

Three mentoring team relationships and obstacles encountered: a school-based case study

Gary M. Kilburg

This case study is a continuation of a research project that investigated 149 mentoring teams in four school districts over a two-year period. The primary goal in the first phase of the study was to identify mentoring teams that were regularly encountering problems, introduce intervention procedures, and assess the effectiveness of those procedures. In this phase, three teams were selected from the original study to represent four common problems encountered during formal mentoring: institutional barriers, issues of time, lack of emotional support, and poor interpersonal skills. Results indicate the need for a closer examination of the principal's role in the mentoring process, more attention to how mentoring coordinators and administrators use their time, a more rigorous mentor selection process, a more detailed evaluation of the teaching environment, additional support mechanisms, and more prevalent sharing of research.

This study is a continuation of research by Kilburg and Hancock (2006) that investigated 149 mentoring teams in four school districts over a two-year period. The current study is differentiated from the published study in that it identifies three case studies that illustrate typical problems and investigates their causes. The primary goal in the first stage of the study was to identify mentoring teams that were encountering recurring problems, endeavor to manage those problems, and assess the effectiveness of those procedures (Kilburg & Hancock, 2003).

From a process of data reduction and analysis, with the help of a trainer from the Mentoring Institute at George Fox University, I identified eight areas of concern: (1) lack of time, (2) mentors and new teachers not in the same building, (3) mentors and new teachers not in the same field or subject, (4) mentors and new teachers not in the same specialty, such as speech therapy and/or specialists working with challenged students, (5) mentors and new teachers not at the same grade level, (6) poor communication and coaching skills, (7) lack of emotional support, and (8) personality conflict.

Professor of Education and Director of the Mentoring Institute, George Fox University, School of Education, 414 N. Meridian Street, Newberg, Oregon 97132 USA. Email: gkilburg@georgefox.edu.

Four district mentoring coordinators and I identified three case studies from the aforementioned mentoring teams to represent these eight areas and provide a contextual examination of the events that negatively impacted their relationships. This phase of the study was conducted over one year.

It is important to note that at the beginning of this study, the majority of mentoring relationships in the four school districts were effective and successful. However, regardless of what a school or district might do to prepare new teachers and mentors, mentoring practices may still fall short of the ideal (Newton *et al.*, 1994; Kilburg & Hancock, 2003).

The mentoring transition process

The K–12 mentoring experience in public schools creates a curious position for the mentor and new teacher. Both are in transition, taking on new roles and responsibilities, negotiating a working relationship that may be marked by anxiety, frustration, and questions about collaboration, authority, direction, and conflict (Newton *et al.*, 1994; Ganser *et al.*, 1998). As with many transitions, the change that both team members encounter is likely to meet some resistance at both the personal and professional levels. This is especially true of individuals with different realities and agendas (Veeman, 1984; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Loucks-Horsley & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Newton *et al.*, 1994).

Throughout this transitional process, the mentoring relationship can be characterized by periods of stability, as well as periods of change. Schon (1971) refers to this process as ‘passing through the zones of uncertainty, similar to being at sea and not knowing exactly where you are at or confronting more information than you can handle’ (p. 12). Although events that stimulate change offer the greatest potential for continued growth, they can also provide the greatest source of conflict (Knox, 1977). For example, mentors who add the responsibility of mentoring a new teacher to their other responsibilities may, in fact, find that the additional task puts them in a position where they are not able to provide the mentoring that the new teacher is in need of in a timely fashion (Kilburg, 2002). Many new teachers are also assigned to teach a subject or subjects that they have never taught, work with student populations that they have not been trained to teach, and/or required to advise or coach a particular sport or activity (Kilburg, 2002). Loucks-Horsley and Steigelbauer (1991) believe that is why it is so important that the people who are responsible for creating this new environment for the mentor and new teacher realize that if those transitional issues are not addressed, the mentoring team is likely to encounter some of the problems next illustrated.

Time

If mentoring is a high priority in a school district, then adequate time must be provided for observations and meetings (Huling-Austin & Murphy, 1987). Data collected in the Kilburg and Hancock (2003) study indicate the single most important

factor that caused repeated problems for mentoring teams was lack of time. A majority of the mentoring teams somehow had to gain additional time for mentoring—time that was typically allocated for teaching, planning lessons, meeting with parents, and working with students. If mentoring teams are not given sufficient time to carry out the mentoring conversations that are so important to developing relationships, the mentoring experience may be seen as nothing more than a token gesture (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Ganser *et al.*, 1998).

Research by the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (1999) indicates that there is a direct correlation of efficacy in the mentoring process and the amount of time mentoring team members spend together. Conversely, when the time is reduced, the mentoring relationship may be negatively impacted.

