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Mentors and New Teachers: A Qualitative Study Examining an East Tennessee School System's  
Mentoring Program

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

Johnson City, Tennessee

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

Nikki Lynn Morris Manning

December 2011

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Dr. Catherine Glascock, Chair

Dr. Edward Dwyer

Dr. Donald Good

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Keywords: mentoring, beginning teachers

## ABSTRACT

### Mentors and New Teachers: A Qualitative Study Examining an East Tennessee School System's Mentoring Program

by

Nikki Lynn Morris Manning

With almost half of all new teachers leaving the profession in the first few years, it is imperative that school systems find ways to support and retain these new teachers. Formal mentoring is a growing necessity. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the effectiveness of one school system's mentoring program.

This study included 4 sets of mentor and mentee teachers. Each set consisted of a beginning teacher in her 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching and an experienced teacher trained by the school system to serve as a mentor. This study was conducted in a rural East Tennessee School System.

The qualitative interviews were conducted by meeting with the 8 participants. A list of possible participants was obtained from the central office (see Appendix A). An email was sent to each possible participant explaining the nature of the study (see Appendix B). An interview guide was used and participants signed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C).

During the interview process, 3 commonalities were found among the 4 sets of teachers. These were the need for better training, common grade level assignments, and the overall positive experience of mentoring.

All of the teachers interviewed indicated that mentoring was a positive experience. Allowing veteran teachers to reflect on and enhance their own teaching while guiding new teachers

through procedures and routines is a win-win situation for all involved. This study found congruence with the review of literature. The study indicates that the mentoring program in this rural East Tennessee county to be a positive and beneficial endeavor. Recommendations for the program include extending the time for mentoring past the 1<sup>st</sup> year and striving to assign mentors to mentees within similar teaching assignments.

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family and friends. Without the wonderful support system and foundation that each of you has provided me I would not have been able to accomplish my goals.

To Mom and Dad for encouraging and supporting me throughout my life.

To my other parents Kim and Junior for late night advice, last minute edits, and always being only a phone call away.

To my husband Jaime for making sure I didn't quit even when I wanted to. I love you!

To my son Austin and my nieces, Stephanie, Josie, and Samantha for always reminding me what is most important in life: love and laughter.

To my brothers and sister, Joe, Josh, and Jenn, for always being there to listen to me cry and make me laugh.

To my best friend Jennifer for being there through all the ups and downs.

To my Granny and Papaw who always believed I could do anything. Your unconditional love and complete belief in me keeps me strong. I love you!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers are leaving the classroom at record rates; most of these teachers are within the first 5 years of their career (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Teachers with no experience enter their classroom for the first time with the same level of duties and expectations as veteran teachers who have been teaching 20 years or more (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). A teacher's 1<sup>st</sup> year can be very demanding during which he or she must learn to deal with time management, paperwork, and classroom discipline (Jonson, 2002). The idea that teachers are expected to “sink or swim” is a long standing one (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Isolation during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of a teacher's professional life is often too much for a young teacher to handle (Jonson, 2002). Unexpected duties and feelings of isolation have resulted in an increase in teachers leaving the classroom.

In today's workforce, professionals who choose to enter the classroom as teachers are exiting the field at a record rate (Jonson, 2002). Since 1994, the number of 1<sup>st</sup>-year teachers who leave the classroom has consistently risen (Jonson, 2002). Within the first 2 years of their career 30% of teachers leave the profession, 10% more leave within the next 3 years, and 50% of all teachers have left by their 7th year (Jonson, 2002). The cost of these teachers leaving is estimated at \$7.2 billion a year nationally (Carroll & Foster, 2010). These numbers indicate that a great change is needed for the teaching profession to grow and succeed in producing highly skilled students.

There are numerous reasons why teachers leave the profession after their first few years. Some of these reasons are personal and have nothing to do with the school environment (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). This rationale may include change in marital status, child birth, or

relocation. Other motives are directly related to the school environment. These may include increased expectations, constant curriculum and policy changes, increased paperwork, and other nonteaching outside duties (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). Although all teachers must deal with these stresses, new teachers are also learning and coping with a new profession (Rutherford, 2005).

Because of this high rate of teacher loss and the increasing dissatisfaction with teacher education, many school systems have put mentoring programs in place (Portner, 2008). Teacher mentoring is the practice of assigning a successful veteran teacher to help and support new teachers during their first few years. The number of states mandating new teacher support programs increased by 25% from 1998-2004 (Portner, 2008).

In 1988 the state of Tennessee began looking at ways to improve teacher education programs so that professionals entering the classroom would be better prepared (Kershaw, 2001; Rutherford, 2005). The state of Tennessee began developing teacher mentoring programs in 1998 (Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), 2003). In 2001 Tennessee adopted standards that guided the new teacher programs and became the foundation for new teacher evaluations. These standards are known as the *Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth* (Kershaw, 2001). During the past decade the state of Tennessee has used Title II grant money to develop and improve their mentoring program (TDOE, 2003). The current vision for the Tennessee Department of Education mentoring program is:

As the State's teacher mentoring and new teacher induction program continues to evolve, the Department of Education envisions a consolidated, systemic, uniform approach to teacher mentoring. Under the No Child Left Behind legislation, local school systems were given greater responsibility for developing and implementing teacher mentor programs within their systems. A major portion of Title II funds is channeled directly to local school systems, enabling them to use part of these funds to support teacher mentoring efforts. It is the goal of the Tennessee Department of Education to provide the professional development and support needed to assure that there is at least one Lead Mentor in each school system available to establish teacher induction programs that are aligned with

school improvement plans. We believe that when administrators, mentor teachers, and other stakeholders support novice teachers through their critical first years of teaching, all children are being taught by highly qualified teachers who are committed to their students and their schools. (Vision, para. 1)

Because of this push toward mentoring at the state level and increased Title II funding, most counties in Tennessee have begun a mentoring program to help new teachers. These mentoring programs often vary greatly from county to county.

The East Tennessee School System in this study has implemented the *Getting Off to a Great Start (GOTAGS)* program as its primary induction program as well as a mentoring program based on the state of Tennessee Mentoring Model. The *GOTAGS* program is based on the research of Harris (2005) at Vanderbilt University. Beginning teachers are given 2 days of induction at the beginning of the school year and then assigned a mentor teacher for their 1<sup>st</sup> year. The training consists of 2 days of sharing and learning. The program has many resources to help new teachers start their school year on the right step. After those first days of professional development, the mentor and beginning teacher are left to develop a relationship. The mentor teacher is asked to keep a log of interactions with the beginning teacher. These interactions may include helping the beginning teacher understand policies at the school, helping set up the classroom or grading system, and dealing with other issues that arise during the school year (Director of Personnel, personal communication, November 30, 2010).

#### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the mentoring program in one East Tennessee County from the perspective of mentees at the end of their 1<sup>st</sup> year teaching and their mentors who have participated in the program. A request was sent to every school, but not all agreed to participate. The county school system has invested time and money each year into its mentoring program. The mentoring program has not been formally approved by the

Board of Education and no specific policy supports it. It is funded through the office of the Personnel Director with Title II federal funds. All 1<sup>st</sup>-year teachers receive a mentor. Each mentor receives support and a stipend at the end of the school year. The stipend varies depending on funding and the number of mentors needed. Two days of professional development each summer are dedicated to the induction and mentoring of new teachers (Director of Personnel, personal communication, November 30, 2010).

### Research Questions

In order to understand the thoughts of teachers who have completed their 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching while participating in the county mentoring program, the following four questions guided the research:

1. What aspects of the mentoring program were most beneficial to new teachers?
2. What aspects of the mentoring program were most difficult to manage according to new teachers and their mentors?
3. What experiences could be added to the mentoring program to enhance its effectiveness?
4. How does implementation of the program vary across the county?

### Significance of the Study

The information gained from this study will be beneficial to teachers, administrators, and school systems in search of a mentoring program to implement. While looking at new teachers' perceptions, this study concentrated on a specific program and its effectiveness in the county school system. On a local level this will help the county evaluate its current program for strengths and weaknesses so it can make changes where needed. Individual mentors may use the

results of this study to strengthen future relationships with new teachers. Other schools systems may use the results of this study to consider their own mentoring programs.

### Definition of Terms

*Beginning Teacher.* A beginning teacher is any teacher who has been teaching less than 3 complete school years (USLegal, 2010). For the purpose of this study, beginning teachers are those teachers who have completed at least 1 year but not more than 2 in this county.

*Mentor.* A mentor “refers to a staff member who serves as a teacher and role-model for new employees” (USLegal, 2010, Mentor law & legal definition, para. 1). According to the Tennessee Department of Education (2003), “Teacher mentoring encourages new teachers to remain in the profession, improves their instruction, and enables them to become members of a learning community” (Background, para. 1). For the purpose of this study, mentors are highly-qualified teachers who have been trained as mentors according to the county’s training model.

*Mentee.* A mentee is a beginning teacher who is being mentored.

*Primary School.* A primary school serves students in kindergarten through 2nd grade.

*Elementary School.* An elementary school serves students in kindergarten through 5th grade.

*Middle School.* A middle school serves students in 6th grade through 8th grade.

*High School.* A high school serves students in 9th grade through 12th grade.

*Induction Program:* An induction is a formal introduction to a job or process (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.).

### Delimitations and Limitations

This study is limited to teachers in a rural northeast Tennessee county school system who have participated in the mentoring program. The participants are all public school teachers whose



1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching was with this school system. This study does not include teachers who have moved from other systems and participated in the mentoring program due to this being their 1<sup>st</sup> year in this school system. Experienced teachers with more than 1 year of established nonmentored teaching are also not included.

This study may be used to help improve the current mentoring program in this school system; it cannot be generalized to teachers in other school systems. The external validity of this study is very narrow because the research is centered on a specific program used by this county school system. Teachers chosen to be part of this study came from a narrow group of teachers and are delimited by those who agreed to participate in the interview process.

### Chapter Summary

The teaching profession can be rewarding and enjoyable, but for the unprepared novice teacher it can also be stressful and overwhelming. School systems have begun to implement a support system for new teachers to help them overcome the obstacles of their 1<sup>st</sup> year. Mentoring programs vary by state, county, and sometimes by individual schools. This county has adopted a teacher induction and mentoring program to help new teachers succeed (Director of Personnel, personal communication, January 17, 2011). This study examined the attitudes of beginning teachers who have completed this mentoring program by interviewing the teachers to determine the program's strengths and weaknesses.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

First-year teachers are expected to begin their career with the same expertise and professionalism as a veteran teacher (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). Other professions allow new hires to carry a reduced workload or work as an apprentice (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). This type of introduction into education makes mentoring an important part of every school. New teachers can better deal with the daily difficulties of teaching on their own when they have the support of a mentor.

#### Why Teachers Leave the Profession

Teachers are leaving the profession for a variety of reasons. The percentage of those choosing to leave within the first 7 years is 40% to 50% (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). There are six major reasons beginning teachers leave education. According to Gordon and Maxey, the contributing factors include:

1. difficult work assignments,
2. unclear expectations,
3. inadequate resources,
4. isolation,
5. role conflict, and
6. reality shock.

As mentioned earlier, teachers are given the same work expectations whether they are 1<sup>st</sup>-year teachers or veteran teachers. New teachers are often given assignments in the most challenging schools because older teachers move to “easier” placements. These new teachers are

given little support and often burn out within a few years (Carrol & Foster, 2010). New teachers are also more likely to be given teaching assignments outside their field (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010). Teachers who are teaching outside their field, those teaching multiple grades, or those teaching multiple subjects are more likely to ask for another assignment or leave the classroom (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010).

New teachers must learn both the formal and informal expectations of their new school (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). Often new teachers do not know what is expected of them; the isolation of the classroom does not help alleviate these feelings (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). It may take several years for teachers to understand what is expected of them in the formal and informal aspects of their school.

First-year teachers may also deal with resources that are out-of-date and in poor condition (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). Often, more experienced teachers “raid” the classroom of a retiring teacher in order to get the best materials and leave old, outdated items for the new teacher (Jonson, 2002). It is not only the poor resources that new teachers inherit, but often the most difficult students and assignments are left for them as well (Jonson, 2002).

First-year teachers often deal with feelings of isolation. They may feel that they are not prepared from their intern teaching experiences. Teachers may also undergo emotional isolation when they are assigned the most physically isolated classrooms (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). New teachers may also suffer from isolation because they feel that if they go to a veteran teacher for help, they will be seen as incompetent (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010).

Although people enter the teaching profession at many ages, it is still more common for a new teacher to be in his or her mid to early 20s. At this age new teachers are often adjusting to living away from home for the first time or starting a family and having children. These life

changes occurring at the same time as starting a career in education can sometimes lead to role conflict. Other family members may not understand the stress of beginning teaching and the new teacher may feel torn between his or her responsibilities at work and those of a new home or family (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

According to Bartell (1995), “No matter what initial professional preparation they receive, teachers are never fully prepared for classroom realities and for the responsibilities associated with meeting the needs of a rapidly growing, increasingly diverse student population” (p. 29). This reality shock can be caused by a conflict between what was learned and what is expected by the school or district, an abundance of nonteaching duties, or by their own misperceptions about teaching (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). Reality shock can cause severe cynicism and reduce a new teacher’s ability to cope with other factors of teaching (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

### What is Mentoring?

Defining mentoring is a challenge because of the numerous definitions in the research. According to one research article mentoring refers to actions used to help and support teacher candidates (Capizzi, Wehby, & Sandmel, 2010). Other research articles use the term mentoring to refer to any professional development occurring between two colleagues regardless of years of experience (Hanson & Moir, 2008). For the purpose of this study the focus is on 1<sup>st</sup>-year teachers who were assigned a mentor by their county school system. Mentors are limited to teachers who were assigned to mentor a new teacher and who had completed the mentor training provided by their county school system.

