

Forces Affecting Beginning Teacher/Mentor Relationships  
in a Large Suburban School System

by

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(ABSTRACT)

According to the U. S. Department of Education (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996), U.S. public schools will hire an estimated two million teachers within the decade. The experience of the beginning teacher is a stressful one with more than 40% of new teachers choosing to leave the profession during the first three years. One promising practice to address this problem is mentoring, an expert teacher helping the beginner one-on-one. The heart of mentoring is the mentor/mentee relationship. This study investigated the nature of the beginning teacher/mentor relationship and the forces that affected that relationship. The methodology was a cross-case analysis of three pairs of mentor/mentees at the elementary level. The data were collected from focus groups, teacher interviews, observations, email responses, and document review. Data were analyzed using a constant comparative method examining emerging themes across all three cases. Trustworthiness of the research was fostered through multiple sources of data, practice interviews, oversight by peers and committee, participant review, and description of themes in the participants' own words. The data revealed that the mentor/mentee pairs developed very strong relationships grounded on reassurance, collaboration, reciprocity, friendship, problem solving, multi-layered support, and informal structures for getting together. Positive forces affecting the relationships included personality of the participants, perception of mentor role, closeness of age, proximity of classrooms, and common teaching assignment. Time constraints acted as a negative force that presented many challenges addressed by mentors and their mentees in very unique ways.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to teachers everywhere  
who make a real difference  
in the lives of children

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Family and friends who have helped me throughout this process are treasured jewels. I would like to cite my parents for instilling in me a love of learning that I have carried throughout my life. I would also like to cite my husband who has given faithfully of his love, time, and support for this endeavor and to my children for their encouragement.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM.....</b>	<b>1</b>
CONTEXT OF THE STUDY .....	1
The Need.....	1
Promising Solutions .....	2
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	3
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY .....	3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	4
DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	4
SUMMARY .....	5
<b>CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>6</b>
STAGES OF TEACHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT .....	6
STAFF DEVELOPMENT BEST PRACTICES.....	8
UNIQUE NEEDS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS .....	9
THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL.....	10
Isolation.....	10
Collaboration.....	11
MENTORING .....	11
MENTOR/MENTEE RELATIONSHIPS .....	12
Mentoring Relationships in Business .....	12
Mentoring Relationships in School .....	13
MENTOR PROGRAM VARIABLES.....	13
SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT VARIABLES .....	14
Selection/Matching of Mentor.....	14
Proximity.....	14
Resources .....	14
Role of the Principal.....	14
Time for Collaboration.....	15
PARTICIPANT PROFILE VARIABLES.....	15
Needs .....	15
Benefits .....	16
Role Definition.....	16
Mentor Supervision Skills.....	17
Conflict Resolution Skills .....	17
SUMMARY .....	17
<b>CHAPTER 3 THE METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>18</b>
THE SETTING.....	18
The School System.....	18
The Mentor Program.....	18
THE PARTICIPANTS.....	19
Criteria for Selection.....	20
Process for Selection.....	20
INSTRUMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION .....	21
Focus Group.....	21
Interviews.....	21
Email Responses .....	22
Observations.....	22
Review of Documents .....	22
Fieldwork Journal.....	22
ANALYTIC PROCEDURES .....	23
Preparation of Documents.....	23

Data Analysis .....	24
TRUSTWORTHINESS .....	25
<b>CHAPTER 4 THE RESULTS.....</b>	<b>27</b>
CASE 1 – RUTH AND KAREN .....	27
The School .....	27
The Mentor and Mentee (Ruth and Karen) .....	28
Preparation for Teaching .....	29
Beginning Teaching .....	30
Mentoring.....	30
The Relationship .....	33
Factors in the Relationship .....	34
Support from Others.....	36
The Future .....	36
CASE 2 – KATHERINE AND LAURA .....	37
The Schools.....	37
The Mentor and Mentee (Katherine and Laura) .....	38
Preparation for Teaching .....	39
Beginning Teaching .....	40
Mentoring.....	40
Working Together .....	41
The Relationship .....	44
Factors in the Relationship .....	45
Support From Others.....	46
The Future .....	46
CASE 3 - LYDIA AND REBECCA.....	46
The School .....	46
The Mentor and Mentee (Lydia and Rebecca) .....	47
Preparation for Teaching .....	49
Beginning Teaching .....	50
Mentoring.....	50
Working Together .....	51
The Relationship .....	54
Factors in the Relationship .....	56
Support from Others.....	57
The Future .....	57
CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS.....	57
The Nature of the Mentor/Mentee Relationship.....	57
Forces That Affect the Relationship and Their Impact.....	64
Conclusion .....	71
<b>CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>72</b>
SUMMARY DISCUSSION .....	72
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.....	73
Selection and Matching of Mentor.....	73
Role of Mentor .....	74
Time for Collaboration.....	74
Beginning Teacher Needs .....	75
A MODEL CASE.....	75
FURTHER RESEARCH .....	77
REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCHER .....	78
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>APPENDIX A DOMAINS AND DESCRIPTIONS.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>FORCES AFFECTING BEGINNING TEACHER/MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS.....</b>	<b>84</b>

<b>APPENDIX B PHASES OF TEACHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>APPENDIX C RESEARCH ON THE NEEDS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>APPENDIX D RESEARCH ON DOMAINS AFFECTING THE BEGINNING .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>TEACHER/MENTOR RELATIONSHIP.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>APPENDIX E CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF MENTORS .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>APPENDIX F PROCESS FOR THE SELECTION OF MENTORS .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>APPENDIX G BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>APPENDIX H FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>APPENDIX I FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>APPENDIX J MENTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>APPENDIX K MENTEE INTERVIEW GUIDE .....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>APPENDIX L MENTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>APPENDIX M MENTEE INTERVIEW GUIDE.....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>APPENDIX N EMAIL RESPONSES.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>APPENDIX O OBSERVATION GUIDE.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>APPENDIX P DEFINITION OF THEMES .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>APPENDIX Q CITATIONS FROM THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS FOR .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>THEMES NATURE OF MENTOR/MENTEE RELATIONSHIP .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>APPENDIX R TYPES OF MENTOR ASSISTANCE CITED IN INTERVIEWS.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>APPENDIX S RELATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEMES.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>VITA.....</b>	<b>114</b>

## TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Forces affecting the beginning teacher/mentor relationship .....	4
Figure 2 Phases of first year teachers' attitudes toward teaching (Moir, 1991) .....	8

## CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM

Cheryl Rivera is a new teacher about to complete her first year of teaching in an urban elementary school. She has a class of 30 fifth graders and has experienced periods of frustration and despair as she tries to cope with classroom discipline and lesson plans. Cheryl loves and cares for her students, but she has decided to leave the field of teaching for a higher paying job in private industry. While this scenario is fictitious, it is all too true as it plays out throughout the United States. The attrition rate among teachers is highest during the first three years of teaching. Combine this with an overwhelming need for new teachers during the next decade and there are some very serious implications.

The reform movement of the last decade cannot succeed unless it attends to the improvement of teaching. If we pay attention to supporting knowledgeable [beginning] teachers who work in productive schools, American education need suffer through no more dead-end reforms. (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996, p. iii)

### Context of the Study

How best to support beginning teachers is an area ripe for research. Several factors bring this issue to the forefront: (a) the tremendous need for new teachers as a result of increasing teacher retirements, student growth, and state mandates for lower class sizes; (b) alternative teacher preparation programs that often leave new teachers unprepared; and (c) teacher attrition which is the highest during the first three years of teaching. A look in depth at these issues will help to understand the magnitude of the problem and some of the possible solutions.

### *The Need*

School systems all across the country are struggling to fill teaching vacancies. Newspapers routinely report the competition among jurisdictions to attract competent teachers through the use of incentives and higher salaries. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) indicated that, according to the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. public schools will need to hire an estimated two million teachers in the next decade. California alone is expected to need 300,000 new teachers in that time frame. According to Wilkins (1998), the Commonwealth of Virginia will need 8,000 new teachers by the year 2014.

Several factors interact to set the stage for this problem: increasing student population and exiting of veteran teachers. The U.S. Census Bureau projections (from 1990 to 2005) showed a 15% population increase with the elementary school population increasing by 28% during that time frame (Pipho, 1998). Just as new students are arriving, record numbers of teachers will be leaving the public schools during the next few years to retire or change careers. Darling-Hammond (1997) calls this the "graying" of the teaching force. The average age of teachers in the United States rose from 40 to 43 during the last decade. And as these teachers leave, there is a smaller pool of available teachers due to declining numbers of education majors in our colleges and universities (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Just as there is a growing need for many new teachers, there is also an overwhelming need to keep these teachers once hired. Unfortunately, teacher attrition is highest during the first three years of teaching as evidenced by these alarming statistics. Schlechty and Vance (1983) reported that nationally approximately 15% of new teachers leave after the first year of teaching (compared to 6% overall), 15% leave after the second year, and 10% exit after the third year. Ingersoll (2002) corroborated these statistics by stating that as many as 39% of newly trained

teachers leave within the first five years. According to Ingersoll the demand for new teachers is due to pre-retirement drop out and not student growth or teacher retirement. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) estimated that 75% of all students who begin teacher preparation programs will leave the field of teaching either during preservice or within the first three years of teaching. The Commission states several reasons for this very high attrition rate among new teachers: (a) New teachers are often given the most challenging teaching assignments and are left to "sink or swim;" (b) New teachers are often placed in the most disadvantaged schools with the most difficult students; (c) New teachers, especially at the high school level, are often given the greatest number of class preparations.

The perception that teachers have learned all that they need in teacher preservice and that they come with a license ready to begin is a great fallacy. In fact, the traditional "sink or swim" philosophy leads to a high attrition rate and lower levels of teaching effectiveness. Beginning teachers have very unique needs that have been well documented in research. Concerns regarding self-adequacy (Fuller, 1969) and classroom discipline and organization (Veenman, 1984) all make the beginning teacher very vulnerable to high levels of stress.

Teaching today has incredible demands due to increased diversity of the student body and increased accountability of state-mandated testing. Many more new teachers will join the ranks of teaching than ever before, many more will become frustrated and overwhelmed, many more will leave teaching during the first few years, and the cycle will begin all over again. High turnover is not only detrimental to morale but also to the intended goals of teaching and learning.

#### *Promising Solutions*

Linda Darling-Hammond, Executive Director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), has called for a new era in school reform that focuses on teachers and teaching. Strengthening the teaching force should be the highest priority of U. S. school reform. Strengthening beginning teachers should be the first step.

One promising solution to help beginning teachers through the pitfalls of the first year of teaching is mentoring. A mentor is an experienced teacher who works in an ongoing basis with the beginning teacher to help with induction and instruction. Many states such as Virginia have mandated mentoring programs for new teachers. A mentor may function as a coach to guide the new teacher into successful use of effective teaching strategies. Unfortunately, this is not widely practiced and the role of the mentor is more often one of providing emotional support to a beginning teacher.

The lady that was my mentor came over the third week of school and goes, "I just realized I hadn't asked you if you needed anything." And she goes, "I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I'm just supposed to be your mentor." You know, and she really didn't know. (Ganser, 1992, p. 23)

A strong professional and personal relationship between mentor and mentee is at the heart of the beginning teacher induction process. Many factors contribute to strengthen or weaken this relationship: (a) structure of the mentor program, (b) school environment, and (c) participant profile. While research stresses the benefits and components of mentoring programs, there is very little exploration of what actually happens at the local level once a mentoring program is implemented. It is well documented that principals are instructional leaders in their schools and play a key role in the induction of new teachers, yet only one research team, Brock and Grady (1996), has focused specifically on this component. There is a definite need for further research to determine what factors contribute to build a positive mentor/mentee

relationship in the school house. Only when this relationship blossoms can the beginning teacher strengthen his/her teaching skills.

#### Statement of the Problem

Building on the research documenting beginning teacher needs, many states have mandated induction programs that include mentoring. Evertson and Smithey (2000) reported that 30 states have implemented some form of mentoring for beginning teachers. In fiscal year 1999, the Virginia General Assembly enacted the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act to support teacher instruction. Included was the Mentor Teacher Program (MTP) which mandated a mentor for every beginning teacher in the Commonwealth.

While the many statewide programs focus attention on the plight of the beginning teacher, they also raise questions. At least 10 of the 30 state mentor programs do not have funding (Evertson and Smithey, 2000). What happens to these programs when they are not adequately funded? With a top-down model are there concerns regarding the implementation and quality of the mentoring?

Research continually reveals the variability in implementation of mentoring programs. According to Brock and Grady (1998), 71% of mentoring programs do not accomplish their objective of assisting teachers through the stressful phases of beginning teaching and many teachers had not received any mentoring at all. Several program inadequacies have been described: Mentors and mentees lack time for collaboration (Chester, 1992); training of mentors is often sparse or non-existent (Furtwengler, 1995); selection of mentors is often haphazard (Feiman-Nemser, 1996); and mentoring programs fail due to lack of administrative support (Brock & Grady, 1996).

Rarely do mentoring programs include coaching and supervision of the mentee (Ganser, 1992; Gratch, 1998). Perhaps this reluctance of one teacher to coach another is embedded in the isolation of the school. Perhaps it is due to lack of mentor training. Perhaps it is due to the mentor's misunderstanding of his/her role. Perhaps it is due to the mentor/mentee relationship itself which is based predominantly on a business world model. Education research to date provides none of the answers to these important questions.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore in depth the nature of the beginning teacher/mentor relationship and the forces that impact that relationship. The setting was a large suburban school system with a well-established mentoring program. The program was founded on best practices in mentoring and provides a mentor for every new teacher, comprehensive training for all mentors, and additional options for beginners beyond the initial mentor program. The school system for this study has substantial survey data, given annually to all mentors and beginning teachers, which documents the value of this program. However, there has been no inquiry into how the mentor/mentee relationships are operating at the local school level. A focus on the mentor/mentee relationship allowed investigation of all variables that are facilitators and barriers to that relationship. An additional goal of this study was to identify best practices in mentoring which can be a valuable resource for the school system.

#### Theoretical Framework

Several perspectives were used as the background for this study: sociological perspective of the culture of the school, perspective of adult learning and staff development, and perspective of teacher career development with a particular emphasis on the needs of beginning teachers. The theoretical framework outlines three variables affecting mentor/mentee relationships: (a) participant profile, (b) mentor program, and (c) school environment.

A thorough review of the literature revealed many secondary variables that influence mentor programs. Participant profile was addressed through personal characteristics, the needs of the mentee, perception of role, supervision skills, conflict resolution, and benefits to mentor and mentee. The mentor program was addressed through purpose, mentor training, and the mentor guidelines. School environment was addressed through time for collaboration, mentor selection/matching, principal attitude/role, proximity, and resources. These variables became the domains of inquiry for the study and are contained in the diagram in Figure 1. Definitions of each domain are contained in Appendix A.

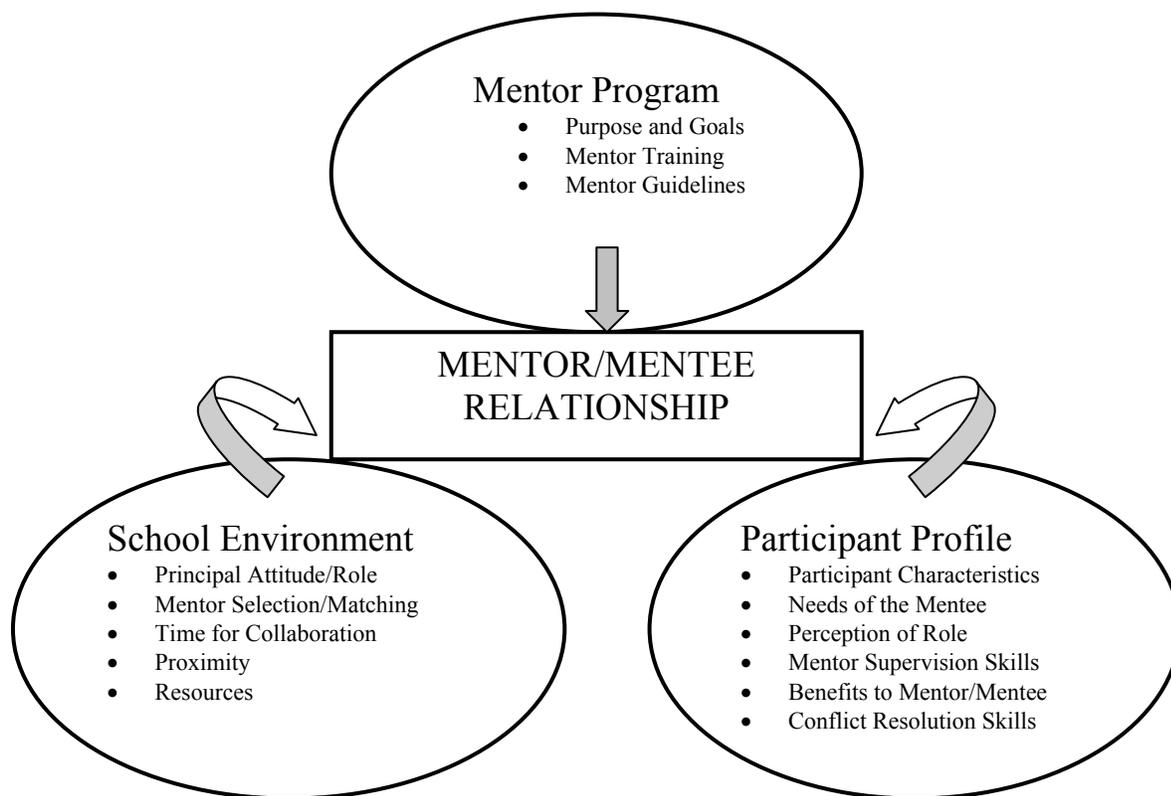


Figure 1. Forces affecting the beginning teacher/mentor relationship.

#### Research Questions

The following three research questions guided this study:

1. What is the nature of the beginning teacher mentor/mentee relationship in a large suburban school system mentoring program?
2. What forces affect this relationship?
3. How do the forces affect this relationship?

#### Definition of Terms

Adult learning - Theories of how adults learn based on self-direction, reflection, experience, and learning how to learn

Attrition - Loss of teachers to the teaching profession

Beginning teacher - Teacher with zero experience who is in the first year of teaching

Coaching - Process of structured observation and guidance designed to provide a teacher with information and feedback that will enable him/her to be more effective

Collaboration - Process of working together with focus on a common goal

Culture - Both formal and informal interactions, habits, and customs of the school which describe “The way we do things around here”

Induction - Systematic sequence of activities which orient and assimilate the new teacher into the teaching profession

Mentee - A first-year teacher who has been assigned to receive the services of induction and ongoing guidance from a mentor

Mentor - Experienced teacher who works in an ongoing basis with the beginning teacher to help with induction and instruction

Preservice - Period of preparation for the teaching profession prior to the first year of teaching

Relationship - Interactions and activities between the mentor and mentee, both professional and personal

Self-adequacy - Ability of the first-year teacher to do the task and meet the commitment

Staff development - Activities which are designed to change an individual’s knowledge, understanding, behaviors, and skills

#### Summary

School systems are experiencing an overwhelming need for new teachers. This is due to increasing teacher retirements, state mandates for lower class sizes, and teacher attrition that is the highest during the first three years of teaching. Teaching has incredible demands, especially during the first year. A promising practice is mentoring to assist the new teacher with procedures and instruction. This study explored the nature of the beginning teacher/mentor relationship and the forces that affect that relationship in the domains of mentor program, school environment, and participant profile. Chapter 2 will present a review of the literature related to this study. Chapter 3 will outline methodology of the research. Chapter 4 will present the results of the study and chapter 5 will discuss conclusions and implications.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teaching is a profession that demands tremendous growth in knowledge and skills. Teachers progress through developmental stages on the journey to becoming fully competent and expert in their craft. One of the early stages is the first year of teaching when the beginning teacher has very unique needs. The experience of the beginning teacher is a stressful one. Fraught with classroom discipline problems, beginning teachers often regress to more rigid teaching methodologies (Veenman, 1984). Whereas teachers were increasingly idealistic, progressive, and liberal in their attitudes during preservice, 70% of teachers interviewed indicated that they shifted to more traditional teaching methodologies such as lecture as a result of classroom discipline problems. Additional stress factors for the beginning teacher are paperwork, the expectations of the principal, time management, and planning daily instruction.

The literature on first-year teachers identified the difficulties of the transition into teaching and supports the need for first-year teacher induction programs. (Brock & Grady, 1998, p. 179)

The teacher in the beginning stage needs a lot of assistance. However, the culture of the school is isolationist, with teachers working in separate classrooms, which does not usually contribute to colleague helping colleague. One promising practice to meet beginning teacher needs is mentoring, when an expert teacher helps the beginning teacher. Mentoring is a part of staff development in many school districts and is specifically geared to meet the needs of the new teacher. The heart of mentoring is the mentor/mentee relationship. Many factors such as school environment, the mentor program itself, and the characteristics of the participants determine the success of this relationship, and therefore, the success of the beginning teacher.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on mentoring of beginning teachers. The body of literature related to mentors and mentor programs began in earnest with a study of teacher career development focusing on the needs of beginners by Fuller (1969). This was followed by a sociological study of the school culture and its effects on teachers by Lortie (1975). Interest in the needs of beginning teachers continued throughout the next two decades with a definitive study by Veenman (1984). Current research centers on how best to support beginning teachers through mentoring.

The first part of this review will focus on teacher career development, staff development practices, the needs of beginning teachers, the culture of the school, and mentoring. The second part will focus specifically on the research questions looking at the mentor/mentee relationship and the domains that impact mentoring: (a) mentor program, (b) school environment, and (c) participant profile.

### Stages of Teacher Career Development

The evolution of the teacher can be seen on a continuum as progressing through various developmental levels and stages. The beginning teacher is but one of these early stages. This view of teaching is based on the research of Maslow who identified a hierarchy of needs which all adults have. According to Maslow, it is only when the lower needs (physiological, safety) are met that the higher needs (love, esteem, and self-actualization) can become motivating factors.

Fuller (1969) was the first to bring Maslow's research into the domain of teaching. She concluded that the teaching career progresses through three phases of development: from pre-teaching (non-concern) to early teaching (concern with self such as class control and subject

matter), and finally to concern with pupils. Fuller characterized the early teaching phase as survival. She stated that it is only after their survival needs are met that beginning teachers can adequately address the impact their teaching has on students.

Two other researchers built on the research of Fuller in defining teacher career developmental phases. Leithwood (1990) saw the cycle of development as (a) launching the career, (b) stabilizing and developing mature commitment, (c) facing new challenges and concerns, (d) reaching a professional plateau, and (e) preparing for retirement. While this model does not include pre-teaching as Fuller's does, it expands phases of the teaching profession up to retirement.

The most recent research of Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000) provided an even greater dimension in the teaching career cycle with six phases progressing from (a) novice to (b) apprentice, (c) professional, (d) expert, (e) distinguished, and (f) emeritus. Steffy's phases are well defined in greater detail than Leithwood's and she recognized a new phase, emeritus, in which the retired teacher still maintains an active role in the profession. Both Leithwood and Steffy describe the early stage of teaching when the basic needs on Maslow's hierarchy are not met.

Ellen Moir (1991) elaborated on the research of Fuller (1969). Her work is significant, as she was the first to depict phases of development exclusively within the first year of teaching. Her work is also significant because she is a practitioner in the field, serving as coordinator of the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project. Like Fuller (1969), Moir saw the beginning months of teaching as survival, dealing with issues such as classroom discipline and everyday routines. In Moir's model the initial outlook of the beginning teacher is optimism and anticipation. The cycle of needs follows a U shape in which the beginning teacher dips into despair but comes back almost full circle towards the end of the first year to a more positive outlook. Moir's five phases of beginning teaching can be defined as follows:

1. The initial phase is one of anticipation. The role of the teacher is romanticized and idealistic. The teacher wants to make a difference. This phase continues into the first few weeks of teaching.

2. There follows a phase of survival. After the first few weeks, the beginning teacher is inundated by situations. She is expending enormous amounts of energy to establish the routine, determine what works, and develop the curriculum.

3. A disillusionment phase comes after six to eight weeks of teaching, bringing disenchantment. There are several stressful events which precipitate this: (a) Back-to-School Night, (b) parent conferences, and (c) classroom observations by administrators.

4. A rejuvenation phase occurs after winter break when the teacher has had an opportunity to rest, to spend time with family and friends, to organize, and to prepare.

5. The final phase is reflection. At the end of the school year, the new teacher has time to reflect on practices, successful and not successful. He/she considers altering teaching strategies, classroom management, and curriculum entering into the second year of teaching.

Figure 2 contains a diagram of Moir's model of the first-year of teaching. Appendix B contains a matrix of research theories on phases of teacher career development.

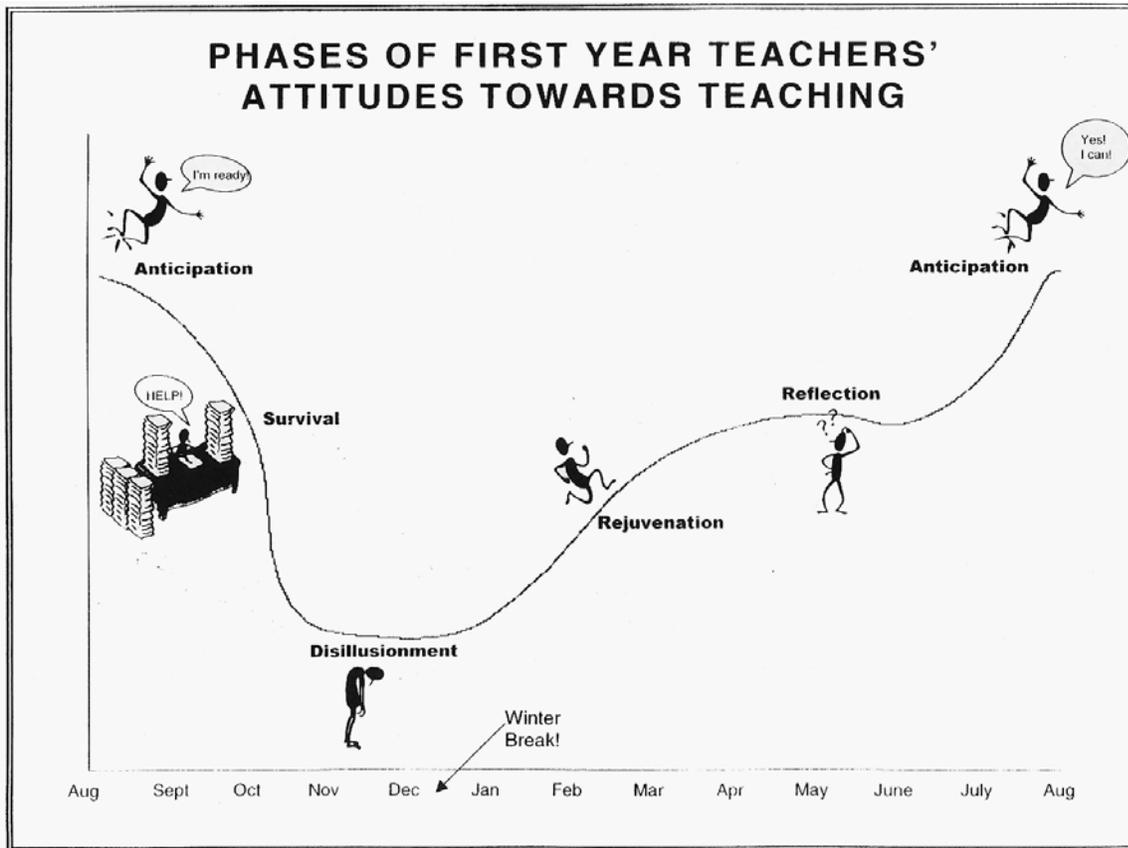


Figure 2. Phases of first year teachers' attitudes toward teaching (Moir, 1991).

### Staff Development Best Practices

The literature has documented the unique phases of teacher career development (Fuller, 1969; Leithwood, 1990; Moir, 1991; Steffy et. al., 2000). The question becomes how to meet the professional needs of teachers in each of these phases, especially teachers in the beginning stage of teaching. These professional needs are usually addressed through staff development, activities that are designed to change an individual's knowledge, understanding, behaviors, and skills. The literature provides insights into how best practices in staff development can be applied for teacher career development.

The traditional notion of teacher learning resides in the concept of in-service training sessions. These are often accomplished outside of the teacher's work location with no follow up within the school or classroom. This notion has been replaced with a model of "job-embedded" staff development (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990) which seeks to improve knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the context of the work location.

Job-embedded staff development is continuous and connected to the daily routine of teaching, unlike the in-service which is delivered outside the realm of the classroom.

While staff development theorists advocate the ongoing nature of professional growth within the work location, the success of that staff development rests on theories of adult learning. Knowles (1980) set the stage for the teaching of adults with his model of "andragogy," defined as learner-centered methodology rather than "pedagogy." Knowles theorized that adults differ in

many ways from children and adolescents and, therefore, should have a different model for learning. Components of the “adragogical” model include:

1. Adults are self-directing and want to reach goals.
2. Adults have accumulated rich life experiences that must connect to learning.
3. Adults are goal-oriented.
4. Adults are relevancy-oriented and must see how learning applies to their work.
5. Adults are practical and focus on the usefulness of learning.
6. Adults need to be shown respect.

Brookfield (1983) built on the work of Knowles and provided four characteristics of adult staff development: (a) self-directing, (b) critically reflecting, (c) experiential learning, and (c) learning to learn. Brookfield went beyond Knowles by emphasizing the important role of reflection in the adult learning process.

Joyce and Showers (1980) added an additional dimension, coaching, to the staff-development models. Coaching is defined as the structured observation and guidance designed to provide a teacher with information and feedback that will enable him/her to be more effective. Joyce and Showers saw coaching as the last step in the process of adult learning which includes: (a) presentation of theory or new skill, (b) modeling of the skill, (c) practice in a guided capacity, (d) structured feedback, and (e) coaching or follow up attention while the new skill is learned. Coaching is the critical attribute in this sequence. When coaching is added to the learning process, Joyce and Showers indicated that a 90% transfer of learning occurs. Coaching is a most promising best practice for teacher career development at any stage but especially in the early stages when the new teacher is learning his/her craft (Joyce & Showers, 1980).