Interpersonal skills

Mentors who experience a deficit in their communication skills may find that they are inclined to direct, command, take away authority, reduce or eliminate input from the new teacher, or simply shut down and avoid collaboration (Weeks, 1992; Kinlaw, 1999; Boreen *et al.*, 2000; Brewster & Railsback, 2001). When a new teacher experiences a communication deficit, they may become argumentative and unwilling to accept helpful criticism or listen to reason (Cross, 1981; Corley, 1998; Kilburg, 2002).

According to Newton *et al.* (1994), Ganser *et al.* (1998), Portner (2001), and Villani (2002), mentors must be willing to communicate belief in the new teachers and provide them with direction, while at the same time allowing them to make decisions for themselves. Boreen *et al.* (2000) and Kinlaw (1999) argue that good communication and coaching strengthen the collaborative process and reflection, which, in turn, contributes to performance and the professional development of both the new teacher and mentor. But when communication is minimized and is not a priority for one or both members, a relationship might not function at its full potential (Kilburg, 2002).

Emotional support

There is little argument that even the most well-prepared beginning teacher needs individualized assistance during the first few years of teaching (Tickle, 1994; Tellez, 1992; Brighton, 1999; Feiman-Nemser *et al.*, 1999; Moir *et al.*, 1999; Odell & Huling, 2000; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). As new teachers encounter the rigors of teaching, many realize that their energy quickly dwindles (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002). Further complicating the problem is the isolation, lack of confidence and competence that many new teachers feel as a result of busy schedules, attempting to establish themselves in a new setting, trying to maintain some form of balance in their lives, establishing themselves and their family, dealing with a curriculum they might not be familiar with and in some cases working with veteran teachers who have all of the answers.

It is also important to recognize that much of the necessary support for the new teacher is intangible in the beginning; that is, the need for belonging, a sense of confidence and self-reliance, and a safe and secure environment (Arends, 1998; Portner, 2001). It seems clear, then, that when new teachers experience a nurturing environment that meets their personal and emotional needs, they are better able to meet daily demands and challenges (Tickle, 1994; Feiman-Nemser *et al.*, 1999; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

According to Kilburg and Hancock's (2006) in their study of 149 mentoring teams, 87% of the new teachers believed that having a strong support mechanism was very important, especially as it related to emotions. When new teachers did not receive that support, many of them fell prey to anxiety, insecurity, and impoverished confidence. When mentors provided the needed support, the new teachers felt encouraged, empowered, and also purposeful, even when facing difficult circumstances.

Institutional barriers

Although there is no single mentoring program design that meets the needs of every school district in every situation, there is a broad consensus regarding the institutional barriers that can negatively impact the mentoring process between mentor and new teacher. The following is a discussion of some of those factors.

Mentoring program planners and coordinators must be aware of the impact of change on mentoring team members. When both new teachers and mentors are placed in situations that challenge them personally and/or professionally, it is important to remember that, for a variety of reasons, there are those who may respond in unexpected ways (Loucks-Horsley & Stiegelbauer, 1991). School leaders should take a proactive approach in training mentoring team members about how change and transitional shock can impact their relationship (Veeman, 1984; Newton *et al.*, 1994; Kilburg, 2002; Villani, 2002). It is important to remember that even though mentoring team members are adults who have a strong educational background and who generally work well with students, it does not mean that they will be free from anxiety, frustration, and destabilization.

Financial commitment is a critical piece of the mentoring puzzle that determines the quality and effectiveness of the mentoring program. School districts and planning committees need to recognize that it is neither fair nor wise to ask teachers to take time from their personal lives without some form of compensation. When a district provides financial resources, they demonstrate a commitment and value for the conversations that new teachers and mentors need to have on a regular basis.

Identifying prerequisite criteria in selecting mentors is yet another factor in determining the effectiveness of a mentoring program. Criteria include approachability, integrity, ability to listen, sincerity, willingness to share time, enthusiasm, teaching competence, trust, receptivity, positive attitude, openness, commitment to the profession, experience in teaching, tactfulness, cooperativeness, and flexibility (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). Unfortunately, too often the selection process is compromised for expediency. When school districts do not take the time needed to be

thoughtful and accountable in the selection process, this form of neglect may negatively impact the mentoring process, the mentoring relationship, and the new teacher's desire to remain at the school or even in the profession (Newton *et al.*, 1994; Kilburg, 2002).

Methodology

This qualitative study investigated a context-specific view of three mentoring partnerships and the negative factors that impacted those relationships.

A multiple case study approach was used to generate descriptive data, allowing me in the role of researcher to discover insights regarding each mentoring team's problem-solving processes. Procedures for collecting data included informal interviews, letters, emails and field notes. Data analysis involved four iterative steps: reading/memoing, describing, classifying, and interpreting the data (Yin; 1984; Bickman & Rog, 1998; Gay & Airasian, 2000; Yin 2003).

