect when entering the classroom, but they can't prepare you for what reality is really like once you walk in and close the door and those children are all yours. It wasn't that long ago that I was in the classroom, and I remember well the frustration on the faces of many beginning teachers. It is true that in education you either "sink or swim" because you don't really know what to expect.

Brenda, also a strong advocate for mentoring, shares her feelings about her role in the mentoring process for beginning teachers in her school:

When I work within the mentoring process, I try not to overshadow mentors. I want them to feel that I am here as a supporter, not an evaluator of what they are doing. I feel the relationship I have with mentors within my school is one of "open communication." They can come to me with any problems or concerns that they may need help on, and I will do my best to assist them.

Brenda explains that in the area where her school is located, teaching is one of the few careers available for professional men and women. She adds, "In this area, we don't have

a lot of turn-over unless someone retires or someone is added due to growth, so hopefully what mentoring we have done in the past has been beneficial.”

Sub-Category 2: Advocating Importance of Mentoring.

Advocating importance of mentoring refers to how the administration within a school system responds to the needs of teachers in addition to publicly promoting the importance of mentoring for beginning teachers new to the teaching profession.

Administrators, including district level administration, principals, and board members are important in advocating the importance of mentoring in order for it to be successful.

Michael sees advocating mentoring as a vital means in ensuring the success of a high-quality mentoring program. He also feels advocating mentoring is the most essential part of the mentoring process. Michael adds, “Teachers need you. They can’t do this job alone or in isolation. He shares this memory of a mentor teacher he worked with:

Mentoring needs to go outside of school walls. I’ve worked with a teacher who would spend time with her beginning teacher outside of school in order to get them acquainted with the school, the administration, and the community. She was truly a unique woman. It made new beginning teachers feel special. We often get so busy that we forget some people need others to talk to.

Michael feels it is important to understand the impact mentoring has on a whole school system, not just how it affects your school. Everybody needs to be involved.

Kim’s feelings about advocating mentoring is similar to that of Michaels. Kim stresses that a principal’s role is to advocate for beginning teachers as well as experienced teachers. She adds, “We’re here to make sure teachers have what they need: materials and physical and emotional support. Whether you’re brand new to teaching or new to a system, mentoring is important to the success of beginning teachers.”

Brenda explains that advocating mentoring has to start with the principal. She continues:

The principal has to work with the district level administration to allow release time for mentors and beginning teachers. The board should also be aware of the importance of mentoring and how it works with beginning teachers. The district level administration has to be aware of the attrition rate of teachers and how mentoring can directly have an effect on what teachers stay in the teaching profession in our schools.

Brenda also relates how the attrition rate in the county where she is an administrator is more of an issue at the middle and high schools than in the elementary schools. She believes, “Since we have a new superintendent this year who is advocating a new formal mentoring program in our schools, hopefully, the attrition rate in the middle and high schools will no longer be an issue for our county.”

Sub-Category 3: Superintendent and Board Role in Mentoring.

Superintendent and board role in mentoring was identified as what role the superintendent and board members in the county should have in the mentoring process of beginning teachers. Often, they are disconnected from the challenges of what beginning teachers have to endure their first year of teaching. The principal participants felt the superintendent and board’s role in this process was just as vital to the success of mentoring as principals’ and mentor teachers’ roles.

Michael saw the role of the superintendent and board as being instrumental to the continuing success of mentoring in the county. Michael believed you have to “sell them on it.” He spoke of the new superintendent in the county:

Our new superintendent is a strong advocate on mentoring being that he is young. The board probably doesn’t understand what a mentor is or what they really do. Mentoring is a relationship-not a job duty! I would like to see us develop our own mentoring program, not copy someone else’s-it

should be based on the needs of beginning teachers in our school. I feel this is a big deal.

Kim, like Michael, also felt the role of the superintendent and board was one of significant importance. Kim explains, “Without them, we can’t place an emphasis on the importance of high-quality teachers. We need the best teachers for our students. They need to support our beginning teachers to make sure they stay with us.”

Brenda felt that mentoring was an issue that should be handled through the individual schools. She did agree with Michael and Kim that the superintendent and board should be aware of mentoring issues and concerns. Brenda especially felt they should be concerned with the attrition of teachers at the middle and high schools in the county. Brenda added, “We are now required to have a mentoring program in our schools. This shows us how the superintendent and board perceive mentoring in the day to day operations of the school.”