Teachers are likely to keep and use new strategies and concepts if they receive coaching (either expert or peer) while they are trying the new ideas in their classrooms. (Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987, p. 79)

#### Unique Needs of Beginning Teachers

Beginning teachers have very unique needs. How to apply best practices of staff development to meet these needs becomes very important. Much research during the last 30 years focused specifically on the needs of the beginning teacher. Frances Fuller (1969) provided one of the most definitive studies in this area with her research which included interviews with 100 beginning teachers and an extensive literature review. Fuller concluded that beginning teachers are more concerned with self-adequacy than with teaching methodology and pupils' learning. Self-adequacy was defined as the ability to do the task and meet the commitment. Concerns of self-adequacy included class control, content, class situations, and evaluations. Breeding and Whitworth (1999) later expanded this notion of self-adequacy to include fear of appearing incompetent. For both Fuller and Breeding, teaching strategies were not expressed as needs. Fuller gave a very thorough conceptualization of the problems of beginning teachers with specific descriptions that were personal and situational.

Educators...might be persuaded by frequent comments of new teachers to the effect that knowing where they are and having the class under control is their “food and drink.” If you don't have that, they say, you can't begin to think about teaching the class. (Fuller, 1969, p. 222)

The needs depicted by beginning teachers in later studies did not change significantly, even though the demands and expectations for teachers were greatly heightened by school reform. Veenman (1984) studied all previous research on beginning teacher needs and identified a total of 68 problems. Again, the most seriously perceived problems of beginning teachers were

centered on self-adequacy rather than teaching methodology. Most often cited were (a) classroom discipline (83%), (b) motivation of students, (c) individual differences among students, (d) assessment of student work, (e) relations with parents, (f) organization of class work, (g) insufficient materials, and (h) individual student problems. Veenman's synthesis was thorough and greatly corroborated the work of Fuller.

Many researchers since Fuller (1969) and Veenman (1984) have continued looking at the needs of beginning teachers. Amy Gratch (1998) worked as a research assistant on The Beginning Teacher Induction Study, funded by the State Department of Public Instruction of North Carolina. Gratch interviewed 10 first-year teachers throughout the state and found beginning teacher needs very similar to those described by Fuller (1969) and Veenman (1984): (a) classroom discipline and management, (b) sufficient materials, (c) paperwork, (d) student motivation, and (e) student needs. Paperwork and difficulty in meeting the needs of individual students were new themes that developed as expressed needs of beginning teachers. Perhaps the former resulted from the increased demands on teachers for accountability and the latter from the increased diversity among our nation's student population. A review of the research on beginning teacher needs is contained in Appendix C.

#### The Culture of the School

It is well documented that beginning teachers have many unique needs (Fuller, 1969; Gratch, 1998; Veenman, 1984). However, the traditional culture of the school does not foster staff development practices that help the beginning teacher meet these needs. The isolation of the classroom, not wanting to open one's "door" for others to see one's own imperfections, makes it difficult for the beginning teacher to seek help from colleagues and for colleagues to be willing to give it (Lortie, 1975).

I just think you sort of stagnate in a way...but I would like to give and take with adults once in a while. Just to be able to be in a large office building once in a while and be talking to someone in my same age bracket. (Lortie, 1975, p. 98)

#### *Isolation*

Dan Lortie (1975), professor of education and sociology at the University of Chicago, did extensive qualitative research on the culture of the school. For the purposes of this inquiry, culture is defined as "the way we do things around here," or more precisely, the interaction, habits, and customs of the school. Lortie visited classrooms in five different towns. His research methodology included first-hand visits to school sites, interviews, surveys, literature review, and open-ended inquiries with teachers. His research was comprehensive, including multiple sources, and encompassed many years.

In his book, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*, Lortie (1975) described the social norms in which teachers work in isolation, classrooms become "individual cells" in an "egg crate" formation, and teachers have very little interaction. The "autonomy of the closed door" is a critical characteristic related to how teachers are socialized into the profession.

From colonial times onward, schools grew as individual cells which led to the egg crate school. But for the long, formative decades of the modern school system, schools were organized around teacher separation rather than teacher interdependence. (Lortie, 1975, p. 14)

According to Lortie, almost one half (45%) of the teachers had "no contact" with other teachers in the course of their work; 32% had "some contact," while only 25% had "much contact." This

is particularly problematic for first-year teachers. Lortie's research provided a foundation for understanding about the isolated culture of the school and how it failed to meet the needs of the beginning teacher.

### *Collaboration*

It appears then that the beginning teacher, in order to obtain assistance with unique needs, should have a school culture that is not isolationist but one that is collaborative. Collaboration can be defined as the act of working together towards a common goal and is the opposite of isolation. While schools are becoming more collaborative, research still documents a school culture that does not encourage collaboration. Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) corroborated the sense of isolation described by Lortie. Feiman-Nemser (1996) documented discussions among teacher colleagues and found a lack of dialogue regarding problems in their classrooms. This norm discourages the beginning teacher from seeking help and the veteran teacher from assisting. In addition, Little (1990) described a school culture that greatly prevents a beginning teacher from requesting help and constrains mentor teachers from giving assistance.

Chester (1992) studied factors that influence beginning teachers' success and found that the context of the school in promoting collaboration was significant. His research centered on five first-year teachers in urban schools in Connecticut during the 1989-90 school year. Schools included three elementary, one middle, and one high school. Chester interviewed teachers and principals at two-week intervals throughout the school year and conducted classroom observations to verify findings. Interview domains for beginning teachers focused on relationships with others in the building, instructional practices, background, expectations, perceptions, and school practices and characteristics. Interviews with administrators and faculty focused on the school's structure, organization, and culture and helped to triangulate emerging themes. A key finding reported age and teacher collaboration as strong indicators of beginning teacher

self-adequacy. Older beginning teachers seem more able to cope with the survival phase of teaching on their own, but this is not so for young beginning teachers who need more collaboration. Chester concluded, quite appropriately, that younger beginning teachers should be placed in schools with strong collaboration. The isolated nature of teaching takes its toll on beginning teachers. This is corroborated by Wildman and Niles (1987).

"For novices to develop into truly good teachers, they need to control their own learning and to collaborate with other teachers" (Wildman & Niles, 1987, p. 2).

### *Mentoring*

One very promising practice that can help the beginning teacher meet his/her unique needs through collaboration is that of mentoring. Mentoring programs are a component of staff development. They are designed to assist teachers through the stressful phases of beginning teaching identified by Fuller (1969) and Moir (1991).

Neophyte teachers benefit from moral and emotional support as well as pedagogical guidance as they negotiate the "reality shock" of their initial teaching experience. (Tauer, 1996, p. 3)

There has been a great deal of research during the last twenty years on the benefits of mentoring and the need for on-site assistance and support for first-year teachers (Little, 1990). Research consistently validates efforts to support beginning teachers through induction and mentoring programs (Ballantyne & Hansford, 1995; Corley, 1998; Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Ganser, 1992; Huling-Austin, 1990; Little, 1990). Little (1990) cited mentoring efforts as most effective in lowering attrition among beginning teachers, reforming teaching, and retaining

talented professionals. Researchers also concluded that supported teachers (those with an ongoing mentor) focus more quickly on instruction than do those teachers who are not supported (Huling-Austin, Odell, Ishler, & Edelfelt, 1989; Odell, 1987; Veenman, 1984).

Based on a spring 2000 voice survey, over 90% of beginning teachers in Fairfax County, Virginia who were mentored indicated that they plan to return to Fairfax County Public Schools after their first year of teaching. Over 90% indicated classroom management training helped them in their classroom, and 80-90% rated their mentors as important to their support.

While the benefits of mentoring programs are well documented, many beginning teachers do not receive these benefits. And even when mentoring is in place, there is the question of its quality and purpose.

#### Mentor/Mentee Relationships

One key quality to successful mentoring appears to be the mentor/mentee relationship itself (Gray & Gray, 1985). For the purposes of this study, a mentee is a first-year teacher who has been assigned to receive the services of induction and ongoing guidance from a mentor. The mentor/mentee relationship includes the interactions and activities between the mentor and mentee, both professional and personal.

Mentor/mentee relationships were first documented in the ancient world. In Homer's epic poem, *Odyssey*, the wise old sea captain named Mentor gives guidance to Odysseus' son, Telemachus, in how to cope with his father's long absence. Galvez-Hornevik (1986) described the ancient "mentor" as a trusted guide and counselor who engages in deep, meaningful, voluntary association with a protégé.

#### *Mentoring Relationships in Business*

Mentoring evolved in the business world as proven executives "mentored" and assisted young promising administrators. The relationships were primarily informal unlike the formal structure of a school system mentoring program in which mentors are most often assigned to work with a mentee.

Kathy Kram (1983) was an instrumental researcher in the arena of business mentoring. She studied 18 developmental pairs of relationships among corporate managers in a northeastern public utility. Data gathering consisted primarily of interviews to ascertain personal perceptions of the relationships. Kram found that successful mentoring relationships fulfill five career functions: (a) exposure to new opportunities, (b) coach, (c) sponsor, (d) protection, and (e) challenge. Mentoring relationships also fulfilled four psychosocial functions: (a) role-model, (b) counsel, (c) confirmation, and (d) friend.

Similar to the stages of teacher career development, researchers have identified stages in the mentoring relationship. Phillips (1977), in her doctoral dissertation, noted a progression of six stages in the corporate mentoring relationship from (a) "initiation," to (b) "the sparkle" (presenting one's best self to produce mutual admiration), (c) "development" (discussion focusing on organizational politics and how to attain career plans), (d) "disillusionment" (realization that little more can be gained by the relationship), (e) "parting" (becoming independent), and (f) "transformation" (becoming a peer, friend, and equal).

Kram (1983) compressed Phillip's six stages to four: (a) "initiation" (fantasies becoming realistic expectations), (b) "cultivation" (mentor providing career and psychosocial functions), (c) "separation" (becoming competent and independent), and (d) "redefinition" (supportive friendship or bitterness).

Both Phillips and Kram reflect a progression similar to the stages of beginning teacher development depicted by Moir (1991) with auspicious beginnings and dips along the way. This is a relationship beginning with promise and often ending with disillusionment.

#### *Mentoring Relationships in School*

One study focusing on mentor/mentee relationships in the school setting was done by Susan Tauer (1996) who examined perceptions of 10 pairs of mentor/mentee relationships using case study methodology. Her research was thorough, including multiple interviews during the year, observations in the work place, and attendance at mentor meetings. Tauer found that the beginning teacher/mentor relationship is very “idiosyncratic” and unpredictable in its nature, and that the context of the relationship was extremely important in shaping its dimensions. Tauer identified three variables in that context: (a) personalities of the participants, (b) structure of the mentor program itself, and (c) community, district, and school environment. This study is significant because of its educational setting, its focus on the mentor/mentee relationship, and identification of domains that define that relationship.

While the importance of the mentor/mentee relationship is well documented, the nature of that relationship in the school setting is not well developed. Very little describes what happens to teachers mentoring teachers and, specifically, experienced teachers mentoring novices. Research has uncovered many variables that affect mentoring. These lie within three domains: the mentor program variables, the school environment variables, and the participant profile variables. The remainder of this chapter will explore how each of these variables is related to mentoring. What is unclear is how these variables affect the mentor/mentee relationship itself.

#### Mentor Program Variables

Mentor program variables that affect the mentor/mentee relationship include purpose/goals, guidelines, and mentor training. Very little research has explored the mentor program purpose, goals, and guidelines. However, one of the most important variables of a mentoring program noted by researchers is the training of the mentor and the quality of that training (Ballantyne & Hansford, 1995; Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Ganser, 2000; Gratch, 1998). Mentor training is often a part of the mentor program yet many mentors do not regularly receive training and many training programs do not focus on the important skills of supervision and coaching (Gratch, 1998; Sweeny, 2000). These skills greatly impact the mentor/mentee relationship.

Evertson and Smithey (2000) studied the effects of mentor training on the mentee. Their methodology included an experimental design with two groups of mentors. One group received a full four-day workshop conducted by a local university; one group received only a one-day orientation by the district. Topics of the four-day workshop included: the mentoring role, concerns of beginning teachers, supervision skills, creating learning environments, and developing action plans. Videotaped conferences of mentors talking with their beginning teachers throughout the year revealed that trained mentors applied conferencing skills, active listening, and probed with follow-up questions. This was not true with the untrained mentors. Weekly summaries also indicated that trained mentors were more likely than untrained mentors to assist the beginning teacher with specific strategies for developing discipline plans, pacing lessons, and changing to student-centered pedagogy.

Preparing mentors for their task does enable them to be more successful if success is defined as supporting protégés’ success. (Evertson & Smithey, 2000)

Evertson and Smithey (2000) found, in addition, that training of mentors not only strengthened the mentees’ teaching but also the achievement of the students in their classrooms.

Beginning teachers of the trained mentors rated significantly higher during classroom observations on managing instruction, arranging the physical setting, establishing routines, motivating students, managing student behavior, and classroom climate, all expressed as beginning teacher needs by Fuller (1969) and Veenman (1984). What is most encouraging is that the students in the classes of beginning teachers with trained mentors rated higher on academic success, student behavior, and task engagement. Clearly, the training the mentors received appeared to make a difference.

#### School Environment Variables

In addition to the mentor program itself, there are many variables at the local school level that greatly impact on the mentor/mentee relationship. School level variables that will be discussed in this section include the selection/matching of the mentor, proximity of the mentor/mentee (Tauer, 1996), access to resources (Chester, 1992), role of the principal (Brock & Grady, 1998), and opportunities for collaboration (Feiman-Nemser, 1996).

##### *Selection/Matching of Mentor*

Matching of the mentor and mentee is critical to the relationship. In most mentoring programs a mentor is assigned to work one-on-one with a beginning teacher. Sometimes, however, a mentor is chosen by the beginning teacher himself or herself. The selection procedure elicits different interpretations by different researchers.

Feiman-Nemser (1996) raised the issue of whether or not a mentoring relationship can be established into a program and whether the mentor should be chosen by the mentee rather than the principal or third party individual. Regardless of the method of selection, Gold (1996) stressed the need for establishing consistent selection criteria for mentors.

##### *Proximity*

In addition to matching of the mentor/mentee, proximity of the two in location appears to be a factor that can more readily foster collaboration. Tauer (1996) indicated that physical proximity and grade level were equally integral variables in the mentor/mentee relationship. In a pilot study of four first-year teachers paired with mentors, Gray and Gray (1985) reported that two relationships were unsuccessful because one mentor was located in a different part of the school and one mentor did not teach the same subject.

##### *Resources*

How the mentee is able to access resources becomes another school level variable to the relationship. Little research has focused on this area. However, Chester (1992) did find that availability of resources, both human and material, was one of three important variables in the self-adequacy of beginning teachers.

##### *Role of the Principal*

One key person to impact the mentor/mentee relationship within the school environment is the principal. "Although a good administrator strives for parity in her or his treatment of the teaching staff, beginning teachers need additional nurturing as they acclimate to the profession" (Weasmer & Wood, 2000). The principal often makes the selection of mentor and matching with mentee; his or her supervision of the mentee is crucial; his/her attitude and actions toward the mentoring process appear to facilitate or become a barrier to the relationship. In the National Center for Education Statistics (1999) survey, 55% of first-year teachers agreed strongly that they felt supported by the administration and 37% agreed somewhat. However, little research attention has been paid exclusively to the role of the principal in the mentor/mentee relationship. Only one research team, Brock and Grady (1996), has focused specifically in this domain. In a

study of 49 second-year teachers and 56 principals in Nebraska, Brock and Grady concluded that the principal is often perceived negatively by the mentee.

The most difficult part of the first year was understanding the expectations of the principal. I didn't know what to expect. What was the role of the principal, and how was I to relate? At the beginning, all I saw the principal do was act as a welcomer. Here's the school. Good luck. I didn't know what his role was, his expectations for me, and how I could expect him to react. I wanted to know his philosophy, expectations for me, his values for education and students, and expectations for quality teaching. I was left on my own to develop a style of teaching and classroom management. I hoped that it was one that he approved of. (Brock & Grady, 1998, p. 180)

One of the most important things that beginning teachers need to know is what the principal views as good teaching and how they (the beginning teachers) measure up. Teachers expressed a need for expectations to be communicated at monthly meetings as well as through one-on-one sessions with the principal. Beginning teachers perceived the need for a longer and more comprehensive induction program than the principals actually gave them (Brock & Grady, 1996).

Chester (1992) found that absence of feedback from the principal early in the year resulted in beginning teachers' feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, neglect, and the perception that competence in the instructional domain was devalued. Weasmer and Wood (2000) concluded that beginning teachers need high visibility of the principal and a lightened load. Robinson (1998) stressed that principals need to familiarize the beginning teacher to the culture, climate, and values of the school. Teachers who experience higher levels of principal support are likely to be less stressed, more committed, and more satisfied with their jobs than those receiving lower levels of support (Billingsley, 1993).

In summary, Brock and Grady (1998) state succinctly the importance of the principal as a key variable within the school environment.

Little attention has been paid to the principal's role in the induction of beginning teachers. Although principals are called on to be instructional leaders, the research provides little information for principals to use in meeting the challenges of beginning teachers. (Brock & Grady, 1998, p. 179)

#### *Time for Collaboration*

The principal's role in helping to find time for the mentor and mentee to collaborate also seems to be a crucial variable in the success of mentoring.

Feiman-Nemser (1996) described time (time to mentor and time to learn to mentor) as the biggest deterrent to a productive mentoring relationship. Maddex (1993) indicated in a survey of 366 mentor/mentees that lack of release time to observe, have conferences, or collaborate was a significant detriment to the relationship.

#### Participant Profile Variables

In addition to the mentor program and school variables, the mentor/mentee relationship is also defined by the participants themselves. However, it is less clear what personal variables these players bring to the relationship and how these variables affect that relationship. Participant profile variables that will be discussed in this section include individual needs, benefits of mentoring, role definition, mentor supervision skills, and conflict resolution skills.

#### *Needs*

Beginning teachers have very unique needs that have previously been presented. A key participant variable for the mentee is how well prepared he/she is in preservice and how

confident to assume teacher responsibilities (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). The needs of the mentor include career enhancement and recognition (Freiberg, Zhibowski, & Ganser, 1996) that will be addressed in the following section.

### *Benefits*

The benefit one receives from mentoring seems to be an important variable in the success of that relationship. This is often reflected by the degree to which the mentor feels a sense of professionalism in helping another teacher. While research substantiated the benefits of mentoring for beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Ganser, 1992; Little, 1990), there are also many benefits for the mentor. "Mentoring can generate as much, if not more professional development for the mentor as it does for the beginning teachers" (Freiberg, Zhibowski, & Ganser, 1996). Freiberg's research on five full-time mentors revealed their increased sense of professionalism, their confidence in working with other adults, and a more clearly defined set of beliefs about their own teaching. Only one-third of the exiting mentors chose to go back to the classroom, thus illustrating that mentoring is a stage in career development for mentors.

In a related study, Ganser (1997) surveyed 94 teachers who had been both cooperating teachers and mentors in seven school districts in Wisconsin. Respondents emphasized that their career as a teacher had been affected by these roles in four ways: (a) source of pride, (b) expanded view of teaching, (c) enhancement of own knowledge and skills, and (d) professional rejuvenation. While many mentoring programs compensate the mentors, it appears that intrinsic benefits can be the greatest reward (Ganser, 1997). This substantiates Maslow's hierarchy on the importance of "self-actualization" and the models of teacher career development specifying "new challenges" and "professionalism."

### *Role Definition*

Research documents that another key variable is the mentor's perception of his/her role. Mentor roles are often ill defined.

Gina approached the relationship expecting her mentor to help guide her to deeper reflection about her teaching practice. Her mentor, on the other hand, was satisfied with a friendship. (Gratch, 1998, p. 224)

In a study of participants in a state-mandated mentoring program in Wisconsin, Ganser (1992) indicated that mentor roles were often ambiguous. "For a variety of reasons, the participants in this study present a vision of mentoring that is far less rich and varied than it otherwise might be" (Ganser, 1992, p. 30). Mentors saw themselves as providers of emotional support and assistance with logistics when their mentees wanted and expected something more. Participants in the study gave little evidence that mentors saw their role as including a focus on the critical elements of teaching such as curriculum design, instructional strategies, or professional development. What then might the role be? Ballantyne and Hansford (1995) defined the role of the mentor changing with the needs of the beginning teacher. During the stressful first weeks of school (survival), the mentor needs to be open, accepting, and friendly. During the first semester (behavior problems), the mentor needs to provide direct assistance. But during the final phase (focusing on pupils, teaching, and learning), the mentor needs to use a more reflective and critical approach. Gordon (1991) saw the role of the mentor as a problem-solver. Feiman-Nemser (1996) concluded that mentors need to assist beginning teachers with "conceptually oriented learner-centered teaching." Unfortunately, this is not often the case. The mentor's perception of his/her role dictates the reality of the relationship.

### *Mentor Supervision Skills*

In addition to the mentor's perception of his/her role, the degree to which he/she possesses supervision and coaching skills is a critical variable (Ganser, 1992). Research on supervision and coaching skills documented the need for mentor training in this area (Evertson & Smithey, 2000).

### *Conflict Resolution Skills*

Mentors and mentees will undoubtedly experience conflicts. These conflicts are internal to the relationship (mentor/mentee) and external to the relationship (mentee/staff, mentee/parents). What conflict resolution skills these participants bring to the relationship may be critical in defining that relationship. An excellent model for conflict resolution is that by Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991) developed as part of the Harvard Negotiation Project. Called "principled negotiation" Fisher shows how to negotiate an impasse using these tenets: (a) separate relationship issues from substance, (b) focus on interests, not positions, (c) invent options for mutual gain, and (d) use independent standards of fairness to avoid a bitter contest of will. These principles can form a very solid framework for dealing with any kind of conflict.

A matrix of research on variables affecting the mentor/mentee relationship is contained in Appendix D.

### Summary

Teachers have defined developmental stages on the road to becoming "truly good teachers." The beginning of the journey is a very stressful one with many unique needs. Yet the isolation of the classroom prevents beginners from being able to "collaborate with other teachers." Mentoring helps to overcome the isolation, can assist the beginning teacher with first-year needs, can help to lower attrition, and can strengthen teaching and learning. The mentor/mentee relationship is at the heart of the process. It can determine whether or not the beginning teacher becomes that "truly good teacher." It is also apparent that the mentor/mentee relationship is very idiosyncratic. Variables such as school environment, the mentor program, and participant characteristics play a unique role in mentoring. However, it is not clear just how these variables affect the mentor/mentee relationship.

## CHAPTER 3 THE METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the beginning teacher/mentor relationship in a large suburban school system and to identify the forces that impacted that relationship. The goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of mentoring in the context of the school (Patton, 1985) and to gain an understanding of the meaning the participants had constructed within that context (Merriam, 1998). Because it best answers the questions of *what* and *how*, qualitative research was chosen as the methodology for this study. Patton (1985) described the uniqueness of qualitative research as a pathway to understanding interactions in their context.

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. . . . The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Patton, 1985, p. 1)

The research design for this study was a cross-case analysis of three pairs of beginning teacher mentor/mentees at the elementary level. Each mentor/mentee pair was considered a single case with similarities and differences explored across all cases. Multiple case designs have distinct advantages and are often considered more compelling (Yin, 1994). Case study's interest in "process rather than outcome, in context rather than on specific variables, in discovery rather than confirmation" (Merriam, 1998, p. 60) made this a valuable method to answer the research questions. A case study is concrete and contextual, taking a holistic view of the situation (Merriam, 1998). For this reason, it enabled examination of the many emerging variables that affected the mentor/mentee relationship.

This chapter will focus on the methodology used for the cross-case study. Specific topics will include the setting, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the research.

### The Setting

#### *The School System*

This study was conducted in a large suburban school system of 160,966 students. These students are housed in 131 elementary schools (primarily grades K-6), 21 middle schools, 24 high schools, and numerous special centers. The student population represents diversity in ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status. More than 20% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. Students speak more than 100 native languages. Expectations for the school system are high with 93% of high school graduates continuing on to some form of postsecondary education.

The school system requires anonymity for all research studies within its jurisdiction. Therefore, the names of the school division, individual schools, and participants in this study have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

#### *The Mentor Program*

Consistent with the national trend, the school system is experiencing a tremendous need for new teachers. Student population has grown by more than 4,000 in the academic year 2001-2002. Many teachers have or will retire within this time period. In 2001-2002, the school system hired 1897 new teachers. Of these new teachers, 795 had zero teaching experience.

Early in the 1980s the school system established a colleague lead teacher program that designated a lead teacher in each building to work with new teachers. Recognizing that beginning teachers needed more support, the Great Beginnings: Beginning Teacher Induction

Program was established in 1995. The purpose of the Great Beginnings program is to “improve the capacity of [school system] to attract, induct, and retain high performing teachers and ultimately to contribute to school improvement” (Office of Staff Development and Training, June 8, 2000, p. 2). With the advent of the Great Beginnings program the colleague lead teacher position was renamed lead mentor teacher with expanded responsibilities. These expanded responsibilities include primary responsibility for coordinating the mentor program within the school and orientation of new teachers.

The Great Beginnings program provides support to all teachers new to the school system. There are different levels of service based on new teacher needs and available resources. The basic component of the program is a trained mentor for all new teachers. A mentor is an “expert” teacher who works one-on-one in an ongoing basis with the beginning teacher at his/her school. Mentor teachers receive formal training from principals and other administrators. Training topics include beginning teacher needs, mentoring styles, supervision, conflict resolution, and teacher beliefs. Mentors perform the responsibility of mentoring in addition to their regular teaching duties and receive a stipend for these extra responsibilities. For the 2001-2002 school year, mentors received \$450 for working with a novice teacher (zero experience) and \$200 for working with an experienced teacher new to the school system. A second component of the program is an optional coaching cohort for the beginning teacher. The coaching cohort is an after-school course taught by master teachers. While all beginning teachers receive a mentor, only a small number participate in the coaching cohort.

Funding for the Great Beginnings program comes from several sources, one of which is the state government. The Education and Accountability Act enacted by the state legislature provides funding for mentors to assist beginning teachers. Each school district in the state must provide a 50% match to receive these funds. In fiscal year 2002 each school division received \$208 for each beginning teacher within its jurisdiction.

While the state provided funding for the mentor program, this was only a portion of the total cost to the school division. During the 2001-2002 school year, funding for mentor stipends came from three sources: (a) state allocation of \$176,358 (Education and Accountability Act), (b) state class-size reduction grant of \$79,425, and (c) local school system allocation of \$469,600. In addition to the stipends for mentors to assist beginning teachers, the school system paid a stipend of \$800 to mentor trainers (administrators teaching the mentor course). The stipend for mentor trainers was funded from the school system’s regular staff development course budget. Additional resources for beginning teachers included two substitute days @ \$85.00 per day. This was budgeted with local staff development funds but cut midyear due to budget deficits.

#### The Participants

Participants in the study were three pairs of mentor/mentees who were a part of the school system mentoring program for beginning teachers. Each pair consisted of a beginning teacher with zero experience and an experienced teacher assigned to work with the beginner in an ongoing basis. The pairs were housed within the same school. Sampling was conducted in a “purposive” (Merriam, 1998) or “purposeful” (Patton, 1990) fashion in order to study information-rich cases in depth. The purposeful sampling targeted outstanding mentors with prior experience in order to identify best practices in mentoring. A focus exclusively on teachers at the primary level allowed for easier comparability in the cross-case analysis.

### *Criteria for Selection*

Criteria for the selection of mentors for the study were developed in consultation with the director of staff development and coordinator of the mentor program. The committee chair was also actively involved in this process. Criteria for mentors included all of the following:

1. Mentors were outstanding mentors as defined by James B. Rowley in *Qualities of the High-performance Mentor Teacher: Knowledge, Skills, and Values*. The Office of Staff Development and Training uses these criteria to describe outstanding mentor teachers. A copy of these criteria is contained in Appendix E.
2. Mentors served at least one previous full year as a mentor teacher.
3. Mentors currently mentored a novice teacher with zero experience.
4. Mentors served two or more years in the same school.
5. Mentors were classroom teachers at the K-3 grade level.

In addition, mentors and mentees exhibited a willingness to participate in the project and received support from their school principals.

### *Process for Selection*

Mentors were chosen for the study through a nomination process that was developed in conjunction with the researcher, the Office of Staff Development and Training, and the committee chair. This process included solicitation to all lead mentor teachers, verification of mentors' qualifications by principals, and an interview screening by the researcher. The researcher first prepared a description of the project and criteria for nomination. The Office of Staff Development and Training sent these via email to all elementary lead mentor teachers in the school system. Nominations were returned directly to the Office of Staff Development and Training whose staff verified qualifications by talking to principals. A list of qualified nominees was then sent to the researcher. A detailed description of this process for selection of mentors is contained in Appendix F.

The initial appeal for nominations resulted in only three viable candidates. This was due to poor timing of the solicitations right before the Thanksgiving holiday. The decision was made to readvertise, which resulted in an expanded pool of nine candidates whose qualifications were all verified by their principals. This list was given to the researcher in early December. The researcher met with each pair of nominated mentor/mentees in early January to give exact details of the study and to solicit interest in the project. The researcher described the project, the time commitment, the value to the school system, and the confidentiality ensured for the participants. Three pairs of mentor/mentees were selected based on the criteria and willingness to participate. Two weeks into the project one pair withdrew and another team was substituted. By mid January all three pairs were selected, oriented, and had signed consent to participate. Biographical data on each participant were then gathered by electronic submission. A copy of this data collection tool is contained in Appendix G.

One of the researcher's goals throughout the study process was to develop rapport with the participants. This included being sensitive to the teachers' needs, their time, and their teaching. As a result, all interviews and meetings were scheduled at the teachers' convenience and not before holidays, prior to parent conferences or preparation of report cards. Despite the fact that the researcher received names of nominees in early December, she waited until after the winter holiday to interview potential teams of teachers. This considerably delayed the start of the study but contributed to rapport of researcher and participants who appreciated the sensitivity of the researcher to their needs.

### Instruments and Data Collection

A variety of data collection instruments were used to achieve better understanding of the participants and to increase credibility of the findings (Merriam, 1998). This variety allowed a comprehensive perspective and a crosscheck of information.

Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective. . . . By using a combination of observations, interviewing and document analysis, the fieldwork is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings. (Merriam, 1998, p. 137)

Primary methods of collecting information for this study were focus group, interviews, email responses, observations, and review of documents.

#### *Focus Group*

A focus group of approximately 6-12 participants is a technique to promote discussion on a given topic (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The researcher conducted two focus groups in December to talk about the mentor program and the participants' views on the mentoring process. Participants in the focus groups were selected because of their relevancy to the topic. One focus group contained eight beginning teachers and one focus group consisted of seven mentors. Participants in the focus groups were chosen because of their willingness to attend and were not included in the mentor/mentee pairs selected for the study. Babbie (1998) stated that group dynamics in a focus group frequently bring out aspects of the topic that would not have been anticipated by the researcher or would not have emerged in interviews. For this reason, the focus groups were a valuable tool in developing the protocols. Interview questions were tested for specificity and modified based on focus group input. A graduate student colleague who took notes during the focus group was also very helpful in debriefing and reflecting jointly with the researcher on themes. Focus group questions are contained in Appendices H and I.