Mentor teachers must provide new teachers with support and encouragement in order to help them succeed. The *Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC)*

has established 10 principles to guide new teachers in their professional development. According to Pelletier (2006) these principles include:

1. making content meaningful,
2. child development and learning theory,
3. learning styles,
4. instructional strategies and problem solving,
5. motivation and behavior,
6. communication and knowledge,
7. planning for instruction,
8. assessment,
9. professional growth and reflection, and
10. interpersonal relationships.

In addition to these principles, Pelletier suggests that the mentor teacher should share his or her love of content areas, bring in curriculum materials, and coach new teachers to use the resources available to them.

The mentor's role can be divided into three parts, "offering support, creating challenge, and facilitating a professional vision" (Lipton, Wellman, & Humbard, 2003, p. 1). Support can be divided into four categories: emotional, physical, instructional, and institutional. New teachers need the emotional support of an expert teacher to help them celebrate successes and reflect on mistakes. They may need the physical support of helping to rearrange the room, locating needed resources, or simply finding their way around a new school. Instructional support could include help with managing time, new teaching strategies, ways to assess, classroom routines, or beginning lesson plans. Institutional support can consist of help with staff procedures, where to

find resources, before- and after-school activities, and other teacher policies (Lipton et al., 2003). Each of these support activities will help a new teacher develop a sense of belonging without the extreme feeling of isolation that is characteristic of a teacher's 1<sup>st</sup> year (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

Although the majority of a mentor's time will be spent in support, in order for new teachers to grow and learn the mentor must also challenge and aid the mentee in creating a professional vision. Mentors should help new teachers set goals and evaluate those goals with data driven results. By using data mentors can encourage new teachers to look into professional development and help them become lifelong learners. These steps are just as important as offering support, but are often overlooked by mentors (Lipton et al., 2003).

While defining mentoring is important, it is also critical to look at the qualities of a good mentor. According to Holden (as cited in Correia & McHenry, 2002), a good mentor is:

- a teacher of teachers;
- an experienced, successful, and knowledgeable professional who willingly accepts the responsibility of facilitating professional growth and support of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship;
- a friend with a positive attitude and a sense of humor;
- an experienced teacher whose willingness to assist and support new teachers is readily apparent in his or her attitudes, beliefs, and philosophies about teaching; and
- sensitive, discreet, wise, knowledgeable, and caring.

These qualities suggest that it takes more than an experienced teacher to mentor a new teacher. It takes someone who is willing to help and offer positive support about all aspects of the teaching profession (Correia & McHenry, 2002).

## A History of Mentoring

The term mentoring is first found in Homer's poem *The Odyssey*. In this poem a warrior's son, Telemachus, is left with a friend named Mentor. Their relationship develops as the friend guides Telemachus through several journeys and challenges (Smith, 2005). Telemachus was not left for Mentor to raise but rather to train him to assume his lifelong responsibilities (Shea, 2002). This is one of the first relationships that demonstrate the unique characteristics of a mentor and mentee bond (Smith, 2005).

Throughout the years, there have been many mentoring relationships. Most adults can identify at least one person who has coached and supported them in some aspect of their lives. According to Shea (2002) mentoring consists of one person investing time, energy, and personal knowledge helping another person grow in skill and knowhow; it is an elemental part of human development. Common areas of mentoring include women executives helping other women move up the career ladder, older citizens helping students with hobbies, volunteers helping at-risk youth, older students helping younger students stand up to peer pressure, college graduates helping students start their careers, and experienced professors helping new teachers (Peer Resources, 2010).

Although mentoring is not a new concept, formal programs in education are much more recent. In 1980 only one state had mandated a program to help teachers adjust in their new teaching careers (Scherer, 1999). This situation is improving. In 2004, 80% of beginning teachers reported being involved in some type of mentoring program compared to only 40% near the beginning of 1990s (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). This is consistent with the development of teacher mentoring in the state of Tennessee. In 1998 Tennessee developed a document to guide mentors. In 1999 the state received a grant to help fund the training of

mentors. In 2003 Tennessee began training academies across the state to train lead teachers to train mentors in their school system. And in 2007 the Advisory Council on Teacher Education and Certification released its recommendations for mentor teachers.

### Five Stages of 1<sup>st</sup>-Year Teachers

Throughout the literature, the stages of 1<sup>st</sup>-year teaching become evident. Teachers do not begin a career in education expecting to fail (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). Moir (1990) identified the five stages of 1<sup>st</sup>-year teachers as:

1. anticipation,
2. survival,
3. disillusionment,
4. rejuvenation, and
5. reflection.

Teachers begin with a feeling of hope and excitement; it is the “reality shock” of the classroom that leads to emotional burnout and high levels of stress (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

The first anticipation stage for beginning teachers is the stage in which new teachers feel that they can make a difference in the lives of their students. New teachers are full of excitement and anticipation, but this phase usually lasts only through the first few weeks of the school year (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000).

After the excitement and anticipation begin to falter, beginning teachers enter the second survival stage (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000). The survival phase usually begins with “reality shock” or “culture shock” (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). New teachers are often surprised and overwhelmed by the amount of work that needs to be done, which has little to do with what is going on in the classroom (Moir, 1990). New teachers spend extra time and energy learning



routines, deciding what does and does not work, and developing lesson plans. After all of this they often still feel like they cannot catch up (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000).

After 6 to 8 weeks in the survival stage, most new teachers will enter into disillusionment (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000). This stage is the most difficult for new teachers and can last for a varying amount of time depending on the individual. The new teachers' self-esteem is attacked during this period. He or she is already feeling overwhelmed and is often hit with disapproval from parents and the first evaluation from an onsite administrator. This is also when family and friends begin to protest about the lack of time the new teacher has to spend with them (Moir, 1990). The disillusionment stage is also the time when teachers begin to get worn down and often become sick; some may question their choice of profession (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000).

The fourth stage is known as rejuvenation. This stage begins with winter break. The break allows beginning teachers to regroup, spend time with family and friends, and organize their classrooms (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000). Although this stage marks an upswing in attitude and enthusiasm, new teachers will often begin to question their teaching and their students' preparedness for state tests (Moir, 1990).

The final stage in a beginning teacher's 1<sup>st</sup> year is reflection. This stage typically begins in May and helps new teachers prepare for their 2<sup>nd</sup> year. They begin to see where to make changes and improve their teaching (Moir, 1990). This stage ends with anticipation and excitement, which brings the new teacher full circle to the first stage: anticipation (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000).

## Characteristics of Mentors

Teachers who decide to take on the responsibility of mentoring must understand the importance of possessing eight essential characteristics. According to Jonson (2002), the mentor must possess these personal characteristics:

1. Is a skilled teacher.
2. Is able to transmit effective teaching strategies.
3. Has a thorough command of the curriculum being taught.
4. Can communicate openly with the beginning teacher.
5. Is a good listener.
6. Is sensitive to the needs of the beginning teacher.
7. Understands that teachers may be effective using a variety of styles.
8. Is not over-judgmental. (p. 9)

In addition to these personal characteristics, there are also professional characteristics that successful mentors must possess.

Successful mentor-mentee matches that result in less teacher turnover are characterized by mentors with at least 15 years experience who teach in the same school, same grade level, and same subject matter as their mentee (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Five distinctive traits have been identified as necessary for positive mentor and mentee match ups. According to Jonson (2002) these are:

- Proximity
- Same or close grade level
- Same or related subject area

- Common lunch or planning period
- Similar personality or educational philosophy. (p. 23)

Once a suitable mentor is found and assigned a mentee, the mentor must strive to form a relationship with the mentee so that he or she feels comfortable seeking answers from the mentor (Jonson, 2002).

### First-Year Teachers as Learners

Other professions are given time to adapt and learn the intricacies of a job before they are given full responsibilities. New teachers are not given this luxury. Similar jobs, such as therapists or social workers, are given lighter workloads and a supervisory colleague who helps them adapt to the new career (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). The educational community has recognized the need for mentoring programs since the mid 80s, but it is only recently with the realization that new teachers are still learning to teach that mentoring has become a priority (Scherer, 1999). “No other profession takes newly certified graduates, places them in the same situation as seasoned veterans, and gives them no organized support” (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010. p. 560). Educators must help new teachers continue to develop their skills through mentoring and professional development (Parker, Ndoye, & Imig, 2009).

New teachers must begin learning about new ideas, informal school rules, and about the educational culture within the school. Adults learn in different and complex ways. The differences in adult learning cannot be simplified to an ordinary definition. Rather it must be explored as an ever-changing theory (Merriam, 2008). Trotter (2006) discusses four types of adult learning theories: age theory, stage theory, cognitive development theory, and functional theory.

Age theory is based on the idea that people go through certain stages in life that are directly related to their age (Trotter, 2006). Sheehy (1996) identifies these stages as provisional adulthood (18-30), first adulthood (30-45), age of mastery (45-65), and age of integrity (65-85+). She also discusses the different generations and how each is dealing or will deal with each age. The most important stage for mentors to acknowledge is the first stage known as provisional adulthood (Sheehy, 1996). Mentors must be able to adapt for new teachers in provisional adulthood as well as teachers who are older and beginning first adulthood.

Stage theory was first developed by Piaget (Trotter, 2006). Supporters of this theory say adults go through stages of development much like children. As adults work through different stages of development, they move forward in their moral identity and self understanding (Trotter, 2006). Mentors can use the stage theory to help new teachers with educational opportunities that will advance them through the stages of professional development.

Cognitive development theory stresses the importance of intellectual development. Adults move from concrete to abstract, for example new teachers tend to focus on external success while veteran teachers are more concerned with verification of their practices (Trotter, 2006). According to Fardanesh (2002), there are three stages in cognitive development: the initial phase, for very basic forms of learning; intermediate phase, where the learner begins to make connections among different information; and the terminal phase, where the relationships become more involved and behaviors are more routine. Learning does not end during the last phase; rather the learner is more focused on problem solving (Fardanesh, 2002).

Functional theory consists of the idea that learning should be personal and directly related to the learner's life. This theory is based on the idea that adults are lifelong learners and seek out opportunities to learn when it impacts their personal or professional life (Trotter, 2006). Smith

(as cited by Trotter, 2006) lists six observations of adult learning that are consistent with the functional theory: lifelong, personal, changing, intuitive, involves experience, and is part of human development (Trotter, 2006).

One theory of adult learning not mentioned by Trotter is the transformative learning theory. This theory is based on the idea that everything is changing and we cannot be certain of the things we know or believe (Taylor, 2008). In the transformative theory teachers and students are assertively engaged in exploring and investigating their own assumptions, standards, thinking, and way of life (Harris, Lowery-Moore, & Farrow, 2008). Teaching strategies that are an inherent part of the transformative learning theory are self-reflection, connecting to previous learning, and varying modes of inquiry (Merriam, 2008).

Adults learn on a need to know basis. Mentors must work to show mentees the importance of the skill or knowledge they are presenting. Until beginning teachers understand the importance of what is being presented, the mentors are not going to make a real difference in the mentee's teaching (Scherer, 1999).

These four learning theories are a sample of the learning theories that have been applied to adults during the past several decades. Adult learning is a complex, ever-changing discipline that continues to grow through more and more research (Merriam, 2008). Good mentors need to continue to read and understand the new research available on beginning teachers: the phases they go through, styles of learning, and adult learning theories in order to provide a strong foundation of support for new teachers (Jonson, 2002).

### Leadership Theories

Positive mentoring relationships are built on trust, a commitment to improving education, and an understanding of the beginning teacher's needs (Jonson, 2002). Leadership is defined in

many ways but is associated with trust between followers and leaders, a commitment to the organization or beliefs, and an understanding of a common goal (Northouse, 2007). The commonalities between leadership and mentoring require a close examination of leadership theories and how they can apply in mentoring situations.

### Transformational Leadership

Mentors should offer support to beginning teachers, while challenging them and helping them meet their professional vision (Lipton et al., 2003). An understanding of transformational leadership theory can help mentors begin to work with mentees through those 1<sup>st</sup>-year obstacles. According to Northouse (2007), transformational leadership is “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (p. 176). Mentor teachers need to create a connection and motivate their mentees in order to motivate them to deal with the stresses of the 1<sup>st</sup> year and help them become successful teachers (Jonson, 2002).

Transformational leadership theory stresses motivation and building connections (Northouse, 2007). A successful mentoring relationship is one where the mentor and beginning teacher get along in both the educational setting as well as outside of school (Jonson, 2002). This connection helps beginning teachers feel they have a “safe place” to go with concerns they may have in their new profession. This “safe place” is an important foundation for the new teacher’s success (Pelletier, 2006).