Category 4 focused on the principal’s role in the mentoring process of beginning teachers. Through interactions with teacher mentors, beginning teachers, the superintendent, and board, the principal participants learned how to successfully play a part in the mentoring of beginning teachers by providing support, by learning how to best advocate the importance of mentoring, as well as, exploring the role that superintendents and board members play in the mentoring process of beginning teachers.

Theme 3 addressed how teacher mentors and school principals interacted with beginning teachers in providing support with the curriculum and instruction, in providing support with conflict resolution, and the role of principals in the mentoring process of beginning teachers. The relationships that developed between the participants, teacher

mentors, beginning teachers, and school principals provided the foundation for these interactions to occur.

Theme 4: Future Implications for Teacher Growth

Theme 4: Future implications for teacher growth was identified as the underlying theme of the mentoring experiences of the participants in the study. It addresses the participants' perspectives on their future growth as educators based on the relationships they formed and experiences they shared in the mentoring process. One category was identified within this theme: *experiencing self-confidence and growth in beginning teachers through mentoring*. This area is discussed in detail using words of the participants.

Category 1: Experiencing self-confidence and growth in beginning teachers through mentoring was identified as how the participants in the study felt in planning and implementing instruction, interacting with their peers, and managing their classrooms. The concept of teacher self-confidence is discussed as it relates to this study.

The idea of self-confidence is typically associated with a belief in oneself and in one's abilities. This idea fits with the findings of this study, for the beginning teachers had gained an understanding of their abilities and strengths and had begun to build confidence in their abilities and strengths through practice. The support of their mentors and principals had been instrumental in achieving this level of self-confidence.

The beginning teachers in this study felt confident implementing learning opportunities for their students. They acknowledged areas of need for their students and sought resources in those areas. Claudia shared that her mentor's words of advice kept coming back to her: "Why don't you try this and if that's not working, try this?" Claudia

continued by saying, “It is just the experience of constantly determining and locating what’s going to work with your students.” According to Leanne, “If you feel confident with what you are doing and that you are doing the right thing, then you feel better about your teaching.”

The beginning teachers in this study felt confident that they were being received as contributing members of their schools’ faculty. Michelle’s transition from paraprofessional to teacher in the same school made her wonder how she would be received by other members of the faculty. Her mentor provided the encouragement needed to make this transition successfully and to feel valued as a member of the teaching staff.

According to this study, beginning teachers also reported they felt more confident about beginning the next school year even without the support of a mentor. Claudia observed that she was more prepared and organized when preparing for a new school year. She had implemented some of the strategies in behavior management and reading from her mentor. Organization and time management are other areas in which she felt she was building from last year’s experiences. Claudia commented, “I have noticed a lot of things we did last year have really come alive this year and I am really trying to make them work and keep working on them.”

Chapter 4 has presented the findings of this study. Four major themes, eleven categories, and twenty-four sub-categories, which represent the recurring ideas in the beginning teachers’ beliefs on their mentoring experiences in a rural north Georgia school system, were defined, described, and illustrated. In the next chapter, the research is summarized, the findings are discussed, and the implications of the research are set forth.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, SUMMARY, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the beliefs about mentoring of three beginning elementary teachers and three elementary school principals in a rural Georgia school system, the impact on teacher retention and the implication for elementary school principals. In this chapter, the research is summarized, the findings are discussed, and the implications for future research are presented.

Discussion

The findings of this study were presented in Chapter 4. The purpose of this section is to present a thorough discussion of the major findings from this study, specifically how these findings are significant in relation to existing literature on beginning teachers' experiences in mentoring programs.

Discussion of Beginning Teachers' Experiences in Mentoring Programs

In a time when high attrition rates among beginning teachers have placed renewed emphasis on providing mentoring programs for all beginning teachers, an in-depth study of beginning teachers' experiences in their respective mentoring programs in rural elementary schools is important. This study shows that, in their respective mentoring programs, the participating beginning teachers formed relationships with their mentors. These relationships resulted from experiences shared with the mentor and were supportive, not evaluative. These findings are consistent with the teacher mentoring literature that emphasizes the importance of relationships and teacher mentoring. Rowley (1999) wrote, "The primary role of the mentor teacher should be that of a support provider rather than a formal evaluator."