#### *Interviews*

Two interviews were conducted separately with each selected mentor and mentee in order to ascertain the progression of the relationships and the forces impacting upon them. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. To ensure sensitivity to teachers' needs, interviews were not scheduled during times that teachers were completing report cards. Thus, the first interviews were conducted in February and the second interviews were held in April. According to Merriam (1998) interviews are the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals.

The researcher developed an interview protocol based on the research questions and domains of inquiry. Interview questions were open-ended with probes to follow. Interview questions were piloted in two interviews, one with a mentor and one with a mentee not included in the study. The purpose of this test was for the researcher to gain familiarity with the technical equipment and to gain proficiency in interview techniques, which helped develop consistency across all interviews. Research questions were modified based on the focus group, pilot interviews, and feedback from committee members. Interview data from the first interviews were used to tailor the second interviews.

Interviews for this study were conducted as "reflective conversations" in order to develop rapport with the participants and to allow the discussion to evolve from the teachers themselves. Interview questions were used as a guide with elaboration, probing, and shifting sequence as needed to pursue relevant themes. Concrete and contextual questions along with wait time elicited richer information than generalities.

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by professional transcribers to ensure that everything said was preserved for analysis. In addition, the researcher took notes to guide her questioning and to highlight areas for further probes. Interview guides are contained in Appendices J, K, L, and M.

#### *Email Responses*

The researcher posed six email questions for each mentor and mentee on a weekly basis. Responses were sent electronically to the researcher and back up copies were created. Questions focused on topics such as the mentee's perception of her teaching at that time, help given from the mentor that week, and help that may be needed. The email responses were intended to provide an additional source of information in an easy format that is within the realm of each teacher's daily routine. However, the email responses did not elicit rich answers. The teachers began with descriptive detail but cut these to very perfunctory and brief responses due to time constraints. Email questions are contained in Appendix N.

#### *Observations*

Observations are a valuable data gathering tool in case study as they take place in the natural field and provide a first hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 1998). For this study, an observation was conducted of each mentor/mentee pair engaging in a conference. In case one, this observation involved an entire multi-age team.

As much as possible the researcher attempted to become a "complete outsider" (Merriam, 1998) during the observation. An observation guide of "look fors" was developed to capture content of the meeting, dialogue, discussion, and nonverbal communication. In order to maintain informality, the researcher did not take literal notes during the conference but used the observation guide immediately afterwards to record literal observations as field notes. Time/date, place, purpose, participants, diagram of the setting, verbal description of the setting, activities/conversations, direct quotations, and nonverbal communications were noted. An observation guide is contained in Appendix O.

#### *Review of Documents*

Documents should be reviewed when it appears they will yield "better data or more data . . . than other tactics" (Merriam, 1998, p. 125). Because they are objective sources of data, documents can provide background on the case study. For this study the researcher reviewed written materials on the school system's mentoring program including mentor handbook, mentor training materials, and reports to the School Board. Particularly helpful were documents related to funding and number of new teachers hired.

The researcher also reviewed written materials at the local school level in the form of documents prepared by each mentor and mentee pair. The action plan was a valuable source of data to corroborate findings from the interviews. The action plan consisted of goals that the mentor and mentee developed jointly for the beginning teacher each quarter. In addition, the researcher reviewed lesson plans and, in case one, the written nomination of the beginning teacher for the First Year Teacher Award.

#### *Fieldwork Journal*

The researcher maintained a fieldwork journal from the beginning of the data collection through the final analysis of data. This journal contained a synopsis of each interview, detailed notes from observations, and thoughts on the process of conducting research. This journal became a valuable learning tool and was used to adapt strategies in future interviews and observations. Merriam (1998) stated that ethnographers often maintain a fieldwork journal to

record their experience in the field. “It includes his or her [researcher’s] ideas, fears, mistakes, confusion, and reactions to the experience and can include thoughts about the research methodology itself” (Merriam, 1998, p. 110).

The researcher also used the fieldwork journal to write memos with insights about emerging themes. These memos were placed in italics to differentiate the researcher’s hunches from the actual recollection of events. Spradley (1979) noted that field note memos or “think papers” could be a valuable source for analysis and interpretation. Ely (1991) called these thoughts “analytic memos.”

These devices [analytic memos] serve an important function in moving the methodology and analysis forward. Analytic memos can be thought of as conversations with oneself about what has occurred in the research process, what has been learned, the insights this provides, and the leads these suggest for future action. (Ely, 1991, p. 80)

#### Analytic Procedures

Qualitative research produces a tremendous amount of data. It is only in the researcher’s analysis of that data that meaningful themes and understandings can be revealed. This study sought to define the nature of the mentor/mentee relationship and the forces that affected that relationship. These very global questions could only be answered by looking discretely at all the parts within the context of the whole. The dynamics of the relationship, therefore, consisted of the interaction of all the domains and all the data sources within each domain. Analyzing the data demanded a thorough and comprehensive approach. In this section the researcher will describe the procedures she used for coding the data and uncovering the emerging themes.

Consistent with qualitative research, data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously. Merriam (1998) affirmed the interactive nature of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

A qualitative design is emergent. The researcher usually does not know ahead of time every person who might be interviewed, all questions that might be asked, or where to look next unless data are analyzed as they are being collected. (Merriam, 1998, p. 8)

Data were analyzed using a multi-case, cross-case method (Yin, 1994). For this cross-case study there were two categories of analysis: (a) within case and (b) cross case. Data were separated and analyzed first by case and then across all three of the cases.

#### *Preparation of Documents*

Two precepts are important for the collection and analysis of data in a case study: (a) systematic recording and organization of the data and (b) sectioning raw data into data items (Bassegy, 1999). To facilitate these procedures, the researcher developed a system of data analysis that utilized both computer software and hard copies. According to Ely, “Analysis packages [software] can remove most of the drudgery from the cut and paste process” (Ely, 1991, p. 90). Computer software has advantages because it allows the researcher to attach codes to segments of text and is capable of searching the document for segments that were coded in a certain way. It also allows the researcher to place data in more than one category, thus capturing the complexity of the research. The computer software used to assist in data analysis for this study was NVivo. The researcher received training in NVivo from a member of the faculty and from an all-day conference session of the American Educational Research Association.

The researcher developed consistent methodology for verifying and storing documents. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed by a professional transcriber onto a computer file and hard copy. The researcher listened to all audiotapes with the hard copy transcriptions to

check for accuracy. Changes were made, as necessary. Verbatim hard copies were also given to the participants for verification.

The researcher imported computer files of all interview transcriptions, email responses, and field notes into NVivo. Files were saved first as “text only” documents and moved into the software program. NVivo marked each interview question and answer as a separate paragraph, thus creating a very high number of paragraphs within each interview transcript. Documents were also copied into sets, one set for each case study. This enabled the researcher to easily find documents within a single case but also allowed movement among the sets.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed for this study working inductively from the particulars to more general perspectives to derive themes of categories (Creswell, 1998). One way to conduct an inductive analysis of qualitative data is the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the constant comparative method each new category of meaning selected for analysis is compared to all other categories of meaning and grouped (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Because it is a continual evolving process, the constant comparative method was chosen as the process for refining categories and deriving themes for this study. To accomplish this, the researcher worked back and forth between the computer software and hard copies in a process that was time intensive but very thorough.

Hard copies of all interviews were printed and color-coded by case (blue for Beaver Creek, green for West Orchard, yellow for Old Mill). These became the basis for the initial data analysis. Using a methodology described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the researcher identified the chunks or units of meaning in the data.

The search for meaning is accomplished by first identifying the smaller units of meaning in the data, which will later serve as the basis for defining larger categories of meaning.

In order to be useful for analysis, each unit of meaning identified in the data must stand by itself. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 128)

These units of meaning were identified by carefully reading through transcripts, field notes, and email responses. The researcher let the units of meaning emerge from the data itself noting very finite categories such as “role of mentor,” “mentor assistance,” and “teacher preparation.” These units of meaning were written in the margins on the hard copy transcripts. The researcher then transferred units of meaning into the software documents, highlighting the text associated with each unit of meaning and coding that text in NVivo as a “free node.” The researcher used the constant comparative process of continual refinement comparing each new unit of meaning to the derived categories and adding new categories as needed. The initial categories were further subdivided into subcategories as the relationships became clear. For example, “mentor assistance” was further sectioned into “mentor assistance – parents,” “mentor assistance – reading,” or “mentor assistance – curriculum.” The researcher also conducted searches in the software for key words such as “time,” “collaboration,” “reassurance” to further refine categories. In all, there were initially 140 “free nodes” or units of meaning.

The researcher derived themes by combining and relating the units of meaning. She printed hard copies of the text coded to each “free node,” and highlighted text within these “free nodes” by case using the established colors. Notes were written on the side of the paper to help capture exact meaning of each node. In this way, the researcher was able to compare text for nodes that were similar, collapsing some nodes and expanding others. Using the software program, several nodes were grouped together as “trees” to become themes (i.e. “friends,”

“comfortable/relaxed,” and “talking/listening,” were grouped as “nature of relationship – friends” as they appeared in context together throughout the interviews).

The researcher completed analysis of all first round interviews before beginning the second round. Quotes for all themes were placed on a matrix. This provided a visual framework to develop questions and probes, and to expand on themes from the first round of interviews when conducting the second. The second interview guide focused on how mentor/mentees solved problems, what motivated their working together the way they did, and how mentees decided where to go for help. Questions also focused on discovering in greater detail forces influencing the themes. In addition, the researcher met with each committee member in April to share initial findings and gain insights prior to the second round of interviews.

Transcripts of second interviews were imported into NVivo and analyzed using the same constant comparative procedures. New units of meaning for the second interviews were compared to those of the first and adaptations made as needed. The second round of interviews substantiated the themes, especially the themes of informal structures and multi-layered support. Problem solving became a new theme after the second interviews as parent issues dealing with grading, retention, summer school, and referrals escalated at the end of the year.

Consistent with a cross-case analysis, themes for each case were scrutinized across all three cases for similarities and differences (Corallo, 1995). The goal in a cross-case analysis is to see “processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). Data for the cross-case analysis were placed on a matrix by case and theme in order to compare and contrast.

The analysis of data was a process that began in March and ended in June. Throughout this process the researcher worked back and forth from the particular (micro) to the broad (macro) to derive meaning from the data. Hunches and relationships between themes were documented in the field notes as the researcher attempted to see how finite details of the data fit into the big picture. The researcher also continually viewed the data in the context of the research questions. A final matrix of themes related to the research questions became the outline for chapter four.

#### Trustworthiness

Traditional concepts of reliability and validity, vital in surveys and experiments, do not apply to case study research (Bassegy, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity in research ensures that a study is measuring what it should be measuring. Reliability ensures that the research methodology could be replicated and that it is consistent throughout the study (Merriam, 1998). A case study is a singularity that is chosen for its interest to the researcher and readers of the project, and not because it is a typical example. Therefore, issues of external validity (generalizing to a large population) are not relevant. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide the concept of “trustworthiness” as the measure of a case study’s truth. Trustworthiness defines the extent to which the conclusions make sense and are an accurate representation of the research.

The researcher employed many methods for developing trustworthiness. Creswell (1998) stated that multiple sources of data give continual opportunities to verify the data from one source to another. Information from the mentor/mentee conferences verified information gained from interviews and vice versa. The action plan, goals developed for the beginning teacher jointly by mentor and mentee, also substantiated the interview findings. In addition, there was consistency across participants, which acted as a form of validity. Mentors and their mentees talked separately about the same events, often using similar words and

embellishing on themes derived one from the other. There was also consistency within each participant, which acted as a form of reliability. The same person in interview two often verified events and themes defined in interview one.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated the importance of peer review in the data analysis process. Peers can fulfill the role of “devil’s advocate” to test emerging themes and conclusions. The researcher enlisted a colleague to read the hard copies and to verify the nodes and themes. In addition, participants viewed the data and could make corrections as they wished. Lincoln and Guba (1985) saw this as one of the most critical techniques for establishing credibility in case study research. Finally, the process of peer review included the dissertation committee, especially chair and research advisor, who were involved with the researcher in each step of the process.

Another important component of trustworthiness is the degree to which the data make sense. This is achieved by using “rich thick description” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) that allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability. Such description draws pictures in words of something tangible, giving vivid descriptions of what it feels and looks like.

Since qualitative research focuses on process, meaning and understanding, the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the research has learned about a phenomenon. (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). Keeler (2002) talked about the importance of the researcher as a “transparent reporter who transmits the voice of the [participants] . . . presented as evidence through quotes” (Keeler, Krueger, Pitsch, & Prinzing, 2002, p. 5). The researcher attempted as much as possible to tell the story of the participants in their own words and then draw conclusions. Written documentation provides vivid descriptions of context, participants, and activities, allowing the reader to determine how closely his/her situation parallels the research situation, and, therefore, can be transferred (Merriam, 1998).

A final aspect of trustworthiness is the confidence one has in the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes an integral part of the process. Spending time in the field allows depth of data collection but can also contribute to subjectivity. The researcher acknowledges her extensive background in the school system as a teacher, assistant principal, area office coordinator, and mentor trainer. This provided a background of context that could affect the way data were viewed. Subjectivity was checked in this study through peer review, participant involvement in the findings, guidance from experts, and oversight of the chair and dissertation committee.

Being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at the least that the processes of the research are carried out fairly; that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studied. The entire endeavor must be grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analyzed, how one’s own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved, and how results are communicated. (Ely, 1991, p. 93)

## CHAPTER 4 THE RESULTS

Three case studies were conducted in three different elementary schools from January to May. In each school the researcher focused on one mentor and her mentee, a beginning teacher with no prior experience. Research questions became the guide to discover the nature of each relationship and the forces instrumental in establishing and maintaining that relationship. Information was gathered from a variety of sources: interviews, observations, email responses, and documents that were developed by the mentor/mentee pair. Interviews and observations became the richest source of data. Weekly email responses tended to be very brief and, therefore, did not elicit as much information.

In this chapter the researcher will present a summary of each case looking at the key elements of school setting, biographical information, mentee's preparation for teaching, current teaching assignments, perception of role, description of the relationship, support for the mentee, and factors significant in the relationship. The chapter will conclude with a cross-case analysis, comparing and contrasting themes that emerged from each case in relation to the research questions.

### Case 1 – Ruth and Karen

#### *The School*

Beaver Creek Elementary, built in 1968, is nestled in a neighborhood of single-family homes and large trees. On the day of the researcher's visit, the sign in front of the school read: "Kindergarten Orientation May 13" and "Spring Concert/Spaghetti Dinner May 14" (Observation Field Notes, April 30, 2002). Approaching the school, one finds a park bench surrounded by vibrant red azaleas and hostas. Inside the building the principal and assistant principal were greeting students and teachers in the hall, as dismissal was about to begin. Inside the office student artwork adorned the window and "Happy Secretary's Day" posters from the first grade hung on the wall. Parents were arriving to pick up their children as a secretary was speaking on the phone to a parent in Spanish (Observation Field Notes, April 30, 2002).

Beaver Creek is proud of its diverse population. Of the 430 students in grades K-5, 121 are English as a Second Language (ESOL). They represent 26 nationalities and 17 different languages. Beaver Creek has changed over the years from a predominately middle class population to one with 37.97% of its students receiving free and reduced lunch, a federal measure of poverty in the public schools. Despite its diversity and high poverty rate, Beaver Creek has continued to raise student test scores during the last three years. The school now meets state standards for achievement and is provisionally accredited since less than 70% of students passed the science exam. The percent of students in grades 3 and 5 passing the state Standards of Learning (SOL) tests for 2000-2001 included 71% (English), 76% (math), 69% (science), and 73% (history).

Four years ago Beaver Creek's new principal initiated a study of early childhood best practices. This resulted in special programs to meet the needs of the Beaver Creek students: Success by Eight, full-day kindergarten, multi-age classes at the primary level, and team teaching at all grade levels. Success by Eight emphasizes ungraded instruction for students in grades K-2. Students are grouped and regrouped for different types of instruction to ensure that each student receives what he or she needs. In multi-age classrooms, students from several grade levels remain together for the entire year.

*The Mentor and Mentee (Ruth and Karen)*

Ruth has been a teacher at Beaver Creek for 7 years and is currently a mentor to Karen, a beginning teacher. Both Ruth and Karen teach multi-age classes. Ruth has a grade K-2 class and Karen has a grade 1-2 class. Their classrooms are located across the hall from each other and each has a movable wall to an adjoining classroom with another teacher who is called a teaching partner. Ruth and her teaching partner, Deloris, have permanently opened the wall between their classrooms making one long common area for 40 students. The classrooms have long tables in the middle with centers and learning areas around the periphery. Ruth and Deloris plan together and teach as a team.

Karen has a teaching partner, Edna, who has 6 years teaching experience but is new to the school system and new to the grade level. Because of this, Karen and Edna are often learning together and rely on Ruth for support and guidance. Karen and Edna have their classroom wall partially open but do a lot of planning and teaching together. Karen shared that her principal would like them to open the wall completely next year, which they will do. Karen's classroom has learning centers and activity areas for the children. There were many manipulatives and books as well as student work (butterfly poems) on the wall.

During the interviews, both teachers talked readily about their experiences. Ruth (mentor) was born in 1969 in Pennsylvania. School was always very important to her.

I think school was always a very important part of my growing up. My parents took it very seriously. My father has a law degree and brother has a master's and law degree. . . .

I think we were very influenced by my parents. (Mentor Interview 2, par. 13)

In high school Ruth volunteered twice a week in an elementary classroom playing games and doing letter reinforcement and projects. Ruth's father wanted her to study law but Ruth fell in love with teaching when she started her student teaching in college. "I love teaching. I love the kids. . . . They walk in every day with a huge smile on their face. They love their teacher" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 7 and 9).

Ruth has been teaching for 9 years at both the fifth and first grade levels, including her current multi-age assignment. Her original teaching experience was in a catholic school with a very traditional curriculum. Ruth declared that she likes the more hands-on approach of teaching with centers that she finds now at Beaver Creek and she prefers the primary children because of their enthusiasm.

Ruth has been very involved in the life of her school. She is team leader and chair of the Human Relations Committee at Beaver Creek. One of her responsibilities in this capacity was to help organize the school orientation for new teachers in August. She helped write the proposal for the Success by Eight special initiative several years ago and has trained student teachers. Her previous experience mentoring a beginning teacher was with an autism teacher last year. Ruth admitted that this relationship was not successful because the teacher was in a different subject area (special education) and her classroom was located in a different part of the building, which made it very difficult to get together.

And it was a little more difficult in the fact that we weren't teaching the same subject area. Her children were mainstreamed into our classroom for part of the day. But in terms of maybe being a person to come to for questions, I didn't always have the answers because I wasn't teaching the special ed. part of that. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 11)

The autism teacher left teaching at the end of the year, which was a source of sadness for Ruth.

Ruth was expecting her first child, due in June, at the time of the research study. She experienced some difficulties with the pregnancy and was not feeling well during most of the fall. She admitted that she left for home immediately after school each day, which curtailed the time she was able to meet with Karen.

Karen (mentee) was born in 1979 in Pennsylvania in a town very near where Ruth previously lived. Despite the 10-year difference in their ages, both mentor and mentee formed an immediate bond because of this affiliation. Karen had many previous experiences working with children including babysitting, coaching youth soccer teams, serving as a playground supervisor, nanny, and big sister. She talked about how she always wanted to be a teacher and attributed this to the teachers she had whom she thought were the “greatest.”

You know, I loved school. I always felt comfortable at school. And they [teachers] were always really my role models. . . . I know what made me feel comfortable and I want to bring that to other kids. (Mentee Interview 1, par.10)

Karen compared teaching to coaching as everyone has their own way of playing a sport, their own style, and their own way of learning.

Karen described herself as “sensitive to other people’s feelings” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 50) but also competitive, which she attributed to growing up playing sports. She likes to learn and wants to go back to school to get a master’s degree or Ph.D. “I think I have a quest for knowledge or however you explain it” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 50). She hopes to coach some day at the high school level.

Karen’s mentor, Ruth, described Karen as “very open to suggestions and learning more” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 67). She is willing to be a “team player, so that’s always nice to have somebody who wants to have suggestions given or wants to come to you” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 140).

#### *Preparation for Teaching*

Karen attended a big eastern university and majored in education. During her junior year the university began a professional development school that paired an elementary school with the university education department. During her senior year Karen worked as a student teacher in this school. She was assigned to a full-day kindergarten from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. during the entire year. She spent a lot of time in an attached second grade class and a fifth grade class where she taught math.

Our math professor was really about teaching them to understand what they were doing, not just teaching them the algorithm. So the teachers and the professors were really good about letting us put into practice what we were getting in our methods classes. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 33)

Karen felt that the professional development experience prepared her well for actual classroom teaching. “I got to see the changes that they [children] made and how they developed their reading skills and just how their behavior changed. . . . Plus I got to work with people that were involved, like the professors” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 23-24). With a ratio of 30 university students to 7 professors, the professional development school provided a lot of individual attention.

Karen acknowledged that last year was really her real first year of teaching as it was very stressful and overwhelming practice teaching in a school all year. However, Ruth, her mentor, talked about how experienced Karen is for a beginning teacher and attributed this to her preparation.

You can tell that the education she had and the experience she had in the field were really beneficial because she's come, jumped right in, first year teaching a multi-age which is often difficult. . . . Every time I've gone into her room her kids are doing exactly what they are supposed to be. And she does a lot of the center approaches we do. So they always seem to be on task and she's pulling her groups. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 49)

### *Beginning Teaching*

Beginning teaching can be very stressful. Both Ruth and Karen talked about the feelings of being in the classroom for the first time and both used the word "overwhelming." Karen described the long hours she initially put into her teaching.

In the beginning it was really overwhelming. I would say in the beginning I was here probably for 12-hour days for the first month of school. I'd get here at 7:00 and leave at 7:00. But once I, once we were able to get our routine done and, you know, planning went much more smoothly when we knew we were doing centers. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 87)

She talked about her need to be a better planner often requesting help from her mentor with materials, curriculum ideas, and prioritizing the curriculum.

We [mentee and teaching partner] were overwhelmed by the Native American unit because we got the binder and it was about a foot thick and we just didn't, I know that, we just had to sit down with them and say, you know, we can't do all of this, can you help us . . . tell us what they [students] need to know for the SOLs or somehow help us organize what we're going to teach them because we can't do it all. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 103)

Ruth reflected on her own beginning teaching 10 years ago and also described her beginning teaching as "overwhelming."

I can still remember my first experience and I wasn't fortunate to be in a school that they had mentors. So I just remember there, you know, there are times that it's overwhelming and you don't know who to go to and what to expect. . . . Every single thing you did in terms of report cards or attendance or whatever, you had to find out what the procedure was. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 149)

At the end of the year, Karen renewed her feelings of stress because of the many parent issues she faced (gifted and talented referrals, report card grades, retention) and fear that she would not complete the prescribed curriculum, especially in science.

Ruth substantiated the stresses of the end of the year. "The end of year document for close-down procedures is intimidating . . . like 20 pages thick of all the stuff you need to do before June" (Mentor Interview 2, par. 83).

### *Mentoring*

Both Ruth and Karen acknowledged the importance of the mentor program. In fact, having a mentor program was instrumental to Karen in her selection of where to teach after college.

I had an interview with somebody from the county and they told me about that [mentoring program]. It drew me here, I think, a lot because I knew what it was like from last year and . . . I didn't think it's fair to just throw somebody in somewhere and say this is your classroom and, you know, close the door and that's it. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 125)

Ruth had taken the mentor training. She said that her perception of the role of mentor was influenced by the fact that she herself had not had a mentor. She saw this as a great need. She

often reflected back on how she felt as a beginning teacher in making decisions about how to work with Karen. Ruth talked about how her role would depend on her mentee and what her needs are. She described herself in this role as primarily a “support person” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 94), someone the beginning teacher feels comfortable coming to if he/she needs help. Ruth felt that her ability to give support is one of her strengths as a mentor.

Karen perceived the role of mentor as a “guide” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 67) and “collaborator” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 68) and described an ideal mentor as one who assumes a very nonauthoritarian role.

It’s not like she’s up here and I’m down here. . . . I think, mentoring should be and is with us, I guess, a lot more of a collaborative thing where we’re both learning from each other. . . . Her role, her door is always open for me to go in there any time. . . . I wouldn’t really like an authoritarian person. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 66-70)

Karen expressed the similar notion of a mentor as support person for the beginning teacher. “She gives me ideas and she gives me support” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 67). *Working Together*

*First meeting.* Ruth and Karen first met during Karen’s interview at Beaver Creek. Ruth’s principal called Ruth to come in during the summer to participate in the selection committee for a new primary multi-age teacher. Karen was an early hire that meant that she had a contract with the school system but had not been assigned to a specific school. Ruth remembered the interview.

I remember thinking that she was wonderful and she was probably our top candidate from that interview. . . . We really liked her so I took her on a tour of the school. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 159, 163)

Karen had two job offers but selected Beaver Creek because of the positive attitude of the principal and staff. The principal had an hour-long phone conversation with her on a Friday night prior to the interview.

That was another thing. There were teachers in my interview and the assistant principal. I just got the same kind of feeling from the staff that I was getting from N [principal]. . . . I made definitely the right choice. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 43 and 44)

Karen, too, remembered the school tour and appreciated Ruth’s forthrightness as they walked the building after the interview. “She told me how it really was here. So from the very beginning she was really, she’s always been really up front with me” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 62).

*First week.* Ruth’s initial assistance to Karen came the week before school started. Teachers worked in their classrooms and had staff, team, and curriculum meetings during this week. As Karen faced the challenges of setting up her room as a new teacher, Ruth stayed late to facilitate this effort and to help Karen plan for the first day.

And I stayed to help Karen set up her room, sometimes hard when you have nothing, to try to find the materials. So we tried to gather as much as we could, especially the night before the Open House. I remember. She was feeling like it wasn’t going to get done, you know. It was one of those, even though you know it will. And we did meet that week to plan and share some of the things that I’ve done on the first day. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 155)

*Learning centers.* Karen described how early on she had a hard time facilitating learning centers for her students. They often missed work when they were pulled for guided reading. She and her teaching partner, Edna, requested help from Ruth and met with her during their lunch hour. Karen also observed how Ruth worked her reading and math centers while Edna

supervised her class one morning. Ruth described a process that transpired over several days with mentor helping both Ruth and Edna.

When they [Karen and Edna] wanted to set up their math centers they came over. Their planning time is our lunch time so we spent several lunch times just kind of sharing what we did and going through the books. And then they would go back and talk and come back and ask questions. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 69)

*Curriculum planning.* Karen spoke of how overwhelmed she was with the curriculum for the Native Americans unit. Both she and Edna needed help in prioritizing what to teach. Karen usually planned with Edna but she often went to Ruth for ideas on how to implement her lessons and get started with materials. This time, the four team members (mentor, mentee and their two teaching partners) worked together to plan the unit.

Well, for the Native Americans unit we [Edna and Karen] were blown away by the whole thing because it was supposed to be, I don't remember, a 12-week unit or something and we just were overwhelmed by it so we went over there and asked them how they broke it down last year and they just put out a binder like about three feet thick and said here, you know, we broke it; we have woodlands and plains and you can take the binder and bring it back whenever you want and make copies of whatever you want to take. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 90)

Karen liked working with the four team members because it was an easy work environment in which they were not competing with each other.

*Assessment.* Assessment is an area in which Karen needed assistance and also reassurance. She described a time when she received a parent complaint after the first report cards because the child got a G (good) on the report card for reading instead of an O (outstanding). Karen wrestled with this grade, talked first to Edna, her teaching partner, but thought she needed more definitive information from Ruth, her mentor.

So then I went over to Ruth and asked her and she said it was my call pretty much that if I didn't feel she was an O and that gave her room to grow. . . . Ruth offered to do the DRA [reading assessment] because I haven't taken the class . . . and then we went and discussed how she did . . . and some things to say to the father. . . . But having Ruth do the DRA and give us ideas about, you know, she said that's happened in her own classroom before and it made the conversation go a lot more smoothly with the father. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 76)

*Student achievement.* Ruth and Karen independently shared a problem that occurred when Karen wrestled with what to do for a student who was not making expected progress. Ruth suggested that Karen refer the student to the local screening committee (committee of teachers, specialists, and administrators to make recommendations for special education services). Ruth gave Karen ideas on what to say, how to write the referral to make it more professional, and what to do in the meeting. Ruth also gave Karen ideas on how to work with the student using a behavioral reward system and self-rating his own behavior. These discussions occurred informally before and during school.

Karen talked about how she went to Ruth's classroom immediately after the local screening meeting to discuss an issue that emerged during the meeting. Ruth's students were at centers so they could talk. The committee had denied special education services for the student and indicated that his grades were too high to warrant low achievement, a necessary criterion for special education eligibility. This raised another issue of how to grade the student's work. As Karen stated, "I had concerns that he [student] was making progress but he still wasn't

[progressing]in a lot of aspects of the satisfactory level” (Mentee Interview 2, par. 17). Karen and Ruth then had discussions about grading and Ruth helped her “talk through” what is an “N” (not making progress) and “S” (satisfactory progress). Most of the discussions occurred in Ruth’s classroom while school was in session during class time for centers and lunch. Karen shared this process.

Right after the local screening committee meeting we were talking about how it went and things and I was just talking about that I was frustrated because I feel what they were telling me to do with giving him Ns wasn’t giving him any confidence to show that he is making some improvement so then I went to her after local screening and we talked. We talked about what to be doing with that. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 25)

The issue continued at report card time. “I went back to her again and said, you know, here are some of the behaviors I was seeing with him, and did she think in some of the cases it warranted, you know Ss or Ns” (Mentee Interview 2, par.31). These discussions were not at set times but when Karen had an immediate need. Karen acknowledged that she liked this fluid arrangement. “I wouldn’t want a mentor . . . to say . . . it’s Tuesday . . . we have to meet now from 4:00 to 5:30. . . . I like the informal (Mentee Interview 1, par. 70 and 131).

*Time.* Ruth and Karen did not have a common planning time. When an issue arose they went back and forth into each other’s classrooms, especially before school, at lunch, and during the times when their classes were in centers. As Karen stated, “We don’t often sit down for an hour at a time and talk, you know, it’s a lot more informal back and forth or she’ll come over during, we have, our lunch overlaps a little bit” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 95). Ruth usually stopped into Karen’s room every morning. Karen went regularly to see Ruth with an issue or question. Thus, issues and problems were addressed as soon as they surfaced and often continued through several days. Karen attributed this informal arrangement to having a teaching partner who can supervise the other’s class.

