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THE EFFECTS OF A FORMAL MENTORING PROGRAM

ON TEACHER RETENTION AND BENEFITS

TO PROTÉGÉS AND MENTORS

by

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A thesis submitted

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Abstract

This thesis is an evaluation research study into the effects of a formal mentoring program on teacher retention and the benefits to mentors and protégés. The program studied took place in the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board in Northwest Ontario during the 1999–2000 school year, and involved the collection and subsequent examination of experiential data collected from participants in the program. The respondents included experienced teachers who served as mentors and new or beginning teachers who were the protégés. A review of the literature outlined the benefits to mentors and protégés as well illuminated such issues as mentor selection and training and descriptions of several other mentoring programs. Further, characteristics of mentor teachers are discussed. The data collected are coded into categories based on benefits to mentors from a personal as well as a professional viewpoint. Benefits to protégés are discussed in terms of qualities of mentor teachers, technical support provided, and communication between mentors and protégés. Teacher retention is defined by school board statistics relating to the number of beginning teachers who made the decision to continue teaching with the school board the following year.

i

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ii

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iii

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

vi

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW

As we attempt to come to terms with the fact that nearly 30% of beginning teachers leave the teaching profession within five years of starting their careers, we begin to realize the importance of successful induction and retention of new teachers (Gonzales & Sosa, 1993). Teachers who receive individualized, appropriate and ongoing support at the beginning of their careers are more likely to remain in their chosen field (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1999). A formal induction program such as mentoring new staff is one way in which school boards are attempting to reduce the high rate of early attrition of teaching staff.

This study is an evaluation research study that examined the effectiveness of a formal mentoring program in the retention of new teachers in a district, the ways in which formal mentoring supported new teachers, and the benefits of the program for the experienced teachers who served as mentors. The findings of this study are based on experiential data collected from twenty-six mentor-protégé partnerships that were formed during the 1999-2000 school year. Data were collected through written surveys, informal conversations, and field notes that were kept on interactions with participants in the mentoring program.

Background/Rationale

In 1997, the province of Ontario passed Bill 104, *The Fewer School Boards Act*, which mandated the amalgamation and reduction of school boards across the province from one hundred twenty-nine major boards to sixty-six. The school district being studied

1

encompasses a large territory in Northwestern Ontario that includes eight communities. Some of these communities are located in remote areas of the region that may be seen by prospective teachers as remote or undesirable places to live.

A potential problem anticipated by the board was the possibility that it could be facing a serious shortfall of teachers in the next several years due to the impending retirement of many "baby-boomer" era teachers and a lack of interest by potential teachers in this part of the province. The school board administration identified as priorities the need to attract and retain new teachers and to make their transition from a Faculty of Education or another school board as smooth as possible. This decision resulted in the development and implementation of a formal mentoring program for new teachers. The intention of the program was to ease the entry of teachers who came to this board into the teaching profession with the guidance of more experienced individuals who had much to offer in terms of professional advice and personal support. The success of such a program hinged upon the participation and dedication of experienced teachers from within the board in all geographical areas.

In March of 1999, the school board's senior administration issued a formal request to all elementary and secondary teachers, asking for applications to participate in a pilot mentoring project to assist in the successful induction of new teachers to the board. Seventy-six teachers from across the board answered the request and submitted their names for consideration for approximately thirty positions.

After the selection process, thirty-two individuals were invited to a series of training sessions in May and June of 1999. These sessions were delivered by a team which included

the following: a representative from the Ontario College of Teachers; a Superintendent of Education with the school board; and two Curriculum Special Assignment Teachers. Training sessions were offered in a central location over three days, and focussed on topics such as roles of mentors; how to deal with issues that may arise between mentors and protégés; case studies relating to problem solving; and how to deal with school situations. Role playing, methods of developing formal and informal relationships, and strategies for offering support to a new teacher who might be facing any number of issues or problems were also included in the training sessions.

In August 1999, after a cadre of new teachers had been hired, mentors and protégés were brought together for two days of activities that culminated in the assignment of partner mentors and protégés. On the first day, the agenda included a series of large and small group activities, surveys, and informal interviews. Following these activities, individuals were asked to submit a list of three mentors or protégés with whom they felt they would be compatible and be able to develop a relationship. From these lists, the team of curriculum coordinators paired mentors with protégés for the 1999–2000 school year. On the following day, mentors and protégés were formally matched and given an opportunity to discuss their plans for the year and to socialize.

Adequate financial support is necessary for implementation of any initiative (Fullan, 1992; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). The board recognized that each of these formal relationships would require ongoing support, both in terms of release time and resources to meet successfully the goals of the program. The board allocated funding to support each of the pairs in the following manner: each pair was given 15 days of release time to be used

at their discretion throughout the school year for such things as meeting together, inter-visitation to other classrooms, professional development, and attending ongoing training offered by the school board. As well, each pair was allocated $250.00 to be used at their discretion for tuition at workshops and to purchase materials needed to support professional activities, or support the relationship.

This study was designed to assess the effectiveness of the mentoring program developed by the district to retain teachers new to the board.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study several key terms are defined below:

- The term "mentor" can be defined as an experienced and trusted advisor (Oxford, 1990, p. 742). Mentors may also be referred to as "buddies," "coaches" and "peer leaders" (Cole & Watson, 1993; Ganser, 1995).

- A "protégé" is a person under the protection, patronage, and tutelage of another (Oxford, 1990, p. 962). Other frequently applied titles for protégés include "neophytes," "inductees," and "new teachers."

- The act of "mentoring" is assumed to be the interaction between two people, where the mentor is trusted, experienced and willing to guide the protégé through a growing period (Merriam, 1983).

- "Formal mentoring" is an official relationship whereby mentor and protégé had been formally paired for a set period of time, in this case one school year.

- "New" teachers are those who were new to the school district. In this study many of these new teachers were experienced teachers who have been hired recently by the

school board.

Research Questions

1. In what ways does a formal mentoring program support new teachers?

2. What are the benefits of a formal mentoring program for teachers who were chosen as mentors?

3. How effective is the mentoring program in the retention of new teachers?

Research Design and Methodology

This study is an evaluation research study that examined the effectiveness of a formal mentoring program in the retention of new teachers in a district, the ways in which formal mentoring supports new teachers, and the benefits of serving as a mentor for experienced teachers. This qualitative evaluation took place over a period of ten months during the 1999–2000 school year. Data were collected through two written surveys, conversations with participants, and field notes kept by the researcher throughout the research period. Twenty-six mentor teachers and twenty-seven protégés were invited to participate in the study.

Significance

In light of the forecasted shortage of available qualified teachers in Ontario, this study addresses one of the strategies school boards can implement to attract and retain new teachers. This study also communicates the importance of the selection of mentor teachers, the need for appropriate training for teachers selected to serve as mentors, and the need for suitable financial support for a formal mentoring program.

Limitations of the Study

Several factors may have influenced the outcome of this study. First, the fact that only one formal mentoring program was studied may limit the transferability of the findings because the experiences of respondents in this program many not reflect the experiences of participants in mentoring programs in other districts. Secondly, some of the protégés were not beginning teachers. Some had taught elsewhere or were returning to the teaching profession after an absence for any number of reasons.

Several assumptions were made before beginning the study. First, it was assumed that mentoring programs and mentors involved in them would support new teachers. Secondly, it was assumed that formal mentoring is an effective means of assisting new teachers in getting through what many perceive to be one of the most difficult phases of their career. Finally, as the researcher and a participant as mentor in the program, I have assumed there are also benefits to teachers who served as mentors in this program. My personal views in favour of mentoring new teachers may have had an impact on the final report, but I have attempted to overcome these views when reporting the views of others in the program.

This chapter provides an overview of the purpose of the study on the effectiveness of a formal mentoring program in the retention of new teachers and the benefits of the mentoring program for mentors and protégés. The following chapter will introduce the role mentoring can play in the induction of new teachers, as well as describe mentor characteristics, selection, and training. As well, a brief description of several mentoring programs is provided.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature examines the literature in support of formal mentoring programs. The first section describes the goals of mentoring and the role of mentoring in the induction process as well as some of the ways mentors support new teachers. The second section defines the typical characteristics mentors should possess, mentor selection and training, and perceived benefits to teachers who serve as mentors. The third section describes other mentoring programs. Lastly, teacher retention is addressed.

The Role of Mentoring and the Benefits to New Teachers

Mentoring of young people is by no means a recent innovation. The notion of older, wiser or more experienced citizens being asked to take charge of younger, less learned individuals dates back to ancient Greek mythology. In fact, the term "mentor" comes from the name of the wise old man who was regarded with such esteem that he was asked take charge of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. Mentor was given the responsibility of guarding Telemachus, educating him, and teaching him the ways of the world while Odysseus was away fighting a war (*Classical Handbook*, 1962).