Participants

Data for the second phase of this study were collected over a one-year period from 2003 to 2004 from 149 mentoring teams in four school districts; 21 of those teams had identified recurring problems, and three of the 21 were then selected for this study as being representative of the types of problems encountered by all of the teams.

Two of the three mentoring teams selected for this study had female mentors and female protégés. The third team was composed of a male mentor and protégé. All of the protégés were in their first year of teaching, and all three mentors had been informal mentors in the past, either for teachers new to the profession or for veteran teachers new to the building and/or district. All of the mentoring teams volunteered to participate in this study. For the purpose of anonymity, none of the team member's real names is used herein.

Procedures

Data for the first phase of the study were collected during the 2001–2003 school years, and for the second phase during the 2003–2004 school year. During the first phase, surveys were collected at each school district's in-service and after each training workshop for mentors and new teachers. A total of 30 workshops and in-service programs were surveyed; each mentoring team member was asked the same six open-ended questions at each meeting and was provided with an opportunity to make additional comments in the survey. Three of the six questions related to the mentoring program's effectiveness, and three questions related to the impact on the mentoring team and helped to identify what issues were negatively impacting the mentoring relationship (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Yin, 1984; Bickman & Rog, 1998; Yin, 2003).

Interviews were also conducted after workshops and in-services. The interview protocol permitted me to speak at length and in detail with mentoring team members

in both formal and informal settings. Field notes were taken during each interview and then rewritten for clarification within 24 hours. The field notes provided rich data for identifying issues and concerns, as well as cross-case themes. While participating as the trainer and participant observer for the four mentoring programs, I gathered a majority of the data in real time. The unique feature of real time was that it provided numerous opportunities to observe the interactions between team members and in a variety of settings. Although each interview session had a unique focus and interaction, I found it useful to have a protocol or list of concerns for guiding the observation. The field notes provided me with a detailed description of what was happening between many of the mentors and new teachers as well as providing insight about the impact of the mentoring programs.

Analysis of data

Data analysis was ongoing, occurring both during data collection and after all the data had been gathered. It consisted of reading, analyzing, and synthesizing information across sources to generate patterns and themes (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Using a constant comparative method, I constructed categories for what the mentoring team members viewed as tensions, problems, or concerns and then categorized them. In order to ensure the accuracy of the data, I also interviewed a number of the participants a second time for clarification and information.

From the data, four categories emerged. At this point I was helped by a university professor that had formal training in designing K-12 mentoring programs from the Mentoring Institute at George Fox University. Using the initial emergent themes, my colleague and I agreed on operational definitions and topical codes for each theme. Using these definitions, I coded the data and developed a conceptual map. These data were organized into a comprehensive display and then analyzed for similarities and differences (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Stories of the mentoring relationships

The stories of the three mentor–protégé relationships illustrate just a few of the obstacles that can arise when two teachers are brought together for mentoring. The following stories illustrate how a domino effect impacted the mentoring relationship and how mentoring teams attempted to remedy that effect.

Brooke and Susan: a question of time

Brooke, a veteran middle school teacher of 22 years, was excited about the opportunity to work with Susan, a new teacher to the school district and the profession. At their initial meeting, Susan seemed to be a personable young woman who was very excited about her first teaching assignment. In addition to teaching science to seventh graders in the middle school in the morning, she would also be teaching biology at the high school in the afternoon.

Over the next few weeks, both Brooke and Susan settled into their daily routine at the middle school. Unfortunately, the routine did not include meeting with one another regularly, which was frustrating to both teachers. Brooke summarized her feelings this way:

The school should have recognized that we would need time to meet on a regular basis, especially during the first part of the school year when Susan needed the most help. It would have been nice to have prep periods that matched up or were opposite of one another, but that wasn't an option for us.

They found that as the year progressed, time became more precious, and more and more questions were left unanswered. It was almost impossible for Brooke and Susan to find time to meet before and after school. Susan was the primary caregiver for her children and, as such, had to take the children to school and pick them up, along with all of the other duties she had before and after school. Brooke was facing similar obstacles with her workload and committee work. She did not have the same preparation period or lunch period as Susan, and she coached sports after school. Their lives were further complicated by Susan's afternoon teaching schedule at the high school. Susan made the following comments regarding her first year teaching:

It was frustrating for me to try and find the time to meet with Brooke. When you have teachers in two different buildings that are supposed to work with one another, then some provisions should have been made to accommodate both Brooke and me. Since the administration made the building assignments, they should have known there might be a problem with meetings.