Most of the time they [discussions] are very informal, that whenever some things come up since she is a teaching partner and I’m a teaching partner. If something is a major thing that needs to be talked about one, I mean, we can get coverage very easily because our rooms are, have the walls down in between them. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 37)

There were times when Ruth and Karen met more formally, usually to plan activities or curriculum. This occurred during their common lunchtime or before or after school. One example included discussions about referrals for the gifted and talented program. Karen had several students who scored high enough on standardized testing to be considered for the program. Ruth and Karen met during lunch and talked about how to fill out the teacher evaluation forms.

We sat down and talked about what all the criteria meant and . . . I think that was actually a formal time because we knew it would take more than just a few minutes. It might have been at lunch. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 106)

The researcher also observed the mentor and mentee with their respective teaching partners in a formal planning session The agenda included planning for a joint Dr. Seuss Day and upcoming field trip to the zoo.

### *The Relationship*

The most important thing for Ruth was having a positive and open relationship with Karen, her mentee. “I think it just leads to a very pleasant learning experience for both people” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 198).

Predominant in their descriptions of the relationship were the words “friendly” and “comfortable.” Ruth noted, “I think it [relationship] is very friendly. She’s you know, called me at home before . . . and I just feel very comfortable going into her room. I think she feels comfortable coming over to ask me questions” (Mentor Interview 2,

par. 64). Karen echoed the words of Ruth also describing the relationship as friendly and comfortable. Comfortable to her meant discussing personal things as well as professional.

It’s [relationship] comfortable and it’s friendly. . . . In the morning [mentor] and I usually get here at 7:00. . . . She’ll just come in, you know. We’ll have a conversation just not necessarily about school, but what she did over the weekend or most anything.

(Mentee Interview 1, par. 91)

Laughter is an important element in their friendly relationship. When talking about the upcoming field trip to the zoo, Karen remarked, “We joke a lot about when she goes to the zoo she’s going to have to just sit on the park bench because she’ll almost be due [pregnant] at that point” (Mentee Interview 2, par. 52). During the team-planning meeting for Dr. Seuss Day that the researcher observed, Ruth shared personal stories about her father-in-law. “Ruth’s body language was open and friendly. She smiled, laughed, and used humor; she made eye contact with the others” (Observation Field Notes, February 22, 2002).

Both mentor and mentee also described a collaborative relationship that was nonhierarchical and nonauthoritarian. Ruth stated that their relationship is an “equal exchange of ideas” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 111). She felt that she got as much from Karen as Karen did from her.

[Mentee] is just outstanding in her professionalism, her knowledge of the curriculum and students, and the time I spend with her I . . . feel like I get something out of it, too.

(Mentor Interview 2, par. 123)

Ruth described some of the teaching ideas she used from Karen such as an egg carton math game to reinforce addition and subtraction and Martin Luther King’s Day cloud writing forms. Karen felt free to adapt Ruth’s ideas to her own needs. “I think the biggest actually is the attitude that she [Ruth] portrayed that she, you know, that she wasn’t telling me how to set, how to run things or set things up” (Mentee Interview 2, par. 66). Karen described their relationship as a football game, in which “She [Ruth] is the quarterback and she’s throwing more ideas but, you know, at the same time we’re working together as a team to get what needs to be done” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 70).

### *Factors in the Relationship*

Ruth and Karen reflected on the factors that were most significant in their relationship. Both attributed a great deal to personality. Karen commented on her mentor’s easy-going personality and the effect it had on her. She also commented on how proximity of their classrooms facilitated back and forth interaction.

I think it also helps that, I don’t know, if this was any consideration when they were set up but I think we have some similar personality characteristics. I would say we were both pretty easy going and, I’ve never really seen her very, extremely stressed and I think that helps me to stay, not to stress out about things. Work will be there. The work will be there tomorrow. You know, there is no need to worry about it tonight. So I just, I think that the proximity and just our personality are really the main things that helped. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 85)

As Karen noted, their personalities seemed to coincide right from the beginning, even during Karen’s interview at Beaver Creek.

Ruth was in my interview from the very beginning. She is the one that showed me around the school. I just think we have similar [personalities]. Our personalities are pretty similar just from the beginning when I was going over there a lot and asking them about things. I think it has a lot to do with our personalities, that they are not in conflict at all, they coincide. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 54)

Ruth also talked of Karen's personality as a prime factor in the relationship and described her as a real team player. "I think Karen, herself, has helped. She is very willing to be a team player, so that's always nice to have somebody who wants to have suggestions given or wants to come to you" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 141).

A second factor cited by Karen was similarity of grade level, the fact that they both taught in a multi-age class. This facilitated planning together.

I think it also helps that we teach the same grade levels for the most part. That she is a multi-age and we're multi-age. And we're on the same plan for the year so we're teaching the same concepts, not always at the same time but you know, where she is going to do Native Americans and we're doing Native Americans at some time. So we can sit down, no matter if I'm doing them in March and she's doing them in May.

(Mentee Interview 1, par. 84)

Ruth felt that difference in teaching assignment was a detriment in mentoring her previous beginning teacher, an autism specialist. Lack of proximity of classroom also played a part in preventing an ongoing relationship as the autism teacher was located in a different level of the building. Karen also identified proximity as a positive factor. "I think one thing is that it's important that she is right across the hall from me. It makes it easy just to pop in and out whenever I have a question" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 84).

Other factors cited in the relationship included the principal and time. The principal was a positive force and time was a negative one. Ruth shared that her principal is always very positive and willing to provide time for them to observe each other. This included allowing the teaching partner to supervise the other teacher's class so that the mentor and mentee could observe each other. And on one full day Ruth was able to go back and forth into Karen's class to videotape her teaching. Karen cited how important this videotaping was and valued the feedback she received on streamlining her morning class meetings. Karen also mentioned how helpful the principal had been in welcoming her and in supporting her when the school system budget was cut in the winter. On separate occasions both the principal and the assistant principal called Karen to the office to reassure her that she would still have her job at the school. The principal also finds positive things to say about her teachers. Karen felt very pleased when her principal told her that she had definitely made the right decision to hire her.

Planning time was also a factor in the relationship. Karen expressed how hard it was to find time to meet because they did not have the same planning time. This necessitated meeting before or after school. And after school was not an option in the fall because of Ruth's pregnancy.

I guess it's hard sometimes because we don't have the same planning time. But I don't know how that would ever, even work because Edna and I obviously have the same planning time because we need to plan more together. And so the time we would meet would be before or after school and I was taking Spanish . . . and sometimes I just wanted to be alone in my room and try to get some things done. . . . I was feeling pressure to get stuff done for tomorrow. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 94)

But Karen also saw a positive side of time. Lack of planning time meant a more informal back and forth relationship, which she liked. “It would be helpful if more time were built into the day. But we don’t really often sit down for an hour at a time and talk; that’s not the nature of our relationship; it’s a lot more informal back and forth” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 95).

#### *Support from Others*

Karen had support from many others at Beaver Creek. She talked about this as her “support network” and indicated that networking and teaming with others was the most important advice she could give a new teacher. “I would tell a new teacher to build a support network at school. Everyone there knows what you are going through and is willing to help/listen” (Mentee Email Response 6).

Karen had a very broad support network that included her teaching partner, Edna, her entire multi-age team (Ruth, Deloris, and Edna) and her lead mentor teacher. Karen and Edna, her teaching partner, would regularly plan together. They shared a common planning time. “Edna has been teaching for 6 years so I do get a lot of my ideas from her because we do the same things. But at the same time, she’s new to the school, too” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 106). Edna and Karen taught their science lessons together with both classes and Edna helped her with specific students’ recommendations for summer school. Often the four multi-age teachers would plan together particularly for field trips, special days such as 100 Day celebration, and beginning units of study such as the Native Americans unit. The researcher observed them in one such planning session. When asked how she decided whom to go to for assistance Karen summed it up as follows:

I guess the first person I would go to is probably Edna, my teaching partner, because we share kids and, you know, we create kids together. . . . We will sit down and plan things together but we would go more to Ruth for getting ideas on how to, you know, get some materials to use or how to get something started such as the Native Americans unit. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 72 and 88-98)

Karen would go to her mentor when she had a question or sometimes Karen and her teaching partner would go together to seek help. In essence, Ruth was mentoring a team of teachers, both Edna and Karen. She would photocopy materials for both of them. She would share her files and plan with them.

Both Ruth and Karen cited the lead mentor teacher for her efforts to support the beginning teachers at Beaver Creek. She brought all mentors and mentees together periodically during the year to discuss key issues such as Back-to-School Night; she organized a morning breakfast for new teachers. “We have a great lead mentor teacher so I could use her. . . . She gives us hand outs every month and different things that we can do with our mentee” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 190).

Karen also had a social network of support at Beaver Creek. She has been to her mentor’s home for a Pampered Chef party. She has become friends with the other new teachers at the school, especially the physical education (P.E.) and music teachers. They regularly go out for dinner or happy hours on Friday night. She commented on how valuable these social relationships were as a way for more informal interaction with colleagues.

#### *The Future*

Karen was nominated for the First Year Teacher Award from her school system. In her nomination packet her principal described her many abilities.

For a first year teacher, Karen has extraordinary classroom management skills. It is apparent from visiting Karen’s classroom that she devoted a great deal of time at the

beginning of the year setting up her classroom routines. Both her language arts and math instruction are organized in a center approach. . . . Karen teaches the children how to problem solve solutions without adult intervention. . . . Karen encourages her students to take risks. . . . She is an advocate for all of her students and her genuine concern for each child is apparent in her daily interactions with them. (First Year Teacher Award Application, April 2002)

Ruth will be off on maternity leave next year but hopes to be a mentor again as the role gives her more opportunities to help. Karen will continue teaming with Edna. Having a mentor has shown her the importance of collaboration.

I guess I never thought of myself as a team teacher with somebody and then seeing Ruth and Deloris being able to do it smoothly helped change my mind on that. It shows that there is always that collaborating, that collaboration and sharing ideas makes life much easier. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 136)

#### Case 2 – Katherine and Laura

##### *The Schools*

Lakeland Elementary, built in 1964, is set on a hill overlooking a large baseball field and playground. The front of the school presented a “vibrant spring picture” (Observation Field Notes, April 18, 2002) with red and white azaleas terraced by the door and two flowering plum trees to the side. The principal indicated that the custodians had just mulched the plantings and that they [custodians] take a lot of pride in their school. Inside the building a father sat on the sofa reading a magazine, presumably waiting for his child to be dismissed. A bulletin board titled “Soaring High – Principals Distinguished Writers” (Observation Field Notes, April 18, 2002) displayed a variety of student work including poetry and stories. A secretary greeted a parent by name and asked how her child was feeling. The principal moved out of the office to be with students as they were dismissed.

Lakeland Elementary has 402 students in grades K-6. There are 62 children in the English as a Second Language (ESOL) program and 20.73% of the student population receiving free and reduced lunch. The school has met all state standards for 2000-2001 and is fully accredited. The percent of students in grades 3 and 5 passing the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests included 87% (English), 80% (math), 80% (science), and 79% (history). The school takes pride in its character education curriculum and emphasis on conflict resolution. This program teaches students skills, techniques, and methods of conflict resolution as well as violence prevention and anger management. Lakeland also has a special education preschool program with Peer Helpers from the K-6 general education classes assisting in the special education classrooms.

Laura is a beginning teacher for a half-day kindergarten class in the morning at Lakeland. While Lakeland is her “home” school and the site of her mentor, Katherine, Laura also teaches a half-day kindergarten class in the afternoon at neighboring West Orchard Elementary. West Orchard is a similar school facility, built in 1955, and has approximately the same enrollment, with 438 students in grades K-6. However, West Orchard has a much lower percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch (5.01% ). There are fewer families with both parents working at West Orchard and many more classroom volunteers. Nearly 100% of families at West Orchard were enrolled in the PTA. West Orchard was fully accredited for 2000-2001. The percent of students in grades 3 and 5 passing the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests included 91% (English), 90% (math), 91% (science), and 87% (history). In all areas these scores were higher than Lakeland’s. West Orchard benefited from expanded technology resources funded

through a business partnership. This included a wireless connection to the Internet and an online student newspaper.

*The Mentor and Mentee (Katherine and Laura)*

Katherine has been a kindergarten teacher at Lakeland for 4 years and is currently a mentor to Laura, a beginning teacher. Katherine teaches two sessions of kindergarten, a morning and an afternoon, in the same classroom. Classes are scheduled back to back so that the afternoon kindergartners arrive as the morning students are being dismissed. Class sessions are each 3 hours. Katherine has a full time instructional assistant to help with her classes.

Laura is a beginning teacher with no prior experience. She teaches a morning session of kindergarten at Lakeland in a classroom across the hall from Katherine, her mentor. However, Laura leaves at noon each day to teach an afternoon session of kindergarten at West Orchard, approximately 2 miles away. At West Orchard she shares a classroom with Kelly, a half time teacher who has been assigned as a “buddy” to Laura. In the same classroom, Kelly teaches kindergarten for a morning session and Laura teaches kindergarten for an afternoon session. Laura noted that teaching in two schools has not been easy, especially adapting to different students and two very different styles of teaching.

Another reason it’s difficult is because my classes are very different. My children at Lakeland seem to be for the most part on a lower level than my children over here [West Orchard]. And also Katherine [mentor] runs her classroom different than the teacher over here runs her classroom. Katherine has the differentiated groups whereas over here it’s a lot of whole group, sometimes two groups, so it makes it hard with planning. I feel like I’m being pulled in two different directions sometimes. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 181)

Katherine and Laura talked about themselves. Katherine has been teaching for 4 years. She was born in 1957 in California. From the time she was small she remembered volunteering with children. Significant for her were her experiences working with special needs students.

When I was in junior high school I volunteered with their Department of Recreation with mentally retarded children. . . . In high school I continued to volunteer with kids who were disadvantaged. And then through college I volunteered with special needs kids. I don’t know why I am not a special ed. teacher because actually I did a lot of volunteer work with special needs kids. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 15)

Katherine admitted that special education was not well developed as a field 20 years ago, which may have influenced her decision to become a kindergarten teacher. She felt that her special education experiences benefited her as a teacher as there are always many students with special needs within the regular classroom.

Katherine graduated from college 20 years ago with a degree in education but chose to work for the government as there was a hiring freeze for teachers. She ended up teaching communication classes for the federal government for 8 years and then taught preschool while her children (two girls) were young. She has always been very involved with her girls coaching Odyssey of the Mind and leading a Girl Scout troop.

Katherine has been teaching kindergarten in the public schools for 4 years. She felt that, although she is 20 years older than Laura, her experiences are more closely aligned with Laura’s because she is a relatively new teacher herself.

I’m not a 20-year teacher. I’m only a four-year teacher. And so I can say to her, I know exactly how overwhelming this is. You know and some of it I’m still trying to figure out. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 53)

At Lakeland Katherine is chair of the Human Relations Committee and lead teacher for kindergarten. She mentored a kindergarten teacher last year at a neighboring school because that school had two new kindergarten teachers. She described herself as positive, optimistic, energetic, and very patient, especially in working with children. Her mentee, Laura, described her as very open and always willing to help.

Laura was born in 1978 in the same county in which she is currently teaching. She decided to work in a daycare center during one summer break in high school to see how she felt about working with children.

And when I was in that center I was working with really young children but I still feel like it gave me a good picture of what being a teacher and what working with kids every day would be like. I just really enjoyed what I was doing and going to work wasn't so much a chore for me. It was something that I liked. And so that's kind of what started me off thinking that I wanted to be a teacher. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 20)

Laura also credited her interest in teaching to the teachers she had as a child in elementary school. "I had the best teachers and I loved school and I loved everything that I did with school. And I felt like I wanted to be a good role model for my students as well" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 20). Laura shared that she felt it important to teach students good values and morals as well as the curriculum as she saw so many students "getting lost in this modern time" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 20). She was currently certified to teach grades K-3.

Laura described herself as caring and sensitive but a real perfectionist when it comes to her teaching.

When it comes to this job I've become a perfectionist. I feel that I'm a very caring and sensitive and kind and empathetic person which I think are great qualities to have for this job. . . . I never feel like I'm doing enough. . . . I always feel like there is something else I should be doing and I always want to do everything to the best that I possibly can.

(Mentee Interview 1, par. 37-43)

Her mentor, Katherine, described her also as very caring, warm, quiet, and very hard working, "She's dedicated and puts a lot of time into preparation" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 137).

### *Preparation for Teaching*

Laura attended a large university in her home state and majored in education. She decided to concentrate on early childhood education during her sophomore year. Her student teaching experience included 8 weeks in kindergarten and 8 weeks in first grade at a school in the county where she is currently teaching. She thought this would be helpful since she hoped to get a job in the same county. The school was very diverse with a high English as a Second Language (ESOL) population. Many of the students came to kindergarten not speaking English and not knowing the alphabet or numbers. This was a contrast to the students in her current classes, especially her afternoon class, who came to kindergarten with higher literacy skills. Laura felt that her student teaching experience was the most helpful part of her teaching preparation.

Just because I was actually doing things. We're always taught in college that hands-on learning is best for the students and it's best for adults, too. Because by teaching and by actually being the teacher I learned, I feel that I learned so much more than I ever learned sitting in a class in college. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 62)

Laura served as a long-term substitute in an elementary school after graduation. She worked with small groups of first graders reinforcing reading and math skills. She was initially offered a position teaching second grade but that job fell through in August. As she admitted, she

was “scrambling around for a job . . . and got offered this kindergarten position” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 30). Teaching in two different schools was not her choice but the best available option at the late date.

### *Beginning Teaching*

Laura reflected on her first several months of teaching as overwhelming. She described a cycle that included ups and downs but also many positive rewards.

The first word that comes to mind is overwhelmed. I feel very overwhelmed just because there is so much being thrown at me and just a lot on my plate right now. It goes up and down, though. Sometimes I’m feeling like I’m on top of things and then other times I’m feeling like I’m barely keeping my head above water. But it is a very positive experience, too, because I am enjoying what I’m doing and I love teaching and I love being with the children every day. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 217)

She was very apprehensive about Back-to-School Night, dealing with parents, and leaned on her mentor for help. She expressed a sense that she continually feels like there is something else she should be doing.

Katherine, her mentor, also described beginning teaching as overwhelming and elaborated on the pressures of working in a school system with very high expectations. She reflected on her own beginning teaching just four years ago and the lack of time to complete her tasks.

It’s overwhelming. The county has very, very high expectations and not that they are not good expectations but there is a lot to do and there is never enough time and there are never enough resources. There is a lot of pressure all the time, you know. She [Laura] says this and I feel this also. Even if you’re at home on the weekend and you’re not doing school work you feel guilty because you feel like there is so much to do that you should be spending all your spare time doing school work. I know the first year that I was teaching, every Sunday afternoon and evening I spent doing school work and you know you still feel like there is not enough time to get everything done. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 76)

Katherine talked also about how Laura often feels very overwhelmed with the kindergarten curriculum “because in kindergarten we don’t have, you know, a math book and you turn to page 10 one day and the next day you do page 11. . . . You just have to look at the POS [Program of Studies] and figure out how you’re going to do all those things” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 46). In the beginning of the year, Katherine helped Laura with the kindergarten assessment, another large area of concern for Laura.

### *Mentoring*

Katherine praised the mentoring program because it is important for beginning teachers to have someone to go to who is not their supervisor. She emphasized that, unlike the supervisor, the mentor is not there to judge you. She saw the role of mentor as a friend but also more than a friend. Because she has been assigned the role, she is someone really looking out for her new teacher.

I think a mentor is more like a friend who is going to, without judging you, give you help, give you information. . . . When you’re a new teacher you need someone that you can just lean on or talk to. . . . You know you make friends in a school but when someone is assigned to you they are really looking out for you. I really think that’s important. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 160)

Katherine defined “looking out for” as making sure Laura had a smooth year, that she didn’t fall on her face, but was prepared for any situation.

Katherine felt that she was well prepared for her role as mentor. While the mentor training provided helpful information such as the cycles of the first year of teaching, Katherine attributed much of her success as a mentor to the communication skills training she did with the federal government, learning how to talk to people in different situations. She was motivated to become a mentor through her many life experiences and her desire to help a new teacher.

And I’m glad to do it because I think it’s really useful to have someone helping you through the beginning, you know, of your career. I’m in a really different position than Laura because, you know, at 45 I have a lot of life experiences that she doesn’t have. . . . Someone just out of college, it’s a scary time. You know, your first job, you have to pay all those bills. It’s a big thing so I’m glad to do it. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 154)

Laura defined the role of mentor as a friend. She elaborated, “I feel a mentor is somebody who is a friend, who listens to you and makes you feel comfortable and also who is willing to share their ideas and thoughts and opinions with you” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 147). Laura also cited the role of mentor as a positive role model through the first year of teaching. She described a mentor who helps the beginning teacher stay focused and not too overwhelmed.

#### *Working Together*

*First Week.* Katherine and Laura met each other for the first time during health training at Lakeland the week the teachers returned. As Laura indicated, “We were just introduced and introduced ourselves to each other and shook hands and just kind of started chatting” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 95). Laura described Katherine telling her about the school in general and trying to help her feel less overwhelmed. “And she just had so much information to share with me about the school and about getting everything set up for the first week” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 97).

Katherine described the first week as very hectic. Teachers had a whole week to get ready for the opening of school but there were intervening situations. Teachers came back on a Monday but Laura did not appear at Lakeland until Wednesday. She was at West Orchard both Monday and Tuesday for meetings because West Orchard was her base school.

It was hectic for her because she had, you know, meetings to go to at that school and this school. It’s a funny thing because her base school is actually that school. So she’s required to go to all of their staff meetings and their meetings; therefore she misses a lot of our meetings. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 88)

Katherine described further the hectic nature of that week as Lakeland had just been given another kindergarten class. This was Laura’s classroom; she was newly employed to the school and also needed to set up an entirely new classroom.

We were given another kindergarten class the week before school started. So we had to get furniture, materials. You know, we’re going through storage closets. She had things that had to be ordered. We needed to talk about what to put on bulletin boards, how to put the schedule on the board, get a calendar, just all the basics of setting up a room, and it’s a crazy time because we had the SACC [School-Age Child Care] program here in the summer so on the first floor we had to completely pack up all the rooms. So my entire room was not set up either. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 84)

Fortunately, Laura’s morning teacher at West Orchard, Kelly, set up their shared kindergarten class at that school.

Laura spoke highly of the assistance that Katherine gave to her during the first week, particularly in helping her set up her new classroom at Lakeland.

When I first got into my room there was furniture in there but it was kind of like all in the middle of the room. And I kind of had an idea of how I wanted to organize things but I really wasn't sure and she came over and helped me move furniture around and gave me really helpful suggestions of how I could do things but not forceful suggestions where I felt like I had to listen to what she was saying to me. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 92)

Katherine's daughter also came over to help Laura cut out bulletin board displays and Katherine assigned her own instructional assistant full time to help Laura. Laura summed up her feelings about her mentor this first week.

She [Katherine] was so willing to help me even though she had all of her own room to set up as well but she was just there for me and just really willing. I never felt like I was a chore to her. I always felt like this was something she wanted to do and she genuinely cared about me and my room being set up. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 93)

*Classroom management.* Laura had difficulty at first with classroom management. She needed to hear what was realistic in setting up her classroom routines in terms of rules and guidelines and she also sought reassurances from her mentor. "It was just helpful to me to hear that reassurance from her that I was on the right track" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 131).

Classroom management continued to be an area that mentor and mentee worked on together. Laura was particularly worried about some behavior problems in her classroom. She talked to Katherine, gained some constructive ideas, and, again, received reassurances that this was normal behavior.

I talked to Katherine about it and she just kind of reassured me and told me that that was normal and that in her class the same things are happening and it made me feel a lot better, like I wasn't the one causing all these problems. (Mentee Interview 1, par.225)

Katherine described how she helped Laura set up her centers in the kindergarten classroom. Laura used Katherine's ideas but modified the structure from four bear groups that rotated each day to a different center to two groups. Katherine described how Laura is more comfortable dividing her class in half so that she and her instructional assistant each have control of a center. Katherine acknowledged that this allowed Laura to cover the same activities but in a way suitable for her own classroom management style.

*Back-to-School Night/Curriculum Night.* Laura described how Back-to-School Night consumed much of her time and thoughts the first few weeks and how she worked through this with her mentor.

Something big for me was help with organizing Back-to-School Night because that was something I was like apprehensive about these parents coming into my classroom for the first time. What do I talk about? What do I give them? What are they going to be expecting from me? So that was something I really leaned on her for. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 117)

Katherine showed her handouts from the previous year and was very reassuring that everything would be fine.

Curriculum Night for parents several weeks later also generated a lot of beginning teacher anxiety and joint planning. Katherine talked about how Laura wanted to make sure that she was doing all the things she needed to do to get her room ready. Mentor and mentee spent time talking about kinds of things to put out on the table and things she could hang in the wall. Katherine recommended that Laura display some big books that her class had made rather than

individual student work because of the absence of individual desks in kindergarten. Katherine shared that it was a good evening for Laura.

*Curriculum planning.* Katherine has been the solo kindergarten teacher in her school so has enjoyed collaborating with another teacher for the first time. “She’s the only one I can talk curriculum about as far the kindergarten curriculum. . . . I’ve always been the only kindergarten teacher. So it’s nice for me to have someone else to talk to” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 58). Katherine indicated that she does most of her lesson planning at home but then shares and talks through items with Laura.

We talk about the upcoming units of study, but I usually plan by myself at home, and just share my plans with her when we can grab a moment. She knows that my door is always open and she is comfortable coming over whenever she has a question or concern.

(Mentor Email Response 1)

Laura stated that most of their interaction is based around planning as that is what she needs most as a first year teacher. Typically in the beginning of the week she will talk with Katherine about plans for that week.

Over the past several weeks she has also helped me with my planning. She gave me a revised copy of her weekly units up until June; she gave me a great activity to leave with a sub since I had to miss school, and she has shown me the activities that she is doing in her class right now, including a great idea for the dramatic play center that incorporated money. (Mentee Email Response 1)

Laura described a collaborative arrangement in which planning and sharing ideas often involved both Lakeland and West Orchard.

We kind of planned out which subjects we were going to cover when like the five senses we did around the same time . . . and we talked about friendship around the same time.

She would just share her ideas and past activities and I would share any new ideas that I had with her. And also being at this school [West Orchard] in the afternoon I’m getting like double ideas from teachers so I share my morning teacher’s [Kelly’s] ideas with Katherine and I share Katherine’s ideas with Kelly. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 105)

Katherine readily shared her curriculum books and books on tape with Laura. She wrote a nine-week letter for parents outlining the kindergarten curriculum and shared this also with Laura, offering to make any changes to meet her needs.

*Time.* Both mentor and mentee described a very informal structure back and forth between their classrooms in order to facilitate their planning. This was necessitated by the fact that the two did not have a common planning time and that Laura left at noon every day for her afternoon kindergarten class at West Orchard. During the beginning of the year she would come back to Lakeland to meet with Katherine but since has stopped doing that because of time and Katherine’s after-school activities with her own children. As Katherine stated:

We have little bits of time where we, you know, go back and forth. . . . And when I have, when she has specials often my class is in centers, and so that’s a time I can go over to her room because my aide is in the classroom. . . . You know, we’re working on this and this and this and just doing it, talking as fast as I can in trying to, you know, get through it in a quick amount of time because that’s what we’re doing. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 99, 106, 164)

Laura corroborated this arrangement indicating that they “just talk here and there . . . before school . . . when her children are having snack, when my children are having snack “ (Mentee Interview 2, par. 9). She remembered one conversation they had walking into the

building in which they talked about report cards. The conversation continued into the classrooms and during recess.

*Parents.* Many of Laura's worries throughout her first year involved parent issues. This was particularly significant in the beginning of the year.

You know, in the beginning of the year, you know, she had a lot of parent worries, worried about this parent or that parent and I could just say to her, you know what, it's going to be fine. And I can give her ideas on, you know, this is what I said to a parent. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 54)

Katherine described these worries as they evolved through the year.

Her biggest challenge throughout the year has been probably worrying about parents and what they're thinking. . . . She just needs someone to say, well, you can do it, you can get through it and, you know, think about saying these things. . . . She's gotten through the situations. She's very good; she really is. She can hold even a difficult conference. . . . I think the hardest part is anticipating and worrying and thinking through. And once she does it, she's very good. (Mentor Interview 2, par. 80)

*Retention.* A very difficult parent conference involved the possible retention of a kindergarten student in Laura's class. Laura admitted that "my biggest challenge during the last few weeks was conferencing with the parents of a child who I think would benefit from repeating kindergarten next year" (Mentee Email Response 2). Laura and Katherine talked about the skills needed in first grade and possible retention. Laura also consulted with the reading teacher.

Well, I had briefly talked to Katherine before. I had talked to the reading teacher within my school. I talked to the teacher at this school [West Orchard] so I just compiled different information from different teachers. That's basically how I did it. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 86)

Laura then decided to conference with the parents who were divorced and had very different philosophies. Katherine rehearsed various conference scenarios with her anticipating what each parent might say. Laura acknowledged that Katherine always has "good advice to give me and I really trust her opinions and her thoughts because she is more experienced than I am" (Mentee Interview 2, par. 30). After her parent conference, Laura ran immediately to Katherine's classroom because the mother had gotten upset with her.

I ran over to Katherine's room just to talk to her about the conference and to get her advice on how everything went and if I said the right things or if I should have said something different . . . and she [Katherine] was just very reassuring . . . that I had told her the right things. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 15)

Later in the day this conversation continued as Katherine "popped back over" (Mentee Interview 2, par. 80) to Laura's classroom to talk further about the child.

### *The Relationship*

Katherine and Laura talked readily about their relationship. Laura described her relationship with Katherine as a flower because it started out small as a seed and then grew.

It's like a flower, I guess, because when we first met it started out small, like the seed was just growing. We were getting to know each other. And then throughout the year it's just progressed. I feel like the flower continues to bloom more and more as our relationship becomes stronger and stronger and we rely on each other for more and more. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 5)

She defined the essence of the relationship with her mentor as friendship. Elaborating, she cited the enjoyment of talking together and her hopes that it was more than a one-way street.