Over recent centuries, we have seen mentoring of younger people through the development and implementation of apprenticeship programs, on the job training initiatives and, more recently, in many professions from medicine and law to education (Gray & Gray, 1985). Although programs such as apprenticeships and on the job training are not

7

necessarily labelled as mentoring programs, they are, in reality, just that. Any initiative that places a junior employee or prospective employee under the care and guidance of someone experienced must be considered to be in the same realm as mentoring.

In the field of health care, for example, doctors do not graduate from a medical school and begin immediately to work independently as surgeons or general practitioners. Instead, they must undergo a series of placements where they are guided, counselled, and instructed by physicians or specialists who are experienced and competent. The reasoning behind this form of induction to the medical profession is that beginning practitioners will be better prepared to practice medicine if they are given the opportunity to work with individuals who explain procedures and expectations. For example, when a new doctor is doing a residency in a hospital or clinic, he or she has the benefit of participating in daily activities such as rounds. During these kinds of activities, the aspiring physician would take part in discussions regarding procedures and treatments while receiving explanations for specific occurrences, prescribed medications, and future treatments. Following this period of supervised practice, residents complete standardized exams to earn a license to practice medicine in their chosen fields.

Likewise, those who aspire to become members of the legal professions must undergo a period of work experience under the guidance of trained lawyers when they graduate from law school. This period of "articling" allows prospective lawyers to become familiar with procedures and the politics of the legal profession. When the period of articling is complete, law students write a formal exam to become licensed attorneys.

These professions place confidence in the belief that successful induction into the chosen

field requires the support, encouragement, and advice of those who have successfully passed through an induction period of their own. The teaching profession holds the same belief about the value of mentoring. Preservice teachers participate in a field experience component in their degree program. The duration of formal supervision and guidance for aspiring teachers by experienced associates is considerably shorter than it is for, say, doctors or lawyers. In the province of Ontario, preservice teachers usually earn a bachelor's degree and a Bachelor of Education Degree, and participate in eight to twelve weeks of supervised "field experience," after which they are eligible for certification. These novice teachers are expected to perform the same job and meet the same expectations as those who have been in the profession for many years (Huling-Austin, 1990; *NASSP Practitioner*, 1999).

Over the past two decades, school divisions in North America have become more aware of the need for supporting new teachers through formally organized induction efforts, including mentoring programs (Rolheiser-Bennett, 1991). Fullan and Hargreaves (1999) explain this trend:

> After decades of assuming that teachers taught alone, learned to sink or swim by themselves and got better over time only through their own individual trial and error, there is increasing commitment to the idea and the evidence that all teachers are more effective when they can learn from and are supported by a strong community of colleagues, and that new teachers can benefit greatly from having a mentor who will be a guide and coach for them. (p. 7)

This recognition has led to widespread support for mentoring programs and a corresponding increase in the development and implementation of formal induction programs such as

mentoring (Cole & Watson, 1993; Gray & Gray, 1985; Theis-Sprinthall & Gerler, 1990). Many questions and issues have emerged from research and practice related to mentoring programs. Challenges school boards must consider when creating and implementing mentoring programs include these: program goals; the level of formality of mentoring relationships; the nature of support provided for mentoring relationships; the amount of funding that should be allocated to the relationships; and the selection of mentors, their training, and how they should be paired with new teachers (Cole & Watson, 1993; Daganais, 1997; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1999; Ganser, 1995; Gray & Gray, 1985). These challenges must be addressed by school districts within the context of decreased funding and growing hiring rates of new teachers.

A number of studies have found that formal mentoring programs for new teachers have specific goals when they are implemented. Although districts label and prioritize their aims differently, researchers suggest the goals fall within three broad categories. These goals are described as follows: (1) to provide beginning teachers with guidance and support; (2) to promote professional development and growth of new teachers; and (3) to retain beginning teachers (Clifford, 1991; Huling-Austin, 1990; NASSP Practitioner, 1999; Odell, 1986; Reynolds, 1992; Varah, Theune & Parker, 1986). Each type of goal is described below.

New teachers need much guidance and support. Veenman (1984) investigated ninety-one independent studies that identified the difficulties experienced by beginning teachers. He identified several key areas in which beginning teachers need support: classroom discipline; motivating students; dealing with individual differences; assessing student work; and organization of class work.

In their handbook *Supporting Beginning Teachers*, Cole, Squire and Cathers (1995) propose that new teachers show a need to be supported both publicly and privately. This hypothesis suggests that new teachers need someone with whom they can talk freely in the hallway or staff room as well as behind closed doors when they feel things are not going well or they have seen a well-designed lesson turn into a disaster. As well, Cole, Squire, and Cathers offer guidelines for administrators who are establishing mentoring programs in order to recognize the types of support mentor teachers can provide to protégés. The areas of support and development are related to the technical aspects of teaching, and include such things as the following:

- curriculum and assessment, where the mentor teacher supports the protégé by offering suggestions about locating resources, creating lesson plans and evaluating student work; classroom management where the protégé is advised about scheduling, assignments for students and time management;

- motivation and discipline where the mentor offers suggestions about how to improve student achievement or how to deal with difficult students; and

- school and board policies where the protégés receives some sort of orientation to the school, district and/or procedures.

Categories from Cole et al. are used as the framework for technical support in the analysis of data.

Gray and Gray (1985) synthesized literature on mentoring in an attempt to discover ways of improving the induction process for beginning teachers. Through their research, they determined that new teachers should have someone they look up to and can view as

a role model. They found that the best mentor teachers are those who model positive behaviour, who are successful at what they do, and who are respected within the school community. They contend that these mentor characteristics must be present for most beginning teachers because there exists a degree of pressure on all teachers to model typical classroom and community behaviours, to be successful, and to earn the respect of staff, students, and parents.

Varah, Theune and Parker (1986) studied an induction program during the 1984–1985 school year in Wisconsin in which twelve beginning teachers were supported by an "induction support team" consisting of the protégé, a mentor teacher, a university consultant and one person from the school district's administration team. From the participants in their study, the researchers found that the primary goals of mentoring in this district included such things as providing professional learning experiences for beginners; providing assistance for beginning teachers to develop professional skills and competency; and giving beginners opportunities to examine different teaching methodologies. Similarly, Gray and Gray (1985) support the theory that new teachers need someone to look up to, asserting that, as beginning teachers begin to develop their own professional persona, they increasingly look to "model" teachers to provide them with inspiration, goals, and guidance.

The guidance and support of a mentor encompass more than informal support. In their study of mentoring practices in 1993, Cole and Watson surveyed one hundred twenty-eight school districts to determine types of induction programs in Ontario. When they asked school districts to respond to questions about induction programs, they received feedback from one hundred nine districts. They found that twelve districts did not have any form of

induction program; thirty-four had an orientation type of program, with informal support provided to beginning teachers; and sixty-three had more formal induction programs that often included a mentoring component. They also found that one of the primary needs of new teachers, as well as one of the chief goals of induction programs, is orientation to their school, department, or school board. Mentors, who are experienced and familiar with the "ins and outs" of the education system in which they operate, can be called upon to fulfill these needs for beginning teachers. This finding is also articulated by Kilcher (1991), who examined research on mentoring during the early part of the 1990s.

Kilchner (1991) compiled a list of guidelines for practice in mentoring beginning teachers. She suggests that one of the goals of mentoring programs should be that of orienting new teachers to issues such as dealing with curriculum, administration, and others in the school. An important aspect of orientation to the environment for a new teacher is knowing whom to approach with specific issues, the experts on a particular subject within a school or district, and where to turn for further assistance.

A Policy Perspective on Teacher Induction (Clifford, 1991), sponsored by Teacher Education Council, Ontario (TECO), endorsed induction programs for new teachers. This policy paper supports the notion that orientation is one of the most important tasks for the successful induction of new teachers, and proposes that school districts across Ontario must build in conditions that will allow new teachers an opportunity to become familiar with their new surroundings (Clifford, 1991).

The orientation aspect of induction for new teachers may be overlooked by colleagues and administrators because of their own busy schedules or because new teachers do not

approach them. By establishing formal mentoring programs, school boards can set specific

expectations for those acting as mentors, including that of orientation to the board and to

curriculum, for their protégés (Cole, 1990).

Concern for the professional development of beginning teachers has also been a

contributing factor to the increase in popularity of mentoring during the past decade.

Beginning teachers pass through distinct stages of professional development during their

first year of teaching (Hall & Loucks, 1978; Horsley & Loucks-Horsley, 1998). A summary

of these changes, based on Horsley & Loucks-Horsley's research, showing typical beginning

teacher responses to each of the stages of development and the role of mentor teachers, is

found in Figure 1. As beginning teachers work their way through each of these stages of

development, it is essential they have support and encouragement from those who have

successfully made the journey through their own induction period. By promoting formal

mentor-protégé relationships, school boards can further meet their goals of developing

professionalism in teachers while at the same time easing the way into teaching for

beginners.