### Situational Leadership

An understanding of situational leadership theory is important for mentors because new teachers will pass through different stages during their 1<sup>st</sup> year (Teacher Quality Enhancement: Beginning Teacher Mentoring, 2002). Situational leadership focuses on the idea that different

situations call for different types of leadership (Northouse, 2007). According to *The Mentor's Handbook: Practical Suggestions for Collaborative Reflection and Analysis*, mentors should establish a relationship, foster professional development, offer emotional support, and encourage self reliance (Correia & McHenry, 2002). These steps coincide with Blanchard and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model moving from directing, to coaching, to supporting, and on to delegating (Northouse, 2007). As new mentors begin directing their mentees on how to begin in the classroom, they can move toward coaching and supporting by helping the mentees with professional development that will improve their teaching. Finally, mentors can move out of the picture as new teachers evolve into experienced professional educators.

#### Induction versus Mentoring

Mentoring is part of a larger program called induction (Portner, 2008). Induction happens for new teachers even in the absence of a formal program; therefore, it is imperative that school districts have an organized induction plan in place (Moir & Gless, 2001). According to Pelletier (2006), there are several components of a high quality induction program:

- A plan for induction: who and what;
- Resources: money, people, materials, and time;
- Orientation: How do we introduce new teachers to the school, district, or community?
- Mentoring: definition, who will they be?
- Professional development: curriculum support and other support;
- Evaluation: Is the program successful?

Another definition of induction is “a structured training process for new teachers” (Scherer, 1999, p. 34). Throughout the research mentoring is discussed as just one part of an induction for

new teachers. This research focuses on the mentoring aspect, but it is important to remember that retention of teachers cannot be successful without a strong induction program in place (Portner, 2008).

The county studied uses the program *GOTAGS* for its induction program. The *GOTAGS* program is based on research by Harris (2005). The program consists of 2 days of training before school starts so that new teachers can be introduced to central office personnel, learn about setting up their classrooms, and discuss concerns and anxieties about the school year. The training is followed by principals assigning a mentor to each new teachers and 2 days of professional development during the school year for new teachers to meet and discuss how their year is progressing (Harris, 2005).

### Teacher Mentoring in Tennessee

In 2003 the Tennessee Department of Education released a plan to help reduce the 50% turnover rate for Tennessee teachers in their first 5 years of teaching. This plan created the *Training of Trainers for Teacher Mentors*, which was later renamed *Lead Mentor Training*. The training provided districts with teachers who were able to return to their school systems and train others to be mentors (TDOE, 2003).

In 2007 the Advisory Council on Teacher Education and Certification offered additional recommendations for mentoring teachers. There was not a significant improvement in the turnover rate from the lead mentor training. The advisory council based its recommendations on the following principles:

- Turnover rate for teachers in their first 5 years of teaching is still at 41%.
- High quality mentoring programs have been shown to reduce the number of teachers leaving the profession after 1 year by 50%.



- High poverty and low performing schools often have a high turnover rate and, if new teacher programs are left up to individual districts, these schools are often left out.
- When a student is consistently subjected to an ineffective teacher for 3 years, he or she falls behind and is not able to reach the same level of achievement as his or her peers.
- Mentoring programs have been shown to boost effectiveness of new teachers and advance student learning and school achievement.

These findings by the Advisory Council on Teacher Education and Certification (2007) lead them to make three important recommendations to the Tennessee State Board of Education.

- The creation, execution, financial support, and evaluation of a statewide program that provides a high quality induction program including a mentor during new teachers' 1<sup>st</sup> years.
- Standards and guidelines should be established for mentor teachers and acceptable mentor programs.
- A stable professional development funding source should be established and designated for new teacher induction and mentoring.

#### Teacher Mentoring in a Rural East Tennessee School System

Teacher mentoring in this rural county is based on the workshop, "Training of Trainers for Teacher Mentors," which was later renamed Lead Mentor Training. The training was conducted during the 2002-2003 school year and is broken down into six sections. Section 1 includes the need to develop a mentoring program in Tennessee. An increase in teacher demand; a growing attrition rate showing that 36% of newly hired teachers leave during the first 4 years;

and another 42% leave during the next 5 is just part of the reason Tennessee began developing a mentoring program (Teacher Quality Enhancement: Beginning Teacher Mentoring, 2002).

The second part of the program focuses on the needs of beginning teachers. According to the manual (Teacher Quality Enhancement: Beginning Teacher Mentoring, 2002),

Ninety percent of beginning teachers who received on-going support remained in the profession. Those beginning teachers who received support reported higher satisfaction with teaching as a career choice. For beginning teachers who received support teaching improved throughout the year. Support for providers reported improved teaching practices for themselves. (p. 26)

These statements show that new teacher support improves the teaching not only in the mentees but also in the mentors.

The third section of the program provides a definition for mentoring. “Effective mentors are secure, have power and expertise, are people oriented, like and trust their mentees, encourage ideas, help their mentee become self-directed” (Teacher Quality Enhancement: Beginning Teacher Mentoring, 2002). This section also includes a checklist for mentor activities throughout the year. This county has chosen to eliminate the checklist and uses a more open-ended journal for documenting mentoring activities (Director of Personnel, personal communication, January 17, 2011).

Sections four, five, and six look at ways to build a relationship between mentors and mentees and guide them through the teaching standards in Tennessee. These three sections consist of hints and tips for mentors and mentees to practice active listening, reflection, and collaboration. Also mentors are encouraged to observe the new teacher during a lesson and discuss the Tennessee State Teaching Standards in relation to the observation (Teacher Quality Enhancement: Beginning Teacher Mentoring, 2002).

Currently, each summer expert mentors who attended the original Train the Trainers meetings and have had successful mentor and mentee relationships conduct workshops for other

county teachers who need training. Principals receive a list of teachers who have received mentor training; it is the principal's responsibility to assign new teachers a mentor from that list (R. Walker, personal communication, January 14, 2011).

### Conclusion

New teachers are expected to perform at the same level as other more experienced teachers starting with their first days in the classroom (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). New teachers find that they are unprepared and are leaving the profession at a high rate (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). Mentoring is increasing across the United States as a way to retain new teachers and offer support in their 1<sup>st</sup> years (Lipton et al., 2003).

As teachers progress through the five stages of 1<sup>st</sup>-year teaching, mentors can help them, prepare them, and support them through each stage (Teacher Quality Enhancement: Beginning Teacher Mentoring, 2002). Mentors can better help new teachers by understanding learning theories and adapting leadership styles to individual mentees. Although mentoring is important, in order to be truly successful, mentoring should be part of a larger induction program (Moir & Gless, 2001).

Through the past 10 years the Tennessee County studied has been working to create a positive mentoring program for new teachers. Changes and adaptations to continually update and improve the mentoring program are constantly made by supervisors in this county. As the research suggests, mentor teachers are an important part in the 1<sup>st</sup>-year teacher's success. Successful mentoring continues to be a significant topic for districts as they work to retain new teachers.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of beginning teachers and experienced mentor teachers concerning the mentoring program currently used in this rural northeast Tennessee county school system. Specifically, the study addressed the perceptions of 1<sup>st</sup>-year teachers who participated in the mentoring program and their mentors.

The state of Tennessee has provided a general framework for the development of mentoring programs while leaving specific details up to individual counties (*Teacher Quality Enhancement: Beginning Teacher Mentoring*, 2002). This county school system has used the guidelines and training provided in Tennessee to develop its current program. With a few minor adjustments over the years, this county continues to improve the process. These improvements include using the GOTAGS (Getting Off to A Good Start) induction program at the beginning of the year and switching from checklists for mentors to a more in-depth personal journal (Director of Personnel, personal communication, January 17, 2011).

The qualitative research method was chosen in order to gain insight into the personal experiences of beginning teachers and their mentors. Interviews allow the focus to be placed on individuals and their perspective on a specific phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2008). Interviews were specifically designed to determine if the mentoring program in the county school system studied was effective in helping new teachers feel successful in their career and what adjustments could improve the program for future teachers and mentors in the county.

## Research Questions

In order to determine the effectiveness of the mentoring program, research questions were designed to gauge both positive and negative aspects of the program. The following questions were the focus of this research:

1. What aspects of the mentoring program were most beneficial to new teachers?
2. What aspects of the mentoring program were most difficult to manage according to new teachers and their mentors?
3. What experiences could be added to the mentoring program to enhance its effectiveness?
4. How does implementation of the program vary across the county?

Responses also reflected new teachers' and mentors' thoughts on improving the existing program. The focus of the research was intended to show how mentees interpret the mentoring program as well as how the mentors see their role. New teachers are directly affected by the program and therefore have the most insight into how it actually works. Data were collected regarding the new teachers' perceptions through interviews using the following four questions:

1. How do mentee teachers describe the effectiveness of the mentoring they received?
2. According to mentee teachers, what are the positive aspects of the mentoring they received and how did they impact the teacher?
3. According to mentee teachers, what are the negative aspects of the mentoring they received and how did they impact the teacher?
4. According to mentee teachers, what improvements should be made to the current mentoring program? In what ways will this improve the program?

In essence, these questions form part of an evaluative structure of the program. Interviews were also conducted to determine how the mentors saw their role and how that affected the mentees' perceptions of the program. These interviews utilized the following four questions:

1. According to mentors, what is your role in the mentor and mentee relationship?
2. According to mentors, what are the positive aspects of the mentoring program?
3. According to mentors, what are the negative aspects of the mentoring program?
4. According to mentors, what improvements should be made to the current mentoring program? In what ways will this improve the program?

### Researcher's Role

The researcher acted as an interviewer during the research process. The researcher, having worked as a mentor in the studied county school system, strove to reduce personal bias by not interviewing those teachers she had worked with as part of the mentoring program. Each interview was conducted in a semistructure that allowed for flexibility. The interviewer had guiding questions, but was able to explore answers more fully depending on the interviewee's responses (Ritchie & Lewis, 2008). Qualitative interviewing allows for a flexible examination of a subject about which the respondent already has experience or knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Probes were used to go beyond the initial superficial answer and reach a more in-depth understanding (Ritchie & Lewis, 2008). Because the interviewer has significant background knowledge of the subject matter, exploring relevant topics was just a matter of pursuing relevant leads (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

### Population

The number of teachers who completed their 1<sup>st</sup> year teaching in the studied county school system with a mentor teacher during the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 school years

determined the sample for this research. These school years were chosen in order to interview teachers with a recent mentoring experience. An email was sent to the 35 teachers who participated during the 2009-2010 school year and the 65 teachers who participated during the 2010-2011 school year. Of these 100 participants, five mentor and mentee pairs initially volunteered to be interviewed. Two teachers (one mentor and mentee pair) dropped out before the interview and eight teachers were interviewed, four mentors and four mentees. All of the participants were female and all but one of the participants taught regular education in an elementary grade self-contained classroom.

#### Data Collection Methods

A letter was sent to the Personnel Director of the county school system requesting a list of teachers who participated in the mentoring program during the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 school years. Each of the identified teachers received an email explaining the research and requesting his or her participation. Those teachers who volunteered were personally interviewed about their experiences in the county mentoring program.

Qualitative research methods are suitable when the researcher is searching for in-depth explanations or understanding (Ritchie & Lewis, 2008). This research was conducted using in-depth interviews in order to allow respondents the chance to explain how mentoring has affected their teaching careers. The interviews were anonymous in that only the researcher knows the respondents' names. Pseudonyms were used for reporting the research findings. Interviews took place at the respondent's school or at an alternative site of the respondent's choosing. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

### Data Analysis Methods

Each interview was carefully transcribed using digital recordings and notes taken during the interview. The respondents then examined the transcripts to assure accuracy. An open-coding method was used to determine categories and commonalities among the transcripts.

Open coding is the breakdown of data into categories (LaRossa, 2005). Open coding involves looking for concepts and their indicators (LaRossa, 2005). After the interviews are completed, each transcript was carefully read for any information that may have been relevant to the study. During the first read-through, the choices of information were very broad. Those were further examined for smaller views of commonality in order to produce categories of information that revealed themes among participants' answers (Merriam, 2009).

During the coding process the examination of data moved from inductive to deductive because, in the beginning, the researcher was examining the material for new thoughts, themes, or ideas. As the coding process ended, the researcher tested the codes to ensure that no new codes could be found (Merriam, 2009). Codes were then arranged into categories and subcategories that allowed the researcher to gain a clearer understanding of the data (Saldaña, 2009).

### Validity and Reliability

Validity is the process by which a researcher checks the data to ensure that the results are grounded and completely constructed (Richards, 2009). During this research, member or respondent validation was used. This is the process of examining the data, writing up the results, and allowing interview participants to read the results for accuracy (Ritchie & Lewis, 2008). Each respondent was asked to read the completed results to ensure that the findings were aligned with her experiences.



Qualitative research does not lend itself naturally to reliability. Reliability is determined when a study can be replicated with the same or similar methods (Ritchie & Lewis, 2008).