This study demonstrated that accessibility of the mentor enhanced the relationship between the beginning teacher and the mentor. When mentors were accessible, beginning teachers sought assistance from their mentors more frequently and more openly. These findings are consistent with Certo's (2002) view that accessibility of the mentor enables the mentor teacher and the beginning teacher to maintain contact on a more frequent and less structured basis.

Consistent with the literature (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002), this study found that personal and emotional support provided to the beginning teachers by their mentors was an important part of the mentoring relationship. This personal and emotional support included positive encouragement and caring and strengthened the relationship between the beginning teachers and their mentors. The formation of these relationships provided the foundation for interactions to take place.

This study found that the beginning teachers shared many interactions with their mentors. Through these interactions, information, ideas, and opinions were exchanged in a wide array of areas. It was found that the mentors of the beginning teachers in this study interacted with them by assisting them in their understanding and implementation of the curriculum. This finding is consistent with the mentoring literature that emphasizes the importance of mentors partnering with beginning teachers to understand, make meaning of, and use the various curriculum frameworks (Moir & Gless, 2001).

This study also found that the beginning teachers received instructional support from their mentors, including learning new ways to teach their students and new ways to implement instructional programs. Rowley (1999) stated, "A quality of a good mentor is the ability to provide instructional support. Through the mentoring relationship, a good

mentor is willing to coach beginning teachers to improve their performance regardless of their skill level.”

Another finding of this study was that beginning teachers received classroom management support from their mentors, including management of time and student behavior. As argued by Brock and Grady (1998), in the area of classroom management, mentors can help reduce the high levels of dread and anxiety experienced by most beginning teachers by encouraging ongoing dialogue, sharing classroom management strategies, and modeling appropriate teacher-student relationships.

Beginning teachers in this study received support from their mentors in dealing with parental problems, including communicating with parents about issues related to instruction and curriculum, as well as situations in which the parent and teacher could not reach a compromise. Brock and Grady (1998) recommended that the beginning teacher be provided support in preparing for parent-teacher conferences and conferences requested by the beginning teacher or parents to discuss special problems.

This study found that the beginning teachers experienced improved morale because of the experiences and interactions they shared with their mentors. Weiss and Weiss (1999) stated that new teachers who spend their first year in mentoring relationships are likely to have higher morale, have a stronger commitment to teaching, and remain in the profession.

Beginning teachers revealed that working with mentors helped them improve the instruction they provided to their students in a number of ways. Through interactions with their mentors, the teachers improved their classroom instruction by learning to plan better, implementing programs more effectively, and improved conflict resolution

management. Schaffer et al. (1992) found that helping teachers focus on instructional issues can help increase academic time and lower time spent on organizational issues and behavior problems. The beginning teachers in this study improved their conflict resolution management through working with their mentors to minimize the opportunities for undesirable behaviors to manifest themselves. Spivak and Prothorow-Smith (2001) stated that the prevention of certain undesirable behaviors involves limiting the factors that encourage these behaviors.

School principals also revealed implications as to their role in the mentoring process of beginning teachers. Principals found three areas in which the role of an administrator was vital in the success of retaining high-quality beginning teachers in the teaching profession: support of mentoring, advocating the importance of mentoring, and the superintendent's and board's role in the mentoring process. Huling and Resta (2001) stated that principals need to understand that providing support to a mentoring program that allows experienced teachers to work with first-year teachers will benefit the students of both the mentor and the first-year teacher. Participating in the mentoring process is not the only way to ensure its success. Advocating the importance of mentoring in schools is also crucial for administrators. As stated by Heller and Sindelar (1991), a visible and attentive principal can promote success in the classroom and help to correct small problems before they have the chance to become destructive to the mentoring program. The success of mentoring beginning teachers cannot stop with just the principal in the school. It must also extend to the outer networks to include the superintendent and the board. They too, must know and understand the concerns affecting teacher mentors and beginning teachers in the schools. Brock and Grady (2001) stated that administrators

often play a make-or-break role in the success of teacher mentoring programs and that any endeavor that requires teachers, both new and experienced, to take on additional responsibilities requires full administrative support.