Stage of Development	Typical Beginning Teacher Responses	Possible Role of Mentor Teacher
Awareness stage	Not concerned with new ideas or methods; concerned with survival	Listener, supporter, offers suggestions when asked.
Informational stage	Wants to find out more about requirements of the position, students.	Listener, offers advice on lesson plans, evaluation techniques, etc.
Personal stage	Wants to know how innovations, policies will affect them personally.	Offers possible implications for new policies, innovations.
Management stage	Concerned with methods of controlling, managing classroom behaviours.	Supporter, listener, offers advice, shares tricks of the trade.
Consequence stage	Concern about how their teaching affects students in their classes.	Shares experiences, successes or failures, offers advice.
Collaboration stage	Ready to share ideas with other teachers; gaining more confidence.	Listener, shares own ideas, supports through constructive advice.
Refocusing stage	Begins to develop and implement new ideas, methodologies.	Shares ideas from experience, shares best practice ideas.

FIGURE 1: Phases of personal adaptation in teaching (summarized from Horsley & Loucks-Horsley, 1998, p. 18).

Teacher Retention

Odell (1986) defines teacher retention as a goal of mentoring programs, whereby districts strive to keep beginning teachers in the profession after a sometimes-difficult induction period.

Estimates of beginning teacher attrition rates vary by district and location of school boards. However, Huling-Austin (1990) studied a formal mentoring program referred to as Project Credit (Certification Renewal Experiences Designed to Improve Teaching) that was initiated as a result of the *Indiana Teacher Quality Act* in the mid-1980s and monitored by Indiana State University. Huling-Austin (1990) found that all twenty-one of the first year teachers participating chose to teach the following year, whereas previous data from the entire state showed that 26.5% of new teachers resigned after one year and 62% resigned within five years (p. 541).

In their study of the University of Wisconsin Whitewater teacher induction program, Varah, Theune, & Parker (1986) placed attrition rates at up to 50% in the first five years of teaching in some districts within that state. Specific reasons for such an exodus of beginning teachers were not provided.

New teachers who are simply placed in classrooms and given the instruction to teach, without professional and emotional support are far more likely to leave the profession before those who receive individualized support from someone they respect and can look up to.

As the teaching profession in Ontario faces a potential crisis in the availability of well trained, quality teachers in the future, the retention of new teachers becomes essential to

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not only the teaching profession, but to society as a whole.

Mentor Characteristics, Selection, Training and Benefits

A number of research studies have identified several characteristics of mentor teachers that allow them to fulfill their duties effectively. Varah, Theune and Parker (1986) contend that where formal mentoring relationships have been established within school districts, individuals who act as mentor teachers have usually been carefully chosen because they possess specific qualities such as dedication to the profession that suggest they will make excellent role models for new teachers.

During a study of mentoring programs that were successful, Daganais (1997) found that when specific characteristics such as evidence of successful teaching at several grade levels were carefully considered during the selection process, mentor teachers were better able to serve their protégés. Daganais found that having knowledge of the curriculum as well as the differences in cognitive abilities of pupils at different grade levels enabled mentor teachers to assist their protégés with lesson preparation and delivery.

While there is no evidence of the number of years of successful teaching experience a teacher must have to qualify for a mentorship role, one study by Ganser (1995) which synthesized literature on mentoring from 1990–1993 suggests eight to fifteen years of experience is ideal. Ganser explains that teachers with less than eight years of experience may be viewed by beginners as not experienced enough to offer support and advice, yet those with more than fifteen years of experience might be viewed as being too far along in their careers to remember what it is like to be a beginning teacher.

In the TECO policy paper, Clifford (1991) says that individuals with proven leadership

ability should be given special consideration to act as mentor teachers because they have proven that they are willing to contribute their efforts to improve the quality of the educational environment for staff and students.

Kilcher's (1991) review of the literature on mentoring new teachers led her to the conclusion that the most effective mentors were those who were willing and able to offer support and guidance on an ongoing basis. A mentoring relationship requires a commitment of time with some cases requiring more than others, particularly if a protégé is experiencing unusual difficulties. Mentors who are willing to commit the time to a mentoring relationship are usually chosen because they enjoy helping others and they have a record of working well with their peers. Evidence of the ability to communicate well with others while at the same time not passing judgment or attempting to force change on others is also given high priority in the selection of mentor teachers (Kilcher, 1991; Cole et al., 1995). Those who are willing to listen and are able to withhold judgment are viewed as most effective supporters by protégés. When these characteristics are carefully considered and candidates are selected because they exhibit all or most of them, the individuals chosen will make excellent mentors and will play positive roles in the professional life of new teachers.

Choosing a group of well-qualified individuals to act as mentors does not guarantee the success of a program. An editorial in the *NASSP Practitioner* (1999) contends that even mentors with excellent interpersonal skills, teaching ability and commitment will require training and support to become successful mentors and to fulfill their roles to the best of their ability (*NASSP Practitioner*, 1999). This training must include components that focus on communication skills, expectations of mentors, and dealing with adults.

In their synthesis of the literature on mentoring, Gray and Gray (1985) found that training for mentor teachers should focus on developing and fostering relationships with adults. By receiving effective training in this area, participants are better able to communicate with and, therefore, are better able to assist their protégés. Gray and Gray also proposed that training for mentors should include the examination of case studies in which scenarios are presented that could emerge with novice teachers. Being aware of possibilities enables mentors to be prepared to deal with issues in a more effective way because they have had prior opportunity to examine possible solutions and outcomes with others during their training sessions.

The 1999 editorial in the *NASSP Practitioner* notes that another important aspect of mentor training is developing skills in peer conferencing to allow for the free exchange of dialogue between participants. The rationale underlying this idea is that increased interaction between the partners will result in a higher level of confidence between the two, ultimately leading to maximum benefit for both protégé and mentor. The protégés benefit from being comfortable enough to share their feelings and experiences, while the mentors gain professional growth and satisfaction from helping their protégés and learning from examining their own experiences.

Several other researchers point to the importance of effective communication skills. Ganser (1997) studied thirteen mentor teachers, one mentor school counsellor, thirteen beginning teachers and two librarians from three different school districts. He found that while respondents valued open communication, emphasis must be placed on helping the mentors learn how to offer advice and suggestions without dictating what protégés should

or should not do in their classrooms or during their lessons. Montgomery-Halford (1998) studied a variety of mentoring programs in the United States,and found that participants in mentoring programs felt that the ability to communicate effectively can sometimes mean the difference between allowing the protégé to sink and throwing his or her colleague a "lifeline." Either way, developing effective communication skills is an advantage to all educators regardless of their role as teacher or mentor.

Formal mentoring programs are beneficial to the protégé in many instances. However, mentor teachers also gain a great deal from the relationships they form with beginning teachers (Wollman-Bonilla, 1997). Wollman-Bonilla interviewed nineteen mentor and protégé teachers in a formal mentoring program in Barrington, Rhode Island during the 1994–1995 school year. She found that mentors in some cases might use their experiences to reconsider what they do in their own classrooms, and may even go so far as to change the way they teach.

Wollman-Bonilla (1997) also found that individuals chosen to help ease the way for new teachers are generally chosen because of the characteristics they possess. Being chosen as mentors gives the participants the feeling of being recognized for their leadership ability and expertise. It also allows them the opportunity to develop their expertise further through training activities designed to increase skills in such areas as communication. Further benefits to mentors identified by Wollman-Bonilla include an opportunity to examine their own teaching, evaluation and management techniques when they are asked for advice or guidance from their protégés. Teachers who reflect on their practices will undoubtedly improve upon what they do when they take the time to consciously think about what they

do in their classrooms on a day-to-day basis.

Finally, some research suggests mentors can learn a great deal from their interaction with their protégés. Wollman-Bonilla (1997) found that this learning might be in the form of new curriculum ideas, a "renewal" or "refreshment" and an improvement in interpersonal skills. Teachers who have experience and the willingness to share it, and who choose to serve as mentors often gain from the satisfaction of knowing they have helped shape the career and professional capabilities of their protégés while benefitting both personally and professionally from their relationship.

Through her study of various mentoring programs in the United States, Montgomery-Halford (1998) found one mentor in the California New Teacher Project who felt she had benefited from her relationship with her protégé because she had learned much about new curriculum initiatives.

Mentoring Programs

This section outlines some of the formal mentoring programs initiated by different districts in Canada and the United States. Many of the mentoring programs, particularly those in Ontario, are referred to in the past tense since most of the boards identified no longer exist as separate entities because of recent amalgamation of school boards in that province. Informal mentoring programs were not addressed because of a lack of literature in this area.

Mentoring and induction initiatives generally emerge in two categories: formal and informal (Cole et al., 1995). Informal programs refer to relationships that occur naturally within schools between new teachers and those who have decided to take new teachers

"under their wing" to offer support, usually only when asked to (Huling-Austin, 1990). While these kinds of relationships are encouraged and supported by site administrators in schools, there is usually little or no training offered to participants. Furthermore, there are no formal requirements that the mentor or protégé must fulfil. This vacuum results in a lack of recognition for the mentor and an element of uncertainty for the protégé, who may not know how much s/he can rely on the colleague for support. In one study of a mentoring program in Ontario, Benyon (1990) found that, in some cases, formal mentoring programs allow mentor teachers to be recognized for their commitment and service as a mentor.