Another view of reliability is offered by Merriam (2009):

And just as there will be multiple accounts of eyewitnesses to a crime, so too, there will be multiple constructions of how people have experienced a particular phenomenon, how they have made meaning of their lives, or how they have come to understand certain processes. (p. 214)

Each person participating in the program will have a different experience. With each year mentors and mentees change, thereby changing the program. Also, according to the Personnel Director for the studied county school system, this has been an ever-changing program as new ideas evolved (Director of Personnel, personal communication, January 17, 2011).

### Ethical Considerations

Before beginning the interview selection process, great care was taken to follow the county school system's rules and procedures regarding contacting teachers for research purposes. After gaining permission from the Director of Schools (see Appendix A), a list of teachers who participated in the mentoring program as 1<sup>st</sup>-year teachers during the 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 school year was obtained from the Director of Personnel. Each teacher was invited by email to participate in the study (see Appendix B). Great care was taken to ensure that teachers could not be identified by their answers. All interview transcripts and recordings have been secured in a safe place.

During the interview process, careful consideration was given to each respondent. Interviews were held at a convenient location for the respondent that ensured privacy. Respondents signed a consent form that stated no payment would be given and participation was completely voluntary (see Appendix C). The East Tennessee State University Institutional

Review Board reviewed the study to ensure that all participants would be protected and approved the study protocol.

### Chapter Summary

A qualitative approach was used in order to gain a rich, comprehensive understanding of how mentees feel about their mentoring experiences. Despite the fact that each mentor attended the same training and followed the same procedures, results varied throughout the county. During the interview and coding processes, differences in experiences across the county were closely examined. After careful examination of the literature and interviews with participants, recommendations can be made to the county school aystem for possible improvements to the overall mentoring program.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of mentors and mentees involved in the mentoring program in a rural northeast Tennessee School System. Mentors and mentees from the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school year were invited to participate. Data were collected from interviews from eight mentors and mentees. These eight people consisted of four mentor and mentee pairs from four different schools within the school system. Pseudonyms were used when referring to each of the schools and the respondents.

Each mentor received training based on the “Train the Trainer” model provided by the state of Tennessee. Workshops were held during the summer for teachers interested in becoming mentors. Davisville Elementary did not have an available trained mentor, so Diane was recruited after the available workshops had been held. She met with another trained mentor after school one day to go over the mentor’s training materials notebook and program expectations.

The research examined the perceptions of the mentors and mentees about the mentoring program in the school system. The interview questions focused on the affect of the mentoring, the role of the mentor, in addition to other positive and negative aspects of the program. Respondents were also asked about possible improvements to the program. During these interviews the following three themes emerged as being consistent throughout the interviews:

1. A need for more training,
2. common grade levels, and
3. positive relationships.

## Anderson Elementary School

Allison has taught kindergarten at Anderson Elementary School for 13 years and served as a mentor to Amanda, who is also a kindergarten teacher. Anderson Elementary School serves 240 students in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This high poverty school is in a rural area; 79% of its students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

### Allison's Interview (Mentor)

Interviewer: Could you please tell us what grade you teach and how long you've been teaching?

Respondent: I teach kindergarten and this is my 13<sup>th</sup> year.

Interviewer: How do you see your roll in the mentor and mentee relationship?

Respondent: Well, I was the mentor and as a mentor, I was a supporter, a leader, and I was a guide to the mentee in case there were questions she needed or anything she needed clarifying.

Interviewer: Can you give me a typical example of some of the things you and your mentee did as part of the relationship?

Respondent: Well, in the very beginning of the year I gave her a list of commonly asked questions, common misconceptions that new teachers have going into the 1<sup>st</sup> year of school. I just gave those to her at the beginning of the year and asked her to let me know what she was concerned about and what she had questions about rather than inundating her with all this information that she may or may not know. I gave her the choice of asking for what she needed.

Interviewer: Did you all teach the same grade level or different grade levels?

Respondent: The same grade level

Interviewer: What were some of the positive aspects of the mentoring program?

Respondent: For a mentee, the positive aspects are knowing that someone that she could come to anytime a problem arises or anytime she had a question. She would have someone there to lean on and 1<sup>st</sup>-year is always stressful anyway and that helps alleviate some of the stress, you know, "What am I supposed to do in that situation?" "What am I supposed to do in this situation?" and as a mentor there is also positive aspects because being a 13-year teacher even though you are a 13-year teacher, you do professional development but you are still stuck in the classroom a lot. You don't get the new innovative ideas and I gathered things as

well from the mentee due to her coming in with the new innovative ideas and the spark that reignited me as well.

Interviewer: Was there anything specific about this particular program, the way the mentoring program was set up, that you like that was a positive aspect to your relationship?

Respondent: No

### Training.

Interviewer: Ok, what were the negative aspects of the mentoring program?

Respondent: Well, to be a mentor in this county we had to go through a one-day training that the county itself provided. And it was the county and the one day program was like on building relationships and it didn't give you much guidance as far as the way how to provide information to the mentee. It seemed like it was a wasted day. It was geared to mentor and mentee but it just didn't address the things that needed to be addressed I felt. Then once you went through that one day training your just said her is your mentee and give me a log at the end of the semester.

Interviewer: What things do you think should have been added to your training?

Respondent: Well I don't think the training itself was necessary because to be able to go through the training your principal like gave your names to the people and if they didn't think you were a good relationship person to begin with then you would not have been sent to the training. So I think you know the training itself was just reiterating what everyone already knew about you because of the relationship building.

Interviewer: So what improvements should be made to the current mentoring program?

Respondent: I think that in order to make sure that the mentor and mentee are in being more or doing what they are supposed to be doing there should maybe be some follow up meetings after school begins, in the middle of the semester, whenever, that all the mentors and mentees meet together with central office staff to discuss some of the things they did together or what has helped and what has not so the other mentors can hear that and see what other mentor are doing. I think the meetings should be for the mentor and mentee together because at that time you are already paired up with your mentee and that way you can listen to how others are getting along, especially if you have a bad relationship with your mentee and that may help get some ideas of how to make it stronger.

Interviewer: You have mentioned several times the lack of support from central office; do you feel that you were given support from administration at the school level?

Respondent: The only support we were given was, do you want to do this, then go to this meeting cause I think you will be good.

Interviewer: Do you think there needs to be a change in that relationship from the principal to the mentor or the mentee?

Respondent: I don't know if it was necessarily the county, well each principal is different throughout the county, but at the particular school I am at is a new principal as well. She has a lot on her and I believe she expected the mentors to alleviate a lot of the new teacher duties off of her because she is trying to figure everything else out too. I don't know if that is the way it is across everywhere, I feel like with her being a new principal that was just one less thing she didn't have to deal with.

Interviewer: So besides after school meetings, is there any other support or other ideas you can think of that central office could provide that would help strengthen the mentoring program?

Respondent: One thing our central office staff did do was they got each mentor a book about mentoring that we could borrow through the year and then we returned it at the end of the year. so that was some reading I guess that provided ideas but being a mentor teacher and classroom teacher and everything else sometimes during the school year you don't have time to read all of the books and stuff. I think maybe smaller articles or weekly tips in your email, just saying hey I am here touching base this is a good mentoring tip I came across on the internet, nothing too lengthy just something that would take 30 seconds to a minute to read.

Interviewer: do you have anything else you would like to add positive, or negative, or suggestions about the mentoring program or your specific relationship with your mentee?

Respondent: There is one other thing that now that I have went through that 1-day training, that's it. I get nothing else. If we get new teachers at my school I can be there mentor, but no new training. I can do this for years and never be reevaluated or reignited or something else I guess. I am done I am a mentor. No more meetings, no more support, that's just it. Yes, there is support as far as I can contact the supervisor and she will get back to you if you have any question but you are never contacted or you're never hey your doing a good job kind of thing. They never come and visit to say hey how is this going on site. Which would be something good that a supervisor could do to see how the relationship was going because no one... I guess if I had a bad relationship then I would have went to my principal but I don't think there is rearranging of mentors and mentees either because people just don't click sometimes and I think that it needs to be reevaluated not just here you go, go with it. That the supervisor could come every once and a while on site and say is there anything I can do for you?

Common grade level.

Interviewer: Anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: The positive aspect of my mentor and mentee relationship is that I feel, well I have always heard that it doesn't matter as far as your mentor who you mentor in the building, for instance, well both me and my mentor were both kindergarten teachers and I felt like that was a good thing because we were able to work together and work on standards together. You know not that I am a kindergarten teacher mentoring a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. I am not very familiar with 5<sup>th</sup> grade standards as much as I am kindergarten and I don't know that I would have been able to give a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher as much guidance as I could a kindergarten teacher. We were at the same pace at the same time, every day we could reflect on what the day was like because we were pretty much doing the same thing. We did all of our planning together, and which helped her to alleviate that stress. I feel the match up of grade levels is a good thing.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

Allison expressed a positive attitude about her mentoring experience. She said she enjoyed working with Amanda, especially because they taught the same grade. She said working in the same grade level was a huge advantage to cultivating a positive mentoring experience.

Allison was not as positive about the training she received or the support she received from the central office. She said follow-up training should have been offered. The county provided each mentor with a book about mentoring, *Mentoring New Teachers through Collaborative Coaching: Linking Student and Teacher Learning* by Kathy Dunne and Susan Villani (2007). Allison said email tips or short articles would have been more beneficial because of time restraints. Overall, Allison said her experience was positive but she would have preferred more communication and support from the administration.

Amanda's Interview (Mentee)

Interviewer: Could you please tell me what grade you teach and how long you've been teaching?

Respondent: I am a kindergarten teacher and this will be my second year.

Common grade level.

Interviewer: This past year you were involved in the mentoring program. Can you describe the effectiveness of the mentoring you received?

Respondent: My mentoring teacher was very helpful. Coming in and not knowing the procedures of the school, she made sure she was there to assist me with anything I needed. She was willing to set aside time during the week to look over plans and make sure that I was covering the things that should be covered and we both shared ideas and ways to keep our kids on target.

Interviewer: Did you all teach the same grade level?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: How do you feel about that? Was that a positive or a negative?

Respondent: for me it was a positive, I don't think anyone else would have understood the demands and the creativity and all the things that go into kindergarten and we both very hands-on type teachers so it worked well for us.

Interviewer: Can you tell me the positive aspects of the mentoring and how they impacted you as a teacher?

Respondent: My mentoring really helped me become an organized more effective teacher. It helped me do more things that involve parents into the learning process and all that like our Q and U wedding to hit our phonics skills we needed to teach. We worked together to create that whole scenario with our parents.

Paperwork.

Interviewer: What are some things your mentor did that helped you increase your parent involvement?

Respondent: She showed me how to do our, we did kindergarten weekly letters which kept parents up to date on the things that were going on in school as far as important events and the skills that were being taught. She discussed with me how to effectively use our school planner to send parents notes about their children's daily behavior and any upcoming events at school that they needed to be informed about. And at the beginning of the year there was so much information that I could not even remember myself that the parents needed to know to get their kids started off to a successful kindergarten year. She put together a parent information folder that contained all that useful information and she was very willing to share that with me so that I could give it to my parents as well.



Interviewer: What are some negative aspects of the mentoring that you received and how did they impact you as a teacher?

Respondent: I can't think of anything negative right off hand. I would say the worst part about the mentoring program is all the documentation that goes along with it. My mentor and I work with each other on a daily basis constantly planning and things like that. So trying to get all that stuff documented and making schedules to have the meetings that were required, it just wasn't effective because we worked together so much.

Interviewer: Was there any specific paperwork that was required by you?

Respondent: The only thing that I had to do was actually look over the log and her notes and make sure that I agreed with what she had written.

Interviewer: What improvements do you see need to be made to the current mentoring program? This applies to the program as a whole and not just you and your mentor.

Respondent: Personally, I had a good experience with my mentor teacher, I would however suggest that in the future anyone who steps up to that role, I think they should mentor someone who is at the same grade level as them. It is more beneficial that way. And also I got to meet with the new teachers at the beginning of the year to discuss our concerns and things questions concerns that we had about the school. I would like to have met with them later on in the year to see the progress we had made and exchange ideas and things like that.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to add about the mentoring program.

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

Amanda was also positive about her mentoring experience. She said having a mentor who taught the same grade she did was a huge advantage. Her mentor helped with parent communication, lesson plans, and school procedures. Amanda said Allison helped her become a more organized teacher and helped her make sure she was teaching everything she needed to.

Allison and Amanda both said the mentoring experience was positive. They both said that being in the same grade level was an advantage to a positive mentoring experience.

## Bradley Elementary School

Beth has taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade for 15 years at Bradley Elementary School and served as mentor to Brenda who is also a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher. Bradley Elementary School serves 224 students in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This high poverty school is in a rural area where 60% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

### Beth's Interview (Mentor)

Interviewer: Could you please tell me what grade you teach and how long you've been teaching?

Respondent: I teach second grade and I have been teaching going on 15 years.

### Procedures.

Interviewer: What is your role in the mentor and mentee relationship?

Respondent: I am a mentor and I feel like it's my place to guide the new teachers and to be able to be a support system and answer any questions that they may have and any concerns and just help them acclimate into our school and into our system and make things as easy for them as possible with standards and paper work and just any questions they may have.

Interviewer: Do you find that working with a mentee, that you set things up and go to them or do you let them come to you?