I feel like we're friends. I can talk to her about anything. It's a very positive relationship. I look forward to seeing her every day in school and I just enjoy talking with her and having her to rely on and hope that she feels like she can come to me when she needs to talk about things, too, because I don't want it to be just a one-sided relationship. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 163)

She also talked about how the relationship was comfortable and nonjudgmental. "And she was very laid back which made me feel comfortable to open up to her and talk to her because I knew she wouldn't be judging me" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 63). Again in her first Email Response Laura emphasized the nonjudgmental aspect of the friendship. "One day last week I went back to Lakeland to get some work done. Katherine was still there and we ended up talking about school, students, and our personal lives. . . . She's there to listen, not to judge me" (Mentee Email Response 1).

Katherine cited over and over again how much Laura worried about things and this defined their relationship. Many of the reasons that Laura went to Katherine's classroom were for reassurance or verification that what she was doing was in fact what she should be doing as a new teacher. She, as mentee, was the initiator of the relationship.

Well with Laura she usually asks for help. So she's very, since she is uncertain about, you know, she's kind of a worrier, I guess, you would say, so she comes to me and she's really worried about so and so, you know, like I'm really worried about doing report cards. Well then we talk about that. I'm really worried about parent-teacher conferences, you know; I'm really worried about, you know, I want to take someone to local screening [committee]. And so she usually comes to me and tells me the things she's worried about and then I can talk about them. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 132)

While giving reassurance and help, Katherine was also receiving in a relationship that was mutually satisfying. She talked about how "we share ideas . . . and so she actually gives me ideas, too" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 30) and it's "giving and taking" (Mentor Interview 2, par. 199). One example was a writing rainbow art project that Laura used at West Orchard that Katherine adapted for her own class.

#### *Factors in the Relationship*

Katherine and Laura both independently cited personality as the main ingredient in their successful relationship. "I feel like it's just been the two of us and Katherine just making such a huge effort. Maybe it's just our personalities mesh so well together. I'm not sure, she just, I feel very comfortable with her and I feel like she just truly cares about how I am doing as a person and as a teacher. And her sincerity shows" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 169). From the mentor's perspective comes essentially the same viewpoint.

I think it's just Laura and I. I think we pretty much have been on our own and I don't know if it's supposed to be that way but I think it's just been Laura and I. . . . I think we have similar personalities. I think we're both pretty much non-judgmental people, very accepting. I'm more outgoing than she is but I think we have very similar personalities and values. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 62 and 66)

Other factors influencing the relationship were time and teaching at a second school. Lack of planning time was cited again and again, particularly as a function of kindergarten (no physical education or music specials) but also as a function of Laura's leaving at noon every day to teach at another school.

The most challenging thing that we face is the time constraints. We just don't have time with each other and every time we do plan it's always so rushed; it would just be nice to

have like a block of time each week to sit down and plan with each other. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 237)

Lack of planning time resulted in Katherine's doing most of her planning at home and then sharing with Laura. "We talk about the upcoming units of study but I usually plan by myself at home, and just share my plans with her when we can grab a moment" (Mentor Email Response 1). References were also made to the pressure of time. "There is never enough time and there are never enough resources. There is a lot of pressure all the time." (Mentor Interview 1, par. 76)

#### *Support From Others*

Laura cited others who had helped her or given support. Foremost among these was the morning kindergarten teacher (Kelly) at West Orchard. By setting up their shared classroom the first week of school Kelly enabled Laura to concentrate on her classroom at Lakeland. Laura followed exactly Kelly's lesson plans at West Orchard, which gave her many ideas that she could implement back at Lakeland. As Laura stated, "She's [Kelly] always willing to help me out. It's like I have two mentors" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 215). Katherine indicated that Laura could be much more innovative and a risk-taker at Lakeland than at West Orchard.

At her other school, just from my, from what I hear, I don't think that she has input there so much, as the other teacher sits down with her on Friday afternoon and says, this is what I'm going to do next week; this is what I'm going to do on Monday; this is what I'm going to do on Tuesday. And since Laura shares her room, Laura does exactly what she does in the afternoon. Whereas here she, I think, since she is in her own classroom, she feels freer to experiment and to try things. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 30-31)

Another teacher instrumental in supporting Laura was the reading teacher who gave her ideas on instruction and computer software for reading. It was the reading teacher whom Laura consulted when she was considering retaining a student and the reading teacher who gave model lessons in her classroom, "But I also like the reading teacher. I feel comfortable with her about things or having her come into the classroom to read a story to the children" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 107). The reading teacher also served as the lead mentor teacher and was most helpful to Katherine in giving her materials, ideas, and strategies for mentoring. As Katherine indicated, she was a "mentor to the mentor" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 16).

#### *The Future*

The half-day kindergarten position at Lakeland would end next year due to declining enrollment. Laura hoped to move into a full-time position teaching kindergarten at another school. At the conclusion of this study, Katherine was considering moving up to first grade so that Laura could have her full-time kindergarten position. In summing up her year, Laura shared the following thoughts.

Well, I think the most important thing that I talked about today is the fact that Katherine is a wonderful friend to me and I'm very glad to have her in my teaching situation and just in my life. I feel like I can go to her for anything and she has made a huge difference in my first year as a teacher. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 285)

Case 3 - Lydia and Rebecca

#### *The School*

Old Mill Elementary is an older building constructed in 1945. It faces directly onto a major road surrounded by mini strip malls and shops. As one approaches the school, one is confronted by several doors and must make a choice of which to enter. Steps leading up from the bus loop actually take one into an entry hall by the classroom wing. The front door around the corner is locked but the school secretary allows controlled access using a TV monitor and

intercom. The office represented a busy thoroughfare on the day of the researcher's visit because it was dismissal time and there was an impending threat of thunderstorms. Parents entered to pick up their children as the sky outside quickly darkened. During the end-of-day announcements on the intercom, the principal reminded all students to go directly home. A secretary left notes in a teacher's mailbox by attaching the message to a clothespin mounted on a 9 x 12 inch box. The secretary indicated that teachers liked this as they could readily see if they had messages while they walked outside in the hallway.

Old Mill is a school with several levels and wings. The classrooms are rectangular in shape and have higher ceilings than in newer schools. Each classroom also has an entire wall of closets as well as a wall of windows. While the classroom storage is an asset, teachers often found it difficult to display student work. Carpeting in many of the rooms was tattered and stained adding to the feeling that this is an older school.

Old Mill has a relatively stable population of 621 students in grades K-6. There are many families with at least one parent (usually the mother) at home during the day; few students (8.08%) receive free or reduced lunch. Despite this homogeneity, Old Mill houses an English as a Second language (ESOL) program for 48 students.

Test scores at Old Mill have continued to rise over the past three years and the school is now fully accredited. The percent of students in grades 3 and 5 in 2000-2001 passing the state Standards of Learning (SOL) tests included 85% (English), 82% (math), 82% (science), and 77% (history).

Old Mill Elementary is a model technology school in which teachers received additional training and the school received additional computer hardware and software. Thus, most classrooms had four or five computers. The school has a web site that featured student work, news from each class, and parent information about shopping online to support the school. A PTA art program allowed students to study artists and their works and then model their artistic styles.

#### *The Mentor and Mentee (Lydia and Rebecca)*

Lydia has been teaching at Old Mill for four years. She was born in Baltimore, MD in 1974 and came to Old Mill directly after earning her Master's degree in early childhood education. Her undergraduate degree in psychology and her Master's degree were both gained at the same state university several miles from Old Mill. Student teaching included experiences at both kindergarten and third grade. As Lydia indicated, she felt lucky to have done her student teaching in the same school system in which she is currently teaching.

Rebecca is a beginning first grade teacher at Old Mill. She is receiving help from her mentor, Lydia, whose classroom is two doors down the hall. Rebecca was only four years younger than Lydia, which facilitated their bonding together both professionally and personally.

Lydia taught second grade for 3 years but this year made a strategic move to the first grade. She was having to learn the curriculum and procedures right along with her mentee, first grade teacher Rebecca, which she has found to be a very valuable experience.

I think I'm very lucky as well because I'm new to first grade and it makes it very interesting for me because I'm having to create things for first grade as she is and in that way I think we kind of have an even closer bond because we are doing this work, kind of in the same place as far as learning the curriculum and creating new activities for the lesson plans. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 47)

Lydia was the oldest child in a large family. This was significant for her in deciding to go into teaching and has been instrumental in shaping her personality, particularly her sense of responsibility and organization that she brought to the role of mentoring.

Being that I'm the oldest child in the family, I'm rather responsible and I like to set goals and meet those goals and, try as I might, I love to be organized but it's difficult in the teaching profession to always be organized but I tend to be that way. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 16)

Lydia's mentee, Rebecca, described Lydia as being "pretty laid back" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 67) and also a lot of fun. Rebecca corroborated Lydia's excellent organizational skills, particularly in the realm of curriculum. "She is much more organized than I am, having taught. You know, I don't know if she's always been organized but having taught for longer she is more organized with stuff" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 68). Rebecca defined "stuff" as many fresh ideas that she contrasted to worksheets and the traditional methodology of some of the older teachers. This newer approach to teaching was an asset of Lydia's that she greatly valued and attributed to their closeness in age.

Rebecca admired Lydia for her positive attitude and described her as a listener who never voiced negative opinions to the other teachers. Rebecca's admiration for her mentor was reflected in words such as "she's so strong . . . she's just sweet" (Mentee Interview 2, par. 190).

Lydia's leadership in the school included chair of the Hospitality Committee and membership in the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) for the past two years. The TAT team assisted classroom teachers with strategies for at-risk and struggling students.

Rebecca was born in 1978 in the same county in which she is currently teaching. Rebecca always wanted to be a teacher. "It's always been in the back of my mind, you know, ever since I was a little girl I wanted to be a teacher" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 49). Her mother was a teacher for several years and her aunts taught as well. Rebecca spoke very fondly of the volunteering experiences she had in high school with deaf students that helped solidify her desire to pursue a career in education.

I really liked my volunteer experience in high school because I was working in a deaf classroom. One of my teachers had allowed me twice a week to miss seventh period to go to a school for about two hours. And so I worked in a second or third grade deaf classroom. But I loved the teacher I was working along side and the kids were so enthusiastic about being at school because most of them at home didn't have any way to communicate with anyone. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 38)

Rebecca originally wanted to teach deaf students but realized that she would be best situated teaching general education and then perhaps moving into deaf education later.

Rebecca described herself as "really laid back" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 63), a term she also used to describe Lydia. For Rebecca, being "laid back" meant being creative and spur of the moment in her teaching. "I'm really laid back. I'm creative in some ways, some ways of thinking. You know, I come up with some of my best ideas just spur of the moment when I'm up there teaching" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 63). She also talked about herself as a procrastinator and felt that this trait (procrastination) has helped her to be flexible.

It doesn't stress me out when I'm always doing things last minute. And honestly, as a new teacher I don't think there is any way I wouldn't be doing things last minute, because I don't have anything under control yet. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 57)

Both Rebecca and Lydia emphasized the very creative aspect of Rebecca's personality, especially in designing bulletin boards and student activities. But this positive trait also had a

negative side as Rebecca tended to take on too much. Lydia spoke over and over again about helping Rebecca to limit what she undertakes, as she would try to generate everything from scratch. “I think she takes a lot home with her, a lot of activities and things that she wants to draw or create” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 56). At the end of the year Rebecca wanted to construct a first grade garden on the school grounds but was gently dissuaded from this endeavor by her mentor.

I told her maybe next year because it's the end of the year; we have report cards; report cards were getting ready to come out. And it would just be a lot to organize. And I think that she just didn't, I think that, when you're a first year teacher you don't kind of understand about everything that's involved in, in a project like that. I mean, there would be a lot of organizational, a lot of talking to parents, and a lot of materials to buy. How would you get that, you know, parents to buy materials. Would the kids really take care of it or would, you know, what would happen if they didn't take care of it, and I don't know, it seemed to be a thing I thought that she would talk about more this year and then maybe initiate it next year. (Mentor Interview 2, par. 13)

### *Preparation for Teaching*

Rebecca graduated from a highly selective university with a very small education program (8-10 students). She did her student teaching in the second grade and felt that she was “set up for success in every way” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 13) as the elementary school was very new, had many resources, and very talented young teachers. Rebecca appreciated that these teachers were “forward thinking” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 13). She described “forward thinking” as using a very hands-on and student-centered pedagogy.

Rebecca’s teaching style was very influenced by her experiences at the university. Her language arts teaching methodology followed a whole word and whole language approach that she modeled from two of her professors. She talked proudly of these professors who were nationally known in the field of reading and writing.

At first I didn't realize how famous they were. And then they would give us their books. We thought, they've written a few books, whatever. Now I go to the teachers' store and I see their pictures up everywhere and all there . . . so it's been really neat to see that. And it's interesting to try to implement their strategies into the classroom and see how much of it is really as easy as they said it would be when they were teaching us. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 11)

After graduation, Rebecca purposefully sought a school that implemented a whole language approach to teaching reading. She had several interviews that were not a good match because the schools appeared to track the lower achieving students. Rebecca preferred a more relaxed classroom with flexible grouping.

Like the way I think they train teachers now is to do so much more hands-on [teaching] and just to have a more relaxed classroom in general. I feel like they taught me that at [university]. Whereas so many of the teachers who have been teaching for a long time have very structured classrooms. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 67)

Despite the promise of a more progressive teaching methodology at Old Mill, Rebecca has been frustrated by some of her teammates who use more traditional methods. She talked about asking the other first grade teachers for help and being handed a file of worksheets, which she did not want. What she really needed was collaboration and creative ideas. The tension between her teaching style and that of the more experienced members of her team was a continuing theme throughout the year.

I would ask for help from the other first grade teachers and I would get a February file and they would say, here is my February file, copy all these worksheets . . . or here is my math file, copy all these worksheets. And I told Lydia, I don't want to keep asking them for help because that's not what I want. I want creative ideas, like collaboration on things. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 139)

### *Beginning Teaching*

Lydia reflected on her own beginning teaching four years ago in the same school as a source for her work with her mentee. It also became a point of comparison as she realized how much she has grown in her own teaching. Lydia remembered her nervousness around parents and described her first year of teaching as “stressful, exhausting, the unknown” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 72). The stress she experienced came from feeling incapable of fulfilling what she was expected to do. She even suggested that beginning teachers should have time together so that they can “share and know that their fears of nervousness are not unique, that a lot of teachers go through that. New teachers go through that” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 187). To add to her frustration, Lydia had a mentor who did not fulfill her needs. As a beginning teacher, she wanted feedback and someone to answer her questions but did not receive this from her mentor.

I wanted some positive feedback. I wanted any kind of feedback. I wanted her to come and ask me if I had any questions, if I needed any help with anything. She really kind of acted like she was bothered by my wanting to ask her questions. And in return I kind of stopped going to ask her questions and I had to kind of seek out my own mentors and kind of find other teachers who were willing to help me. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 165)

Rebecca described her first year of teaching as a very stressful one. She talked about going in waves, the ups and downs.

With feeling, I go in kind of waves my first year, feeling completely stressed out and feeling just like, forget it, I'm going home today, you know. Some days I'll keep myself here really late. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 76)

Stressors included her lack of experience, parent issues such as conferences, and nervousness in completing all the curriculum. She described in detail how her lack of experience on the first day of school affected her, as many children became sick and she didn't know what to do.

I just decided I'm going to write a book about things they don't tell you when you're a beginning teacher, but like little things, like all my kids were sick the first day. And, of course, I know that they are anxious but I don't know what to do when all these six year olds are coming up to me saying they're sick. You know, am I responsible if I don't send them to the clinic? . . . You don't know what your responsibilities are and then, you know, if you're going to get in trouble if they really are sick. Nobody said that to me. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 89)

The end of the year brought renewed stress and she described how she was exhausted. “And I have exhausted myself. I mean, the end of the year now, I'm like, I'm not superwoman” (Mentee Interview 2, par. 174). Lydia provided the emotional support for her mentee during this time of exhaustion. “Lydia helped me out in every way I could use in the past few weeks from specific questions about students to emotional support – seemed like they were stressful weeks and we shared that feeling of exhaustion” (Mentee Email Response 1).

### *Mentoring*

Lydia continually reflected on her own experience as a beginning teacher to frame perceptions of her role as mentor. She recalled the very poor experience she had with her own mentor and was, therefore, trying to be an even better mentor to Rebecca. She saw her role as

mentor in terms of being the big sister. The big sister is one who looks out for her little sister's best interests. She elaborated that best interests meant going beyond helping with lesson plans to include friendship.

And I guess I see myself as when I'm a mentor as being more like a friend to Rebecca and more of somebody who looks out for her best interests, more than helping her, you know, with her daily lessons which correlates with my little brother and little sister, I guess, the same kind of, same kind of thing. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 19)

Rebecca described the role of mentor as someone she could feel comfortable going to when she had questions. She indicated that originally she thought of a mentor as a role model and someone to emulate but, with Lydia also new to first grade, it is more like a team.

Before, I always thought of a mentor as somebody that you look up to and you try to follow and they teach you a lot of things. But with Lydia being new in first grade, too, it's really become more of a team. And I can see how a mentor can be more of a team idea. Mentoring can be more of a teamwork than necessarily just a role model or a teacher, which is, I guess, a change in my opinion of what mentoring would have been before. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 70)

### *Working Together*

*First meeting.* Lydia was not appointed to be Rebecca's mentor until October. This meant that Rebecca was without formal support during the crucial first weeks of school. This occurred because Old Mill was without a principal during August and most of September and decisions regarding selection of mentors for the new teachers were never made. In this school system it is the principal who makes the ultimate selection of mentor in consultation with the lead mentor teacher. The late appointment of a mentor was a source of real stress for Rebecca and was instrumental in defining her relationship with Lydia.

I was so anxious going in as first year teacher and not knowing who my mentor was going to be. . . . They said, you know, your mentor will call you; they'll get in touch with you; they'll do this; they'll do that. And then I didn't get phone calls and it was getting close to school and I was just thinking, I'm going to have to start taking over a class soon; I wish someone would call me; I wish I knew something. So it would have been nice to have her earlier on. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 81)

In the absence of a mentor, the lead mentor teacher helped Rebecca and answered questions. However, she was a librarian and had no current experience at the first grade level. Rebecca relied primarily on her mother who had been a teacher to help her set up her classroom. She described vividly her first impression of the school.

My mom was with me. I live with my parents right now. My mom was with me and she goes, especially being at this old school, she goes, can you call them back. Can you call the other schools that have called you that were newer, you know, that would have given you a better room, because the paint is chipping off the walls in here. All of these closet doors are off their hinges, like, I mean, all of this stuff just looked so old. It smelled musty in here. There were stains on the carpet and you just didn't even want to know what they had come from. I mean, I walked in and I was like, the radiator rattles. I said, what am I going to do? But once I started getting stuff up I became a little bit more relaxed about it. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 28)

Because Rebecca had no mentor, the three other first grade teachers (including Lydia) helped her out. Team members gave her packets of information and planned with her. Lydia provided a packet for Back-to-School Night and worked with her. Lydia and Rebecca's first weeks were

spent as equal colleagues, rather than as mentor and mentee, which defined their relationship. Though she wished she had had a mentor earlier, Rebecca talked about the positive side of the late appointment that made their interaction more reciprocal.

I think it might have been a little bit more of an intimidating relationship for me to meet her in that way [mentor and mentee]. So there are pluses and minuses to the fact that we met later. Plus is being, you know, now I feel very comfortable with her because for the first few months that we knew each other we were just running to each other with ideas instead of me always coming to her. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 83)

After she was appointed as mentor, Lydia felt much more responsible for Rebecca and Rebecca came solely to her for help instead of rotating questions among the first grade team. To help make the transition to this new relationship, Lydia invited Rebecca to a pumpkin carving party at her house with her friends. She thought that they should get to know each other better since they would be working more closely as mentor and mentee.

*Parent Issues.* Rebecca relied on Lydia for help with many issues, particularly in dealing with parents. Lydia would help her mentee think through a problem, brainstorm some possibilities, and simplify solutions. Rebecca would sometimes want to do more than was necessary or prudent in the situation.

One day early in the first semester Rebecca received an angry note from a parent indicating that her son had brought home an inappropriate library book. Lydia just happened to drop into Rebecca's room that morning to see how she was doing and learned of the situation. "I do that a lot, actually, we don't set up times but I'll be walking by and just walking in" (Mentor Interview 2, par. 43). Lydia shared how she worked through the solution with Rebecca, helping her to focus solely on the issue at hand.

So she just asked me how I would respond or how I thought she should respond to the note. She wanted to say all this information. I said, wait a second Rebecca, I said, you know, the more you say sometimes the more it kind of opens the can of worms and all you need to say, all you need to do, is answer their note. You know, she wanted to kind of go on and on and on about how she'll help them pick out books and she'll talk to Ms. Pat and she'll do this and that. And I said, you know, let's just start from square one and tell her, okay, he won't be checking those books out anymore. You know, you don't really need to go into all this stuff because I said then she's going to come back and say what about this, what about this. So she was very appreciative. (Mentor Interview 2, par. 58)

Lydia's advice was predicated on her own experience in working with parents. She indicated that she learned early on to be friendly and to the point.

*Student achievement.* Rebecca sought Lydia's help with another parent issue dealing with a poor performing student. Rebecca had sent work home with the parent throughout the year but nothing had been done. This was a source of great frustration for Rebecca. Rebecca recommended on the student's third quarter report card that he receive tutoring during the summer. This precipitated an angry response from the parent which Rebecca felt was accusatory.

But with one student I have a mom who is a single mom and she is really busy and every report card I've gotten a note that says, I really need you to be consistent and be sending things home for me to help my son. And every report card I send her home tons of stuff and there is no evidence that any of it is being done and he is one of my lower kids. . . . And I recently got another very, almost attacking letter from her . . . because I had suggested on the report card that possibly he have a tutor this summer. . . . So my note

came back on an envelope. The whole front of the envelope, one of those huge manila envelopes was covered with her writing saying, I am a college educated woman; I have a daughter who has a 3.9 GPA; I have to pay many taxes and can't afford a tutor. I should be able to help him if only you can provide me with the things. I need assignments; I need this; I need this; I need this. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 14)

Rebecca took the initiative to get help from her mentor. She went immediately to Lydia's classroom, talked to her, listened to her, and continued talking about the issue at recess that afternoon. The saga concluded with the mentor suggesting that Rebecca see the principal. Later that day, Rebecca was able to meet with the assistant principal who agreed to support her in a conference with the mother.

Rebecca experienced frustration with other parent issues. Sometimes she brought these directly to her mentor and sometimes she brought the issue before the entire first grade team at lunch. Lunchtime, when all four were together, was often used to talk about "morning issues," things that surfaced in their classrooms during the morning. One such issue was recess and how it shouldn't be used for student discipline. Rebecca had taken recess from a student and received a complaint from that child's parent. The first grade teachers explored the issue and suggested other classroom management techniques for Rebecca to use.

*Planning.* Lydia and Rebecca spent time together planning instruction, particularly when they began a new unit. This style of planning started even before they were officially working as mentor and mentee, as both had similar teaching styles and both were learning the first grade curriculum together. On one Monday afternoon they met to plan an upcoming science unit on plants. The researcher observed this planning session and noted that mentee and mentor both shared ideas equally. They had both done research independently and used this time to "brainstorm ideas as the conversation went back and forth" (Observation Field Notes, par. 25). Rebecca conceptualized how they might make a class big book and Lydia shared ideas she had found for growing grass Chia dolls. Both mentor and mentee asked questions, discussed materials and time frame, and divided the responsibilities. Rebecca offered to purchase seed materials during the spring break and Lydia agreed to draft a parent letter. Rebecca commented at the end of the session how relieved she was to have conceptualized the entire unit as she was "just so nervous how to get it all done" (Observation Field Notes, par. 20).

Planning sessions were a vital part of their relationship as both mentor and mentee were breaking new ground at a new grade level. Even at the end of the year Lydia expressed how much she valued this collaboration in being able to learn right along with her mentee.

I still feel like we are learning together about first grade. . . . I'm learning about worms and seeds and everything with her and we're able to plan together . . . and, in a way, I think it's really beneficial because we're kind of at the same level and we can help each other out in that way. (Mentor Interview 2, par. 107)

*Staff issues.* Rebecca felt a tension throughout the year in working with the other two teachers on the first grade team who were both older and used a more formal approach to teaching. Rebecca talked about how she eventually stopped going to them for help because she didn't find their materials worthwhile.

Like at this school there are a lot of older teachers who are tired of coming up with new stuff. And they are very willing to give me copies of the worksheets and ideas of what they are doing. But their ideas of what they have been doing are things they've been doing for like 20 years. And so in some ways that's not helpful to me because it's not the same type of stuff that I am interested in doing in here. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 67)

Conflict with the team escalated during the spring. Rebecca perceived that the principal valued and recognized her forward-looking approach over the more traditional style of her colleagues.

It's an issue because if I'm doing something that the principal considers to be the right way and I've only been here for a year and the other teachers are doing something that the principal considers to be the wrong way, they've been here for 20, like I look like the little, I look like the little super woman who is trying to do everything perfectly. The principal is on my page and she is starting to make those changes and I came in the same year that she did. And I already do things the way that she wants to change them to be done. And so it's been a problem. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 155-157)

Rebecca's principal nominated her for the First Year Teacher Award. This precipitated what Rebecca perceived to be sarcastic comments from her teammates.

Many colleagues have "congratulated" me in sarcastic ways. I have received many comments made in order to let me know that "I won't always have this energy" or that I'm "just making life more difficult for myself." I have seen that at such a school with many experienced, and in some ways stubborn teachers, I have my work cut out for me in order to be doing the best job that I can and at the same time not be stepping on anyone's toes. . . . It's not easy to make friends when you're always trying to do one more fun project if my colleagues aren't interested in working together on it . . . which some have made clear is the case. So, that said, I've had a tough couple of weeks dealing with that and I've come to the decision that I will be as nice as I can and depend on those colleagues who I know I can go to and create fresh ideas with – like Lydia. (Mentee Email Response 5)

The stress of deteriorating colleague relationships and fear that she would not accomplish all that was expected caused a major break down. One May afternoon Rebecca went to Lydia's room crying. "I had broke down the other day, just like broke down. I went into Lydia's room and I cried and I just didn't even know who else to go to . . . being so stressed out" (Mentee Interview 2, par. 86-88). Lydia provided the needed support. This support included a trip across the street for ice cream and guidance in how to deal with the situation. Rebecca reflected on this experience and how Lydia helped her to focus on what ways these colleagues can help her despite the philosophical differences.

She said to me, you can still learn a lot from these people. You know, even if they don't do things the same way that you want to do them, they have been here for a long time and they have a lot of experience. . . . Ask them how have you done this in the past instead of asking them for ideas that you're really not interested in using. Ask them for things that you need to know. That way we can still communicate and I can still learn from them in other ways. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 145)

### *The Relationship*

Both Lydia and Rebecca readily shared thoughts about their relationship. Lydia spoke of an understanding relationship in which they both could bounce ideas off each other. This was consistent with the researcher's observation of their planning session.

I think we have a very understanding relationship in that she knows that if she ever has anything that she needs to talk about or wants to bounce off of me that she can come and tell me that. And I, I feel the same way that if I have something I want to share with her or I want to ask her that we can at any time. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 89)

Working initially as colleagues helped their relationship be more comfortable and relaxed. "Now I feel very comfortable with her because for the first few months that we knew each other we

were just running to each other with ideas instead of me always coming to her. And it was relaxed and we didn't have a scheduled meeting because we didn't even know she was my mentor" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 82). Lydia also described the relationship as comfortable. When the mentor role was established, Lydia purposefully tried to keep the relaxed stance and not be overbearing.

Well at the beginning I didn't want to be, how should I put that, overbearing. I kind of wanted to be there as a resource for her and not somebody who was nagging her or always there. . . . I kept telling her if you ever need anything just come to my classroom and I think after a few reminders of that then she felt more comfortable when she would come in here. (Mentor Interview 2, par. 122)

Lydia also felt that it was important to include Rebecca in activities outside of school such as the pumpkin carving party. Their relationship was one of social and personal involvement as friends. Lydia spoke of a lunch together that was a bonding time. "We went to lunch together and, you know, at a real restaurant, had a real lunch and came back to the seminar. So that was definitely a bonding time" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 95). Their conversations involved personal talk such as families, movies, or what they did on the weekend. They went to happy hours together. Rebecca attributed the friendship outside of school as making them feel more comfortable together as mentor/mentee. "Like we've gone out, you know, sometimes after work, too. So having that, you know, friend relationship has also helped me feel comfortable in going to her when I have questions" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 68).

Lydia also talked about their relationship as reciprocal. This involved bouncing ideas off each other and mentor learning from mentee as well as vice versa. She described their planning for a social studies lesson on needs and wants. "She [Rebecca] created something, too, about needs and wants and wants to share that with me. So it is very reciprocal in that way" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 47). A lot of the exchange of ideas is predicated on the fact that Lydia is also new to first grade and learning right along with Rebecca. "I was also having to refresh and look back and I'm new to first grade" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 143). Rebecca corroborated this mutuality. "During the plants unit we were both sharing ideas. Since she is new in the grade going to science inservices, we both came back with cool ideas to trade back and forth" (Mentee Interview 2, par. 48).

Both Lydia and Rebecca described their relationship as very informal. Lydia defined this as "impromptu" emphasizing that, although they had a daily common planning period, the times such as recess, lunch, and before school were equally valuable for interaction. "We've kind of made it very liberal but it's really kind of impromptu. At recess, before school starts" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 45). Flexibility allowed them to meet whenever they wanted or needed. "We meet when we need to. . . . We both understand that if there is something we need to talk about or we want to share that we will and we will find the time to meet" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 113). Lydia often stopped in Rebecca's classroom with materials before school. They discussed issues at lunch and at recess. Rebecca very much liked this arrangement, as she often was too overwhelmed to have a prolonged meeting with her mentor. "But I don't feel like we have to meet this one day if I'm just feeling overwhelmed" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 76).

The informal nature of their relationship developed while they were still just colleagues working together and was hard to overcome once they became established as mentor and mentee. As far as the county wanting us to have a structured mentor/mentee relationship . . . it seemed almost impossible for us to make the transition between just stopping by and the time of having a structured meeting time. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 106)

The guidelines for the mentor program specify that mentor and mentee meet for one-half hour each day. Rebecca indicated that the principal supported their more informal relationship and did not require that they meet daily for a specified time. “She’s [principal] there to make sure we’re getting everything that we need but not . . . you signed a thing that said you would meet half an hour every day” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 150).

#### *Factors in the Relationship*

When asked what factors have been most instrumental in developing and maintaining their special relationship, Lydia responded that time together was a prime factor. It was the personal and social things that they did together which made a difference.