In 1988, the Halton Board of Education initiated one of the earliest mentoring programs in Ontario, *Partners in Education*, which paired beginning teachers with experienced mentors. The partners attended sessions sponsored by the board to provide training in ways to deal with issues such as orientation, curriculum and making parental contacts (Stoll, 1991). Data were not provided regarding the success of this program or its duration.

Another mentoring program implemented in Ontario was sponsored by the Carleton Board of Education in conjunction with the University of Ottawa. This program, *Partners in Reflection*, was initiated in 1989. The Carleton project included an expectation that the board would do its part for new teachers and that the Ministry of Education, faculties of education and the teacher federations would participate to better facilitate teacher induction (Carleton Board of Education, 1990). Spence and Hayes (1991) reported that pairs of teachers were provided with release time and brought together monthly to participate in workshops that were mutually supportive. Participants were given further opportunity to reflect together in order to improve their teaching practice during release time, but no

evidence of the success of this program is provided.

In 1998 the Red Deer School District No.104 in Alberta initiated a mentoring program in collaboration with The University of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association. This program supports the mentor-protégé relationship through training and conferences that are held during the year to allow for joint planning and reflection on practices and experiences (Garvey, 1999).

In 1988 the Etobicoke Board of Education developed a mentoring program, *Growing Together: A Mentoring Program*, in which newly hired teachers, when they signed their contracts, were informed of opportunities to be paired with experienced teachers in the school to which they had been assigned. The school board did not offer any formal training to mentor teachers and protégés, and did not provide release time or funding to promote the relationships. Instead, principals in the schools were assigned responsibility for choosing mentor teachers, pairing them with newly hired teachers, and facilitating the mentoring relationships through release time and funding support (Etobicoke Board of Education, 1988).

Varah, Theune, and Parker (1986) report that in the mentoring program which they studied in Wisconsin, mentor teachers had to have at least three to five years of successful teaching experience and were expected to attend training sessions to learn strategies to facilitate the relationship. Incentives to mentor teachers included tuition free graduate courses in mentoring at the sponsoring university.

Montgomery-Halford (1998) describes a mentoring program in one district in Ohio that was supported by stipends of $1000 for mentors and four days of release time for

participants. Under this program, new teachers were also paired with experienced teachers. In this program, both teachers were expected to observe the other teach, and mentors attended initial training sessions to improve skills in dealing with new teachers and the issues they might encounter.

Although the literature on mentoring discusses issues such as mentor characteristics, mentor training, and benefits to participants, there are aspects of mentoring that are not discussed at length. A gap exists in the availability of literature regarding the effectiveness of mentoring with regard to new teacher retention. There is a need for hard data that clearly identify the role mentoring plays in the retention of new teachers.

This chapter reviewed the literature on mentoring in relation to the role of mentoring in the induction of new teachers as well as mentor characteristics, selection and training. A brief description of several mentoring programs was also provided. The research on mentoring shows that with proper mentor selection and training, school boards can in fact help ease the transition into teaching for beginning teachers and, hopefully, influence on the retention rates of beginning teachers. The next chapter describes the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study is an evaluation research study that examined the effectiveness of a formal mentoring program in the retention of new teachers in a district, the ways in which formal mentoring supports new teachers, and the benefits of serving as mentors for experienced teachers. The school board authorized me to study the mentoring program (Appendix A). I was also a participant mentor during the initial year of the program.

Design and Methodology

This study is a qualitative evaluation research study of a mentoring program for new teachers in a school district in Northwestern Ontario. Data were collected through two written surveys (one at the mid-point of the school year, and one at the end of June), informal conversations, and field notes kept by the researcher. Written surveys were chosen in order to elicit candid responses and to provide participants with an opportunity to carefully consider their responses.

The first survey contained ten questions that covered ideas/issues articulated in the literature such as how relationships evolved over the course of the year, positive and negative experiences, and the nature of support given to new teachers. Mid-year surveys were administered at a central location where meetings of mentors and protégés took place. This method of convenience sampling (Patton, 1990) tends to yield an enormous bank of data, but allows for maximum variation (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) in views from a broad

24

range of perspectives. The year-end survey addressed more specific aspects of how the formal mentoring relationship supported the protégés throughout the year, how the mentors benefited from their relationships, and the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Field notes documented the highlights of the conversations and comments made at group meetings and were used to add to the findings during the data analysis. The record of informal conversations between the researcher and participants kept throughout the course of the study allowed for opportunistic sampling (Patton, 1990). These encounters allowed for more intimate sharing of personal experiences and perhaps increased candor and discovery of further themes for analysis. As the researcher and a mentor in this study, I kept a research log of my own experiences throughout the program. In my log, I included a record of activities in which my protégé and I participated, issues we discussed, ways I felt I supported my protégé, and examples of concerns I had about the program. I also recorded the experiences of others in my log as they shared them with me during this study.

Data regarding retention rates for participants in the program were reported to me orally by the school board superintendent, who was responsible for overseeing the mentoring program.

Sample

Respondents invited to participate in this study included protégés, who were beginning or experienced teachers who were new to the district, and veteran teachers with varying years of experience who had been chosen to serve as mentors. Twenty-six mentors and twenty-seven protégés were invited to participate; twenty-three mentors and twenty-three protégés agreed to participate in the study. Questions were tailored toward individuals

based on their role in the program.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to administering the first survey, participants in the mentoring program were invited to participate. To obtain informed consent, I advised respondents about the purpose of the study, risks, and benefits. This procedure was done through an oral presentation by the researcher at a large group meeting where mentors and protégés had gathered in February 2000.

I explained that all research conducted for this study was collected under the guidelines specified by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. Respondents were made aware of the following through a cover letter and consent form (Appendices B & C).

- There are no apparent risks in discussing their experiences or sharing their viewpoints with the researcher.

- Data collected by the researcher will be kept in strict confidence, and names would not appear at any time in drafts or the final version of this study.

- Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

- The researcher will store data securely collected for this research for a period of seven years.

- A report of the research would be available to respondents through the main office of the school board or Lakehead University Faculty of Education Library.

Research Process

Data Collection

Data collection took place during the 1999–2000 school year (Appendix H), and includes written surveys (Appendices D, E, F, G) and informal conversations. Participants in this study were invited to respond to two surveys. The first, designed jointly by the researcher, the Superintendent of Education and the Curriculum Coordinator for the school board was administered in February 2000. The second, designed by the researcher, was administered at the end of the school year.

The initial survey, which took place mid-way through the school year (in February), was carried out jointly by the school board and the researcher. The participation level for this survey was high because all respondents were together in a single location and the survey was presented as an activity to be completed during the day. This survey yielded permission from twenty-three protégés and twenty-three mentors for the researcher to examine their responses.

The year-end written survey was administered in June. The surveys for the year-end collection of data were sent to each of the participants in the program. This stage was accomplished via school board mail to ensure all participants received the surveys. Addressed return envelopes were provided with the survey to promote their return and encourage participation. The participation level for the final survey was fairly low, probably a result of poor timing on the part of the researcher, since June tends to be a very busy time of year for all teachers. In the end, nine of the mentor teachers out of 26 surveys sent (35%) and eight of the protégés out of 26 surveys sent (31%) responded to the final survey.

Data Analysis

The following procedures were used to sort and code data. First, the surveys were read three times so that the researcher might ascertain whether the research questions had been answered and whether anecdotal data might illuminate themes. Secondly, the research questions were listed on chart paper and individual responses to specific questions were placed under appropriate headings. The two surveys completed by participants were not treated independently in terms of the timing of data collection. However, mentor responses were kept independent of protégé responses. Thirdly, data related to Cole, Squire, and Cathers' (1995) categories regarding the nature of support by mentor teachers to protégés were coded:

- curriculum and assessment;

- classroom management;

- motivation and discipline; and

- school and board policies or procedures.

Examples of the responses assigned to each category	
Technical Support	**Examples of Responses**
Curriculum and assessment	■ planning lessons ■ marking papers ■ designing tests ■ using rubrics
Classroom management	■ seating arrangements ■ setting up centres
Motivation and discipline	■ strategies for motivating students ■ classroom behaviour
School, board policies and procedures	■ deadlines for long term plans ■ where to turn for guidance, curriculum materials etc. ■ access to student files

Figure 2: Areas of support provided by mentor teachers.

Fourthly, the researcher sorted the data related to each research question/theme into categories. The dimensions of each theme and examples are illustrated in Figure 3.