Respondent: It works both ways. Sometimes I would set certain meetings up for sure, but often maybe they would just drop in after school if they had something come up in between that. So it pretty much worked both ways.

Interviewer: What are the positive aspects of the mentoring relationship?

Respondent: I loved it as a mentor because it really helped me. It helped remind me of a lot of things that I may have taken for granted and of course I learned a lot from them too. You know I feel like when I first came into the system I had a mentor and it was a lifeline. It was so important for me to have that, just the security and being able to go to somebody, ask questions, have them answered, and I think that's important because that meant a lot to me to provide that for somebody else.

Interviewer: Were you assigned a mentor? Was that a formal relationship?

Respondent: It was grade level. They were splitting a grade for the first time and so it was totally new to me and my mentor was priceless. She truly guided me into what I needed to know about the school and kind of the things...She gave me a lot of ideas, shared a lot of ideas in the way that she taught in a way that encouraged me and gave me that security that I needed in the classroom to feel secure and confident. To have that confidence in somebody that I could go to, that's what I try to be as a mentor.

Interviewer: What negative aspects of the mentoring program have you seen?

Respondent: I haven't experienced a whole lot of negative. It has all been pretty positive. I did have some issues of some complaints from other staff members about one of my teachers that I mentor. That was kind of challenging as far as figuring out how to approach that and do it delicately and not overstep my bounds as a mentor.

### Principal roles.

Interviewer: In your situation is your principal part of the mentor and mentee relationship or does he stay out of it and leave it up to the teachers?

Respondent: For the most part, he leaves it independently. He would check occasionally and if I did have issues with say that one that I felt could be a possible problem, you know I did discuss it with him and ask for his advice on how I should deal with it and as far as what my position is and really what his is as a principal as far as dealing with it and not crossing a line.

Interviewer: Did you observe the mentee teaching?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: How did you feel about that?

Respondent: Well, for me to be able to do that, if I am going to be an effective mentor I need to know what's going on in the classroom, their style of teaching, and their lesson plans so that I have more of an idea of who they are and how they teach so if they come to me with questions or advise I know upfront and can give them a more effective answer.

### Organization.

Interviewer: Do you see any improvements that need to be made to the mentoring program?

Respondent: Well, I feel like some things could be a little more well organized. I had a supper support system; my central office has been as far as providing me with suggestions. I was not given a very strict guideline on how to do things but the way I did it was document the days we met and I would write down the things we discussed that came from that list and if there were any things that came up incidentally throughout I would add that to it and I just had to do it that way to make sure I was covering all areas and documenting and times we wouldn't do talk about anything on that list. It would be just comments, questions, concerns. They were specifically on that list...but my system worked for me and I don't know that they could come up with a design that was standard and would cover both aspects. I guess if I were to say anything for improvement there would be a suggestive list of things to go over with your mentor but to also have a template where you can make notes on it, put in you know...just a little more simplified. I used my own and I don't know if they could come up with a standard that well, there's not going to be anything that pleases everybody, of course. I like things kind of stupid proof because we are all busy throughout the year and if you get things too complicated then it become a burden if you get too tied up.

### Training.

Interviewer: In the other interviews it has been mentioned that mentors receive training and then they are qualified from then on out, that there is no other meetings, trainings, staff development for them. How do you feel about that?

Respondent: I think it would be good to have extra training or at least every other year to provide some because things change. Things are changing in the state, in the county, and within your own school so to stay updated and make sure that you are on the same page across the county at least to be able to stay current. My training was at least five years ago and it was a couple of years before I had my first one to mentor and so I had to go back through my notebook to refresh my memory and prepare myself for the job but I was provided at the beginning of the year a lot of things from central office. I had great support from them but I still think it would be great for mentor teacher s to meet together and discuss what they experience.

Interviewer: Another suggestion has been that for the mentees to meet during the school year. That they have their new teacher in-service before school starts and they are assigned a mentor but then there is nothing really more from central office. And one of the suggestions that have been made is that they have some type of meeting for the new teachers to discuss things and how are things working, and how are things going.

Respondent: I agree with that. That would be fantastic, because they are going to learn from each other. Somebody might bring up an idea or suggestion that they hadn't thought of before that maybe they want to bring back to their mentor. To me that's a win win situation.

More than one mentee.

Interviewer: You have a unique situation that I have not hit upon before. You actually mentored three different people. How was that as far as stretching your resources, your personal time and energy that you have to give? How did that make you feel?

Respondent: Fortunately we are a very small school, so it was easy. One of them I met with weekly because we were looking at plans together. The other two I might not meet formally with them maybe just once or twice a month but we would see each other in the hall way they might drop in my classroom after school. I might stop by on their planning time to check in with them. It wasn't just a formal meeting. It was just an ongoing process that happened daily/weekly. It worked out positively for me because I could meet with all three of them as a group. Plus it was really easy for me to see different individuals.

Common grade level.

Interviewer: How do you feel about mentoring people not in your grade level?

Respondent: Well, I was fine with that. I did mentor one that was on my grade level and then I had two related arts or one related arts and a guidance and they're taking care of all our kids, all our students but they still have a lot of the same issues. I don't really think it matters what grade level. We are still going through a lot of the same things and in my situation where I only had one grade level teacher and the other two were exceptions, I think that probably made it easier than if I had had three different grade levels.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add, positive, negative, anything you would like to add about the mentoring program?

Respondent: Well, I felt like it was very successful. It was a positive experience. I think really for me I enjoyed doing it. It was a positive thing for me; I did not dread having to meet with my people. It just helped us jell as a family we consider our school, our staff as a family. It creates more of that atmosphere when you get to know everybody and not just those people on your grade level.

Interviewer: Thank you very much!

Beth's comments were very positive about her mentoring experience. She said that serving as a mentor helped her reflect on her own teaching and become a better teacher. She had a unique situation, because she actually mentored three people during the same school year. She said this was not a positive or negative experience. She often met with all three mentees at the

same time, while still reserving some meetings for one-on-one discussions. Beth said it was not important for a mentor or mentee to teach the same grade level. She mentioned that new teachers all deal with similar situations regardless of grade level.

Beth said that more training would be a good idea. She received her mentoring training 5 years ago, but did not receive her first mentor for several years. She suggested that mentor teachers should meet together to discuss their experiences so that they may learn from each other. She mentioned that her principal took a hands-off approach to the mentoring, but was readily available when she had concerns about one of her mentees.

#### Brenda's Interview (Mentee)

Interviewer: Could you please tell us what grade you teach and how long you've been teaching?

Respondent: I teach 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and this is my 2<sup>nd</sup> year in the classroom.

#### Procedures.

Interviewer: Can you describe the effectiveness of the mentoring you received this past year?

Respondent: It's hard to describe priceless. Having somebody to go to with questions that were really that they really needed to be answered because I needed to know what the policies and procedures were but they weren't necessarily something I needed to take to my principal. Having that person was invaluable because I didn't feel like I was bothering my principal with the smaller more insignificant things at least in my opinion that a new teacher needs to know but again like I said to me its bothersome to have to go to an administrator for every little thing when you have someone in the school that willing to assist you.

Interviewer: Did you all know each other before the school year started?

Respondent: We did not.

Interviewer: When were you all assigned?

Respondent: At the beginning of school we were assigned, of course I have been fortunate that she is also my partner in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. We were assigned at the beginning of the school year last year.

Interviewer: How important is it, do you feel, that you teach the same grade level?

Respondent: It's been great for me, but I can see where she would be a great mentor regardless of grade level. A lot of that is my personality as well because I am very outgoing and I am going to seek out information whether it's across the hall or on the other end of the hall. So again, with my personality I would have gone to her regardless of whether she taught the same grade as I did. It made it a lot more convenient but I know that is my personality and not all new teachers are that comfortable to do that so I can see where having the same grade for those especially those that are just out of college that have not had any other work experience would be very beneficial.

Interviewer: So have you worked other places before this?

Respondent: I was director of a pre-school program for 10 years.

Interviewer: Did you already have your teaching certification before that?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: And you had never been in a classroom?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Oh my, that must have been interesting coming from that to this.

Respondent: It was.

Interviewer: Was it a positive thing?

Respondent: It was I was ready to move into the classroom. I loved being an administrator. I had birth to four years old. So it was really great to be able to plan a program and watch it be implemented that got them ready for kindergarten. But I was ready for my own classroom.

Interviewer: So what were the positive aspects of the mentoring you received?

Respondent: Making me feel at home and comfortable in the school. Making me feel like I belonged, because I was able to find out information that I needed before ...something simple was an assembly. I was able to talk to my mentor to find out what the policies and procedures for getting in and out, that sort of thing. I was prepared before I went in, that way I wasn't lost, out in left field, with my class the only one doing what they weren't supposed to because I didn't know policies. So it made me feel a part of the school.

Interviewer: Do you think the school dynamics made that easier or harder?

Respondent: Easier

School atmosphere.

Interviewer: Can you describe what it's like to work at this school?

Respondent: My experience at this school has been that we are a team. We are a family. We work together not just grade level but we work with the grade above and the grade below to make sure we are meeting the needs of our students, giving them the best education they can have. Being the best teachers we can be for them and that is exactly what I wanted when I left my previous job.

Interviewer: What are some negative aspects of the mentoring program that you have seen?

Respondent: Timing is always an issue, there's just not enough time. Not enough time to stop, those questions are asked on the fly, when you are going rather than being able to sit down at any point and say "Okay, now how is it going?" We did meet and well she had liked three or four and we all met at a couple of different points. It would have been nice at different times to have those more scheduled, more set apart.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it was negative thing that she had more than one mentee?

Respondent: I did not have any negative impact there. Again, I acknowledge that I am her partner in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade so we work together all day long. I know I did not, and I don't think anyone else did either but I can't speak for anyone else.

Length of time.

Interviewer: What improvements could you see being made to the current mentoring program and how do you think it will improve the program?

Respondent: The program itself within the county, I really don't know that much about then I knew I would be assigned a mentor when I got the job and that was it. I have no idea how well, is she my mentor this year as well? Is it a one year thing and it's done?

Interviewer: It is a one year thing and it's done.

Respondent: Ok

Interviewer: But what typically happens is that if you establish that relationship, the relationship doesn't go away.

Respondent: Right

Interviewer: But as far as the formal part, the mentoring part in your county, that no longer exists. The policy in this county is that new teachers who have never been



in the classroom before receive mentors and that's it. If you are a teacher somewhere else and move into this county, you don't receive a mentor. If you switch grade levels you don't get one. Those are more of an informal type thing.

Respondent: Grade level wise, I can see if you are still in the same school and you change grade levels, that may not be as big of an issue needing a mentor, but I think if you change schools even within the county you need a mentor because every principal is different, every principal runs there school, they have different expectations and different guidelines. And if you don't know what those are and you don't have a mentor how are you going to learn them.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to say about the mentoring program, good, bad, improvements?

Respondent: I think it's a great program and it can only be improved on by possible extending that mentoring relationship, you said the relationship doesn't go away, but extending that beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> year, and incorporating that into new teachers coming into the county as well as transferring schools.

Interviewer: Do you see that your teaching has impacted your mentor's teaching?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: How did that work?

Respondent: We are a team. I came into with that attitude as well as she did. And we plan together, we share ideas, we share materials and when you work as a team, everybody benefits, everything gets better.

Interviewer: Anything else that you would like to add?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Thank you very much!

Brenda described her mentoring as "priceless." She was able to learn about policies and procedures before events at school took place. She said she always knew she had someone to go to if questions arose. Brenda did mention that her personality is very outgoing and she seeks out answers when she has a question, not always relying on someone to come to her.

She described the only negative aspect of the program as a lack of time. There was not always enough time to meet and discuss on a formal basis. Though she said that Beth having

more than one mentee was not a problem, she was her partner in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. She said the positive school environment helped make her 1<sup>st</sup> year more pleasant.

Beth and Brenda both indicated that their school environment is much like a family. The staff worked together to help one another. Brenda talked about how easy it was to go to any of the teachers for help because of this atmosphere.

### Collins Elementary School

Carol has taught at Collins Elementary School for 28 years and is currently teaching in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. She served as mentor to Courtney who is also a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Collins Elementary School is in a rural area and serves 420 students in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This school is considered to be high poverty because 70% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches.

### Carol's Interview (Mentor)

Interviewer: Could you tell us how long you've been teaching and what grade you teach?

Respondent: I have been teaching for 28 years and right now I teach 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

Interviewer: How do you see your role in the mentor and mentee relationship?

Respondent: Last year was my first time being a mentor and my mentee was a very, very, very good one. My role, I would think, would be one that she could discuss any questions, anything that she has, to give a lot of support, and maybe at times offer my own advice. Not to really tell her what to do, but to just give advice along the way if I feel she needs it or she asks for it.

Interviewer: At any point did the principal come to you and ask you to go to her or did the principal step into your relationship at all?

Respondent: No, not at all. Since both of us teach the same grade and my goodness gracious, we see each other in the morning before school takes up, we eat lunch together, we have our recess time together, so we have plenty of talk time and any questions that come up during the day, really at any time, I guess. It was easy to take care of anything

Common grade level.

Interviewer: What are the positive aspects of the mentoring relationship?