It was even more frustrating knowing that we both have very busy schedules and the district made no accommodations to help us out.

Susan also felt uncomfortable asking other teachers to answer questions that she felt she should know or that Brooke should be able to answer even though she might not have time to. The following comment reflects Susan's frustration:

I don't know what else to do if Brooke isn't available. I try not to lean on [other teachers] too much, and they are always happy to help me out; I still feel some anxiety when I ask them for help, especially if I know it will require a commitment of time on their part.

At the end of the second month of school, Brooke and Susan agreed to begin using email and the telephone as their main sources of communication. That seemed to work fairly well for both, but there were times that Susan needed a response quickly when it was not possible. There were also times when the server was down, so email was not an option then. Susan was reserved in calling Brooke on the phone in her classroom because she did not want to interrupt the class. Brooke characterized the frustration that both she and Susan felt during this time: 'I enjoyed working with Susan so much, but it was just so hard to always respond to her questions in a timely manner.'

On occasion, Brooke and Susan met in each other's homes after school, although Susan felt guilty about taking time away from her family. Susan did admit to me on one occasion that she wished the school district had provided Brooke with some

type of compensation for all of the work that she was trying to do for her as a mentor teacher.

As the year came to a close, both Susan and Brooke felt that they had done their best to connect, but they were rarely successful. Although they described their relationship as positive, Brooke did not see it as ‘very mentor-like.’ In the end, both were disappointed by their lack of time to collaborate and the district’s lack of foresight in providing time for the mentors and new teachers to meet on a regular basis. Susan concluded,

We did the best we could under the circumstances but felt that the support that we needed in terms of time was just not available in the amounts that would have been helpful to us.

Alex and Ron: problem solving becomes an issue

Alex had taught in the district for 12 years and was considered by the administration to be a very effective teacher. This was his first experience as a formal mentor, although he had informally coached other new teachers over the years. Ron was a recent graduate of a Master of Arts in Teaching Program and had been hired by the school district just after graduation. Both Alex and Ron seemed to relate well in the beginning. They met on a weekly basis during the first few months, and their conversations revolved around such topics as the first day of school, classroom management, grading procedures, expectations of the principal, maintaining balance in one’s life, and planning lessons.

At the beginning of the third month, Ron began voicing his concern over his inability to develop creative and effective lessons:

I can’t believe all of the things that need to get done after a day of teaching, grading papers and meeting with students—I just don’t have the time to plan like I should... It seems like I’m always jumping from one thing to another.

Alex made every effort to assist Ron by allowing him the opportunity to take teaching materials from his files and modify them in any way that he wanted. Unfortunately, this did not seem to help Ron as much as Alex expected:

It seems like Ron struggles more with the issue of time than other teachers that I have worked with, and I’m not sure why. It’s easier for him to use time as an excuse rather than using it as an opportunity for growth.

After school one day, Ron walked into Alex’s room and asked for help to develop a unit on dinosaurs. After spending about two hours with Ron, Alex pulled out his own file on dinosaurs and gave it to Ron. Although he told Ron to modify the lessons, Ron decided to use them as is because it did not require additional work on his part. Ron’s following comment speaks to his unwillingness to find time for lesson preparation.

I am so fortunate to have Alex’s lessons to fall back on. I know that I should be spending the time on creating innovative lessons, but the time is just not there.

Over the next few weeks, Ron continued to ask for help from his mentor with regards to planning and teaching lessons. The theme that emerged from those discussions was

that he ‘never seemed to have enough time in [his] daily schedule to get everything done.’ Alex continued to coach Ron about taking responsibility for his own work and the issue of time management. However, when Alex confronted Ron about making constructive choices in lesson planning, Ron’s response was, ‘I don’t have the time.’ Alex immediately responded,

You don’t have a choice; I’m not going to continually provide you with lessons because you don’t feel you have the time to prepare. We’ve spent all kinds of time talking about what you need to do to organize your day, and yet you still don’t do it. What’s it going to take to get you to plan your own lessons?

Midway through the third week, Alex was approached by another teacher in the building. She shared that Ron had been soliciting help from various faculty members for lesson plans because he apparently had no time to develop his own.

The next morning, before school began, Alex asked Ron if he was continuing to rely on the other teachers for his lessons. He responded affirmatively. Both Ron and Alex had a long conversation that afternoon. Alex explained,

What was happening to Ron was something similar to getting caught with your hand in a cookie jar; what I mean by that was Ron was going behind my back after I had told him that he needed to find the time to work on planning his lesson instead of relying on other teachers to do his work for him.

As the school year came to a close, things seemed to get better for both Ron and Alex. Alex felt as though he had seen some progress but knew that Ron would probably require more help in the future than he could provide. Unfortunately, the school district did not have a mentoring program that extended beyond the first year.