Themes/Dimensions of Themes	Examples
Benefits to Mentors ■ Service to the profession ■ Personal affirmation and renewal ■ Development of personal relationships	"giving something back to the profession" "being a mentor teacher has reinforced my love of the profession and renewed my commitment to students" "emphasis on reflective practice" "I made a new friend"
Benefits to Protégés ■ Qualities of mentor teachers ■ Technical support ■ Communication	"my mentor had successful teaching experience" "having a sense of empathy" See Figure 2 "my mentor was willing to listen anytime I needed him" "my mentor listened without passing judgment"
Teacher Retention	School board statistics on retention rates of protégés

FIGURE 3: Themes and examples of data in categories.

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology. Ethical considerations, as well as the methods of data collection and analysis, were discussed. The following chapter describes the findings and interpretation of the data collected on teacher mentoring.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the findings and interpretation related to the study on teacher mentoring. Three themes based on the research questions were identified: benefits to mentors, benefits to protégés, and teacher retention. The first section of the chapter presents the profile of participants and describes the themes. The second section discusses the interpretation of the findings.

Findings

Profile of Participants

Participants who agreed to participate in the study included mentors and protégés, both the elementary and secondary panels. Tables 1 and 2 provides a partial profile of participants as well as their gender and teaching panel. It is important to note that five mid-year surveys received from mentors and four mid-year surveys received from protégés with permission to use had illegible signatures or granted permission to use, but did not contain a signature. As well, one end of year mentor survey and one end of year protégé survey received with permission to use had illegible signatures or granted permission to use, but did not contain a signature.

TABLE 1: Profile of participants in mid-year surveys.

	Male	Female	Elementary	Secondary
Mentors	5	13	11	7
Protégés	6	13	6	13

30

TABLE 2: Profile of participants in year-end surveys.

	Male	Female	Elementary	Secondary
Mentors	2	6	3	5
Protégés	2	5	1	6

Benefits to Mentors

The mentors in this program were located in each of the communities serviced by the school board and ranged in experience from three years of teaching with this board to over twenty years with the districts that were amalgamated to form the current board. Data collected from mentors came from twenty-three mentors who completed the mid-year survey and eight individuals who completed and returned the year-end survey. Responses about their experiences in the mentoring program led to the identification of three separate yet related dimensions of the theme: (1) service to the profession or a feeling of giving something back; (2) personal affirmation and renewal; and (3) development of personal relationships.

Service to the Profession. Several mentors reported a sense of nostalgia whereby having close contact with a new teacher reminded them of their first years of teaching and helped them to remember that new teachers need assistance and support. As one mentor simply wrote, "It reminded me of my first year." Another said being involved in this program as a mentor gave him a "feeling of accomplishment" as he saw the "progress" his protégé was making throughout the year.

When asked how they felt they had benefited from being mentor teachers, many mentors suggested they were proud of the fact that they were able to "give something back

to [their] profession" or that being chosen as mentor teachers "allowed [them] to feel like [they were] making a contribution" to the teaching profession. Others felt they had given something back to the profession in the form of their own creativity. As one mentor stated, "I was able to share my ideas with someone else."

Personal Affirmation and Renewal. When asked about their experiences in the mentoring program and how they felt they had benefited through their participation, mentors made comments that indicated personal affirmation and sense of renewal. For example, one commented, "Being a mentor teacher has reinforced my love of the profession and renewed my commitment to students." Another said, "It has helped me focus on my own teaching style." Still another noted that being a mentor "rekindled [his] thoughts about being a new teacher and re-energized [his] teaching.

Several mentors acknowledged a feeling of pressure or tension that came from opening their classrooms and practices to others' scrutiny. As one mentor stated, it "kept me on my toes—I had to run my classroom as smoothly as she ran hers." Others noted the impact of mentoring on their own practices. For example, one wrote, "It helps [me] to focus on my own teaching style." Another commented that being in this program puts "emphasis on reflective practice." Still others suggested that both partners would become better teachers because "The mentor is forced to think about skills and techniques which have become habits and routines. The mentee is given the benefit of strategies which have withstood the test of time."

Several mentors found that they had learned more about curriculum or assessment either from or because of their protégés. One mentor teacher stated, I "boned up on the

new curriculum and rubrics."

One of the benefits of the program was having professional development days in which partners were able to select activities from which they might benefit. As a mentor, I took advantage of attending workshops on leadership that my colleagues were not able to attend because they did not have days available to do so. This benefit provided participants with opportunities for professional growth.

Development of Personal Relationships. Although the mentors responded primarily to questions about the benefits they realized from this program from a professional perspective, several indicated they had benefited in a personal sense as well. These mentors commented that they were able to develop personal friendships that extended beyond the collegial relationship. For example, several mentors made the following statements:

- I got acquainted with a great person...always a bonus.

- I made a new friend.

- I have developed a close relationship with a colleague that will last for years to come.

Benefits to Protégés

The protégés in this program included beginning teachers with little or no experience; experienced teachers who were new to Northwestern Ontario; and seasoned teachers from the board who were returning to the classroom after an absence or leave. The data collected from the protégés came from twenty-three protégés out of twenty-seven who were invited to participate and responded to the mid-year survey and eight out of twenty-seven who responded to the year-end survey.

There are three dimensions related to the theme of benefits to protégés: (1) the qualities

of mentor teachers; (2) technical support based on Cole's et al. (1995) research into methods of supporting protégés; and (3) communication. Each of these dimensions is discussed below.

Qualities of Mentor Teachers. One of the most important features of the mentoring program was the invitation that the board extended to teachers to act as mentors and the subsequent selection of the teachers who served as mentors by a panel of board administration and curriculum coordinators. When asked what qualities they felt mentors should possess, protégés listed characteristics they felt were important. Protégés stated that teachers who are selected to serve as mentors should have "good listening skills," "a sense of empathy," and be "non-judgmental." Several protégés said they needed someone who was "willing and able to give time and energy to another teacher."

Other protégés in this program perceived that it was important that their mentors "had successful teaching experiences" so they could benefit from their mentors' knowledge of curriculum and teaching methodologies.

Technical Support. Technical support provided to beginning teachers by the mentors in this program is related directly to teaching in the classroom on a daily basis. The categories described below are Cole's et al. (1995) and are based on their research into mentoring.

Curriculum and assessment. Mentors and protégés alike agreed that it was critical for the protégés to have support with curriculum and assessment to enable them to make it through the first year. Many participants indicated they assisted or had been assisted with some of the more routine tasks such as "marking" and "report card advice" as well as some

of the more challenging tasks such as creating "Individual Education Plans" for students with learning disabilities, and providing suggestions for classroom planning and evaluation techniques. As one beginning teacher observed, this sharing meant "the difference between sleepless nights of worrying and planning and getting a restful night of sleep." One mentor suggested that providing support with "planning for courses" was important for teachers at the high school level.

Another mentor suggested that mentors could help to "facilitate visits outside the school" with staff they knew in other schools within the district, enabling beginning teachers an opportunity to tap into further sources of curriculum materials and assessment ideas. Some mentor teachers assisted their protégés by arranging for visitations with other teachers they knew within the district. One protégé stated that she was able to "gain access to certain teachers' rooms while they taught" because "my mentor suggested teachers" I should visit. Such visits were especially useful for high school teachers in the communities within the district where they might be the only teacher teaching a particular subject because each community has only one high school. Without the relationship that existed between mentors and protégés, these learning opportunities may not have existed because the protégé would not have known whom to contact to arrange such a visit.

Mentors also assisted protégés with locating and creating resources. For example, one mentor observed that he helped his protégé by "finding and creating French resources." This is a challenge for experienced teachers, and presents difficulties to beginning teachers who may be teaching as many as seven or eight different classes on a daily rotation.

Several protégés felt their mentors had been instrumental in helping them "get certain

resources" or in being a "good source of resources." Several mentioned that mentors advised them about "curriculum programs such as *Reading Recovery* etc." and that their mentors were "a link to subject/program ideas and support."

Classroom management. Many of the protégés indicated they were grateful to their mentors for providing useful strategies for dealing with classroom management issues such as organization, timing of lessons, and workload for students. One protégé stated that her mentor helped her to "figure out how much time [her] students need to complete a task." A mentor suggested he helped his protégé by "showing general routines" that need to be followed on a daily basis to make sure all "the forms and paperwork are completed." Another said she was able to assist her protégé by making suggestions to help her "manage [her] time more effectively." One protégé felt that being able to turn to someone in the building who knows these aspects of the school climate can help a new teacher have "small issues resolved quickly so that they don't mushroom into large ones."

Interactions allowed both partners to reflect on what worked and what didn't work in their classrooms throughout the year. Having an opportunity to reflect upon and analyze personal practice is an advantage for both mentor and protégé that may not have existed without the availability of time to share experiences with someone else who may be experiencing similar situations in another setting. One pair of participants suggested that, although they had not taken many days off together, they did "take the opportunity to visit each other's classrooms." They both agreed that it was difficult to be honest about what they had observed, but felt that, because they knew and were comfortable with one another, they were able to share suggestions for improvement in classroom management.