I think spending a lot of time together, I mean, just meeting together, whether we’re talking or whatever. I think that’s important, too, as far as our relationship goes to not spend our entire day talking about school and the kids and, you know, our entire lunch period talking about that. We tend to talk about, you know, current movies, or you know, our families, things like that, so I think that’s very important as well. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 179-180)

Rebecca felt that the disinterest of her whole first grade team, though negative in nature, contributed positively to her relationship with Lydia. Because the team did not meet on a regular basis and the two older first grade teachers left immediately after school and had differing teaching styles, Rebecca relied more heavily on Lydia, even before she was established as her mentor.

I think that it’s funny this has helped us in our relationship but our whole team in general isn’t very organized about meeting every week which we’re strongly encouraged to do. But I have two other teachers on my team who have taught for a long time. I feel badly maybe saying, could you sit down with me but I don’t want to be the one to make them sit down and do it. . . . They come in, you know, half hour before the kids get here and they leave right after the kids leave. . . . So that has really helped me with Lydia, because she is the designated person I can go to and she doesn’t mind me coming to her and so almost the disorganization of my team has helped my relationship with my mentor because then I come to her specifically. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 103)

Rebecca also cited closeness in age and newness of her mentor to first grade as positive factors. “Apparently the first thing she said to the principal when she was asked to be my mentor was, but this is my first year in first grade, how am I going to be her mentor? I don’t know what I’m doing either” (Mentee Interview 1, par.104). This sense that her mentor was not an authority figure but someone learning along with her was very much noted by Rebecca.

Lydia’s closeness of age also allowed her to better relate to what Rebecca was experiencing.

Being pretty close age and being in the same grade level and also being new in the same grade level has really helped because I feel like a lot of people who have been teaching the same grade level can definitely be helpful if they are helpful people. A lot of people can be mentors and don’t realize that they have forgotten a lot of little things because they’ve been doing it so long. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 104)

Rebecca described how she was late to her first assembly because she thought the office would call her down. She felt that more experienced teachers might take it for granted that the office would not call classes down for an assembly. But somebody new to the grade would not and would “remember to tell me the little stuff” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 104).

### *Support from Others*

Rebecca received support from many sources especially during the first month when she did not have a mentor. Family was instrumental as Rebecca's mother helped her set up her classroom. The first grade team helped her plan for the first week of school and provided her with materials for Back-to-School Night. The first grade team discussed issues at lunch, often assisting Rebecca to work through issues. The lead mentor teacher took on a bigger role as she functioned as acting mentor to Rebecca before the new principal came and a mentor was assigned. Lydia cited how the lead mentor teacher was even a mentor to her, often inquiring how the mentee was doing and giving ideas and support. Rebecca shared how the lead mentor teacher, being a librarian, regularly brought library books to her room. And the entire staff welcomed each new teacher with a scrapbook of teaching ideas to survive the first year.

### *The Future*

Rebecca was selected to participate on a panel of beginning teachers at the new lead mentor teachers' meeting in June. The researcher observed this panel and listened as Rebecca articulated how it felt to be a new teacher and how the lead mentor teachers could help. She stressed the importance of selecting the mentor for the beginning teacher early on. She plans to continue in first grade at Old Mill with her mentor, Lydia. Though Lydia will no longer function as her mentor as this is a one-year assignment, both of them will continue to work as colleagues and teammates.

### Cross-case Analysis

All three cases describe a rich experience of mentoring with many unique attributes. In this section the researcher will present the similarities and differences in the cases in an effort to define relevant themes. These themes will be developed using the research questions as a guide. First, the researcher will describe the nature of the mentor/mentee relationship focusing on the various ways that mentors and mentees interact and work together. In the second section, the researcher will explore the forces that affect and impact upon this relationship.

#### *The Nature of the Mentor/Mentee Relationship*

(1) What is the nature of the beginning teacher mentor/mentee relationship in a large suburban school system mentoring program?

Successful mentoring appears to be the mentor/mentee relationship itself (Gray & Gray, 1985). Mentors in this study stated that having a positive relationship with their mentees was very important. Ruth summed up her first interview by stating that "I think just having a positive relationship and an open relationship with the person you're working with is the most important thing. I think it just leads to a very pleasant learning experience for both people" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 198). Karen also stated that her positive relationship with Ruth was the most important thing.

Just what is this positive relationship between mentor and mentee? The nature of that relationship is the first research question to be explored. Several themes have evolved from the data that describe the nature of the mentor/mentee relationship across all three cases. These themes substantiate the way the mentors and mentees relate to each other both professionally and personally. The themes have been identified as reassurance, collaboration, reciprocity, friendship, problem solving, informal structures, and multi-layered support network. A definition of each theme is contained in Appendix P.

*Reassurance.* The overwhelming nature of beginning teaching with its uncertainties and stresses as described in this study supports the theme of reassurance. In cases two and three each

mentor took primary responsibility to ease the mentee's worry and to build self-esteem. The goal was to strengthen the beginning teacher's self-adequacy, one of the most important needs of beginning teachers as described by Fuller (1969). Self-adequacy for Fuller meant confidence in one's own subject matter adequacy, meeting expectations, and demonstrating the desired standards of teacher conduct. These components were all present in the reassuring relationship between mentors and their mentees.

Interviews and observations in cases two and three revealed evidence of reassurance that followed a predicted pattern. The mentee demonstrated self-doubt, felt she was not doing a good job, and worried. The mentor provided empathy and understanding. Reflecting on her own beginning teaching, the mentor often shared her similar experiences with the mentee. The mentor gave material and assistance as needed, helping the mentee to work through issues. Lastly, the mentor reassured the mentee that she was indeed doing a good job. This last part was crucial to the relationship and to the mentee's self-adequacy. The pattern was exhibited over and over again.

Laura and Katherine in case two exhibited the strongest pattern of reassurance in their relationship. Laura tended to be a worrier and was the primary initiator in going to Katherine for help. Katherine stated that her goal during the year was to give Laura confidence. She described how she helped Laura with the kindergarten assessments and then gave her the needed reassurance that she was doing what she was supposed to. Katherine also described how overwhelmed she herself was as a beginning teacher dealing with parents. She communicated this to Laura to reassure her.

I can tell her I know exactly how overwhelming this is. . . . She had a lot of parent worries; worried about this parent or that parent and I could say to her, you know what, it's going to be fine. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 53)

Laura corroborated that she was often hard on herself but that reassurance from her mentor made her feel like she was on the right tract. This was valuable in dealing with student disrespect. "She's just kind of reassured me . . . that that was normal [student disrespect] and that in her class the same things are happening" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 225).

Reassurance was evident also in the relationship of Lydia and Rebecca in case three. Lydia too described Rebecca as a worrier, a quality apparent in both mentees needing reassurance. To deal with this, Lydia's fourth quarter goal for Rebecca was "Building confidence" (Mentor/Mentee Action Plan). The researcher observed this aspect of reassurance during a planning session.

The mentee also shared that she had marked the wrong students absent that morning. . . . She worried that the parent would be called that his/her student was not in class. Lydia told her that this happens to everyone. (Observation Field Notes, March 18, 2002)

Lydia provided intensive reassurance when Rebecca fell apart emotionally one afternoon in May due to end of year stresses. Lydia calmed her down, assured her she would be fine, and took her out for an ice cream planning session.

While participants in cases two and three demonstrated a strong relationship of reassurance, this was not evident in case one for Ruth and Karen. The researcher has speculated that this may be due to Karen's extensive preparation for teaching. Unlike the other two beginning teachers, Karen participated in full-time student teaching in a professional development school. She acknowledged that her student teaching was stressful and really like her

first year of teaching. With added experience and confidence coming into the classroom, Karen may not have needed as much reassurance.

*Collaboration.* Management of the curriculum was a key problem for all three beginning teachers in this study. Karen spoke of the long hours she put into her teaching in the beginning and her desperate need to prioritize the curriculum, especially with the Native Americans unit. In Laura's case, feelings of being overwhelmed surfaced because of the open-ended nature of the kindergarten curriculum. In Rebecca's case, stress was a constant as she tried to manage her innate drive for creativity and still cover all the material. One of the aspects of beginning teacher self-adequacy described by Fuller (1969) is concern for subject matter curriculum. This is consistent with the experiences of the three beginning teachers in this study who found curriculum to be a primary stressor.

Because of the need to manage the curriculum, planning together for instruction became the most frequent form of interaction between mentor and mentee in all three cases. Laura's statement about planning was illustrative of this theme.

I feel like most of our time together is spent planning and talking about upcoming studies and upcoming lessons. . . . So much of our interaction is based around planning that is a lot of what I need being a first year teacher. (Mentee

Interview 1, par. 11, 179)

The planning represented by mentor and mentee was a collaborative endeavor. Collaboration meant planning together as colleagues and working cooperatively toward a common goal. Most planning involved long-range units of instruction or special activities. The planning session was marked by an exchange of ideas and delegation of responsibilities. Mentor and mentee would plan together as a pair or as an entire multi-age team, as in case one, in which Ruth and Katherine often worked as a foursome with their two teaching partners. This was true in planning for the Native Americans unit, Dr. Seuss Day, 100 Day, and upcoming field trips. The researcher's observation of a team session led by Ruth noted that each individual contributed ideas and activities, including a Venn diagram, storybook character, door handle hanging, and story maps.

The researcher also observed a planning session with Lydia and Rebecca, in case three, as they collaborated for an upcoming science unit on plants. Mentor and mentee shared as Rebecca demonstrated how she used a big book on seeds and Lydia showed her Chia doll for growing grass seeds. Decisions were made jointly that affected both classrooms. An added dimension of this planning was a science lesson that they hoped to teach for both classes together. Planning for all mentor/mentee pairs intensified in the spring due to the fear of not completing the curriculum.

This model of collaboration breaks through the isolation of the school described by Lortie (1975) and Feiman-Nemser (1996). It corroborates the findings of Gratch (1998) that successful beginning teachers have more collegial relationships. Both the pairs of Ruth/Karen and Lydia/Rebecca experienced much collaboration. Ruth and Karen's school, Beaver Creek, had a strong climate of collaboration. The principal involved teachers in hiring interviews and actively encouraged Karen and Edna to take down their wall to team teach like Ruth and her teaching partner, Deloris. Lydia and Rebecca teamed together since they were both new to the grade level and had similar teaching styles. Karen and Rebecca were both nominated by their principals for the First Year Teacher Award. It is noted that there may be some relationship between this collaboration and their success as beginning teachers. Laura did not have the benefit of working as closely with her mentor due to her afternoon session at another school and lack of common planning time.

The collaborative nature of the mentor/mentee relationship in this study was one of planning together, not reflective practice or coaching of mentee by mentor as described by Joyce and Showers (1980). There was little evidence that ongoing structured observation and guidance were a part of the collaboration. Ruth and Karen demonstrated some isolated pieces of the model as Ruth videotaped Karen's teaching and provided structured feedback. The feedback, particularly in analyzing Karen's morning meeting, was welcomed by her and used to adapt her teaching. All three mentees indicated that they would have liked more ongoing opportunities for observation.

*Reciprocity.* All three cases demonstrated a relationship that was two-sided with equal exchange of ideas. This way of relating was termed "reciprocal" by Lydia and speaks to the essence of how mentor and mentee conducted business. This reciprocity, in which both mentor and mentee take an equal role, is quite different from the traditional sense of mentor as a guide, one who holds a superior position in molding the mentee. Galvez-Hornevik (1986) recalled the story of Mentor in ancient Greece who supervised Telemachus when his father was away. Original mentoring was a father-son guided type of relationship.

The three case studies presented here included common components of reciprocity. Reciprocity meant sharing, an open door, nonauthoritarian and nonhierarchical balance of power, and respect for each other's ways. Sharing included mutual sharing of ideas and activities, present in all three cases. Ruth cited this as "an equal exchange of ideas" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 111), Karen as a "two-way street" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 82), Katherine as "giving and taking" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 199), and Rebecca as "trading ideas back and forth" (Mentee Interview 2, par. 48). Though their definitions had semantic differences, they described the same phenomenon.

As the sharing played out with each mentor and mentee, it meant that the mentor was learning as much from the relationship as the mentee. This was a crucial piece that translated into mutual respect for one another. Freiberg, Zhibowski, and Ganser (1996) maintained that "mentoring can generate as much, if not more, professional development for the mentor as it does for the beginning teachers" (p. 15). This type of sharing was a strong component, particularly in cases one and three. Lydia and Rebecca bounced ideas off each other as they attended inservices and learned the first grade curriculum together. Ruth described with excitement how she learned a new egg carton math game from Karen or a cloud model for Martin Luther King's Day writing. Sharing also included mutual sharing of troubles and frustrations as well as instructional ideas. Karen stated this attribute.

And if I'm having any troubles with students I'll talk to her about it and vice versa. If she's having trouble or feeling frustrated or anything or even like happy about anything then we mostly kind of share with each other. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 103)

The balance of power in the reciprocal relationship was equal as on a poised teeter-totter. While the mentors commanded respect, they did not flaunt this. The respect was not forceful or overbearing. Karen was especially attuned to this aspect of her relationship with Ruth. "But she hasn't been; she's not overbearing at all" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 67).

*Friendship.* In all three cases mentor and mentees used the word "friends" to describe their relationship. Age differences and outside activities did not seem to matter in this perception. Laura, who spent the least amount of time with her mentor and whose relationship spanned the greatest age difference of 20 years, was the most outspoken in describing her mentor as a "friend."

Well, to me my mentor has become my friend. And she is someone I feel comfortable enough with to share my ideas. . . . I feel like we're friends. I can talk to her about anything. . . . She is a friend who listens to me and makes me feel comfortable. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 141, 163, 147)

Kram (1983) cited being a friend as one of the four psychosocial functions of the corporate mentoring relationship. While this tenet has not been explored as thoroughly in the school setting, friendship is the nature of the relationships in all three case studies.

Friendship is defined by the participants, not in the traditional sense as sharing personal interests and times together, but as a professional relationship that is comfortable and relaxed. This meant feeling comfortable sharing ideas, thoughts, and opinions. The mentor was viewed as someone who listens and someone to talk to. This also meant talking about personal issues and things out of the school realm. Laura and Katherine talked about their personal lives when they had a chance. Lydia and Rebecca regularly shared conversations about movies, families, and Lydia's boyfriend. Ruth and Karen shared what they had done on the weekend and felt a personal bond as they both grew up in the same area in Pennsylvania. Informal interactions such as laughing and joking were particularly a part of Ruth and Karen's relationship. Karen commented jokingly that Ruth would have to sit during the zoo field trip since her baby would be almost due then. The researcher observed a lot of laughing and joking during their planning session.

Despite the fact that they all talked about their relationship as friendship, only one pair, Lydia and Rebecca, actually maintained a social relationship outside of school. Lydia invited Rebecca to a pumpkin carving party at her house; they went to a seminar together, a baby shower, and regularly out to dinner. Both were single and within four years of age, which contributed to a sharing of very personal experiences.

Mentors and mentees also described their friendship as nonjudgmental and non-critical. This aspect of the friendship led Karen to trust her mentor and value her mentor's good advice and opinions. "I think a mentor is more like a friend who is going to, without judging you, give you help, give you information" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 160).

*Problem solving.* Problem solving is the process or way in which individuals or groups solve various problems or issues. Problem solving was a big part of the relationship between each mentor and her mentee. Problems were usually brought forward by the mentee because of her lack of experience with an issue. In many cases, particularly with Laura, problem solving included reassurance that one had performed appropriately.

Lydia and Rebecca in case three exemplified a directive style of problem solving. In dealing with a parent, Lydia first helped Rebecca define and simplify the issue, as Rebecca wanted to do way more than necessary. In the issue of the "inappropriate" library book, Rebecca wanted to tell the parent all the things she would do for the student. Lydia helped Rebecca focus on the key issue, preventing the child from signing out the book. Lydia then gave Rebecca solutions in how to respond, urging her to write a friendly but brief letter. Lydia reflected on her own experiences to make this recommendation.

Ruth and Karen in case one demonstrated a style of problem solving that was very collaborative. They brainstormed what to do about a student who was not making expected progress, discussed possible solutions, and decided jointly to refer him to the local screening committee for possible special education assistance. Both mentor and mentee worked together to draft the referral and Ruth even came to the screening committee meeting with Karen.

Katherine in case two did a lot of anticipating and thinking through possible solutions in problem solving with Laura. She helped Laura talk through the issue of retaining a child, rehearsed various scenarios for the parent conference, gave Laura much reassurance, and followed up after the meeting. This style was attuned to Laura's need for reassurance and support, particularly in dealing with parents.

Gordon (1991) highlighted problem solving as one of the mentor's main functions. He described the process to include gathering information, defining the problem, generating alternative strategies, designing an action plan, implementing the action plan, and assessing and revising that action plan. While each case represented a different style of problem solving, the methodology was basically the same as in Gordon's model. An issue arose; the mentee went to the mentor; the mentor brainstormed with the mentee and talked about solutions; the mentor advised; the mentor followed up. The "action plan" became the actual letter to the parent or the visit to the local screening committee. As represented in all three cases, parent issues and student achievement were the most common types of problem solving for mentor and mentee.

*Informal structures.* Problem solving and planning described most of the content of the mentor/mentee relationship. Friendship, reciprocity, and reassurance defined the way the participants interacted. The theme of "informal structures" emerged from the data to describe how the relationships were organized so that mentor and mentee could get together. It defined a way of operating that was generally impromptu and informal. This was a very strong theme across all three cases. Mentor and mentee went back and forth to each other's classrooms and meetings were generally unscheduled. This led to predominantly quick, short times together. Katherine reflected on this arrangement.

You know we're working on this and this and this and just doing it, talking as fast as I can in trying to, you know, get through it in a quick amount of time because that's what we're doing. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 164)

Informal times to get together included recess, lunch, before and after school, class time during center or snack, and even when walking into the building. In case two Laura often went over to Katherine's class while her students worked in centers and vice versa. This arrangement was made possible because each had an instructional assistant who could supervise the entire class. In case one Ruth and Karen could also visit back and forth while their students worked at centers since each had a teaching partner to supervise in her absence.

Mentor and mentee were equal initiators in the informal arrangement. Mentees visited their mentor's classrooms with a question, issue, problem, or need. All three mentors would regularly check in on their mentees before school to share ideas or to alert the mentee about something. Lydia often dropped things off in Rebecca's classroom on her way back from the photocopy machine. Ruth brought information over to Karen about school procedures. Mentees also felt free to enter mentors' classrooms at any time. In case three Lydia described how she had made it very explicit to Rebecca that she could stop by. "So in the beginning, I kept telling her . . . if you ever need anything, just come to my classroom" (Mentor Interview 2, par. 122).

Informal structures for meeting allowed issues to extend over several days. Katherine described how she and Laura started talking in the parking lot before school about an issue; the conversation continued in the classroom when Laura's students were at centers, and continued further when they decided to meet more formally to prepare report cards. Issues, thus, worked from informal to informal and also informal to formal. Planning for units of instruction (cases one and three) and composing local screening referral (case one) took more time and necessitated an arranged meeting before or after school. Lydia and Rebecca (case three) indicated that their

formal planning time intensified at the end of the year to ensure that they covered the entire curriculum. Their planning for a unit on growing seeds observed by the researcher lasted almost two hours and was very thorough.

Data in cases one and three revealed mentees who actually preferred the informal arrangement. Karen stated that she would not want to meet on a regular day after school each week. Rebecca shared that if she were tired or “stressed out,” she would prefer the option not to meet. The principal often supported this impromptu arrangement. Participants in case three indicated that their principal did not require them to meet at a regularly scheduled time each day but allowed flexibility as long as needs were being met. The informal style of mentoring evidenced by all three cases describes a reality very different than Lortie (1975) found in his study of school culture. Lortie saw very little interaction among the teaching profession and termed this the “autonomy of the closed door.” Gratch (1998) also defined the culture of the school as one of isolation with “sink or swim” for new teachers. The informal and daily interaction of mentors and mentees in this study refutes the notion of lack of collegiality in the schoolhouse. Being able to go back and forth to the mentor’s classroom enabled the mentee to get questions answered but also served as immediate reassurance and affirmation (self-adequacy) that she was doing a good job. The informal nature of this relationship seems to result because of the interrelatedness of several factors: (a) proximity of classrooms, (b) lack of scheduled planning time, and (c) personalities of the mentor/mentee (openness, willingness to share, respect for one another) which will be discussed in a later section.

*Multi-layered support network.* The support structure for the beginning teachers in this study came from many different sources other than their mentors. Many individuals within the school played significant or secondary roles. The nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee was thus expanded and widened. This is consistent with the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program in California described by Lucas (1999). In the California model it is not a single mentor who helps the beginning teacher but a network of “support providers.”

In all three cases the lead mentor teacher was a very significant player in the mentor/mentee relationship. In case one this individual was a real school leader who was described very positively by Ruth. The lead mentor teacher brought all mentors and mentees together regularly for meetings, planned breakfasts for the new teachers, and provided monthly handouts on pertinent topics such as parent conferences. Katherine in case two talked about how the lead mentor teacher in her school was a mentor to her. The lead mentor teacher in case three played a major role as surrogate mentor to Rebecca during the first two months of school. Lydia described how her lead mentor was an advocate for beginning teachers.

In all three cases teams of teachers were also significant in the relationship. This was especially true in case one in which each mentor and mentee also had a teaching partner with whom they teamed. In essence, Ruth mentored both Karen and Edna and often all four members participated in planning. Karen then had the advantage of multiple viewpoints. She indicated that she would often go to Edna, her teaching partner, first for help with a specific student but would go to Ruth, her mentee, for curriculum issues or school procedures. Edna, though a veteran teacher, was also new to the school system.

In case three all first grade teachers talked about “morning issues” at lunch. Morning issues included many things such as when to suspend a student from recess. Laura in case two had the advantage of two teams, as the kindergarten teacher at her second school was a “buddy” mentor who regularly shared with her.

In all three cases, participants mentioned the principal as instrumental to the relationship. In case one Karen spoke most highly of her principal. The principal spent more than an hour on the phone with her prior to her interview, which was instrumental in her decision to pick this particular school. When the School Board cut the school system budget, the principal made a point to assure Karen that she would still have a job at Beaver Creek. The principal was also a strong supporter of multi-age classrooms, encouraging Karen and Edna to team-teach more closely. In both cases two and three the principal assisted the beginning teacher with parent issues. Brock and Grady (1998) documented the importance of the role of principal in feedback and induction of the beginning teacher. Weasmer and Wood (2000) found that higher level of principal support led to the beginning teacher's being less stressed, more committed, and more satisfied with the job. This was certainly true in this study.

A matrix of citations from the interview transcripts for all themes presented in this section is contained in Appendix Q.

*Assistance.* Assisting the beginning teacher was a major part of the mentor/mentee relationship. The type of assistance that mentors gave to their mentees was consistent throughout all cases. In the beginning most assistance involved mechanics and logistics such as setting up the classroom. This evolved to management issues such as planning for and supervising centers (cases one and two). By the end of the year, mentor and mentee were spending a great deal of time planning (case three – science unit; case one – Dr. Seuss Day, field trips) and also talking about specific students. This was evident as Ruth and Karen wrestled with referral of a student for special education and as Laura grappled with her mentor regarding retention of one of her kindergarten students. This sequence of assistance is consistent with the research on stages of beginning teacher concerns conducted by Veenman (1984). He found that early concerns of survival were followed by teaching situation concerns (methods, mastery of teaching/learning skills) and finally by concerns regarding students.

All three cases demonstrated mentor assistance with setting up the classroom, lesson and unit planning, assessment (report cards, retention, standardized testing), special needs of children, resources/materials, and parent issues. Mentors and mentees in individual cases also dealt with classroom management (case one), end of year procedures (case one), field trips (case one), grant writing (case three), gifted and talented referrals (case one), health curriculum (case three), morning meetings (case one), substitutes (case two), special days/activities (case one), procedures (cases one and three), reading assessment (case one), responsive classroom (case one), routines (cases one and two), science curriculum (case three), technology (case three), and the writing curriculum (case three). A matrix of types of mentor assistance provided to the beginning teachers in this study is contained in Appendix R.

#### *Forces That Affect the Relationship and Their Impact*

(2) What forces affect this relationship?

(3) How do the forces affect this relationship?

The mentors and mentees in this study developed strong relationships that defined how they worked together. In this section the researcher will explore the forces that influenced that relationship and the impact that each force exerted. The forces by their very nature were interactive and integrated. While these forces will be described in a linear fashion, they must be viewed in the totality of the mentoring experience and not in isolation. The forces that appeared to have most impact were the participant profile variables (mentor perception of role, mentee's needs, personality, and age of participants). School environment variables that appeared significant were grade level assignment, proximity of classrooms, the principal, and time. Mentor

program variables did not surface directly as major contributors to the relationship except for mentor training and budget cuts. There were case-specific forces as well, unique to each relationship, which played a major role in forming mentor/mentee interaction. A matrix of themes and forces related to the research questions is contained in Appendix S.

*Participant profile forces.* The factors inherent in the participants themselves appear to have most influence on each case. These factors became forces shaping and acting on the relationships. These forces will be described as role perception, personality characteristics, and age level.

In all three cases the mentor's perception of her role as a mentor was directly related to the reality of the relationship. What the mentor viewed as her mission was, thus, played out in the nature of the relationship. Internal beliefs influenced actions. All mentors saw their role within the realm of support and, therefore, provided mostly instructional support through curriculum planning and emotional support through reassurance. There was little emphasis on coaching, a process of structured observation and guidance designed to provide the teacher with feedback (Moir, 1991). This is consistent with Ganser (1992) who found that the reality of the role of mentor was primarily a support to help the beginning teacher find his/her own style, encourage experimentation, share work experiences and pitfalls, and share curriculum information. Formal coaching as an ongoing strategy is not an expectation for the mentor/mentee pair in this school system. Observation and conferencing skills, however, are addressed in the mentor training and mentors are expected to conduct at least one formal observation of their mentee.

Ruth in case one viewed the role of mentor as a support person based on the beginning teacher's needs. Her mentee, Karen, had very strong teaching skills and, therefore, needed a more collaborative type of relationship. Karen corroborated this by describing the role of mentor as a guide and collaborator, not a hierarchical or authoritarian figure. The nature of the relationship for Ruth and Karen was, in fact, very collaborative. Katherine in case two viewed her role as looking out for her mentee, reassuring, and being there as a friend. Her mentee, Laura, also viewed this role as a friend. The nature of the relationship for Katherine and Laura was intensive reassurance and friendly interaction with less collaboration and planning than in the other two cases. Lydia in case three viewed the role of mentor as someone who would look out for her mentee's interests as a big sister and also as a friend. The nature of her relationship with Rebecca was one of problem solving, intensive emotional support, and learning together.

Mentors had a strong sense of their role. This sense evolved from the needs of the mentee, the mentor's prior experience, and the mentor's reflections on her own beginning teaching. In all three cases mentors reflected back to their own beginnings to define the role. Ruth remembered the help she needed and tried to be proactive in assisting Karen with upcoming responsibilities such as report cards and conferences. Lydia used her experiences working with parents to help Rebecca traverse the emotional maze of interacting with parents. Katherine drew on her skills as a communications trainer in assisting Laura.

Negative experiences with mentoring also defined the role for all three mentors. Ruth did not have a mentor and realized how much she had needed one. Her experience with the autism teacher was not successful because of the different content area. She was, thus, committed to make the relationship with Karen a successful one. Lydia's mentor never gave her the feedback or assistance that she needed. She was determined to make herself totally available to Rebecca. Katherine's mentoring of a teacher at another school never got off the ground. She, too, realized the importance of supporting Laura.

The perception of role of mentor had an immeasurable impact on the nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee. Had the mentor viewed her role as a coach, interactions might have been different with more observation and feedback.

Personality was a second significant force in this study. In two of the three cases mentors and mentees cited personality as the prime factor in forming their relationships. In the third case, personality was not explicitly cited but could be inferred from researcher observation and interview comments regarding the social and personal times spent together.

Karen in case one acknowledged that she and Ruth both have the same personality characteristics of being easygoing and not stressed. This force led to a relaxed relationship. Case one also illustrates the importance of the mentee's attitude in forming that relationship. Ruth attributed most of the success of her relationship with Karen to Karen herself. She cited Karen as a team player and emphasized her willingness to receive assistance. Karen actively solicited suggestions and demonstrated an internal need to grow and learn. This personality trait surfaced as she described herself as a lifelong learner who wanted eventually to pursue an advanced degree. There is very little research on the qualities of the mentee in a successful mentor/mentee relationship but Karen's desire to learn would exemplify one such positive quality.

Katherine in case two also emphasized that she and Laura had similar personalities. She attributed the success of their relationship solely to the two of them.

I think it's just Laura and I. I think we have been pretty much on our own. . . . I think we have similar personalities. We're both pretty much non-judgmental people, very accepting. . . . I am more outgoing than she is but I think we have very similar personalities and values. (Mentor Interview 1, par. 62 and 66)

The non-judgmental and accepting qualities of both mentor and mentee cited by Katherine were also evident in the other two cases, though not cited specifically. The mentor training for mentors in the county emphasizes active listening and acceptance as characteristics of a high quality mentor. This was evident in all three case relationships. Sensitivity to the viewpoints of others and willingness to be an active and open listener were also characteristics found by Huling-Austin (1989) in successful mentors.

Participants in each mentoring relationship also had a high regard for each other. This is not unusual in view of the close working relationship that developed in each case. Mentees described their mentors in very positive terms. Laura portrayed Katherine as positive, upbeat and friendly. Rebecca admired Lydia's fresh ideas and her interest in always wanting to learn. Karen thought Ruth had a "great" personality and great sense of humor. "She's easy to talk to. She's, you know, she's funny" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 65). The researcher corroborated this sense of humor. Mentors were universal in describing the dedicated qualities of their mentees and their mentees' receptivity to new ideas. As Katherine expressed about Laura, "She's a great first year teacher. . . . She's very caring; she's warm; she's quiet; she's very hard working; she's very dedicated and puts a lot of time into preparation" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 41 and 44).

Willingness to receive assistance, easy-going nature, and nonjudgmental acceptance were personality forces at work in all three cases. They had a tremendous impact in allowing the mentee to seek assistance in a risk-free environment. They allowed the mentor to exercise her role unimpeded. If these qualities had not been in place, relationships would not have formed as comfortably. This was the case with Lydia's prior experience as a beginning teacher when her mentor's negative attitude actually stopped the relationship in midstream.

Age level of the participants was a third significant force on the relationship in all three cases. Lydia and Rebecca were only four years apart. Ruth and Karen differed by just 10 years. Laura and Katherine had the widest age span of 20 years but functioned as closer in age since Katherine had only been teaching for four years. The most experienced mentor was Ruth with eight years of teaching.