This study also revealed future implications for teacher growth, particularly in the area of self-confidence. Zimmerman and Stansbury (2000) explained the role of a mentor in the growth of a beginning teacher's self-confidence:

Support providers must recognize the importance of helping beginning teachers identify and understand their teaching strengths. Recognizing and understanding their successes not only provides an enormous boost in confidence, but also helps beginning teachers build on those strengths.

Summarizing, the findings of this study contribute to the body of existing literature on beginning teacher mentoring programs in rural elementary schools and the implications it has for school administrators. Most notably, this study was different from previous studies of beginning teacher mentoring programs because it focused on the experiences of beginning teachers in mentoring relationships in rural elementary schools and provided an in-depth look at the relationships that developed between the beginning teachers and their mentors. This study also found that, through their interactions, the relationships that developed between the beginning teacher and her mentor were of a closer, more personal nature than relationships described in other mentoring studies. The research also found that administrators at all levels, have a vital role in the mentoring of beginning teachers to ensure that the high-quality beginning teachers being hired are supported, happy, and decide to stay in the teaching profession. Self-confidence was also found to be an important finding in this study since beginning teachers felt more confident about beginning the next school year even without the support of the mentor.

Conclusions

The findings in this study correlated with the research questions in the study. The overarching research question, What is the impact of mentoring on first year teachers? ,is consistent with the study which showed that mentoring had a significant impact on the retention of first year teachers. In an era where more than two million new teachers will be needed in classrooms across the United States by the year 2010 (Feiman-Nemser, 2000), the support that new teachers receive in their mentoring experiences is crucial in making sure these teachers stay in the teaching profession. Beginning teachers are faced with numerous challenges today including motivating students, classroom management, student diversity, assessment of student work, and maintaining relationships with parents. The support beginning teachers received in this study in these areas helped make them better teachers and more confident in their abilities in the classroom. The participants in this study expressed the importance of mentoring as playing a major important part in their decisions to stay in the classroom, and believed these experiences helped them develop as teachers to better prepare them for their second year of teaching even without their mentors.

The research findings also correlated with the first research question, How does mentoring influence the teaching of first year teachers? The findings in this study showed a profound influence on the quality of the participants' classroom teaching. All three beginning teacher participants reported they received support with curriculum planning, instruction, classroom management, and with interacting with parents. This finding is consistent with the mentoring literature that emphasizes the importance of mentors partnering with beginning teachers to understand, make meaning of, and use the various

curriculum frameworks (Moir & Gless, 2001). This study also found that the beginning teachers received instructional support from their mentors, including new ways to teach their students and new ways to implement instructional programs. Rowley (1999) stated, “A quality of a good mentor is the ability to provide instructional support. Through the mentoring relationship, a good mentor is willing to coach beginning teachers to improve their performance regardless of their skill level.”

Findings from the study addressed the second research question, How is mentoring perceived by school administrators?, it was found that the administrators in the study each agreed that mentoring was essential for beginning teachers in order to provide them the support and assistance they need during their first year of teaching. Brock and Grady (2001) wrote that a supportive administration is an essential element of a successful teacher-mentor program. Often, principals are the first ones to recognize the need for a support system for first year teachers. Many of the school principals in this study shared that they were not mentored early in their careers, which makes them understand the need for mentoring for their beginning teachers in their respective schools.

The findings in the study also addressed the third research question, How do mentoring relationships with beginning teachers help contribute to teacher retention and teacher development? Each of the beginning teacher participants in this study shared that their decision to stay in the teaching profession resulted from the support they were given in their respective mentoring relationships. Participants expressed the one-on-one interactions they had with their mentors ultimately impacted their decision to stay in the teaching profession. These findings are consistent with the literature (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002) in that personal and emotional support provided to the beginning

teachers by their mentors was an important part of the mentoring relationship. This support included positive encouragement and caring and strengthened the relationship between the beginning teachers and their mentors.

Lastly, the fourth research question, How do mentoring relationships with beginning teachers help contribute to job satisfaction?, correlated with the research findings in that beginning teachers reported improved job satisfaction and morale because of the experiences they shared with their assigned mentors. Weiss and Weiss (1999) stated that new teachers who spend their first year in mentoring relationships are likely to have higher morale, have a stronger commitment to teaching, and remain in the profession. The close, personal interactions between the beginning teacher participants and their mentors made them happier and more fulfilled in their positions.