Laura and Jennifer: micromanaging the new teacher

Laura was an especially gifted teacher, and this was her first experience as a mentor in a formal mentoring program. She was anxious about working with a new teacher, but looking forward to the opportunity. At the beginning of the school year, Laura summarized how she felt about mentoring:

I have to admit that I’m a little nervous about being a mentor. I hope that I can provide the support and help that Jennifer needs. I worry, though, that I might not be able to provide her with everything she needs. But with that said, I still am looking forward to working with her this year.

Jennifer was a new teacher who had just completed her teacher education program and was looking forward to her new teaching position. She felt much anxiety about the start of the new school year but was confident that with the mentor assigned by the school district, she would overcome any fears.

Over the next few months, Laura and Jennifer developed what seemed to be a collegial relationship. They had many opportunities to discuss their perspectives on classroom management, parent conferences, grading, and students’ special needs. At times, they disagreed on issues such as how a particular student might have been

managed, areas of concern about the administration, and in several cases how a particular lesson should be taught, but that didn't impair their relationship.

When Laura began observing Jennifer in her second month of teaching, something changed in their relationship. Jennifer noted,

I was surprised that Laura became much more authoritative and direct in her reflections of my teaching, particularly when I made a mistake. That seemed so odd to me because this just seemed like it came out of nowhere.

Laura seemed less interested in Jennifer's attempts and more interested in results. Often, Laura's comments would be, 'Here's what you should do,' or 'Here's what you need to do.' When Jennifer questioned Laura about her method of mentoring, Laura explained that Jennifer needed that input so she would not make the same mistake twice.

Jennifer tried very hard to please her mentor, but unfortunately that only produced more anxiety and frustration for her. With her self-confidence declining, Jennifer began to feel uncomfortable around Laura. Two months later, Jennifer talked with the principal about the problem that she was having with Laura micromanaging her teaching. At the conclusion of their meeting, Jennifer reflected,

The principal was very understanding of my situation, but he told me that I should try to make the best of it and he would support me as much as possible during the rest of the school year.

Although the principal provided Jennifer with guidance and support, he was not always available. That had a negative impact on the quality of the mentoring process for Jennifer, as well as impacting her self-confidence. As the school year and the mentoring experience came to a close, Jennifer summed up her experience as a new teacher:

I felt like I was in high school or student teaching when the cooperating teacher would tell me what I needed to do. It would have been much more helpful to have discussed what needed to be done or to talk about the different options that might have been available. It would have been nice to have worked through some of the problems that I encountered, and to make the decisions about what to do by myself.

I also have to say that I did appreciate what the principal was doing, but he just didn't have the time and he wasn't always available when I needed to talk with him.

Laura, on the other hand viewed her coaching style differently:

I remember my first year of teaching, which didn't include having a mentor as a guide; it felt like I was being thrown to the wolves on some occasions. In Jennifer's case, I really felt that I needed to give her more direction because I didn't want her to repeat a lot of the mistakes that I made. There may have been times when I should have let her make the decision, but it just seemed much easier to tell her how to do it.

The results of these conversations with Jennifer and Laura indicated four issues. First, Laura was micromanaging because it was an expedient way of taking care of problems that Jennifer may have been encountering in the classroom. Second, Laura was providing solutions for Jennifer's problems, not options. Third, the district's

mentor in-service did not include training in peer coaching techniques. Fourth, both mentor and new teacher did not practice effective problem solving techniques in managing their relationship and eventually let the problem define their relationship.

Cross-case themes

Data from the three case studies were categorized according to impact on mentor teachers and their protégés. Four themes emerged from a cross-case analysis of multiple data sources, including interviews, letters, emails, observations, and field notes. For the purposes of this phase of the study, time is considered separate from institutional barriers, although there is a direct correlation between the two. The following are the four case themes that were identified: (1) institutional barriers, (2) issues of time, (3) lack of emotional support, and (4) poor interpersonal skills.

Institutional barriers

For the purpose of this study, institutional barriers consist of all practices and procedures by a school district that inhibit a successful mentoring experience. In the first profile, Brooke and Susan encountered a number of institutional barriers. Having Susan teach at both the middle school and high school helped the school district; however, the distance between the two schools did not enhance an effective mentoring process for Brooke and Susan. In fact, it hindered their ability to meet on a regular basis and carry out those conversations that are so important to the mentor and new teacher.

Unfortunately, this distance created a problem that was never overcome. Susan could have met with her mentor more often if she had been placed in only one school. With no mentor appointed for Susan at the high school, she was caught between two cultures without adequate support. With Brooke not being compensated by the school district for her mentoring services, Susan was reluctant to ask for assistance beyond school hours. Although Brooke and Susan felt they had a good relationship, they also felt it would have enhanced the effectiveness and success of the mentoring process if the school district and the mentoring program had provided more support and resources.