Closeness in age or in level of teaching experience meant that the mentor could more readily identify with the mentee. It also contributed to a more collegial relationship and, as in Rebecca's case, meant that her mentor was more attuned with her teaching philosophy and not set in her ways.

I think being closer in age has helped us. . . . I think a lot of people can be mentors and don't realize that they have forgotten a lot of little things because they've been doing it so long. . . . If she was an older teacher . . . someone who was set in her ways in teaching I wouldn't feel as comfortable coming to her to ask for ideas because I would feel that I was interrupting or bothering. It's been really important for me to have somebody who is at a new enough stage like I am that she is still trying out new things. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 104 and 156)

The perception that the mentor can function appropriately as a mentor without many years of experience contradicts research on qualities of a successful mentor. Huling-Austin (1990) cited the older experienced teacher with high status as a preferred choice for a mentor. Lydia, only four years out of college and new to first grade herself, would not meet this criterion.

Closeness of age clearly had an impact on the relationships in this study. In case three it allowed Lydia and Rebecca to share social experiences as well as professional, thus creating a closer bond. In both cases one and two, it allowed the mentor to have more empathy for the beginning teacher. Despite closeness in age, all three mentors in this study demonstrated excellent teaching skills and were well respected in their schools as evidenced by researcher observation and informal school conversations.

*School environment forces.* Structural forces within each school were extremely significant in forming each relationship. These forces included time, grade level assignment, and proximity of classrooms. Many of these are factors that must be taken into consideration early on in the selection and matching of mentor with mentee. Because of this, these forces are directly attributable to the principal of the school who must make these decisions. The principal, thus, became an additional force on the relationship.

Time was one of the most important forces acting on all three relationships. All mentors and mentees cited lack of time as being very significant. Time for the participants meant time to spend together, time for planning, and time for mentor/mentee observation. It was a negative force as the limitations of time constricted what the mentor and mentor could do together.

Rebecca and Lydia in case three were the only mentor/mentee pair who had a common planning time together. This consisted of a half hour daily while both their classes were at music or physical education. Lydia valued this time together; "I think it helps that we have a joint planning time as well as lunch together and a joint recess together that we can interact" (Mentor Interview 1, par. 105). Despite this common planning time Lydia specifically cited time as a hindrance to their relationship. School responsibilities such as staff meetings in the morning, personal obligations in the afternoon, and even fire drills interrupted their time together.

The mentor/mentee pairs who did not have a common planning time had even more challenges to find time to get together. As Karen in case one stated, "It's hard because we don't have the same planning time" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 94). Karen's participation in a Spanish

for Educators class after school and Ruth's need to leave early every day due to her health further restricted their time. In case two, Katherine and Laura had even less opportunity to meet because Laura was only present at Katherine's school in the morning.

The primary needs expressed by the beginning teachers in this study, particularly help in prioritizing and planning the curriculum, assessing students, and dealing with parent issues, all required time for mentor and mentee together. How they each met this challenge defined their relationship. In essence, the negative force of time had a positive impact as each mentor/mentee team developed informal structures going back and forth between each other's classrooms during the day. In both cases one and two participants dropped into each other's classrooms at center time and utilized other support personnel to supervise their classes. In case three, recess and lunch became a time for discussions. Lydia and Rebecca also overcame lack of time within the school day by doing things outside of school. Lydia attributed this personal time together as a positive force on their relationship.

Time exerted a negative force but the informal structures that resulted were positive and valued by all participants as a comfortable way of interacting. Karen summed up this dichotomy. So I think that would be helpful if more time was built into the day. But at the same time we don't really, that's not even the nature of our relationship, though. We don't often sit down for an hour at a time and talk, you know, it's a lot more informal back and forth. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 45)

Feiman-Nemser (1996) cited time as the biggest deterrent to a productive mentoring relationship. Maddex (1993) also cited lack of release time to observe, have conferences, or collaborate as a significant detriment to the mentor/mentee relationship. As of May only one mentor, Ruth, had found the time to formally observe her mentee. Ruth was able to videotape Karen's teaching in bits and pieces as she periodically left her class with her teaching partner.

A strong philosophy of collaboration by the principal was also another way of overcoming the challenge of time. At Beaver Creek the principal provided substitutes for grade level teams to plan together one day each quarter. The school also held a morning assembly for students each day so that teachers could have more time together.

Similarity of grade level between mentor and mentee was cited as another force in the success of each relationship. Since mentor and mentee spent much of their time planning, each mentee felt it important that the mentor not only know her curriculum but also be actively involved in its implementation. Rebecca shared this viewpoint.

If she were at a different grade level I think that would be difficult, too, because grades are so different. And even if you have taught all different grades before, you're so focused on what you're doing while you're doing it that I can't imagine that it would be easy to go back and forth, even just in your thought process. You know, because if I'm in fourth grade and I'm thinking about, you know, them writing essays about Virginia history, but that in first grade they can barely write those sentences, it's really difficult to change frame of mind that quickly. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 73)

Teaching the same grade level or subject matter is a characteristic that enables the experienced teacher to work successfully with the beginning teacher (Huling-Austin, 1989). In fact, two of the mentors cited difference in grade level as a negative factor in their prior mentoring experiences. Ruth attributed her unfamiliarity with the special education curriculum to the failure of her relationship with her autism teacher mentee. Karen had an unsuccessful experience as a beginning teacher because she taught kindergarten and her mentor taught sixth grade.

The impact of similar grade level assignments meant that all pairs spent more time together planning, which, thus, strengthened their relationships. It meant that Ruth could help Karen deal with two curricula, that Katherine could assist Laura with kindergarten management issues, and that Lydia could help Rebecca simplify her lofty creative ideas. It, thus, strengthened the instructional skills of each beginning teacher.

Proximity of mentor and mentee's classrooms was also a strong positive force on each relationship as expressed by each case. Karen and Laura had classrooms directly across the hall from their mentors. Rebecca's classroom was located in the same corridor as Lydia's. Laura felt that she and Katherine would not have interacted as much had she been in a different part of the building. Karen and Rebecca both attributed being right across the hall to the ease of going back and forth. For Rebecca the large older school with many wings could have been a significant barrier to her relationship with Lydia.

I can't really imagine what it might be like being in a different part of the building. This is a big building. And if we were on different ends, honestly, I don't know that I would run to her classroom when I had a quick question. You know, I don't think we would talk as much. I don't think we would share as many ideas because she walks by my classroom on her way back from the copier. (Mentee Interview 1, par. 72)

Mentors also reflected on their prior experiences mentoring and cited lack of proximity as a detriment. Ruth had to forge across the school to her autism mentee's classroom. Katherine had to drive to another school to mentor her kindergarten teacher. Tauer (1996) found that physical proximity and grade level were equally integral variables in the mentor/mentee relationship. Gray and Gray (1985) found that two of four mentor/mentee pairs in a study had unsuccessful relationships because one mentor was located in a different part of the school and one mentor did not teach the same subject.

Proximity, thus, appears to have equal impact with grade level on the mentor/mentee relationship. The impact of the proximity force was apparent in the informal structures that formed in each case. Being close by enabled the mentee to drop into her mentor's classroom even during instructional time. This allowed the mentee to have immediate feedback and answers to questions and provided immediate emotional support. Proximity also allowed the mentor to drop by more easily with materials or to check on the mentee.

*School system forces.* School system forces were rarely mentioned in the interviews as significant with the exception of the school system budget cuts and the mentor program. Just prior to this case study, the school system experienced a severe budget deficit. In the past, each mentor/mentee pair had received two days of substitute time to observe each other or for the mentee to observe in another teacher's class. This funding was cut for the 2001-2002 school year. As a result, substitutes for any observation between mentor and mentee had to be arranged and funded by the local school. This meant utilizing an instructional assistant to supervise a class or paying for substitutes from local school funds. Despite the budget cuts, observation of mentee by mentor continued to be an expectation. Mentors and mentees in this study found various ways to modify the formal observation process in order to spend time in each other's classrooms. In case one Ruth videotaped Karen's teaching, going in and out during the day while her teaching partner taught both classes. In case three, Lydia and Rebecca planned joint classroom lessons in science. While these were not formal observations they did entail discussions and feedback about teaching.

Both Karen and Laura mentioned observation of another teacher as a positive thing. Karen visited Ruth's classroom to see how she implemented her centers. Laura felt she could learn a lot from observing another teacher.

I would like feedback from her and I would love to just watch her teach. I'd like to watch any experienced kindergarten teacher teach just to get more ideas and learn more. I feel like teachers learn so much from each other. (Mentee Interview 2, par. 171)

As Karen indicated, "I know that with budget cuts they had to take away some of the time or substitute money. . . . And I think that would be very useful to have that back" (Mentee Interview 1, par. 128).

The mentor training was viewed as a positive force, particularly the segment on the needs of beginning teachers and cycles of beginning teacher attitudes toward teaching. Mentors generally reflected on their own experiences as a beginning teacher, their own prior experiences with mentoring, and their mentee's needs to make decisions about mentoring. Thus, the mentor training was but one of several forces that influenced mentors' decision-making. Because of this, it is difficult to assess the direct impact of the mentor training. The impact is most probably more indirect as concepts and skills learned have been assimilated by the mentors and, with distance, are not specifically recalled.

Training for mentors is universally viewed as important for the success of mentoring. Training is needed in skills not normally viewed as part of teacher preparation (Ganser, 1999). Classroom practice of beginning teachers was strengthened in mentors who received training (Evertson and Smiley, 2000).

*Case-specific forces.* Susan Tauer (1996), in studying the mentor/mentee relationship within the school setting, found it to be very idiosyncratic and dependent on contextual factors. What Tauer refers to as "idiosyncratic factors" the researcher will describe as case-specific forces. These were the forces in each case, unique to that case, which projected an immense impact on the relationship. These forces emerged as:

(a) teaching in a second school, (b) late appointment of a mentor, (c) mentor's new grade level, (d) mentor's health, and (e) conflict of teaching styles.

Laura in case two taught a morning and afternoon session of kindergarten at two different schools. This provided challenges in setting up two classrooms and dealing with two very different styles of teachers. It also had a tremendous impact on her relationship with her mentor, Katherine. Because Laura left at noon each day, time to meet with her mentor was extremely limited. As a consequence, most planning was done individually by the mentor and shared later with her mentee. This was in contrast to the other two cases in which mentor and mentee planned jointly for upcoming curriculum units. Planning jointly by the pairs in cases one and three contributed to a level of collegiality that was not apparent in Laura and Katherine's relationship.

Lydia's late appointment as Rebecca's mentor in case three had a strong impact on Rebecca psychologically and professionally. Lack of consistent emotional support in the crucial first few weeks of school may have contributed to Rebecca's stress and need for reassurance throughout the year. It also affected the relationship. As Lydia and Rebecca worked together first as equal colleagues and not as mentor/mentee, their relationship formed as a very collegial and personal interaction. Theirs was the only relationship with a social component. Functioning as teammates and not as mentor/mentee defined their relationship for the entire year.

Lydia's new grade level assignment was another force that acted in tandem with her late appointment as mentor. As Lydia was new to first grade, she was learning the curriculum along

with her mentee. The mentor was, thus, put in a similar position with the mentee as both were learning together. The impact of this event was a relationship that functioned as equal colleagues, a heightened sense of collegiality, and a lot more sharing and collaboration than evidenced by the other mentor/mentee pairs.

Conflict of teaching styles was another force on the relationship in case three. Rebecca's hands-on approach to teaching was in direct contrast to the more formal structured style of her colleagues. The result was a withdrawal from her colleagues that resulted in increasing tension throughout the year. The impact this had on her relationship with Lydia was evident. Rebecca needed and Lydia gave her much emotional support. Moir (1991) described the cycle of beginning teaching as an upward spiral of enthusiasm and confidence toward the end of the year. While the other two mentees generally followed Moir's cycle of first year teaching, Rebecca took a huge dip at the end of the year because of her frustration and stress. Corley (1998) stated that beginning teachers who are more in line with collectively acceptable practices of their fellow teachers and more in agreement with administrator, student, parent, and community expectations are more successful. Rebecca was in line with the latter but not the former and this generated a great deal of conflict.

Mentor's health was another case-specific force that impacted upon case one. Ruth's pregnancy and accompanying poor health in the fall interfered with her ability to meet with her mentee, Karen, as she needed to leave after school each day. Because of this, Karen relied more on her teaching partner for support, which solidified their collaboration.

#### *Conclusion*

The mentors in this study were extremely committed to their mentees. They have formulated very positive relationships despite many challenges such as lack of planning time and factors unique to each school. What appears most instrumental in these three cases are the informal structures that have evolved between mentor and mentee, the personalities of the individuals, and the role that mentors have adopted to meet the needs of their mentees.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of the beginning teacher mentor/mentee relationship and the forces that impacted upon that relationship. Three cases at the elementary level were studied in depth. Chapter five will include a summary and discussion of findings, implications for practice, a model case, recommendations for further research, and reflections of the researcher.

### Summary Discussion

The data in this study showed the importance of establishing and maintaining a strong relationship. Ruth, a mentor in case one, succinctly stated this crucial aspect of mentoring. “I think just having a positive relationship and an open relationship with the person you’re working with is the most important thing. I think it just leads to a very pleasant learning experience for both people” (Mentor Interview 1, par. 198). Looking deeply at the nature of this relationship through focus groups, interviews, email responses, and observations became the heart of this study.

While the relationships took many forms, they were all based on respect, equality of collaboration, commitment of time and resources, and the mentor’s understanding of what it means to be a beginning teacher. The cross-case analysis noted several basic themes that permeated and defined each relationship. These themes evolved from the data as reassurance, collaboration, reciprocity, friendship, problem solving, informal structures, multi-layered support, and assistance.

Participants in this study shared a universal sense of the overwhelming nature of beginning teaching. Mentors in two case studies utilized *reassurance* extensively to help develop self-adequacy of their mentees, important for beginners (Fuller, 1969). As management of the curriculum became a prime stressor for all beginning teachers, planning for instruction was the most frequent form of interaction between mentor and mentees. Working together towards a common goal was the foundation of this *collaboration*. The theme of *reciprocity* evolved from the data as mentor/mentees demonstrated a mutuality that was two-sided and non-hierarchical. *Mentor assistance* focused first on mechanics, management, and curriculum planning, then moved into student and parent issues, consistent with Fuller (1969).

The data also presented a theme of *friendship* that defined a comfortable and relaxed professional relationship for all mentor/mentee pairs. This relationship often included personal conversations and social activities outside of school. *Problem solving* was also a part of each relationship as mentees brought issues forward to their mentors for resolution. While mentor/mentee pairs demonstrated different styles of problem solving from directive to collaborative, they all addressed issues dealing with parents, students, or staff members.

By far the strongest theme emerging from the data was that of *informal structures*. Because of time constraints and easy access to each other’s classrooms, mentors and their mentees developed very informal and very impromptu methods of getting together. Mentoring for the beginning teacher expanded to a form of *multi-layered support* with help coming from a variety of sources: (a) the assigned mentor, (b) the lead mentor teacher, (c) teammates, and (d) the principal.

Forces impacting the relationships centered primarily on the participants themselves: (a) perception of role, (b) personality, and (c) age. Mentors all had a strong sense of their role based on needs of the mentee, reflections on their own beginning teaching, and prior experiences with

mentoring. Personality was quoted most often as the most distinguishing factor in each relationship, including mentee's willingness to accept new ideas and mentor's non-judgmental and easy-going nature. Mentor/mentee pairs were all close in age or they were also somewhat close in number of years of teaching. This enabled the mentor to more readily identify with mentee's needs and teaching style.

The data revealed several school forces significant in the relationships: (a) similar grade assignment, (b) proximity of classrooms, (c) role of the principal, and (d) time. Even though principals were instrumental in providing support and time for planning, the study still showed lack of time to meet and work together. This became the strongest factor impacting upon each relationship.

This study exhibited the complexity of the mentor/mentee relationship. Themes and forces were highly interrelated. Individual and school factors interacted prominently as forces influencing each relationship despite the fact that each relationship operated within the same school system mentor program. In fact, unique factors such as a beginning teacher assigned to two schools, the late appointment of a mentor, a mentor's new grade assignment, and a mentor's ill health also significantly influenced ways of working together. These are, in essence, the realities of being in a school.

Because the contextual factors that determined each mentor/mentee relationship were so significant, this research substantiates the work of Tauer (1996). In writing about her research, Tauer noted the following.

Results emphasized the idiosyncratic nature of the mentor/mentee relationship, and found the district/school culture surrounding the mentor program to have a significant influence on the relationship. (Tauer, 1996, p. 1)

Tauer cited personality as the strongest variable and, in most cases, the only variable influencing mentor/mentee relationships, either positively or negatively (Tauer, 1996). In the researcher's study other factors were found to be significant as well.

#### Implications for Practice

Since the evolution of the beginning teacher mentor/mentee relationship is unpredictable and unique, schools need to strive to create the optimal conditions to make this relationship work. "Those designing such programs should emphasize creating the optimal context for positive relationships rather than attempting to mandate specific dimensions of the relationship" (Tauer, 1996, p. 1). Just what factors need to be considered in this optimal context? The findings from this study offer glimpses of some of these factors. They form implications for current practice at both the school and mentor program levels that can extend the knowledge beyond Tauer.

#### *Selection and Matching of Mentor*

Because of the importance of personality, age, grade level, and classroom proximity on the mentoring relationship, the selection and matching of mentor with mentee becomes crucial. This is a responsibility at the local school level and, therefore, falls most heavily on the principal and lead mentor teacher. Choices are too often made on the basis of who is available and willing to serve. The data in this study established the importance of personality as a key aspect in the relationship. Principals and school personnel should carefully consider personality when making a match of mentor and mentee, looking for a mentor who is non-threatening with outstanding human relations skills. Particular attention should be paid to the mentee's sensitivity, confidence, self-esteem, and level of teaching proficiency. Getting to know the beginning teacher prior to the opening of school then becomes extremely important. Principals should invest time over the

summer to learn as much as possible about their new teachers in order to make a good match with a mentor. Unfortunately, principals often do not know who that new teacher will be, due to the realities of the staffing market.

The mentor/mentee relationships in this study refute the traditional view of older, wiser teacher as mentor to a neophyte. All mentors were within 10 years of their mentees in age and/or years of teaching experience. The mentees valued this closeness in age/teaching experience as it fostered reciprocal collaboration, mentor/mentee understanding, and a more compatible teaching style.

The implicit understanding of the mentor-protégé relationship is one in which an older and wiser person helps a younger less experienced one to grow and develop so that the reciprocity of the process is rarely considered. (Tauer, 1996, p. 4)

Principals and lead mentor teachers are encouraged to think outside the box when selecting mentors. Mentors need to be outstanding teachers as defined by criteria established by the school or school division. However, they do not necessarily need to be veteran teachers with many years of experience.

Principals should also take into consideration proximity of classroom and similarity of grade level when making a match. Though these two factors did not seem as prominent as personality, they played a unique role in the relationship, allowing mentors and mentees to flow easily back and forth to each other's classrooms and facilitating lesson planning. The importance of the selection and matching criteria for mentors should be communicated to principals and other school personnel via principals' meetings, newsletters, and meetings of lead mentor teachers.

#### *Role of Mentor*

Mentors in this study adopted their stance of mentoring in accordance with their notion of the role of mentor. In most cases this perceived role was to support the mentee and build self-esteem. This role was predicated on prior experiences with mentoring, the needs of the mentee, and reflections on beginning teaching. Very little research has focused on the role of the mentee in the mentor/beginning teacher relationship. This study showed the importance of the mentee's willingness to learn and receive assistance. Since the perceived notion of role influenced the actions of both the mentor and mentee, principals and lead mentor teachers should clarify this role with both participants. Key questions such as what the mentor hopes to achieve, what is his/her perception of the role, and what the mentee perceives are his/her needs are essential to the success of the mentoring relationship.

Additionally, schools and school divisions need to ensure that training is in place for mentors. Where training programs are already in place, these should be reviewed to affirm that they are doing what they need to do. The school division in this study has a comprehensive training program for mentors. This training program could be expanded to strengthen the coaching and supervision role of mentors, consistent with Joyce and Showers (1980), Evertson and Smithey (2000), and Ganser (1992). This could ultimately strengthen the beginner's teaching.

#### *Time for Collaboration*

Lack of time to meet was the strongest force logistically on the mentor/mentee relationships in this study. Only one pair had a common planning time. Lack of time was instrumental in the informal and impromptu structures that developed in which mentors and mentees went back and forth between each other's classrooms. But this informal structure did not allow in-depth time for planning necessitated by the overwhelming nature of the curriculum.

Despite the lack of time, teachers and principals found constructive ways for mentors and mentees to get together such as classroom coverage by team colleagues, use of substitutes, and daily opening school assemblies.

Scheduling options should be explored at the elementary level to allow time for more teacher collaboration, especially for new teachers. Longer planning times in a block schedule and common times for music, band, and strings are several examples. Examination of teachers' assignments such as paperwork, extra duties, and time that beginning teachers are outside of school for training should also be considered. The school system needs to share best practices of schools that have charted innovative ways to provide this collaboration. While a budget may hinder extensive funding for substitutes, other options might be considered such as hiring retired teachers for several hours per week or funding substitutes for those beginners most at risk.

Consistent with the research of Chester (1992), new teachers, especially younger new teachers, should be placed, if at all possible, in schools with high levels of teacher collaboration.

*Beginning Teacher Needs*

Beginning teachers in this study demonstrated an array of needs following very closely the research of Veenman (1984) and Fuller (1969). Mentors assisted mentees with management issues (classroom set up, routines, centers), curriculum planning, and finally with student issues (retention, assessment, and special needs). The needs of the beginning teachers reflected an attitudinal cycle during the first year of teaching consistent with Moir (1991). However, the data in this study illustrated additional stressors for beginners at the end of the year that had not been documented by other researchers. Dealing with assessment, parent issues, and completion of the curriculum were all highly stressful. In this respect, the Moir model needs to be adapted to reflect another sharp attitudinal dip near the end of the year that mirrors the dip in late fall. This realignment of the Moir model could be addressed in the mentor training and in the lead mentor teacher meetings and communicated to all mentors. Awareness of the stresses that new teachers encounter near the end of the year would be valuable for mentors as they work with their mentees.

Research on the needs of beginning teachers also should be updated to reflect the current dynamics of greater parent involvement in education. Problem solving for student assessment and parent issues such as gifted and talented referrals, report card grades, and retention are now routine encounters for all teachers, but most problematic for beginners as seen in this study. Training for beginning teachers in parent involvement and parent relations is essential. This is an area not often addressed in teacher preparation. A course in school/community partnerships, often part of principal preparation, would be most valuable in teacher certification as well. In addition, the school system mentor training and lead mentor teacher training could strengthen the parent relations component. Mentor training in lesson planning, needs of beginning teachers, and the cycle of first year teaching (Moir, 1991) were all cited by mentors as important to their roles and should be continued.

#### A Model Case

One of the goals of this study was to identify best practices in mentoring. What could one learn from all three cases that would be a beacon for outstanding practices in the induction of the beginner? In this section the researcher will build an outstanding mentoring relationship model by taking the best practices from all three cases. Characteristics of this exemplary model have been identified as: (a) explicit criteria for mentor selection, (b) timely appointment of the mentor, (c) role clarification, (d) intensive early mentor assistance, (e) principal leadership, (f) support

for collaboration, (g) focus on instruction and teaching, (h) networking opportunities for beginners, and (i) extensive pre-teaching experience of the beginner.

The principal at Beaver Creek knew her teachers, even her beginning teachers before they appeared on the doorstep. She had explicit reasons for selecting Ruth to mentor Karen that recognized both of their personalities. As the principal indicated to the researcher, “Karen was an incredible first year teacher but was quite sensitive; I did not want to give her a mentor who was overwhelming and compelling but one that would help with the subtle finesse of teaching” (Principal, Beaver Creek, 2002). Ruth was also appointed as Karen’s mentor early in July. Since she had been on the interview team to select Karen, Ruth’s initial meeting with Karen was very positive. This set the stage for a very productive relationship well before the opening of school.

Intensive initial assistance for the beginning teacher prior to the opening of school was exemplified at Lakeland by Katherine in her support for Laura. Helping Laura find resources to set up an entirely new kindergarten classroom was a major undertaking. Despite the fact that she herself had a classroom with furniture piled in the middle, Katherine worked with Laura, assigned her own instructional assistant to Laura, and also sent her daughter to assist the beginner. In Laura’s eyes, this defined Katherine as a mentor who truly cared about her mentee and was a real “friend” (Mentee Interview 1, par. 141).

Mentors and their mentees in each case were united in their perception of the role of mentor. For Ruth and Karen this was a guide and support in a collaborative relationship; for Katherine and Laura this was reassurance and friendship; for Lydia and Rebecca this was a friendly team. Unity of purpose contributed to mutual understanding and a positive relationship. Mentor training with its emphasis on the role of the mentor and the needs of beginners contributed to this perception. A meeting of mentor and mentee with principal to set parameters of role as described by one beginner in the focus group is also a best practice.

Principal leadership was modeled at all three schools through teacher empowerment, communication of support for the beginner, and fostering a climate of collaboration. In case one, the principal empowered teachers in her school to be involved. A panel of teachers interviewed new teacher applicants and made the recommendation to hire Karen. The welcoming feeling that this interview process engendered was instrumental in Karen’s decision to choose Beaver Creek as a place to teach. The principal also communicated her support for Karen during the interview process and throughout the year. This included an hour-long telephone conversation prior to the job interview, positive comments stating that she had made the right decision in hiring Karen, and reassurances that Karen would not lose her job due to the budget crisis. While these comments appeared small and random, they were major to Karen.

The principal at Old Mill exemplified support for the beginner through her flexibility in allowing the mentor and mentee to craft their own informal way of interfacing instead of adhering to a rigid meeting schedule. She also made many positive comments encouraging Rebecca’s student-centered style of teaching which was in direct opposition to her teammates. Principals and assistant principals at all three schools regularly deflected parent problems away from the beginners through phone calls and conferences.

The principal at Beaver Creek found many innovative ways to support collaboration. She initiated a daily 10 minute opening assembly in the cafeteria for all students led by the reading teacher and counselor. This allowed teachers a 45-50 minute duty-free time before students appeared in their classrooms. The principal provided substitutes for quarterly team planning and instructional assistants so that Ruth could videotape Karen’s teaching. The focus at Beaver Creek on instructional strategies was evident as the primary teachers had studied early childhood best

practices and had adopted a model of multi-age teaching. The principal encouraged Karen to team teach with her partner in the multi-age class by opening up the wall between their classrooms.

Several cases modeled the importance of networking for beginners. At Beaver Creek there were many young teachers working in a collaborative relationship. This fostered networking outside of school with social activities for the beginners that helped to relieve stress. Schools with few beginners might consider pairing with neighboring schools to provide this networking. At Old Mill the mentor and mentee exemplified a relationship that included much social networking through sharing personal lives, times for ice cream together, and after-school parties.

Several cases set an example for outstanding teacher preparation. Karen had a strong preparation in teaching as a result of her yearlong classroom experience in a professional development school. She admitted that the professional development experience year had really been her first year of teaching with all its stresses. At Beaver Creek she arrived with self-adequacy already intact and was ready to move into a collaborative relationship with her mentor. Unlike the other mentees, she needed little or no reassurances. Rebecca had a strong teacher preparation program that included grounding in student-centered whole language instruction by national leaders in the field. In view of this data, one might question whether or not alternative teacher preparation programs that require little or no time in the classroom can adequately train one to weather the storms of the first year of teaching. Research has documented the value of a mentor (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Ganser, 1992; Huling-Austin, 1990; Little, 1990) but whether the mentor can help overcome teacher preparation deficiencies is uncertain.

The exemplary models imbedded in these cases have implications for all mentoring relationships. Specific rationale for mentor selection sets the stage for a positive relationship. Principals are instrumental in orienting and encouraging beginners. They can also be instrumental in finding creative ways for teachers to collaborate. Their important role should be communicated at principals' meetings and through articles in the school system's newsletter. The local school plays a major role in setting the conditions for mentoring to be successful.

#### Further Research

The research for this study focused on three cases at the primary level of teaching. It is hoped that research on more cases will verify findings and expand the focus to look at different participant variables. Further research might examine gender differences of male/male and male/female and their impact on the mentoring relationship, as all the examples in this study were female. Researchers should also look at the teaching level differences of upper elementary, middle, and high school, as all examples in this study were primary teachers. The homogeneity of gender and teaching assignments leaves room for much further exploration.

Further research needs to focus on use of time for collaboration in the beginning teacher/mentor relationship. Lack of time was a major challenge for each case study yet was overcome in very creative ways. Future studies should focus on best practice models for time and scheduling. The school system mentoring program might initiate a pilot study of time with selected pairs of mentor/mentees. The study could explore the effects of a more formal structure with substitute time factored in as opposed to the informal structure adopted by these mentor/mentee pairs. What additional behaviors might be seen and how does this affect the beginning teacher are some possible questions to investigate.

Case one provided a strong message about the role of the principal in the mentor/mentee relationship yet little research, other than Brock and Grady (1996), has focused specifically on

the principal in this domain. Further research might explore the role of the principal in the induction of new teachers and in the mentor/mentee relationship. Looking at the principal would add a new dimension to the knowledge base and enhance the research on instructional leadership.

Further research might also look at reflective practice in terms of the mentor/mentee relationship. Ferraro (2000) defined reflective practice as a thoughtful process of “considering one’s own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline” (Ferraro, 2000, p. 1). Questions to be considered might include how reflective practice is used by the mentor/mentee in planning, problem solving, and daily interaction to strengthen the beginner’s understanding of his/her own teaching. Looking at the role of more formal observation and coaching by the mentor is an area of further research also noted by Corley (1998).

Lastly, most research, including this study, has encompassed a very limited time frame. One cannot get a true sense of the success of the beginning teacher without looking at how the mentor/mentee relationship impacts over several years. Thus, a longitudinal case study of the beginning teacher would be valuable in terms of retention to the teaching profession as well as success in the art of teaching. One might want to know if there is a correlation between the strength of the mentor/mentee relationship and the beginner’s success after three or five years in the classroom.

#### Reflections of the Researcher

This study was made possible because of the professionalism of the six participants who willingly and openly shared their lives as teachers, individuals, and mentor/mentees. Their dedication and commitment to students, to their mentoring relationships, and to this project were evident throughout the research. Despite significant time constraints, they always managed to come forward and to reveal their true selves. This study was also made possible because of the guidance of many colleagues, specifically the dissertation committee and doctoral cohort who gave support and feedback.

A dissertation study is shaped by others but executed by the individual. The researcher was humbled by this experience and learned more than she ever thought possible. It was in the process rather than the product that true learning took place. It was transformation from a neophyte doctoral student to a confident researcher that evolved during this endeavor. The researcher would like to highlight a few of her learnings throughout this process.