In conclusion, the data from this study correlated with the research questions and indicate that the experiences of the beginning teachers in their mentoring relationships in the school system in rural north Georgia facilitated a positive, successful first year. Engagement in the mentoring relationship led to supportive interactions, which provided the means for positive outcomes and the strength to overcome the challenges identified by the beginning teaches in the study.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore beginning elementary teachers' beliefs regarding their mentoring programs and to explain their perspectives. The research was guided by one overarching research question and four subquestions: (a) What is the impact of mentoring on first year teachers?, (b) How does mentoring influence the teaching by first year teachers?, (c) How is mentoring perceived by school

administrators?, (d) How do mentoring relationships with beginning teachers help contribute to teacher retention and teacher development?, and (e) How do mentoring relationships with beginning teachers help contribute to job satisfaction? This study was conducted in elementary schools in a rural north Georgia school system where formal beginning teacher mentoring programs were not implemented, but were facilitated informally within the individual schools.

The research design used in the study was grounded theory. In accordance with grounded theory methodology, in-depth, face-to-face interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted with three beginning teacher participants and three principal participants. Constant comparative analysis was used to collect, code, and analyze the data, which included interview responses and researcher's memos. Recurring ideas in participants' responses were identified and organized into four main themes, eleven categories, and twenty-four sub-categories which emerged from the data and from the interpretation of the data. Despite the researcher's use of probes and other interviewing techniques, the participants' responses were impacted by the elements of professional experience and career exposure.

The results of this study suggest that beginning teachers form relationships with their mentors based on accessibility of the mentor and personal and emotional support from the mentor. Beginning teachers and mentors take initiative in forming these relationships. This study also revealed that beginning teachers interact with mentors in a variety of ways. These interactions included curriculum support, instructional support, classroom management support, and conflict resolution support. This study also revealed the implications these findings had on school principals including supporters of

mentoring, their role in advocating mentoring, and the role of the superintendent and board in the mentoring process. Furthermore, this study included future implications for teacher growth in self-confidence.

Implications

In this section, the implications of the findings of this study are discussed.

Implications for further research are followed by implications for practitioners in the field of education.

Implications for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the beginning teachers' beliefs about their experiences in their respective mentoring programs and relationships. The mentoring experiences in the county where this study took place were largely effective in providing support for beginning teachers and affecting classroom instruction in positive ways.

In the current era of educational reform, further in-depth study of effective mentoring programs and of the strategies used in these programs is warranted for two reasons. First, the *No Child Left Behind Act* makes the effectiveness of instruction a major concern for every school in the nation. This study has established that the mentoring practices associated with the relationship between the beginning teacher and the mentor improved the effectiveness of classroom instruction, making further study of mentoring practices a worthy pursuit. Second, this study has demonstrated that the mentoring relationship added an additional level of support for beginning teachers, enabling them to reach new levels of self-confidence. This finding supports the need for

further study of mentoring programs and mentoring relationships, especially with the current focus on nationwide teacher recruitment and retention problems.

Additional studies of mentoring programs in rural areas at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels would also be beneficial. These studies would add to the small database of information about beginning teachers in rural schools. The recruitment and retention of teachers in rural schools is an area in which little research has been completed (Harmon et al., 1996). The anticipated nationwide teacher shortage will have an impact on rural areas, especially as they struggle to attract and retain highly qualified teachers in the areas of math, science, and special education.

The beginning teachers in this study indicated several ways students benefited from the mentoring relationship. Teachers mentioned that students received better instruction and achieved some academic gains. A goal of additional research would be to investigate the following question: Do the students of beginning teachers in mentoring programs make greater academic gains than do the students of beginning teachers not in mentoring programs?

Few research studies exist that have tracked teachers in order to add to the knowledge base of how teachers develop over time, as most studies are conducted only during the first year of teaching. Additional research involving teachers who have participated in mentoring programs would provide insight into how the mentoring programs have affected their development as teachers as well as their decisions to remain in the profession.

This chapter has provided a summary of the study and a detailed discussion of the findings as they relate to relevant literature. Implications of the study's findings for

further research were presented and discussed. Perhaps the most effective way to conclude this study is to use the words of Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) that describe the ultimate goal of teacher mentoring programs, “The goal is not to create high-quality mentor programs as ends in themselves, but rather to incorporate mentoring as part and parcel of transforming teaching into a true learning profession” (p.56).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BEGINNING TEACHER STUDY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Pseudonym: _____

Age: _____

How do you describe yourself?