Respondent: Well, I do think that anyone that is teaching a grade for the first time, even if maybe a person has taught several years but they go to a different grade and they are teaching that one for the first time, I feel that they need a mentor even with that much less if it a person's 1<sup>st</sup> year teaching. There are so many things besides what just goes on in the classroom. There are a lot of things with curriculum; you may have certain students that have a bad home life that they may have questions about. They may need advice from someone who has taught for a long time who has dealt with the same problems but it's a lot more than "Okay, here is the curriculum. I can help you with that." There are a lot of other things that go on in being a teacher so I think the mentor they really need to be there for that person and that person needs to feel comfortable in coming to them. Not feel like they are going to bother the mentor, because we are there to help them in all aspects.

Interviewer: You mentioned changing grade levels, how important did you think it was for you and your mentee to both be at the same grade level?

Respondent: Well, I will tell you I think that was very helpful that we were dealing with the same curriculum and we may have even had the same problems like if we were teaching the same skill that our kids were having a problem with and we could deal with it. And again, if she was having a problem teaching a certain skill, since I have taught this grade for a long period of time then I could tell her some of the little tricks or some of the things that make it easy to maybe help her with her students. I think us being the same grade level, I think was a big help and made it a whole lot easier.

Interviewer: What are the negative aspects of the mentoring?

Respondent: Really and truly, as far as like with me, and working with mine this year, and again we were on the same grade level. I think that just worked out fantastic. We were close to each other in the building; we were dealing with the same curriculum and things, so that was easy. Now something I think could be difficult if a person was maybe mentoring someone that was maybe out of what they were qualified for because I would have a hard time if I was relating to someone who was, I don't know, art or music or special ed, because I don't really know that much about their curriculum and especially with special ed...their guidelines. I think the fact that my person was on my grade level, or maybe if it was someone who was just one above or one below that you would have a lot in common with those. But if you are at opposite ends of the building, or maybe if what both of you are teaching is just so far apart, I think that would definitely be a drawback.

## Training.

Interviewer: What about anything that was required, was there paperwork that was required, were there meeting you had to go to? What were the requirements?

Respondent: I think that the training I had last summer was really good. We were given a binder that had lots of helpful things with it. I did use some of the suggestions and things in it last year also, so that was good. As far as the things that I had to do, I kept a log of the contact I had with my mentee, but that was an easy thing to do. Usually at the end of the week, whatever things came up, I just typed it up and that was it. That was minimal. We were also provided a paperback book that to me was not really that helpful. The binder and the training were much more helpful than the book that was provided for us.

Interviewer: What improvements can you see being made to this program?

Respondent: Now that I would really have to think about because like I said, the training it was good. I think the binder and all the different information with it, it was really helpful and like I said if I had that I always had it to go to for a reference. That was great. I had no problems but I think if I had [the personnel director] would have been a really good person to have talked with. The principal here at my school could have been very helpful to had we really needed anything. But I don't know maybe I was just lucky.

Interviewer: Going back to the first question, your role in the mentor and mentee relationship. Do you feel like you are here for a support for her or do you feel like it was more your job to go to her?

Respondent: I think it was kind of half and half. I know at the very beginning I went to her because I kind of showed her how we started things at the beginning of the year, how we set things up. I wanted to show her and make her feel comfortable. We provide the binders for our students and we have all kinds of little information inside and we ran copies of those things so she would have that. Just to, kind of, tell her how things work. We team up for bus duty and I made sure she was my team mate so that I could help her with that too. So I did a lot at the beginning and then later as the school year went on if she had any questions, then I knew she felt comfortable to come to me because she knew I would help her out.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add about the mentoring program, positive, negative, improvements that are needed, changes that need to take place in order to enhance the program for mentors and mentees?

Respondent: I would just strongly suggest, because I know when we had our training, some things were mentioned that some mentees, even at the end of the school year, didn't know who their mentors were supposed to be. I would strongly suggest that whenever they are paired up that they always have someone who is either close to them in whatever building they are going to be located in or at least close to them in whatever they are teaching, as close as possible in something. It

is an obligation, maybe get in touch with the mentees and make sure the mentors are helping them. I guess that would maybe [personnel director] and maybe she does this anyway. But I enjoy the program and I think it is great.

Interviewer: Do you feel that it has enhanced your teaching at all?

Respondent: I think it makes me more aware of what I do and then to explain and show to others what I do and then they can take that, either add to it or delete things from it. It makes me aware of what I do, because after so many years you just get into the swing of things.

Interviewer: Anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: It is a great program and I know when I began teaching my principal said, "You can go to so and so and ask them if you have any questions." It's a lot better now that you have had someone who has had some training and you just have someone there and you know they are there for you.

Interviewer: Thank you very much!

Carol was very positive about her mentoring experience. She said that teaching the same grade level was very beneficial. She did not set up a specific time to meet with her mentee because she said that they saw each other enough on a casual basis to take care of any concerns. Carol said that anyone new to a grade level should have a mentor even if they are in the same school. She mentioned the importance of understanding the changing curriculum.

Carol said the training and binder she received were helpful, but not the book. She said that mentoring helped make her aware of her teaching, especially having to explain it to someone else.

#### Courtney's Interview (Mentee)

Interviewer: If you could please tell me, what grade you teach and how long you've been teaching.

Respondent: I teach 4<sup>th</sup> grade, this will be my 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

Common grade level.

Interviewer: How do you describe the effectiveness of the mentoring you received?

Respondent: It was beneficial that we were both in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade because we were right across the hall from one another I felt like the mentoring I received was very helpful for my 1<sup>st</sup> year teaching. My mentor as well as the other 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers was very helpful.

Interviewer: Did you know them before you started here?

Respondent: I met my mentor a few times.

Interviewer: Were you assigned your mentor before school started?

Respondent: Yes

Data.

Interviewer: That was good. What were some of the positive aspects of the mentoring and how did they affect your teaching?

Respondent: Being a 1<sup>st</sup>-year teacher and not knowing anything, I think the biggest thing for me was all the data I was given. It was like "Here's a report. Here's a report. Here's a report." and I had no idea what to do with all of it. That was the most frustrating part for me. Not knowing what it was and what I was supposed to do with it.

Checklist.

Interviewer: What are some of the negative aspects of the mentoring you received?

Respondent: I think if she would have had a checklist and met with me on a regular basis to discuss things that would have helped. She was very helpful when I had questions, but she waited on me to come to her. Sometimes I didn't know what questions I needed to ask and if I didn't know what the questions were how could I know to ask them. An example would be when we were given our data reports and told to put them in our data notebooks. No one explained what we should do with them; I had to find that information on my own.

Interviewer: What improvements could you see being made to the mentoring program as a whole?

Respondent: As I mentioned earlier, I think a new teacher checklist should be used so that important topics that need to be discussed are covered and not missed. Perhaps even a sign off for the mentor and mentee after they have been discussed.

Interviewer: Can you think of anything else positive or negative that you would like to share about the mentoring program?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Thank you very much!

Courtney displayed mixed feelings about her mentoring. She said she enjoyed her mentor and that being in the same grade level was a positive aspect. She also mentioned that they were right across the hall from one another and the close proximity helped.

She said her mentor left things up to her too much. She did not know what to do with the many reports she received and instead of reaching out to her, Carol waited on Courtney to come to her with concerns. Courtney suggested that in the future, mentors have a checklist to go by to ensure that all important topics are covered during the mentor and mentee meetings.

### Davisville Elementary School

Diane has taught 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade science for the past 26 years at Davisville Elementary School and served as mentor to Debbie who taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Davisville Elementary School is in a rural area and serves 150 students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The school is considered to be high poverty because 77% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches.

### Diane's Interview (Mentor)

Interviewer: Could you tell us what grade you teach and how long you have been teaching?

Respondent: I have been teaching for 26 years and I teach 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade science.

### Training.

Interviewer: Can you describe your roll in the mentor and mentee relationship?

Respondent: I was asked to be a mentor to a new teacher two years ago and I had never been a mentor before. I had not received the training yet on being a mentor but very soon at the beginning of that school year I met with one of the trainers at the

high school and received a very large notebook with all kinds of ideas and activities that I could use. The new teacher that I was going to be working with was functioning as an interim teacher that year. It was possible a temporary position. As far as my role, I knew that I was going to be of service to her with any questions that came up throughout the year. I was going to introduce her to faculty and get her to know general procedures of how our schools worked and just wanted to be a liaison between her and the principal if that was necessary. Just be a resource person to her in many ways.

Interviewer: Do you see your role as more...do you go to her with advice and comments or do you sit back and let her come to you if she has questions and concerns?

Respondent: Well, initially I think I tried to set up appointments to meet with her on a regular basis. Then at each of our meetings I asked "if anything comes up that you have question about." We did a lot of communication through email as far as setting up appointments and sometimes even answering questions. That particular year I was in a portable trailer outside the building, she was inside the building and she was teaching a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade position and I was teaching a middle school position. We weren't really passing each other in the hall way, seeing each other randomly throughout the hallway very much so we really did have to schedule our times together.

### Procedures.

Interviewer: Could you explain a little bit how that worked with you being a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and her being a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher? Describe the positive and negative aspects of that.

Respondent: With general questions, just having to do with how the school operated, things she needed to know, there wasn't really a negative to my not teaching at the same grade level. But in terms of curriculum, specific things that she needed to know, I had to admit to her that I was not an expert on 3<sup>rd</sup> grade curriculum and so I would try to direct her to where she could get the answers she was looking for. She didn't have a lot of specific grade level curriculum problems. It was more if she had a student that she was having difficulty with and we needed to talk about if this was someone we wanted to consider referring for special ed or what special adaptations we might make with that student. The other thing with that is that this teacher had worked at a school up around ETSU and she had an interim position before so she had sort of a half a year teaching experience prior to being a new teacher at our school. She was a real go getter, so if there was some information that she needed that I couldn't help her with she either sought the grade level teacher above her or below her or would even contact the same grade level teacher at other schools within our system. She really knew how to find that specific information but there were times when I could direct her to something more curriculum related to her grade level. I would say that in general throughout schools, it would be my recommendation that a mentor teacher be on the same



grade level or very close to the same grade level as the new teacher. In our school, that's just not possible.

Interviewer: What are some positive aspects of the mentoring program?

Respondent: I just think having a close rapport with another teacher when you are a new teacher is important. It is for your own emotional stability. As a new teacher you are going through a lot of things that affect you emotionally and probably at a bigger school, the mentor teacher would be even more valuable, you may not know everybody in the faculty but you know that one person you can rely on and go to. I think at our school we have a very close faculty, we are very small and so in this case the new teacher felt very comfortable going to any teacher for help.

### Scheduling.

Interviewer: What about negative aspects of the mentoring program and how they impacted the teacher?

Respondent: I think the only difficulty we experienced was getting our schedules to connect. Usually when we met we didn't meet for 10 or 15 minutes, we met for an hour or hour and a half. Her schedule was very busy with her family and there were times she had to leave right after school. I did some tutoring right after school on certain days of the week, so there were certain days of the week I couldn't meet with her after school, but that is generally what we did was try to meet after school on a regular basis. There were times, if you looked at my log, we didn't meet all week, and we would just communicate through emails instead of getting together.

Interviewer: Part of the research suggests that common planning times are very important, do you see that as being something that would have been beneficial to you?

Respondent: Sure, sure, common planning times would have been wonderful. It's just not something that is a possibility in a lot of situations.

Interviewer: What improvements do you think should be made to the mentoring program in this county?

Respondent: I hadn't really thought about that too much. As I said, I didn't really go through the regular training program that was available, because I didn't find out until school was almost ready to start that I was going to be a mentor. Maybe the regular training that takes place during the summer time is more extensive. My training was more, where I just met with this teacher after school one day, the trainer, and we kind of quickly went through the notebook, the manual. There was no follow up with that particular trainer, not to fault the situation, probably if I had asked for more assistance with that I would have gotten it.

Interviewer: Do you think it would have been beneficial for the mentors who were currently mentoring to meet during the school year and talk about what was going on?

Respondent: That would be a good idea; I hadn't thought about that but yes, we would have probably gotten ideas from each other.

Interviewer: Did you think the log did a good enough job as far as keeping you on track?

Respondent: I think the log help keep me accountable, help me make sure I was doing what I was supposed to be doing or at least what I thought I was supposed to be doing. I didn't mind it; I would kind of enjoy it, reflecting. I would come back to my computer after our meetings and I would kind of reflect on how the meeting went.

Interviewer: Did you see any ways your mentoring relationship enhanced your teaching or had a negative impact on your teaching?

Respondent: I really can't say that I noticed it effecting my teaching one way or another.

Interviewer: Do you think if you were mentoring someone in the same grade or subject area that it could have impacted your teaching?

Respondent: Probably could have helped because new teacher has new ideas. I think I could have learned a lot from a new teacher if they were teaching similar course work. She did have good ideas and some of the things she was doing, I found very interesting. I can't think of anything specific that I went back to my classroom and implemented.

Interviewer: Is there anything else, positive or negative, that you would like to say about our mentoring program in this county?