Motivation and discipline. Student motivation and discipline did not emerge as a common difficulty experienced by protégés, although several protégés commented that their mentors were able to give them advice about "discipline matters" or that they offered "discipline tips" to help them deal with particularly difficult students. One of the protégés suggested that because her mentor had taught a certain student in the past, they were able to share strategies that had been effective previously in motivating the student. Another said that he talked with his mentor from time to time about discipline problems they had encountered and how they dealt with them.

School and board policies and procedures. Another area of support provided by mentors was in the area of school and board "politics." Because departments, schools, and districts have their own cultures, new teachers who are unaware of the climate in their staff rooms, departments, or boards run the risk of not knowing the "ins and outs" of a particular culture. Some of the protégés believed their mentors helped them by "offering knowledge about the 'system'" as it functions and by sharing "community and board contacts" throughout the year, especially at key times such as the end of reporting periods when electronic "report cards need to be completed" or when "forms need to be filled out." Several mentors also commented that offering "an orientation to the school" and/or "introduction to the 'key' people in the board office" were among the useful strategies that made protégés' lives much easier during their first year with the board.

Protégés and mentors agreed that having someone who is charged with helping the beginning teacher survive those first months of school was not only helpful, but in some cases, lifesaving. Protégés benefited from having mentor teachers who could share with

them, for example, how long or short-term plans must be completed in their department as well as dates when they were due. Mentors also helped new teachers learn about teaching contracts, medical leave plans, and dental and medical benefits available.

Communication. When protégés were asked to list the most important ways their mentors supported them, all protégés indicated that communication was important to them and that they benefited from simply having someone to talk to. Several respondents said they appreciated having someone to "confide in" and someone who "always asks how we are doing and if they can help in any way." Many of the mentors also said that one of the most important ways they supported their protégés was to listen to them when they needed someone to talk to.

Several mentors said that, in addition to listening, it was important that mentors "provide positive indirect criticism" or be "someone to talk to who is neutral." Additionally, many of the protégés commented they felt another way their mentors had supported them was by offering emotional support when they were feeling low or were experiencing difficulties in class or with students. Protégés appreciated the guidance and advice they were given that was based on their mentors' experience. This advice came in the form of "giving suggestions," "offering direction," or "being someone to help, if needed." One participant appreciated her mentor's ability to "quietly offer suggestions" while another felt that having someone available to "provide guidance with important events or dates" was very important. By the end of the year, all protégés noted that their mentors had supported them at some point throughout the year.

Furthermore, many of the protégés felt that advice they received from their mentors

concerning how to deal with parents who wanted information about assessment techniques, school administration and their expectations, and other teachers was invaluable during their first year with the board.

Teacher Retention

The primary purpose of the mentoring program initiated by the school board was to attract and retain new teachers while providing beginning teachers with support during their first year of teaching. Of the twenty-seven new teachers who chose to participate in the mentoring program, all twenty-six made the decision to continue teaching with the board the following year. This figure represents a 96% retention rate for new teachers.

Participants in the program were asked to identify concerns or make recommendations they thought would strengthen the program. These are discussed below.

Concerns. Overall, participants in the mentoring program expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their experience. However, there were some difficulties experienced by participants in this program. Because of the huge geographic area covered by the amalgamated school board, several of the pairs were teachers who lived and taught in different communities. This geographic separation meant having to bridge a distance of more than two hundred kilometers for some partnerships. The distance between some of the communities combined with the condition of highways in Northwestern Ontario during the winter months made travel not only difficult for some, but also dangerous. In these instances, participants reported communicating through school board mail services, long distance telephone calls, and electronic mail.

Another issue that posed problems for some partnerships was that their grade and

school assignments were not the same. Some partnerships were composed of elementary and secondary teachers. Several respondents suggested that their partnership could have been more helpful to the protégé if he or she had been placed in the same school and were teaching the same grade or at least in the same panel.

When asked whether they would serve as mentor teachers again, most of the mentors said they would. The mentors who expressed concerns about participating again cited the issue of proximity to their protégé as hindering their further participation. One mentor said she would mentor again, but "only if [her] protégé is in the same community as me."

Recommendations. Despite the positive experiences had by participants, several respondents made recommendations to help improve the mentoring program. Two suggestions were logistical in nature: the matching of mentors and protégés; and the location of mentor and protégé pairings. One protégé wrote that he felt the mentor and protégé should be "in the same community" so travel was not necessary, "in the same school" so the mentor could be more accessible, and "in the same subject area" so the mentor could understand and relate to curriculum and discipline issues. This comment relates to the matching of elementary with elementary and secondary with secondary teachers, which one participant felt was "more important than having your mentor in the same geographical area."

Another recommendation from the participants in this program was that it is very important to educate all staff and the public regarding the purpose of the mentoring program. One of the protégés noted that we need to work on the "promotion of positive factors of [this] program to staff and public" so that all stakeholders understand the

importance and purpose of the mentoring program. One mentor wrote, "The program is excellent, but many [fellow staff members] were bitter [because they, too,] mentor on a daily basis" and do not receive time off or formal recognition for their efforts.

Interpretation

The purpose of this evaluation study was to examine the effectiveness of a mentoring program initiated by a school district in Northwestern Ontario to promote the retention of teachers who were new to the district. As described in Chapter 1, the board developed a program to train mentors and protégés with its partners, the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario College of Teachers. Experienced teachers across the district were invited to indicate their willingness to act as mentors. From a list of seventy-six volunteers, thirty experienced educators were selected to mentor protégés.

The mentors met for professional development sessions in May and June of the year prior to the protégés beginning their appointments the subsequent September. The program was theoretically based; it drew on the literature on mentoring to provide mentors with knowledge and skills to enable them to support their protégés. In August, mentors and protégés were brought together for in-service and the opportunity to meet one another. Mentors and protégés were invited indicate the names of three individuals with whom they believed they could work. A board team then matched the mentors and protégés. Thus the board launched the program with mentors who had signalled a willingness to participate and protégés who had choice in selecting partners. This strategy provided a sense of ownership to the teams of mentors and protégés.

The district funded professional development sessions in February and at the end of the

school year. In addition, the district provided funding in the form of fifteen professional days and an allowance of $250 per team to enable teams to select days, activities, and resources that were most valuable to meet the particular needs of individual teams.

Thus, in developing the mentoring program, the district recognized the importance of induction in the retention of new teachers (Gonzales & Sosa, 1995; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1999), the value of a formal mentoring program (Cole & Watson, 1985; Gray & Gray, 1985; Theis-Sprinthall & Gerler, 1990), and adequate financial support (Fullan, 1992; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998).

In evaluating the effectiveness of the mentoring program, this study focused on three key facets: benefits to mentors, benefits to protégés, and the rate of teacher retention following the year of implementation. These facets formed the basis of the research questions and served as the themes in analysis of data. Responses by mentors about the benefits they enjoyed included service to the profession or giving something back; personal affirmation and renewal; and development of personal relationships.

The ability to support formally someone just entering the teaching profession gave some mentors a "feeling of accomplishment" to "give something back to [the] profession," and that being mentor teachers allowed them to derive a sense of satisfaction in that they were helping someone succeed. This feeling of accomplishment was evident in responses from mentors who believed that their contributions as a mentor were important to the protégé, the school, and the school district. These findings are consistent with the findings of Wollman-Bonilla (1997), who found that the feeling of worth that results from being selected as a mentor is an important benefit for mentor teachers.

Mentors also experienced feelings of personal affirmation and renewal in their ongoing relationships with protégés. As one mentor said, "Being a mentor teacher has reinforced my love of the profession and renewed my commitment to students." In terms of renewal, mentors commented on their increased awareness and reflection of their own practices and current curriculum guidelines, as well as their own personal professional development in the areas of curriculum and assessment.

The responses cited by protégés on the multiple ways in which mentors offered technical support helps us to understand more clearly why mentors experience renewal. They worked closely with their protégés on tasks and challenges related to curriculum and assessment (i.e., preparing courses, lessons, grading, report cards, and accessing resources) and classroom management (i.e., time management, pacing of lessons, and routines).

While the literature on mentoring focuses primarily on the protégés, several researchers have reported on similar benefits to mentors. Wollman-Bonilla (1997) found that mentors' learning might take the form of new curriculum ideas and increased reflective practice. Montgomery-Halford (1998) cited an example of a mentor in her study who noted that one of the most important benefits she gained had been the opportunity to learn about new curriculum initiatives.

One of the benefits identified by the mentors in this program that is not prevalent in the literature on mentoring was that of forming personal relationships. Some of the mentors observed that they had developed a personal relationship with someone new that extended outside the school setting, and felt that this aspect of the program was a benefit to their personal as well as professional lives.

There were three dimensions related to the theme of benefits to protégés in this program: (1) the qualities of mentor teachers; (2) technical support received, based on Cole's et al. (1995) areas of support for beginning teachers; and (3) communication.

The protégés surveyed indicated they had benefited from the experiences of their mentor teachers. The selection of mentors with a variety of teaching experiences was important to the success of the relationships because experienced teachers could share knowledge of curriculum ideas and teaching methodologies. This finding is supported by the findings of Daganais (1997), who discovered that among the most important mentor qualities was that of successful teaching experience at several grade levels.