In the second case, Alex and Ron's dilemma was not as apparent as the other profiles. The institutional barrier they encountered concerned a school district that did not make provisions for mentoring new teachers beyond the first year. However, because Alex knew Ron needed additional assistance, he volunteered to work with Ron as an informal mentor during the new teacher's second year of teaching. That seemed to make a great deal of difference in three ways. First, Ron became more responsive to Alex's suggestions; he knew 'Alex was correct in his directions,' despite the fact that Ron was still learning to apply many of Alex's first-year suggestions. Second, Ron knew that he had to change or that he could lose his teaching position. Third, Ron became much more comfortable with Alex's suggestions as he grew in experience at the end of the school year and found the time needed to prepare his lessons.

In the third case profile, Jennifer encountered a problem meeting with the principal. Although the principal had committed to helping to mentor Jennifer, the constraints of his job limited his availability. In addition, the principal said he did not feel that he could resolve the issue that existed between Laura and Jennifer because of the 'political impact.' The result was that Jennifer felt she was 'in limbo,' altering her perception of an effective mentoring program. The principal's mentoring relationship was also seen as a conflict of interest in that he served dual roles as Jennifer's supervisor/evaluator as well as taking on the responsibility as a mentor.

Issues of time

The issue of time impacted all three mentoring teams. For Brooke and Susan, finding time in an already busy schedule caused the greatest problem. It was compounded by Susan's discomfort in asking for Brooke's help outside of school and a lack of compensation for Brooke. Having Susan teach in both the middle school and high school also complicated the issue.

Ron's inability to take care of the most fundamental lesson plan because he did not 'have the time' was not acceptable to his mentor. Furthermore, Alex suggested that Ron was

Just not able to juggle all of the pieces of the teaching puzzle, and he just didn't seem to be as serious as he should be about taking on the responsibility himself to become more organized and a better time manager.

However, the real issue facing Ron had to do with the fact that he was a procrastinator.

In Laura and Jennifer's case, the principal's busy schedule did not permit him to meet with Jennifer as much as she needed. Thus, timeliness of answering questions was compromised. For Jennifer, this further complicated her life and increased her frustration level with the principal and toward the mentoring program.

Lack of emotional support

Despite the best plans, Brooke was not able to provide the support that she intended. Susan, on the other hand, felt that Brooke was doing all that was possible. The concerns for both team members was that the school district was not able to provide any release time, and their teaching schedules and locations did not provide time to meet and/or observe one another in the classroom. Susan felt particularly lost on the high school campus because no one there had been assigned as a mentor to help her, and Brooke only had experience teaching at the middle school.

In Alex and Ron's case, the relationship became adversarial rather than supportive and nurturing. Alex felt he was providing the necessary mentoring support to help Ron work through the time issue, but Ron was unwilling to commit to helping himself. Alex also felt that he was not demonstrating those important and fundamental characteristics so effective to teaching practices. Ron, on the other hand, knew that

Alex was trying to help him; however, he could not comprehend that he was being asked to do something profoundly uncomfortable. Ron felt overwhelmed and seriously questioned whether he was in the right profession. Originally, he had no idea that there was so much work involved. The defining moment for Ron was when Alex asked him if he felt 'teaching was his calling.' The answer came several days later, when Ron claimed he really did want to teach; when he felt overwhelmed by the initial experience, he reverted to his old habit of procrastination. After talking with both Alex and the principal at the school year's close and thoughtfully preparing for his classes during the summer, Ron was able to make a successful comeback during his second year in the district. When asked why he had a change of heart and mind, his response was,

Alex challenged me to be better than I thought I could be and I guess if he could believe in me, I could do the same. Although it was difficult at first, I had to retrain how I thought and worked, but it paid off and hopefully I'll be able to pass that on not only to other new teachers, but to my students as well.

The underlying issue for Laura and Jennifer was Laura's lack of patience as a mentor, which had a direct correlation with her unwillingness to allow Jennifer to learn from her mistakes. The focus in this case was on methods, not results. Laura's micromanaging tendencies provided solutions without getting input from Jennifer, and that hindered Jennifer's willingness to identify options that would have been helpful in making her own decisions.

Poor interpersonal skills

In the case of Ron and Alex, the new teacher's inability to solve his lifelong habit of procrastination created problems. Unfortunately, Ron had not mastered conflict resolution through perseverance. Rather than looking at conflict as an opportunity to resolve an issue, Ron only saw it as a negative experience where he would have to admit defeat and lose face. Only at the end of the school year did Ron seem to understand that his way of thinking had caused problems. He started to view conflict as an opportunity for growth and for alternative ways of thinking and behaving. With Alex's help, Ron began to develop strategies of organizing his professional life and time management skills.