Respondent: I don't really know. I haven't communicated with other mentors or other new teachers as far as how they were affected by the program or their feelings about the program. I guess I have heard other people's comments that there were some new teachers that didn't feel like the mentoring program was very effective. That would probably be the case where they didn't get to meet with their mentors as much as they wanted to, didn't get as much from their mentors as they wanted, but I have also spoken with some new teachers who say they wouldn't have gotten through the 1<sup>st</sup> year teaching without the help of their mentors. It does seem like it is a very individual thing and I would imagine that your research is going to find that to some extent. It's individualized, there are some mentor/new teacher relationships that were beneficial to both people and highly recommend the program and if there wasn't a lot of follow through I can see how some teachers could have been very disappointed by it.

Interviewer: Thank you very much!

Diane was positive about her mentoring relationship with Debbie, but said the distance between their grade levels and their classrooms made the situation difficult. Diane said it was her job to point Debbie in the right direction because she was not familiar with her curriculum. Diane did not receive the formal county training and instead met with another teacher to receive and go through the mentor binder.

When asked about the affect of mentoring on her own teaching, Diane did not notice any difference in her own teaching. She did say that if they had been closer in grade level that it could have influenced her teaching.

#### Debbie's Interview (Mentee)

Interviewer: If you could please tell me, what grade you teach and how long you've been teaching.

Respondent: I teach 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, this will be my 2<sup>nd</sup> year. I did 1 year in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade prior to that.

#### Common grade level.

Interviewer: How do you describe the effectiveness of the mentoring you received?

Respondent: The mentoring I received went very well. At my school we do have a disadvantage because we don't have two of the same grades so the person mentoring me was a 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher whereas I was a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher at the time. Some of the things we could meet about were limited.

Interviewer: How did that affect your relationship? The research tells us that it is actually better to have it that way, which I find surprising. Most of the people I have talked to say it should be the same grade level. The research says it is better to be with someone outside your grade level because you get a better perspective of the school as a whole. How do you feel about that?

Respondent: I think it should be outside your grade level, but I don't think middle school and elementary school crossing is the best idea, but the mentor I had was great. Our relationship was wonderful. She was very proactive in anything that I needed or helping me out, giving me ideas. Some of the ideas she brought back to me were from a long time ago when she taught something lower.

Interviewer: What were some of the positive aspects of the mentoring you received?

Respondent: It gives you a nice relationship, someone you know you can go to and you don't have to worry or scared about what they are going to think. She said right at the beginning, it doesn't matter what it is.

Interviewer: How long did you know her?

Respondent: Just when I started.

Interviewer: Were you aware that she was going to be your mentor before school started?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Anything else about the positive aspects?

Respondent: No

#### School atmosphere.

Interviewer: What are some of the negative aspects of the mentoring you received?

Respondent: I don't really think I had negative aspects, I know from going to the meeting, the new teacher meeting we all had to go to at the beginning of the year, that there were a lot of people being mentored that didn't feel comfortable with their mentor. They weren't proactive and that was a problem, I am proactive. If I want something, I will go find it. I didn't just go to my mentor; I went to whoever I needed to go to in the school. I asked, it didn't matter who it was, it was the kind of atmosphere it was. Ask whoever you want to or need to and that is what I did. Whereas a lot of new teachers I heard, they didn't seem very proactive. They would kind of sit back and wait for someone to come to them. If their mentor didn't almost beat it out of them, then they weren't getting the help they needed and they didn't understand why.

Interviewer: In your opinion as a mentee, do you think it should be the mentor or mentees job to step up and forge the relationship?

Respondent: It should be the mentor's job. The mentor is already comfortable where they are at and the mentee is not.

Interviewer: What improvements could you see being made to the mentoring program as a whole?

Respondent: I think, well I did this two year ago during my interim, so things could have even changed since then. Maybe a little more emphasis on the mentor, training with them or something, to get them to understand, they have to go after the mentee. Even if they are not asking for help, be there "What can I do for you?"

Because I saw a lot of good teachers bumfuzzled, upset, and things weren't going their way, they weren't getting the help they needed, but they were the type to just sit there and not say anything.

Interviewer: Can you think of anything else positive or negative that you would like to share about the mentoring program?

Respondent: It would kind of neat if they would have the mentor and mentee together in a huge group setting, everybody in the whole county has to go to this one meeting and you have both of them there, that way it already establishes a relationship and a basis for what you need at the beginning of the year.

Interviewer: Thank you very much!

Debbie was very positive about her relationship with Diane. She said it was a good thing for them to be in different grades, but one in elementary and one in middle school was too far apart. Debbie said that she was very proactive and would seek out information when she needed it, even if it meant going outside the school to another 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher. Debbie also suggested follow-up meetings throughout the year where the mentors and mentees from across the county could all meet.

### Training Summary

The training received by the mentors consisted of 1-day training and a binder of information. Mentors also received a paperback book the year they mentored, which was to be returned at the end of the year. Diane did not receive the 1-day training. Instead, she received training one-on-one during an afternoon from a teacher who had previously served as a mentor. Each of the mentors said the training was lacking in some way.

Allison said the training was unnecessary because it focused on relationship building and not specifically about mentoring. She said that a principal shouldn't send a teacher to the training if the teacher was not good with relationships. Her suggestion was that mentors and mentees

should meet together several times throughout the school year with other mentors and mentees and central office staff.

Beth mentioned that she received her training 5 years ago and then did not receive a mentee for several years. She suggested a refresher course every other year to discuss changes and keep updated. Mentors should be kept updated with changes within the county and state educational systems. Testing and standards are changing quickly and mentors should be ready to assist new teachers with these updates.

Carol said the training she received was helpful and so was the binder. She said that the book she was given this year was not beneficial to her mentoring. She said she enjoyed having the binder as a reference point.

Diane did not go through the regular training. Her training was very quick and she said that if she had asked for more help she would have received it. A previously trained mentor met with her for about an hour one afternoon to explain the binder and mentor expectations. Other mentors received a whole day working with several trainers. When asked, she agreed that mentors meeting during the school year would be a good idea.

#### Common Grade Level Summary

Another common element mentioned during each of the interviews was common grade level. The mentors and mentees had mixed feelings about how important common grade levels were to a positive relationship. Mentors who said this was a positive aspect of their mentoring relationships said the common curriculum and testing environment allowed for a more comprehensive mentoring situation. Teachers who were mentored by teachers outside their grade level said they could go to other teachers within their grade level for help.

Allison and Amanda agreed that having both of them working in kindergarten was a huge advantage. Amanda mentioned that teachers outside of kindergarten would not understand the unique stress that goes along with teaching kindergarten. Beth and Brenda had a great relationship and worked together as grade level partners, but both of them said that being in the same grade level was not a defining aspect of a positive mentoring relationship. Brenda said Beth would be a positive mentor in any relationship. Beth mentored several teachers and did not say that common grade level mattered because the school procedures and the kids were the same. Carol and Courtney both said that being in the same grade level was important. Carol even mentioned that if a teacher changes grade levels after teaching several years, he or she should have a mentor to help the teacher adjust to a new curriculum. Diane and Debbie did not say that being in the same grade level was important but being close to the same grade level was. The curriculum and the students change between grade levels and too much of a change does not allow mentors and mentees to relate about classroom issues. Debbie mentioned that the difference between an elementary teacher and a middle school teacher was not a good pairing because of the differences in the children's ages.

### Positive Relationships Summary

Each of the mentor and mentee pairs stressed how wonderful and positive their relationship was. Allison spoke about how important it was to connect to new teachers and learn from their innovative ideas. Amanda spoke about the support and organizational skills she learned from Allison. Beth mentioned how the mentor and mentee relationship helped remind her of things she had taken for granted. Brenda is quoted as saying, "It's hard to describe priceless," when asked to describe her mentoring. Carol said that mentoring Courtney helped make her more aware of her own teaching. Carol was able to reflect about her teaching when she

explained why she did things the way she did to Courtney. This reflection allowed Carol to refine her own teaching. Courtney enjoyed having someone across the hall she could go to for help and support. Diane found that learning about teaching in a lower grade was interesting. Debbie said it was important to have someone to go to for support.

Each of the people I interviewed said her mentoring experience was overall positive. There were very few complaints or concerns. Each mentor said that it was her job to offer support and make sure that her mentee was comfortable asking questions. Each mentee said that she had a positive relationship with her mentor and could go to her with questions or concerns.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the mentoring program in this rural Tennessee county school system. This qualitative study was completed by interviewing four sets of mentors and mentees within the mentoring program. A list of possible participants was obtained from the county central office. An email was sent to each mentor and mentee explaining the research and asking for volunteers. Five sets of mentors and mentees responded to the original request with one pair dropping out prior to the interview process.

Record numbers of teachers are leaving the profession with 50% of them leaving in their first 7 years in the classroom (Jonson, 2002). New teachers are expected to enter the school setting and perform at the same level as teachers with 20 years of experience (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009) In order to combat this rapid turnover schools are implementing mentoring programs (Portner, 2008). Tennessee began developing teacher mentoring programs in 1998 (TDOE, 2003).

This rural East Tennessee County has implemented a mentoring program based on the state of Tennessee Mentoring Model. The process includes new teachers attending an induction program before school starts and then being assigned a mentor for their 1<sup>st</sup> year. Mentors take part in a 1-day training session. They are then asked to keep a log of interactions with the mentee.

#### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the mentoring program in one East Tennessee County from the perspective of mentees at the end of their 1<sup>st</sup> year teaching

and their mentors who have participated in the program. Mentors and mentees were asked to meet on a regular basis. Mentors were asked to attend training, read current research, and keep a log of interaction with their mentee. Mentors receive a stipend each year for their involvement with the program. The amount of the stipend varied depending on the county budget. Resources have been invested into the mentoring program to assist new teachers in having a more successful 1<sup>st</sup> year.

### Conclusions from Research Question #1

In order to understand the thoughts of teachers who have completed their 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching while participating in the county mentoring program, four questions guided the research. This section reports the conclusions from research question 1.

1. What aspects of the mentoring program were most beneficial to new teachers?

#### Common Grade Level

Though not specifically part of the mentoring program, teachers mentioned that mentors and mentees with the same grade level assignment worked better. Mentees paired with mentors within the same grade level suggested that it added a positive aspect to their relationship.

Courtney at Clarksville Elementary said,

It was beneficial that we were both in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade because we were right across the hall from one another. I felt like the mentoring I received was very helpful for my 1<sup>st</sup> year teaching. My mentor, as well as the other 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, was very helpful.

The idea that the mentor teacher was dealing with the same testing and curriculum helped mentees feel more comfortable asking questions. Courtney's mentor, Carol, went so far as to say if someone changes grade levels, he or she should have a new mentor. She said that anyone teaching a grade level for the first time, regardless of whether it was a new teacher or a veteran, should have a mentor in that grade level. She said it went beyond just sharing ideas concerning

the curriculum. Learning about students and their needs at that particular grade level is also important. Knowing what has gone on in a student's personal life is another issue. "It is more than, Okay, here is the curriculum. I can help you with that."

Amanda and Allison said it was particularly important for kindergarten teachers to share grade levels because of the unique situation of teaching kindergarteners. Amanda said,

For me it was a positive. I don't think anyone else would have understood the demands and the creativity and all the things that go into kindergarten. We both are very hands-on type teachers so it worked well for us.

Allison agreed that grade level is important. For her, a positive aspect of this process was that both she and her mentee taught kindergarten. They could work together on standards and plan similar activities for their classes.

We were at the same place at the same time every day, and we could reflect on what the day was like because we were pretty much doing the same thing. We did all of our planning together and that helped her to alleviate that stress. I feel the match up of grade levels is a good thing.

She had heard others say that sharing a common grade level was not really that important in the mentor-mentee relationship. However, she doubted that she would have had as positive a relationship with a new 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher as she did with Amanda.

I am not very familiar with 5<sup>th</sup> grade standards as much as I am with kindergarten, and I don't know that I would have been able to give a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher as much guidance as I could a kindergarten teacher.

Common grade level is seen as a positive aspect of the mentoring relationship. Even mentors and mentees who did not say it was necessary said they enjoyed a closer relationship if they taught the same grade level. It is much easier to support and aid someone when the curriculum, materials, and activities are common.

## Positive Relationships

Each mentor and mentee agreed that the relationship they created was a positive one. When asked to describe the effectiveness of the mentoring she received, one mentee stated, “It’s hard to describe priceless.” Mentees also mentioned that the atmosphere of the school helped them form positive relationships with their mentors and other teachers.

Family and team were terms that were used by respondents to describe the school atmosphere. Brenda said,

My experience at this school has been that we are a team. We are a family. We work together not just with grade level but we work with the grade above and the grade below to make sure we are meeting the needs of our students and giving them the best education they can have.

“Being the best teachers we can be for them is exactly what I wanted when I left my previous job,” said Debbie from Davisville Elementary. She did not have a mentor from the same grade level but commented that the school atmosphere helped overcome the disadvantage of different grade levels, “I didn’t just go to my mentor; I went to whoever I needed to go to in the school. I asked; it didn’t matter who it was. It was the kind of atmosphere it was.”

Positive relations throughout the program helped mentees feel more welcomed and secure within their schools. Not always limited to a positive mentoring relationship, positive school environments were cited as being a valuable aspect for new teachers.