1. Patience - Setting the groundwork for the study to begin, developing valid criteria for mentor selection, and practicing interview techniques before the study began demanded patience. There were many setbacks, such as the need to re-advertise for mentors, but the process did evolve.
2. Rapport – Establishing rapport with the participants was most crucial to the interview process. The researcher learned to anticipate key times not to visit the schools such as during testing, prior to holidays, and at the end of grading periods.
3. Reflection – The researchers’ log became an invaluable tool for learning to think like a researcher. Reflections on the process, such as interview techniques, helped the researcher move from a very structured stance to deeper and deeper probes during the course of the research.
4. Style – The organization and analysis of the data became the biggest challenge in this qualitative study. The researcher adopted her own style of organization and analysis consistent with the constant comparative method. The use of both computer software

- and hard copy data analysis enabled the researcher to look introspectively at the microcosm while also moving back and forth into the macrocosm of the big picture. This made all the difference in being able to decipher themes.
5. Collaboration – The researcher grew to value the critique of others, particularly committee chair, committee, and colleagues. This open review of one's own work is often not easy but was a vital part of the process. Engaging others into the project, communicating via email, and meeting face to face with committee members energized the researcher and validated the process.

Learning how to nurture good teachers to become excellent in their craft is what motivates and inspires this researcher. This case study has been a vehicle to do this.

Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art. . . . Because it is an exercise in such depth, the study is an opportunity to see what others have not yet seen, to reflect the uniqueness of our own lives, to engage the best of our interpretive powers, and to make, even by its integrity alone, an advocacy for those things we cherish. (Stake, 1995, p. 136)

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## APPENDIX A

## DOMAINS AND DESCRIPTIONS

## FORCES AFFECTING BEGINNING TEACHER/MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

Domain 1: Mentor Program

Description: This domain will assess the impact of the school system mentor program on the mentor/mentee relationship. Included will be the program purpose and goals, mentor training, and the mentor guidelines.

Domain 2: School Environment

Description: This domain will assess the impact of the school culture, the people, and the physical entity of the local school on the mentor/mentee relationship. Included will be the role/attitude of the principal, process for mentor/selection/matching, collaboration, proximity, and resources.

Domain 3: Participant Profile

Description: This domain will assess the individual attitudes, skills, and attributes which the participants bring to the mentor/mentee relationship. Included will be personal characteristics, the needs of the mentee, perception of role, mentor's supervision skills, benefits, and conflict resolution.

## APPENDIX B

## PHASES OF TEACHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Researcher	Population	No.	Phases	Distinctions
Fuller (1969)	Teachers	3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-teaching</li> <li>2. Early teaching</li> <li>3. Late concerns</li> </ol>	Pre-service through teaching
Leithwood (1990)	Teachers	5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Launching career</li> <li>2. Stabilizing</li> <li>3. New challenges</li> <li>4. Professional plateau</li> <li>5. Focusing</li> </ol>	Beginning teaching through end of teaching
Moir (1991)	First-year Teachers	5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anticipation</li> <li>2. Disillusionment</li> <li>3. Survival</li> <li>4. Rejuvenation</li> <li>5. Reflection</li> </ol>	First-year teaching only
Steffy (2000)	Teachers	6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Novice</li> <li>2. Apprentice</li> <li>3. Professional</li> <li>4. Expert</li> <li>5. Distinguished</li> <li>6. Emeritus</li> </ol>	Beginning teaching through retirement

## APPENDIX C

## RESEARCH ON THE NEEDS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS

Findings	Researcher
Beginning teacher isolation	Lortie (1975), Veenman (1984), Little (1990), Feiman-Nemser (1996), Hargreaves & Fullan (2000)
Concerns of self-adequacy	Fuller (1969), Breeding & Whitworth (1999)
Classroom discipline	Fuller (1969), Veenman (1984), Gratch (1998), Breeding & Whitworth (1999)
Motivation of students	Veenman (1984), Gratch (1998)
Dealing with individual students	Veenman (1984), Gratch (1998)
Relations with parents	Veenman (1984)
Organization of class work	Veenman (1984)
Materials and resources	Veenman (1984), Gratch (1998)
Individual student problems	Veenman (1984)
Paperwork	Gratch (1998)
Preserving professionalism	Breeding & Witworth (1999)

## APPENDIX D

RESEARCH ON DOMAINS AFFECTING THE BEGINNING TEACHER/MENTOR  
RELATIONSHIP

	<u>Mentor Program</u> Training (T) Guidelines (G)	<u>School Environment</u> Principal Role (PR) Mentor Selection (MS) Collaboration (C) Proximity (PX) Resources (R)	<u>Participant Profile</u> Needs of Mentee (N) Perception of Role (R) Mentor Supervision (S) Benefits (B) Conflict Resolution (C)
Ballantyne & Hansford (1995)	(T)		(R) (N)
Billingsley (1993)		(PR)	
Brock & Grady (1996)		(PR)	
Chester (1992)		(PR) (C) (R)	
Evertson & Smithey (2000)	(T)		
Feiman-Nemser (1996)	(T)	(MS) (C)	(S)
Fisher, Ury, & Patton (1991)			(CR)
Fuller (1969)			(N)
Freiberg, Zhibowski, & Ganser (1996)			(R) (B)
Furtwengler (1995)	(T)		
Galvez-Hjornevik (1986)			(R)
Ganser (1992)			(R) (N) (S)
Ganser (1997)			(R) (B)
Ganser (2000)	(T) (G)	(MS)	

table continues

	<u>Mentor Program</u> Training (T) Guidelines (G)	<u>School Environment</u> Principal Role (PR) Mentor Selection (MS) Collaboration (C) Proximity (PX) Resources (R)	<u>Participant Profile</u> Needs of Mentee (N) Perception of Role (R) Mentor Supervision (S) Benefits (B) Conflict Resolution (C)
Gold (1996)		(MS)	
Gordon (1991)		(C)	(R)
Gratch (1998)	(T)		(N) (S)
Gray & Gray (1985)		(PX)	
Hargreaves & Fullan (2000)		(C)	
Joyce & Showers (1980)			(S)
Leithwood (1990)			(N)
Little (1990)		(C)	
Lortie (1975)		(C)	(N)
Maddex (1993)		(C)	
Moir (1991)			(N)
National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996)	(G)		
Robinson (1998)		(PR)	
Steffy (2000)			(N)
Sparks & Loucks-Horsley (1990)			(S)
Sweeny (2000)	(T)		

table continues

	<u>Mentor Program</u> Training (T) Guidelines (G)	<u>School Environment</u> Principal Role (PR) Mentor Selection (MS) Collaboration (C) Proximity (PX) Resources (R)	<u>Participant Profile</u> Needs of Mentee (N) Perception of Role (R) Mentor Supervision (S) Benefits (B) Conflict Resolution (C)
Tauer (1996)		(PX)	
Veenman (1984)			(N)
Weasmer & Wood (2000)		(PR)	
Wildman & Niles (1987)		(C)	

## APPENDIX E

## CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF MENTORS

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Qualities of the High-performance Mentor Teacher: Knowledge, Skills, and Values  
Developed by James B. Rowley, The University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio

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Commits to the Roles and  
Responsibilities of Mentoring

1. Dedicates time to meet with the mentee.
2. Persists in efforts to assist the mentee despite obstacles or setbacks.
3. Maintains congruence between mentoring words and actions.
4. Attends meetings and professional development programs related to mentoring.
5. Models self-reflection and self-assessment as hallmarks of professionalism.

Reflects on Interpersonal  
Communications and Decisions

1. Reflects on what, where, when, and how to communicate with the mentee.
2. Adjusts communication style to developmental needs of the mentee.
3. Respects the confidentiality of the mentor-mentee relationship.
4. Self-discloses regarding one's own professional challenges.
5. Models effective helping relationship skills.

Models a Commitment to Personal  
and Professional Growth

1. Lives the life of learner as well as teacher.
2. Engages the mentee as fellow student of teaching and learning.
3. Pursues professional growth related to teaching and mentoring.
4. Advises the mentee on professional growth opportunities.
5. Models fallibility as a quality fundamental to personal and professional growth.

Accepts the Beginning Teacher as a  
Developing Person and Professional

1. Endeavors to see the world from the mentee's point of view.
2. Anticipates the needs of the mentee by thinking like a beginning teacher.
3. Understands the common problems and concerns of beginning teachers.
4. Applies theories of adult learning and development.
5. Models acceptance of diversity in others.

Serves as an  
Instructional Coach

1. Employs the clinical cycle of instructional support.
2. Values the role of shared experience in the coaching process.
3. Engages the mentee in team planning and team teaching whenever possible.
4. Possesses knowledge of effective teaching practices.
5. Models openness to new ideas and instructional practices.

Communicates Hope and  
Optimism for the Future

1. Encourages and praises the mentee.
2. Holds and communicates high expectations for the mentee.
3. Projects a positive disposition toward the teaching profession.
4. Avoids criticism of students, parents, and colleagues.
5. Models personal and professional self-efficacy.

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Note. Adapted from "The Good Mentor," by J.B. Rowley, May 1999, *Educational Leadership*, 56, p. 20.

## APPENDIX F

## PROCESS FOR THE SELECTION OF MENTORS

1. The lead mentor teachers in elementary schools nominated mentors to participate in the study based on the criteria of James B. Rowley. Every elementary school has a lead mentor teacher who coordinates the school Mentor Program. The lead mentor teacher is actively involved with the program and:
  - Collaborates with administrator to select mentors for beginning teachers.
  - Attends training by the Office of Staff Development and Training.
  - Provides full-day school-based orientation for new teachers.
  - Conducts topic-specific mini workshops.
  - Serves as the liaison between the administration, mentor, and new teachers as appropriate.
2. The Office of Staff Development and Training received names of nominees.
3. The Office of Staff Development and Training talked to principals to verify that mentor nominees exemplify the stated criteria.
4. A list of eligible names was then forwarded to the researcher.
5. The researcher contacted nominated mentors and their mentees.
6. Three mentor/mentee pairs were selected who met the criteria and were willing to serve.
7. The researcher met with each pair of mentor/mentees to give exact details of the study. Reassurances about confidentiality and informed consent were provided.

APPENDIX G  
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION  
(ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION)

Mentor

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Current school assignment \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years teaching experience \_\_\_\_\_

Previous teaching assignments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

School leadership positions \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date completed mentor training \_\_\_\_\_

Previous experiences mentoring \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Previous experiences supervising student teachers \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Interests and hobbies \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Mentee

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Current school assignment \_\_\_\_\_

Certification Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Areas of endorsement \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher preparation institution \_\_\_\_\_

Degree/s \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

## Student teaching experience

Grade level/s \_\_\_\_\_

School/s \_\_\_\_\_

School system \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time \_\_\_\_\_

Previous experiences working with children \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Interests and hobbies \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX H  
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Mentors

Background Statement

This focus group is an introduction to my dissertation study on beginning teacher mentor/mentee relationships. I am very interested in your views about mentoring. What you say will help me design questions I will use to interview mentors and mentees. I plan to ask you some general questions. I hope that we can have an informal conversation in which you will feel free to comment and react to each other. You are all currently mentoring a beginning teacher and have many rich experiences and ideas to share. I am audio taping this conversation as I want to capture your exact language and possibly may use audio clips as part of my dissertation. You will remain anonymous, as I will never reveal your names, just the fact that you are mentors.

Opening Question

Tell your name, school, and current mentoring assignment.

Introductory Question

You are currently mentoring a beginning teacher. Think back to an experience you had with your mentee in the last few weeks that you thought was positive. . . . Was there an experience that was challenging?

Transition Questions

What is the role of the mentor? Now how is that different from the definition of mentor? I know the research definition but I really want to hear what it means to you. . . . Can you give a definition of "mentoring?"

Why did you become a mentor?

How does being a mentor compare with how you generally work with other teachers?

Key Questions

As I begin my study focused on the mentor/mentee relationship, what things do you think need to be studied?

How important is it for you to establish a relationship with your mentee? How do you go about this?

Who are the people who have helped you establish your relationship?

What forces have helped you? What forces have hindered you?

### Ending Questions

Consider all the comments shared this evening. Which aspects of mentoring are most important to you? If you had one minute with the school superintendent what would you tell him about mentoring?

Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't talked about?

## APPENDIX I

## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

## Mentees

Background Statement

This focus group is an introduction to my dissertation study on beginning teacher mentor/mentee relationships. I am very interested in your views about mentoring. What you say will help me design questions I will use to interview mentors and mentees. I plan to ask you some general questions. I hope that we can have an informal conversation in which you will feel free to comment and react to each other. You are all currently beginning teachers and have many rich experiences and ideas to share. I am audio taping this conversation as I want to capture your exact language and possibly may use audio clips as part of my dissertation. You will remain anonymous, as I will never reveal your names, just the fact that you are beginning teachers.

Opening Question

Tell your name, school, and current assignment.

Introductory Question

What is it like being a beginning teacher?

You are currently working with a mentor teacher. Think back to an experience you had with your mentor in the last few weeks that you thought was positive. . . . Was there an experience that was challenging?

Transition Questions

What is the role of the mentor? Now how is that different from the definition of mentor? I know the research definition but I really want to hear what it means to you. . . . Can you give a definition of "mentoring?"

What do you feel are your greatest needs as a beginning teacher?

How have your mentors helped you?

Key Questions

As I begin my study focused on the mentor/mentee relationship, what things do you think need to be studied?

How important is it for you to establish a relationship with your mentor? How do you go about this?

Who are the people who have helped you establish your relationship?  
What forces have helped you? What forces have hindered you?

### Ending Questions

Consider all the comments shared this evening. Which aspects of mentoring are most important to you? If you had one minute with the superintendent what would you tell him about mentoring?

Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't talked about?

## APPENDIX J

## MENTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Interview 1

Introduction

Purpose for the interview

Interview as a conversation about mentoring

Participant Profile Domain

I'd like to get to know you. Share a little about yourself.

How would you describe yourself?

What are your prior experiences mentoring/supervising?

What do you see as your strengths? Needs?

I'm interested in hearing about your mentee.

What words describe your mentee?

What are his/her personal characteristics?

What are his/her strengths? Needs?

What does mentoring mean to you?

What do you think is the role of the mentor?

Why did you become a mentor?

How has it affected your own teaching?

How is working with your mentee different from working with other teachers?

What are your greatest strengths as a mentor? Areas to grow?

How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?

Who has helped you form a relationship with your mentee?

What has helped you?

Who has hindered you? What has hindered you?

Do you have any relationship beyond school?

What do you think it feels like to be a beginning teacher?

School Environment Domain

Now think back to the beginning of school. Describe the first week with your mentee and some of the things you did together.

How were you selected to be a mentor? Matched together?

What happened at your initial meeting?

What types of assistance did you provide your mentee? How?

Think back to an experience you had with your mentee in the last few weeks that you thought was positive... Was there an experience that was challenging?

What did you talk about?  
How and when did you meet?  
What affected the experience?

### Mentor Program Domain

What do you think beginning teachers need?

Could you tell me about a time when you helped your mentee.  
How did you identify what he/she needed?  
How did you decide what strategies to use in helping him/her?  
Where do you get your ideas on how to be a mentor?  
Talk about preparation you have had for this role.

### Conclusion

Consider all the comments you have shared with me. Which are most important to you? If you had one minute with the superintendent what would you tell him about mentoring?

Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't talked about?

## APPENDIX K

## MENTEE INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Interview 1

Introduction

Purpose for interview

Interview as a conversation about mentoring

Participant Profile Domain

I'd like to get to know you. Share a little about yourself.

How would you describe yourself?

What are some experiences you have had working with children?

Describe your teacher preparation.

What do you see as your strengths? Needs?

I'm interested in hearing about your mentor.

What words describe your mentor?

What are his/her personal characteristics?

What are his/her strengths?

What does mentoring mean to you?

What do you think is the role of the mentor?

What would you like the role to be?

How is working with your mentor different from working with other teachers?

What would happen if your mentor were at a different grade level? Different part of the building?

How would you describe your relationship with your mentor?

Who has helped you form a relationship with your mentor?

What has been instrumental in helping you form a relationship with your mentor?

Who has hindered you? What has hindered you?

Do you have any relationship beyond school?

What does it feel like to be a beginning teacher?

School Environment Domain

Now think back to the beginning of school. Describe the first week with your mentor and some of the things you did together.

What happened at your initial meeting?

What types of assistance were provided to you? How?

What types of help did you feel you needed back then?

How is that different from what you feel you need now?

Think back to an experience you had with your mentor in the last few weeks that you thought was positive... Was there an experience that was challenging?

What did you talk about?

How and when did you meet?

What affected the experience?

Have you received support and developed a relationship with others?

### Mentor Program Domain

What do you think beginning teachers need?

Who are some of the people who have helped you this year? How?

How do you feel about the mentor program?

Is the mentor program meeting the needs of beginning teachers?

What else might complement the mentor program to help beginning teachers?

### Conclusion

Consider all the comments you have shared with me. Which are most important to you? If you had one minute with the superintendent what would you tell him about mentoring?

Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't talked about?

## APPENDIX L

## MENTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Interview 2

Mentor/mentee Relationship

As we begin, could you think about a metaphor that describes your relationship now with your mentee: My relationship with my mentee is like \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

How has your relationship changed since our last meeting?

What are some successful moments?

What are some challenges/conflicts?

What do you see as the mentee's needs/strengths?

What factors have been significant in your relationship?

Tell me something that happened in the past few weeks in working with your mentee.

How did you solve an issue/problem?

How did you work it out?

School Environment Domain

Describe to me how it feels in your school.

What role do parents play?

What role do teachers play?

What is the role of the principal?

Are there opportunities for teacher collaboration?

How does this affect your relationship?

How does your school orient and assist beginning teachers?

What activities are planned?

What is the process for obtaining materials/resources?

Who assists (reading teacher, librarian, lead mentor teacher, team leaders)?

How does this affect your relationship?

Participant Profile Domain

Reflect on your mentee's growth this year as a teacher.

How has being a mentor changed your life or your thinking about being a teacher?

Would you be a mentor again?

Mentor Program

Describe a time when you observed the mentee and/or she you.

What did you gain?

How did you find time to do this?

If you did not, what prevented you from doing this?

Could you reflect on the impact of the mentor training.

What things in the mentor program are most significant in affecting your relationship with your mentee?

Conclusion

What else is there that you want to share with me about being a mentor and working with your mentee that you haven't shared?

## APPENDIX M

## MENTEE INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Interview 2

Mentor/mentee Relationship

As we begin, could you think about a metaphor that describes your relationship now with your mentor: My relationship with my mentor is like \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

How has your relationship changed since our last meeting?

What are some successful moments?

What are some challenges/conflicts?

What do you see as your mentor's strengths?

What factors have been significant in your relationship?

Tell me something that happened in the past few weeks in working with your mentor.

How did you solve an issue/problem?

How did you work it out?

School Environment Domain

Tell me something about how it feels in your school.

What role do parents play?

What role do teachers play?

What is the role of the principal?

What opportunities are there for teacher collaboration?

How does this affect your relationship?

How does your school orient and assist beginning teachers?

What activities are planned?

What is the process for obtaining materials/resources?

Who assists (reading teacher, librarian, lead mentor teacher, team leaders)?

How does this affect your relationship?

Participant Profile Domain

Reflect on your growth this year as a teacher.

Describe a lesson that was successful. What made it so?

Describe a lesson that did not go as you wanted.

What are your goals for next year?

How has having a mentor changed your life or your thinking about being a teacher?

Mentor Program Domain

Describe a time when you observed the mentor and/or she you.

What did you gain?

How did you find time to do this?

If you did not, what prevented you from doing this?

What things in the mentor program are most significant in affecting your relationship with your mentor?

Conclusion

What else is there that you want to share with me about being a beginning teacher and working with your mentor that you haven't shared?

APPENDIX N  
EMAIL RESPONSES

Mentor	Mentee
How did you help your mentee this week?	How did your mentor help you this week? How could he/she have helped you?
How was your teaching this week?	How was your teaching this week?
Did you have any conflict with your mentee this week? How did you resolve it?	Did you have any conflict with your mentor this week? How did you resolve it?
Did you use any ideas from your mentor training this week?	Who helped you this week?
What is your biggest challenge as a mentor this week?	What is your biggest challenge as a beginning teacher this week?
What advice would you give a new mentor?	What advice would you give a new teacher?

APPENDIX O  
OBSERVATION GUIDE  
Mentor/Mentee Conference

Participants

Date

Location

Purpose for meeting

Content of meeting

- Planning
- Problem solving
- Resources
- Specific children's needs
- Assessment
- Curriculum
- Parent issues
- Personal life
- Classroom management

Pattern of relationship

- Body language
- Structure (informality v. formality)
- Talking – who
- Sharing – who
- Questioning – who asks, how answered
- Active listening skills
- Respect for professionalism (mentee to mentor and mentor to mentee)
- Collaboration
- Resolving disagreements

## APPENDIX P

## DEFINITION OF THEMES

*Reassurance* refers to the mentor's way of easing the beginning teacher's worries and building the self-esteem and confidence of the beginner.

*Collaboration* refers to colleagues who are planning together, teaming, and working cooperatively toward a common goal.

*Reciprocity* refers to the equal exchange of ideas and sharing activities and/or similar experiences in a two-way fashion.

*Friendship* refers to feeling comfortable and relaxed together, talking/listening in a nonjudgmental way, and sharing personal experiences and/or social activities.

*Problem solving* refers to the various ways that mentors and mentees solve problems and deal with issues.

*Informal structures* refer to the informal and impromptu structure for getting together with meetings generally unscheduled.

*Multi-layered support network* refers to the support structure for the beginning teacher that comes from many sources including mentor, lead mentor teacher, teammates, and principal.

## APPENDIX Q

## CITATIONS FROM THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS FOR THEMES

## NATURE OF MENTOR/MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

Themes	Case 1		Case 2		Case 3	
<b>Reassurance</b>	<b>Mentor 1</b>	<b>Mentee 1</b>	<b>Mentor 2</b>	<b>Mentee 2</b>	<b>Mentor 3</b>	<b>Mentee 3</b>
Interview 1	Par. 132		Par. 51 Par. 53-54 Par. 64-68 Par. 80	Par. 117-119 Par. 127-131 Par. 199 Par. 221 Par. 225	Par. 23 Par. 151-161 Par. 187	Par. 64-67 Par. 81 Par. 155-157
Email Response					#5 #6	#5
Field Notes Action Plan Interview 2			Par. 94	Par. 74	March 18 4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter Par. 21-27	March 18 4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter Par. 86-88 Par. 145
<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>Mentor 1</b>	<b>Mentee 1</b>	<b>Mentor 2</b>	<b>Mentee 2</b>	<b>Mentor 3</b>	<b>Mentee 3</b>
Interview 1	Par. 43- 45 Par. 47 Par. 111 Par. 141 Par. 155	Par. 70 Par. 90 Par. 103 Par. 107	Par. 58	Par. 84 Par. 105 Par. 133 Par. 179	Par. 47 Par. 105	Par. 70 Par. 82
Email Response	#4			#1 #2		
Field Notes	February 22	February 22			March 18	March 18
Action Plan	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter 3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter 3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter		
Interview 2	Par. 54 Par. 105	Par. 78 Par. 175- 178		Par. 13	Par. 107	Par. 8-12 Par. 50-56 Par. 98
<b>Reciprocity</b>	<b>Mentor 1</b>	<b>Mentee 1</b>	<b>Mentor 2</b>	<b>Mentee 2</b>	<b>Mentor 3</b>	<b>Mentee 3</b>
Interview 1	Par. 61 Par. 105 Par. 111 Par. 123	Par. 67-68 Par. 82 Par. 103	Par. 30 Par. 33 Par. 166	Par. 103 Par. 105 Par. 163	Par. 47 Par. 143 Par. 167	Par. 48 Par. 94
Email Response Field Notes Action Plan Interview 2	Par. 79 Par. 123	Par. 46 Par. 66 Par. 68	Par. 179 Par. 199	Par. 60 Par. 74	Par. 107-108	Par. 46 Par. 48

Themes	Case 1		Case 2		Case 3	
<b>Friendship</b>	<b>Mentor 1</b>	<b>Mentee 1</b>	<b>Mentor 2</b>	<b>Mentee 2</b>	<b>Mentor 3</b>	<b>Mentee 3</b>
Interview 1	Par. 118-123	Par. 49-52 Par. 62-70 Par. 80 Par. 91 Par. 131 Par. 160	Par. 64 Par. 132 Par. 160 Par. 141-147	Par. 30 Par. 63 Par. 80 Par. 92 Par. 141 Par. 147 Par. 163 Par. 285	Par. 19 Par. 89 Par. 95 Par. 170-181	Par. 68 Par. 76 Par. 82 Par. 101 Par. 109 Par. 149
Email Response				#1	#4 #6	
Field Notes	February 22	February 22			March 18	March 18
Action Plan Interview 2	Par. 64-68	Par. 6 Par. 52	Par. 44	Par. 7 Par. 19 Par. 30-32 Par. 46 Par. 211	Par. 105 Par. 122 Par. 125	Par. 6-7 Par. 46 Par. 57 Par. 70 Par. 149
<b>Problem Solving</b>	<b>Mentor 1</b>	<b>Mentee 1</b>	<b>Mentor 2</b>	<b>Mentee 2</b>	<b>Mentor 3</b>	<b>Mentee 3</b>
Interview 1 Email Response Field Notes						
Interview 2	Par. 148-165	Par. 8-35 Par. 72-87	Par. 15 Par. 24 Par. 54-62 Par. 80 Par. 199	Par. 15 Par. 80-87	Par. 35-72	Par. 14-30 Par. 152-153
<b>Informal Structures</b>	<b>Mentor 1</b>	<b>Mentee 1</b>	<b>Mentor 2</b>	<b>Mentee 2</b>	<b>Mentor 3</b>	<b>Mentee 3</b>
Interview 1	Par. 61	Par. 25-31 Par. 37 Par. 45 Par. 70 Par. 73 Par. 87 Par. 94-95 Par. 106 Par. 131	Par. 99 Par. 106 Par. 164	Par. 103 Par. 113 Par. 226 Par. 105-113	Par. 45 Par. 48 Par. 82 Par. 89 Par. 105 Par. 113 Par. 122	Par. 76 Par. 93-95 Par. 106 Par. 128-129 Par. 150
Email Response	#1 #5		#1	#2		
Field Notes						

Interview 2	Par. 48 Par. 60	Par. 18-36 Par. 40 Par. 56-58	Par. 70	Par. 9 Par. 15 Par. 21 Par. 56-58 Par. 70-80	Par. 38-44 Par. 74 Par. 80 Par. 110- 123	Par. 6-11 Par. 38-44 Par. 74-88
<hr/>						
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Case 1</b>		<b>Case 2</b>		<b>Case 3</b>	
<b>Multi-layered Support Network</b>	<b>Mentor 1</b>	<b>Mentee 1</b>	<b>Mentor 2</b>	<b>Mentee 2</b>	<b>Mentor 3</b>	<b>Mentee 3</b>
Interview 1	Par. 45 Par. 75 Par. 99 Par. 141 Par. 151 Par. 190	Par. 42 Par. 88 Par. 105-106 Par. 112 Par. 115 Par. 122 Par. 132	Par. 16 Par. 142	Par. 55 Par. 86 Par. 107 Par. 155 Par. 206- 215	Par. 29 Par. 68 Par. 102 Par. 125 Par. 128 Par. 131 Par. 135 Par. 167	Par. 131 Par. 133- 134
Email Response		#2 #4 #6				#4
Field Notes	February 22	February 22				
Interview 2	Par. 46 Par. 99 Par. 107	Par. 36-37 Par. 72 Par. 108- 113 Par. 192	Par. 80 Par. 118- 138	Par. 86 Par. 106- 107	Par. 94 Par. 227	Par. 107- 114 Par. 219- 223

## APPENDIX R

## TYPES OF MENTOR ASSISTANCE CITED IN INTERVIEWS

Assistance	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Assessment (Reading)	X		X
Assessment (Report Cards)	X	X	X
Assessment (Retention)		X	
Assessment (Testing)		X	X
Classroom Management		X	X
Curriculum (Health)	X		X
Curriculum (Science)			X
Curriculum (Social Studies)	X	X	
Curriculum (Writing)			X
Field Trips	X		
Gifted and Talented	X		
Grant Writing			X
Morning Meetings	X		
Parent Issues	X	X	X
Planning (Lessons)	X	X	X
Planning (Substitute)		X	
Procedures	X	X	X
Resources/Materials	X	X	X
Responsive Classroom	X		
Routines	X	X	
Setting up Classroom	X	X	X
Special Activities	X	X	
Special Needs of Students	X	X	X
Technology		X	X

## APPENDIX S

## RELATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEMES

Research Questions	Themes
What is the nature of the beginning teacher mentor/mentee relationship in a large suburban school system mentoring program?	Reassurance Collaboration Reciprocity Friendship Problem solving Informal structures Multi-layered support network Assistance
What forces affect this relationship? How do the forces affect this relationship?	Participant profile forces Perception of role Personality Age/experience level  School environment forces Time Grade level Proximity of classrooms Principal  School system forces Budget Mentor training  Case-specific forces Two schools Mentor's late appointment Mentor's new grade level Mentor's health Teaching styles

## VITA

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 Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

1986            George Mason University, Fairfax, VA;  
 Master of Education, Education Administration and Supervision

1964            Smith College, Northampton, MA;  
 Bachelor of Arts, History and Elementary Education

**CERTIFICATION**

Virginia Elementary School Principal  
 Virginia Kindergarten Elementary Grades 1-7

**WORK EXPERIENCE**

2001-2003     Graduate Associate, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

1977-2001     Fairfax County Public Schools, Fairfax, Virginia

2000-2001     Coordinator, Regional Office

1998-2001     Coordinator, Elementary Programs, Area Office

1997-1998     Program Monitor, Area Office

1994-1997     Assistant Principal, Union Mill Elementary

1992-1994     Program Monitor, Area Office

1987-1992     Assistant Principal, Union Mill Elementary

1986-1987     Curriculum Resource Teacher, Area Office

1977-1986     Classroom Teacher, Grades 1-2, Belle View Elementary

1974-1978     Elementary Homebound Teacher

1964-1967     Arlington County Public Schools, Arlington, VA

1965-1967     Kindergarten Teacher, Fort Myer Elementary

1964-1965     Kindergarten Teacher, Wakefield Elementary

**ADJUNCT TEACHING**

2000-Present Military Career Transition Program, Old Dominion University

1997-2001 Adjunct Professor, George Mason University

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