As for Jennifer and Laura, Jennifer did not like conflict with other adults. She felt that this was exacerbated by being the 'new kid on the block'. Although it may not have been completely appropriate for Jennifer to contact the principal because he was her evaluator, she felt she needed to talk to someone in authority. It is important to note at this point that the principal had placed Laura and Jennifer together. When Jennifer needed to talk with the principal, he was just too busy because of his schedule. Jennifer decided to rely on another teacher mentor, which was greatly helpful. During the latter part of the school year, Jennifer and Laura had less contact with one another due to Jennifer's growing confidence and dependence on two mentors instead of one (Garvey, 1995; Mullen, 2005).

Conclusion

This study has sought to illuminate the problems that three mentoring teams encountered on a regular basis. My stories of their experiences provide different views of how mentors and new teachers responded to the multiple challenges encountered on a daily basis. Unfortunately, mentoring program coordinators and mentoring program planners have a drastically different view from those who first come to teach in their systems. We need to clarify this tension.

I believe that the real value of this study does not rest on the results and conclusions, although they are helpful. The study's significance lies in creating a research agenda that examines intervention procedures as they relate to institutional barriers, time, lack of emotional support, and the impact of poor interpersonal skills. Based on this study's outcomes, the following suggestions are recommended for future research:

1. *Principal's role.* There should be a closer examination of the principal's role and responsibilities in the mentoring process. The leadership of principals is essential in any mentoring program, but it is also important that they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. This is especially true as it relates to their role as an evaluator, supervisor, mentor, or coach in the mentoring process and the impact it has on that process when it is not carried out appropriately and effectively.
2. *Time factor.* School districts need to provide ample time for mentors and new teachers to meet and observe one another, and on a regular basis. It would also be helpful to examine the process of how that time might be built into the school schedule. There is also a need to investigate the choices both new teachers and mentors make with regard to taking time out of their personal schedules, and how that impacts them collectively and individually.
3. *Assessment process.* There should be a close examination of mentor training, especially as it relates to the coaching process and working with colleagues that are transitioning to the profession. It would also be of value to assess the workshops that new teachers and mentors are required to attend during the school year, as well as the impact of intervention procedures in resolving problems.
4. *Challenges encountered by new teachers.* It would be helpful to have a more detailed account of the types of challenging classes, multiple preparations, remedial classes, and student populations that new teachers encounter during the first year of teaching.
5. *Mentoring tensions.* More evidence is needed of mentoring tensions that mentoring teams encounter on a regular basis. Although this study uncovered several intervention strategies that three site-based mentoring teams used to deal with their tensions, a need still exists for a more detailed account with a larger sample population. This larger sample would help to identify the various tensions that emanate from mentoring team relationships as well as the methods that proved both successful and unsuccessful in resolving those tensions.
6. *Emotional support.* Emotional support is one of the most vital forms of assistance the induction team can provide for beginning teachers. Unfortunately, not all

mentors have the ability and the skill level to provide that support. Additional research needs to be conducted to determine the type of emotional support training or peer coaching that mentors receive, and the impact that training has had on the mentor and the mentoring relationship.

Finally, school district personnel and education faculty need to share the results of their investigations to build on the research on mentoring tensions and intervention procedures that are implemented to remedy those tensions. As educators learn more about the problems that mentoring teams encounter beyond those typically found in the literature, they will be in a better position to explore more fully the limits of applied intervention techniques. It is important to monitor the progress of our efforts through well-designed research for the dual purpose of informing practice and policy and discovering those questions that have yet to be asked.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to my wife, Peggy Kilburg, as well as the four anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and editing on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