## Conclusions from Research Question #2

In order to understand the thoughts of teachers who have completed their 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching while participating in the county mentoring program, four questions guided the research. This section reports the conclusions from research question 2.

2. What aspects of the mentoring program were most difficult to manage according to new teachers and their mentors?

## Scheduling

The issue of scheduling time to meet with her mentee was difficult for Diane. She stated, “I think the only difficulty we experienced was getting our schedules to connect. Usually when we met we didn’t meet for 10 or 15 minutes. We met for an hour or hour and a half.” Her schedule was very busy with her family, and there were times she had to leave right after school. She was also involved with tutoring right after school on certain days of the week. This limited the days she could meet with her mentor. The use of email was very beneficial in the absence of common grade levels.

I couldn’t meet with her after school, but that is generally what we did was try to meet after school on a regular basis. There were times, if you looked at my log, we didn’t meet all week, and we would just communicate through emails instead of getting together.

Brenda also mentioned scheduling as an issue. “Timing is always an issue. There’s just not enough time.” She said there was often not enough time to stop and ask questions. The questions were being asked “on the fly” as each teacher was on her way to somewhere more important at the moment. There was often no time for the two to sit down at any point and say, “Okay, now how is it going?” Scheduling was an issue with Brenda as well as trying to meet with two or three other mentees at the same time. “It would have been nice at different times to have those more scheduled, more set apart.” Even though they taught the same grade level and mentioned having lunch together, they still found it difficult to sit down and have formal mentoring meetings.

Mentors and mentees often find that scheduling time to sit down and talk and reflect is hard to do. With many other obligations both professional and personnel, teachers find time limited.

### Conclusions from Research Question #3

In order to understand the thoughts of teachers who have completed their 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching while participating in the county mentoring program, four questions guided the research. This section reports the conclusions from research question 3.

3. What experiences could be added to the mentoring program to enhance its effectiveness?

#### Training

The training consisted of a 1-day session during summer in-service that was based on the state model of Train the Trainers. Allison said that too much emphasis was given to relationship building because, “If you were chosen for the program then your principal already felt you were a good relationship builder.” She suggests meeting throughout the year with your mentee instead,

I think that in order to make sure that the mentor and mentee are doing what they are supposed to be doing; there should maybe be some follow up meetings after school begins, in the middle of the semester, or whenever all the mentors and mentees could meet.

Her suggestion that mentors and mentees meet together with central office staff to discuss some of the strategies they used would be an advantage to the program. Sharing what has helped and what has not would allow them to learn what other mentors are doing.

I think the meetings should be for the mentor and mentee together because at that time you are already paired up with your mentee and that way you can listen to how others are getting along, especially if you have a bad relationship with your mentee and that may help get some ideas of how to make it stronger.

The teachers interviewed suggested several ways to make the training more beneficial. These ideas included more meetings, meetings spread throughout the school year, and meetings where mentors and mentees met together with other mentors and mentees to share ideas.

## Administrative Support

Allison mentioned that her training was 1 day of relationship building information. She said follow-up training should be offered to the mentors.

There is one other thing that now that I have gone through that one day training, that's it. I get nothing else. If we get new teachers at my school I can be their mentor, but no new training. I can do this for years and never be reevaluated or reignited or something else I guess.

She commented on the book given to the mentors and suggested that shorter articles or email tips would be a more effective way to help mentor teachers. Allison said that after school meetings would be a good idea. Other mentors agreed that meetings during the school year that involved the mentees and mentors together would be an improvement to the program.

Beth received her mentor training 5 years ago and said it would be a good idea to renew her training so she could find out if anything had changed throughout the county or state. She suggested that administrative support could help organize the program.

Well, I feel like some things could be a little more well organized. I had a super support system; my central office has been [supportive] as far as providing me with suggestions. I was not given a very strict guideline on how to do things, but the way I did it was to document the days we met. I would write down the things we discussed that came from that list and if there were any things that came up incidentally throughout, I would add that to it. I just had to do it that way to make sure I was covering all areas and documenting even the times we wouldn't talk about anything on that list.

She wanted more detailed guidelines but also commented that her way of doing things may not work for everyone.

Mentors said that more administrative support is needed. Suggestions for what type of support varied among the interviews. One teacher wanted better organization, while another wanted more meeting to discuss the mentoring program. According to the mentors, the administration has left them with few guidelines, which allows more personalization for each mentor, but leaves some mentors feeling unsupported.

### Conclusions from Research Question #4

In order to understand the thoughts of teachers who have completed their 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching while participating in the county mentoring program, four questions guided the research. This section reports the conclusions from research question 4.

4. How does implementation of the program vary across the county?

#### Variation Across the County

According to these interviews there is very little variation across the county in each school's mentoring process. Each mentor was trained by someone within the studied county. Principals leave the mentoring to the mentor teachers while being available if problems arise. Beth commented that for the most part her principal left her to work independently. He would occasionally check to see if she had issues with anything that could be a possible problem.

I did discuss it with him and ask for his advice on how I should deal with it and as far as what my position is and really what his is as a principal as far as dealing with it and not crossing a line.

Each of these participating mentors was from a small, low-economic community school with more of a family atmosphere. The lack of variation may be due to the similarities in the schools' structures.

The lack of variation in individual schools limits the results of this study. If this study was duplicated with different respondents, the conclusions could be different. High school teachers and middle school teachers did not participate in this study although they were invited to participate. Also no volunteers were from the higher economic schools in the county or the larger elementary schools. The lack of participation from these subgroups could affect the outcome of the research.



### Implications for Practice

The mentors and mentees interviewed for this research were very positive about the mentoring program in their county. During the interviews respondents had very little negative to say about the program. Several mentors and mentees did give concrete suggestions for the future of this program.

This county's program provides new teachers with positive mentors. The team spirit of the school helps foster strong relationships throughout the school and in turn helps new teachers succeed. This research was limited because each volunteer was from a small rural school with a strong community base. Three of the four sets of mentors came from an elementary school with the fourth from a kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade school. The lack in variation of school types limits the findings but also suggests that this type of positive environment increases the chance of success for beginning teachers.

### Common Grade Level Suggestions

The research and interviews both indicate that common grade level is important to a successful mentor and mentee relationship. These relationships grow because teachers can discuss common curriculum, data, and testing. When a common grade level is not available, new teachers have to look elsewhere for the grade level specific help they may need. Depending on the personality of the new teacher, this may or may not be an issue. New teachers who are outgoing will not have difficulty seeking the answer to any problem they have. Shy or withdrawn teachers may be left feeling confused and disappointed in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching without someone in their grade level available for support.

### Training Suggestions

Although most of the participants were very positive about the training they received, they agreed that further training would be a positive addition to the program. Mentors and mentees said that meetings throughout the school year with other mentors and mentees from across the county would be beneficial. This would be an opportune time to talk with others in the program and see what they could do to enhance their own relationship. Mentors also mentioned that retraining or a refresher training course would be helpful. They are concerned that there may be new policies, ideas, or strategies that they may be unaware of that could make their mentoring better.

### Scheduling Suggestions

Scheduling seems to be the biggest concern with teachers who are not in the same grade level or who do not share a common planning time. Mentor and mentee teachers suggested that finding time during the school year to sit down and talk was often difficult. Teachers used email to help fill in when scheduling a meeting was too difficult because of outside constraints.

### Implications for Further Research

This research was focused on one rural east Tennessee county. The county uses a mentoring model based on the Train the Trainer model provided by the state of Tennessee. Further research can be conducted to enhance this research.

Additional research might include quantitative data concerning the effectiveness of this county's mentoring program. One way to do this is to develop surveys to determine the effectiveness of the mentoring. Allowing mentors and mentees the opportunity to think at length about their responses will give truer results to the questions. Taking away the time restraints of

an interview situation gives respondents the ability to expand on their answers and the freedom to edit their responses.

Another means of increasing research is to conduct duplicate studies in other counties with mentoring programs in place. Research from counties using the same Train the Trainer model would provide comparisons to the original county studied. Similarities and differences in implementation and effectiveness of the programs would be of great benefit to other counties considering the Train the Trainer model. It would also allow a direct comparison of various components of the model.

A financial study would be beneficial in determining the cost of the mentoring program and its affect on teacher retention. Replacing a teacher comes at a high cost, as does the implementation of a successful mentoring program. School districts looking at budget restraints may benefit from such a comparison.

Finally, a long-term study that follows teachers through the first 5 years of their career would give greater insight into the benefits of a mentoring program. The research could focus on the type of mentoring received and compare different types of mentoring to job satisfaction after 5 years. This type of study would allow many variables to be considered such as type of student teaching, induction programs, time allotments, reduction of 1<sup>st</sup>-year teacher duties, stipend for mentors, common grade levels, and school atmosphere. This type of study would help school districts determine what works for new teachers.

Formal mentoring is still a novel concept in education. As new research and literature become available, mentoring programs will undergo changes for improvement. These changes will allow future studies to continually enhance the program.

## Chapter Summary

This research focuses on one county in rural east Tennessee and the mentoring program used by the school system. The interviews suggest that this is a positive program that enhances new teachers' experiences. Suggestions found for improving the program are conclusive with the literature review. Common grade levels, more in-depth training for the mentor and mentee, and help with scheduling are common concerns across the literature. The positive aspects of mentoring far outweighed any negative points of the program. Having a strong support system for a new teacher is an important step in becoming a successful partner in the school community. This county should strive to continue its mentoring program while looking at ways to enhance the experiences of their mentors and mentees.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to Director of Schools

June 16, 2011

Mrs. XXXXXXXXX,

I am currently working on my doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. As part of my dissertation project, I would like to request permission to interview mentors and mentees from the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. I will contact these teachers by email and only those who are willing to volunteer and respond accordingly will be contacted after the initial email.

I have already completed IRB training. I do not plan to use the teachers' names or identify the school system in my final research. I am enclosing a working draft of the first three chapters of my dissertation. My research questions, as well as the interview questions I plan to use are included in these chapters.

If you have any questions about my research, please contact me at (423) 293-5225 or [nikki.manning@hck12.net](mailto:nikki.manning@hck12.net). Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Thank you,

Nikki Manning  
Mooresburg Elementary School

## APPENDIX B

### Initial Email

To: New Teachers/Mentors in the Mentoring Program

From: Nikki Manning

Date: July 7, 2011

Re: Research

I am currently doing research on the perceptions of teachers about the formal mentoring program being used in your county. The name of my research project is, *Mentors and New Teachers: A Qualitative Study Examining an East Tennessee School System's Mentoring Program*. I would like to ask you to privately share your perceptions of the mentoring program.

Your perceptions will be compiled in my dissertation and shared with Central Office as a way to help produce a stronger mentoring program. Your participation in this program is completely voluntary. All information shared with me will be coded and protected. Any use of quotes will be assigned pseudonyms and you will have an opportunity to review all information for accuracy before completion.

If you are interested please respond to me at [nikki.manning@hck12.net](mailto:nikki.manning@hck12.net) or call me at 423-293-5225.

If you have any additional questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Nikki Manning  
Second Grade Teacher  
Mooresburg Elementary School  
305 Hwy 31  
Mooresburg, TN 37811  
(423) 272-9597

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

#### **EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT (ICD)**

The purpose of this note of INFORMED CONSENT is to explain a research project in which I am requesting your participation. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer. By no means is there any pressure for you to participate in this research.

#### PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study will be to examine the perceptions of mentor and new teachers regarding the effectiveness of the formal mentoring program of the county schools.

#### DURATION:

Participants will be asked to participate in an interview where data will be collected. There will be no limit to the interviews, the investigator will use a script but will also be flexible as to gain further insight into the experience.

#### PROCEDURES

In all forms of qualitative research, some or most of the data is collected through interviews (Merriman, 1998). Therefore, interviews will be conducted by using a script and allowing the questions to snowball as the interviewee discusses their experiences and perceptions of the mentoring program. Interview respondents will be determined through purposeful sampling to ensure all respondents are a part of the official mentoring program. The director of schools in the studied Tennessee county has given her approval of this specific research. All interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the participants and will be conducted by the researcher using audio-taping and researcher transcription. Interviewees will then be asked to review written transcripts to ensure accuracy.

#### ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS

There are no alternative procedures. Your participation is voluntary.

#### POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

No known or expected risks are associated with this research.

#### POSSIBLE BENEFITS

By participating in this research project, the participants will be able to help continue to refine and develop a more effective mentoring program for the county schools. The participant's perceptions will be a valuable source of data for Central Office.

#### VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling Nikki

Manning, whose phone number is (423) 293-5225. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

In addition, if significant new findings during the course of the research which may relate to the participant's willingness to continue participation are likely, the consent process must disclose that significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to the participant's willingness to continue participation will be provided to the participant.

In addition, if there might be adverse consequences (physical, social, economic, legal, or psychological) of a participant's decision to withdraw from the research, the consent process must disclose those consequences **and** procedures for orderly termination of participation by the participant.

### CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Nikki Manning at (423) 293-5225, or Dr. Catherine Glascock at (423) 439-7509. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at (423) 439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423) 439-6002.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Principal Investigator's home for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, ETSU IRB, and personnel particular to this research in the ELPA department have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

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SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