The protégés in this program benefited from their mentor teachers' willingness to share their knowledge. Protégés noted that they received valuable advice in many areas (i.e., classroom management, dealing with parents, curriculum, lesson planning, and student evaluation). This finding is consistent with previous research by Kilcher (1991), who stated that the most effective mentor teachers were those who were willing and able to offer support and guidance on an ongoing basis, and who could offer additional support when a beginning teacher might be experiencing difficulty.

All the protégés indicated they had realized benefits from being involved in this program. They reported that their mentors had supported them in one way or another, and that having a mentor when they began or resumed their teaching careers in Northwestern Ontario made that transition much easier to manage. Previous researchers have identified the importance of supporting beginning teachers. Gray and Gray (1985) report that beginning teachers need to have someone they can look up to and can view as a role model.

Varah, Theune and Parker (1986) support this notion by advocating the importance of beginning teachers having "model" teachers they can look to for inspiration and guidance.

Beginning teachers need support with the technical aspects of teaching. In this study, protégés reported these technical were made easier to manage from having mentor teachers who could share their experience and knowledge. Beginning teachers benefited from this experience when it came to carrying out the daily routines and activities that are associated with teaching at both elementary and secondary school levels. The support beginning teachers received from their mentors in this program was consistent with the suggestions for support made by Cole et al. (1995), who provide a framework for effective mentoring programs. Technical support provided by mentor teachers is important to protégés, but another benefit identified by protégés in this program is that of communication.

Responses about ways protégés are supported by mentors indicate that beginning teachers need to know they have a specific person with whom they can communicate. They expressed a need to feel they have someone whom they can go to with concerns, while at the same time knowing their feelings, hardships, and difficulties will be kept in confidence and that they will not be judged because of their lack of experience. The knowledge that someone is always going to be there for a beginning teacher to turn to or to share his or her thoughts and emotions with is obviously valuable. One protégé stated that having someone to "help when asked" was important to him as he embarked upon his career. Protégés suggested that having a mentor meant they had someone who could be counted on to reassure them throughout the year, during both successful and challenging times alike. The importance of the ability of mentors to communicate effectively with their protégés is

supported by Kilcher (1991) and Cole et al. (1995), who observe that mentors must possess this skill, as well as the ability to listen without passing judgment or trying to force change on others. As well as encouraging professional development of staff and easing the way into teaching for beginning teachers, school districts undertake mentoring programs to increase the retention rates of new teachers.

The school district stated from the start that one of the goals of the mentoring program was to retain the new teachers it hired. The statistics provided by the school district indicate that 96% of beginning teachers who participated in this program chose to continue teaching with the same board the following year. When compared to retention rates in some districts in Wisconsin of 50% as identified by Varah, Theune, and Parker (1986) and 73.5% identified by Huling-Austin (1990), a 96% retention rate is very high and has implications for the school district in that it shows the program was effective in retaining their new teachers.

This chapter described the findings of the study and the interpretation. The final chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is a qualitative evaluation research study that examined the effectiveness of a formal mentoring program in Northwestern Ontario in teacher retention and the benefits to mentors and protégés. Data were collected during the 1999-2000 school year, which was the first year of the program. Participants included new teachers who were beginning their careers or returning to the teaching profession after an absence for various reasons and experienced teachers who served as their mentors. Data were collected through two written surveys. The sections below present the conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions

Three themes based on the research questions were identified: benefits to mentor teachers, benefits to protégés, and teacher retention. Within the third theme, concerns identified by participants and recommendations for improving the mentoring program were presented.

Mentor teachers reported that they benefited from the program in two ways. They believed that their participation was a contribution to the profession and that they experienced professional renewal.

Having the opportunity to develop both professional as well as personal relationships was also important to the mentor teachers who participated in this study. Protégés observed that key qualities of mentor teachers included effective listening skills, empathy, the ability

47

to support them without being judgmental and successful teaching experience. Thus, ability to communicate was a key dimension of mentoring support.

Protégés in this study also benefited from their participation. They were assisted by mentors in technical aspects of teaching: curriculum and assessment, classroom management, motivation and discipline, school and board policies and procedures.

If one of the goals of mentoring programs is to ensure that teachers who begin to teach continue to do so, this program has met that goal. Ninety-six per cent of the beginning teachers who participated in this program chose to continue teaching with the school board studied. This figure suggests that, from a district perspective, this program was a success. One of the implications is that the board did not have to undertake a major recruitment initiative to replace existing teaching positions the following year.

The program has been successful not only in the district, but also in the selection of effective mentors, and in the provision of support to new teachers. Both mentors and protégés experienced satisfaction from participation in the program.

The findings of this study also emphasize the importance of formal mentoring programs for other school districts. As school boards across the province face the reality of the looming teacher shortage, they must have ways of attracting teachers to and keeping them in their districts. Other school districts should be given an opportunity to examine the model for mentoring new teachers that has been adopted by the school district studied. This process can be achieved through careful dissemination of results by the school board through newsletters, presentations at conferences, and sharing of experiences by participants in the program with school board officials from other districts.

Participating in a formal mentoring program offers beginning teachers an opportunity to have the support they need as they enter the teaching profession and also gives them an opportunity to develop formal relationships that extend outside the school. Teachers who are formally supported, encouraged, and reassured as they enter their teaching career obviously stand a much better chance of making it through that first, often difficult year of teaching. Those who serve as mentors have an opportunity to share their talents, experience and wisdom with someone new and ultimately impact positively on the lives of students for many years to come.

As beginning teachers come to the realization that demand for their service is increasing, they recognize that school districts must provide incentives to attract quality teachers to their jurisdictions. A formal mentoring program is one example of an incentive that may attract new teachers to a district as well as provide them with support and guidance many beginning teachers require during their first months of teaching.

Recommendations

It is recommended that

1. *the board consider participants' concerns and recommendations about pairing and placements of mentors and protégés to enhance the benefits of the program.*

2. *the board continue the mentoring program as an ongoing strategy to support the professional development of new teachers and the professional renewal of mentoring teachers.*

3. *the board disseminate the findings of this evaluation study on its mentoring program so*

that other school districts may benefit from the results as they develop similar programs for beginning teachers.

4. *the board, and other boards which develop mentoring programs, conduct evaluation research studies which document the nature of the programs, selection processes of mentors, the experiences of the partners, the concerns and professional development of protégés, benefits to both parties, and the impact on teacher retention, and student learning.*

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APPENDIX A

School District Consent Forms

Consent Form

Keewatin-Patricia District School Board

This will confirm that Larry Hope has permission of the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board to use the data collected from a written survey completed on February 3, 2000 by participants in the board's mentoring program.

I recognize that Larry Hope is conducting research into the benefits of formal mentoring for new and experienced teachers as a thesis to be submitted to Lakehead University to qualify for the degree of Master of Education. The data collected from participants will also be used to report on the effectiveness the mentoring program initiated by the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board during the 1999 –2000 school year.

_____
Signature

_____ Superintendent of Education _____
Position

_____ April 17, 2000 _____
Date

955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada P7B 5E1

Faculty of Education
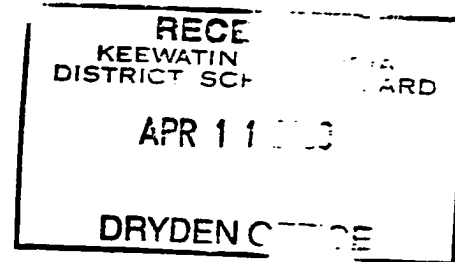
Larry Hope
General Delivery,
Longbow Lake, ON
P0X 1H0

Janet Wilkinson, Superintendent
Keewatin-Patricia District School Board
79 Casimir Ave,
Dryden, ON
P8N 2Z6

Dear Janet

As you are aware, I am conducting an evaluation study into the benefits of mentoring for both beginning and experienced teachers within the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board as a thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Education.
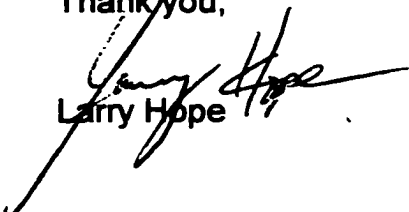
I am writing to obtain permission to have access to the written survey completed by participants in a workshop put on by the board in Dryden on February 3, 2000. While attending this workshop, I described my research and asked participants for permission to view their surveys to assist me with my work.

Those participants who wished to share their experiences with me signed a consent form indicating their preference. However, as per guidelines established by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board, I am writing to ask you to confirm that the school board has also given me permission to use the information collected to assist me in my study.

The only action I ask of you is that you sign the consent form included to indicate the board has given me permission to use the information collected in a survey completed by participants on February 3, 2000. Please return the consent to me in the addressed envelope included with this letter.