- _____ American Indian or Alaskan Native
 _____ Asian
 _____ Black or African American
 _____ Hispanic or Latino
 _____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 _____ White, non-Hispanic, non-Latino
 _____ Other

Did you participate in a student-teaching experience? _____
 If so, in what school did this student-teaching experience take place?

What grade are you currently teaching? _____

Number of teachers at your grade level? _____

Number of years your mentor teacher has been teaching? _____

Highest degree (Beside the highest degree you have earned, list the institution from which it was obtained):

Bachelors degree: _____
 Masters degree: _____
 Ed.S degree: _____
 Doctorate: _____
 Other (Specify): _____

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL STUDY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Pseudonym: _____

Age: _____

Years in Education: _____

Years in Administration: _____

How do you describe yourself?

_____ American Indian or Alaskan Native

_____ Asian

_____ Black or African American

_____ Hispanic or Latino

_____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

_____ White, non-Hispanic, non-Latino

_____ Other

Do you assign mentors to beginning teachers in your school? _____

Do your teacher mentors participate in a formal training program before working with beginning teachers? _____

Number of teachers in your school? _____

Number of teachers who serve as mentors in your school? _____

Number of beginning teachers in your school? _____

Highest degree (Beside the highest degree you have earned, list the institution from which it was obtained):

Bachelors degree: _____

Masters degree: _____

Ed.S: _____

Doctorate: _____

Other (Specify): _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR BEGINNING TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

1. What were your experiences with a mentor/mentoring program?
2. What support were you provided by your mentor with classroom management, discipline, instruction, and professional duties?
3. What support were you provided by your principal?
4. How did the support you received from your mentoring experience effect your choice to stay in teaching?
5. What challenges or difficulties have you faced in your first-year of teaching that your mentoring experience helped you with the most?
6. How did your mentoring experience benefit you in these areas:
personal/emotional, instructional, classroom management, classroom discipline, professional duties, etc.?
7. Which area (from question #6), did your mentoring experience prove to benefit you the most as a beginning classroom teacher?
8. What did your mentoring experience mean to you?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANTS

1. What are your personal experiences with a mentor/mentoring program?
2. What characteristics do you feel are important when pairing mentor teachers with first-year teachers?
3. What do you feel is your role in the mentoring process of first-year teachers in your school?
4. What do you perceive as the reasons for the high rate of attrition of first-year teachers in the teaching profession?
5. What solutions do you feel would help in the retaining of highly qualified first-year teachers in the teaching profession?
6. How did the support you received in your mentoring experience affect your choice to stay in the teaching profession?
7. How important is a principal's role in advocating the importance of mentoring/mentoring programs for first-year teachers?

APPENDIX E

MENTORING STUDY INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Research Participant:

My name is Renea Colson. I am a teacher in the xxxx xxxxxx school system and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am interested in examining beginning teachers' beliefs about mentoring and the impact these beliefs have on teacher retention and its implications for elementary school principals.

This letter is to request your assistance in gathering data to analyze this situation. There is, of course, no penalty should you decide not to participate or to later withdraw from the study. If you agree to participate, an interview time will be established where you will be asked a series of 7-8 questions about your mentoring experiences. The interviews should last approximately thirty minutes to one hour. Completion of the interview will be considered permission to use the information you provide in the study. Please be assured that your responses will be kept absolutely anonymous. The study will be most useful if you respond to every interview question. There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort. If this occurs, you may choose not to answer one or more of the questions, without penalty. You must be at least 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you would like a copy of the study's results, you may indicate your interest below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

If you have any questions about this research project, please call Renea Colson at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, they should be directed to Dr. Linda M. Arthur at Georgia Southern University at (912)681-0697.

Let me thank you in advance for your assistance in participating in this research study. The results should allow me to better understand the importance of mentoring relationships.

Respectfully,

Renea Colson
Doctoral Student
Georgia Southern University

Title of Project: Elementary Teacher Mentoring in a Rural Georgia School System: The Impact on Teacher Retention and the Implication for Elementary School Principals

Principal Investigator: Renea Colson

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Linda M. Arthur, P.O. Box 8131, Statesboro, Georgia 30460, 912-681-0697, larthur@georgiasouthern.edu.