If you have any questions about my study, please contact me at (807) 548-7537 or (807) 547-2292. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Mary Clare Courtland can also be contacted at (807) 343-8696 or email at mccourtl@mercury.lakeheadu.ca if you have any questions about the research being conducted.

Thank you,

Larry Hope

955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada P7B 5E1

Graduate Studies and Research
Telephone (807) 343-8785 / 343-8283
Fax (807) 346-7749 / 343-8075

23 May 2000

Mr. Larry Hope
Faculty of Education
Lakehead University
THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO
P7B 5E1

Dear Mr. Hope:

Based on the recommendation of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project entitled: THE EFFECT OF A FORMAL MENTORING PROGRAM ON TEACHER RETENTION AND BENEFITS TO PROTÉGÉ AND MENTORS.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Maundrell
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Board

/lw

cc: Dr. M.C. Courtland, Supervisor

APPENDIX B

Cover Letter

Dear Mentors and Protégés:

This year you are participating in a Mentoring Program established by the board. I am a graduate student at Lakehead University and am conducting an evaluation study of the program for my thesis. I am particularly interested in examining how mentoring supports new teachers and the benefits of being a mentor for experienced teachers. My supervisor for the study is Dr. Mary Clare Courtland of Lakehead University.

The findings from the study will provide valuable information to the board and will contribute to the literature on mentoring. I request your participation in the study. Through your participation in the research, you will help to identify ways mentoring supports new teachers and what the benefits to experienced teachers are from being involved in such a program. You would be asked to participate in one or more of the following activities:

1) **An audio taped focus group interview.**
   This will require a time commitment of approximately 1–1 ½ hours.

2) **A written survey in early February during a large group meeting.** This will require a time commitment of about 30 minutes.

3) **A written survey near the end of the school year.** This will require a time commitment of approximately 30 minutes.

4) **Informal one-on-one or small group conversations with the researcher** that will occur as time permits during the data collection period.

The research is consistent with the ethics guidelines established by Lakehead University. As a participant, it is important that you understand the following:

- There are no risks involved in your participation in the study
- You may withdraw at any time
- Feedback will be kept in confidence
- Names will not be used at any time during the research or reporting period
- Data collected will be stored securely by Larry Hope for a period of seven years
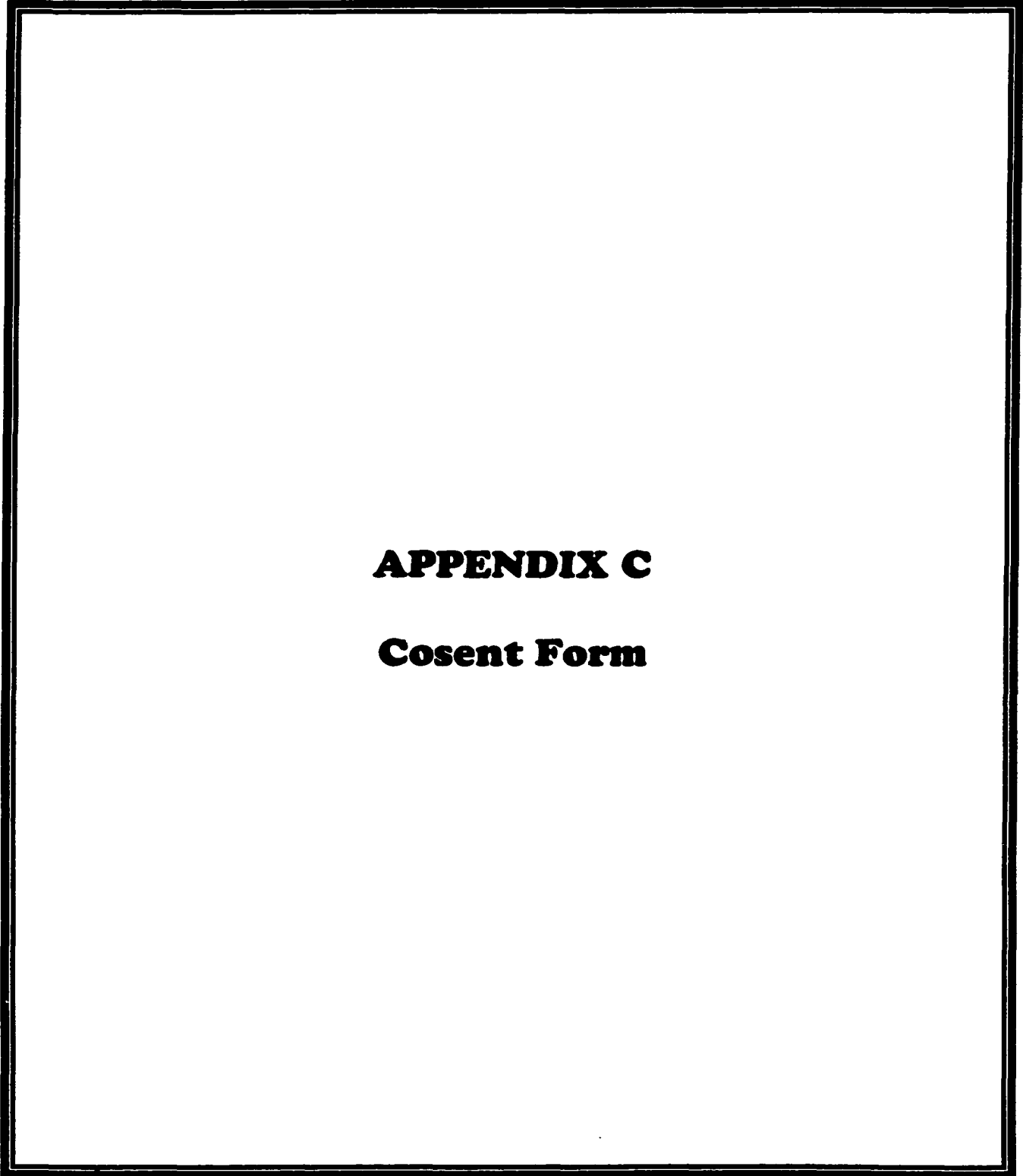
I look forward to your participation in this research. If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact me at any time at 807-548-7537 (home) or 807-547-2292 (work) or email at larry.hope@kenora.kpdsb.on.ca. You may contact Dr. Courtland at 807-343-8696 or email at mccourtl@mercury.lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you,

Larry Hope

APPENDIX C

Cosent Form

Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

Consent Form

I have read the letter describing Larry Hope's study on mentoring. I understand the following:

- There are no risks involved in my participation in the study.

- I may withdraw at any time.

- My responses will be held in strict confidence.

- My name will not be used at any time during the research period or in the report.

- Data collected will be securely stored by Larry Hope for a period of seven years.

Reports of the research will be available to me through the school board office or Lakehead University Faculty of Education Library.

- -

I agree / do not agree (CIRCLE ONE) to participate in the study.

_____

Signature of Participant

APPENDIX D

Mid-Year Mentor Survey

MENTORS

Survey Questions

1) Explain what caused you to want to become a mentor teacher.

2) What qualities do you think mentor teachers should possess?

3) What is your personal vision of the role of mentor teachers?

4) What value did the training sessions hold for participants in this program?

5) Based on your experience, what do you think the benefits to participants in this program are?

6) Outline what you think the downfalls of this program are.

7) What do you feel are the most important ways mentors support new teachers? (in order)

8) In your opinion, what conditions contributed to the success or failure of this program?

9) What do you think the implications for the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board are as a result of this program?

10) If I had been with you and your protégé on a typical release day, what would I have witnessed?

APPENDIX E

Mid-Year Protégé Survey

PROTÉGÉS

Survey Questions

1) What caused you to come to the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board?

2) What qualities do you think mentor teachers should possess?

3) What do you perceive to be the role of mentors?

4) What value did the training sessions hold for participants in this program?

5) Based on you experience, what do you think the benefits to participants in this program are? Outline what you think the downfalls of this program are.

6) What do you feel are the most important ways mentors support new teachers? (in order)

7) In your opinion, what conditions contributed to the success or failure of this program?

8) What do you think the implications for the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board are as a result of this program?

9) If I had been with you and your mentor teacher on a typical release day, what would I have witnessed?

10) How do you feel about this program?

APPENDIX F

Year-End Mentor Survey

MENTORS

Survey Questions

1) In what ways did you support your protégé?

2) How did you benefit personally and professionally from the relationship?

3) What strategies initiated by the board were of most value to you in developing the mentor/protégé relationship?

4) What concerns or issues do you have with this program?

5) What recommendations would you make to improve the mentoring program?

6) Would you serve as a mentor teacher again?

APPENDIX G

Year-End Protégé Survey

PROTÉGÉS

Survey Questions

1) In what ways did your mentor support you this year?

2) How did you benefit personally and professionally from the relationship?

3) What strategies initiated by the board were of most value to you in developing the mentor/protégé relationship?

4) What concerns or issues do you have with this program?

5) What recommendations would you make to improve the mentoring program?