References

- Arends, R. I. (1998) Teacher induction: research and examples of contemporary practice, paper presented at the *Suncoast Academy for Teacher Induction, Pinella County Schools, Largo, FL*.
- Bickman, L. & Rog, D. J. (1998) *Handbook of applied social research methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage).
- Boreen, J., Johnson, M., Niday, D. & Potts, J. (2000) *Mentoring beginning teachers: guiding, reflecting, coaching* (Portland, OR, Stenhouse).
- Brewster, C. & Railsback, J. (2001) *Supporting beginning teachers: how administrators, teachers, and policymakers can help new teachers succeed* (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory).
- Brighton, C. M. (1999) Keeping good teachers: lessons from novices, in: M. Scherer (Ed.) *A better beginning: supporting and mentoring new teachers* (Alexandria, VA, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development).
- Corley, E. L. (1998) First-year teachers, strangers in strange lands, paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, October*.
- Cross, P. (1981) *Adults as learners: increasing participation and facilitating learning* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass).
- Feiman-Nemser, S., Carver, C., Schulle, S. & Yusko, B. (1999) Beyond support: taking new teachers seriously as learners, in: M. Scherer (Ed.) *A better beginning: supporting and mentoring new teachers* (Alexandria, VA, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development).
- Fullan, M. & Stiegelbauer, S. (1991) *The new meaning of educational change* (2nd edn) (New York, Teachers College Press).
- Ganser, T., Bainer, D. L.; Bendixen-Noe, M., Brock, B. L., Stinson, A. D'Antonio, Giebelhaus, C., et al. (1998) Critical issues in mentoring and mentoring programs for beginning teachers, paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, October*.
- Garvey, B. (1995) Healthy signs for mentoring, *Education and training*, 37(5), 12–19.
- Gay, L. R. & Airasian, P. (2000) *Educational research: competencies for analysis and application* (6th edn) (Columbus, OH, Merrill).

- Gordon, S. P. & Maxey, S. (2000) *How to help beginning teachers succeed* (2nd edn) (Alexandria, VA, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development).
- Guyton, E. & McIntyre, D. J. (1990) Student teaching and school experience, in: W. R. Houston (Ed.) *Handbook of research on teacher education* (New York, Macmillan).
- Huling-Austin, L. & Murphy, S. C. (1987) Assessing the impact of teacher induction programs: implications for program development, paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, Washington, DC, April. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 283 779).
- Kilburg, G. (2002) Issues in mentoring from the perspective of the center for excellence in mentoring, paper presented at the *Oregon Association of Teacher Educators Conference*, Portland, OR, February.
- Kilburg, G. & Hancock, T. (2003,) Addressing sources of collateral damage in mentoring programs, paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*. Chicago, IL, April.
- Kilburg, G. & Hancock, T. (2006) Addressing sources of collateral damage in four mentoring programs, *Teachers College Record*, 108(7).
- Kinlaw, D. C. (1999) *Coaching for commitment* (2nd edn) (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass).
- Knox, A. B. (1977). *Adult development and learning* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass).
- Loucks-Horsley, S. & Stiegelbauer, S. (1991) Using knowledge of change to guide staff development, in: A. Lieberman & L. Miller (Eds) *Staff development for education in the 90's: new demands, new realities, new perspectives* (New York, Teachers College Press).
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, M. A. (1984) *Qualitative data analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA, Sage).
- Moir, E., Gless, J. & Baron, W. (1999) A support program with heart: the Santa Cruz Project, in: M. Scherer (Ed.) *A better beginning: supporting and mentoring new teachers* (Alexandria, VA, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development).
- Mullen, C.A. (2005) *The mentorship primer* (New York: Peter Lang).
- National Foundation for the Improvement of Education. (1999) Creating a teacher mentoring program, paper presented at the *National Foundation for the Improvement of Education Symposium*, Los Angeles, CA.
- Newton, A., Bergstrom, K., Brennan, N., Dunne, K., Gilbert, C., Ibarguen, N. *et al.* (1994) *Mentoring: a resource and training guide for educators* (Andover, MA, U.S. Office of Education).
- Odell, S. & Huling, L. (2000) *Quality mentoring for novice teachers* (Indianapolis, IN, Kappa Delta Pi).
- Portner, H. (2001) *Training mentors is not enough* (Thousand Oaks, CA, Corwin).
- Schon, D. A. (1971) *Beyond the stable state: public and private learning in a changing society* (London, Temple Smith).
- Stansbury, K. & Zimmerman, J. (2000) *Lifelines to the classroom: designing support for beginning teachers* (San Francisco, WestEd).
- Stansbury, K. & Zimmerman, J. (2002) Smart induction programs become lifelines for the beginning teacher, *Journal of Staff Development*, 23(4 Fall) <http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/jsd/stansbury234.cfm> (accessed 19 March 2004).
- Tellez, K. (1992) Mentors by choice, not design: help-seeking by beginning teachers, *Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(3), 214.
- Tickle, L. (1994) *The induction of new teachers: reflective professional practice* (London, Cassell).
- Veeman, S. (1984) Perceived problems of beginning teachers, *Review of Educational Research*, 54(2), 143–178.
- Villani, S. (2002) *Mentoring programs for new teachers: models of induction and Support* (Thousand Oaks, CA, Corwin).
- Weeks, D. (1992) *The eight essential steps to conflict resolution* (Los Angeles, CA, Jeremy P. Tarcher).
- Yin, R. K. (1984) *Case study research design and methods* (Beverly Hills, CA, Sage).
- Yin, R. K. (2003) *Application of case study research* (2nd edn) (Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage).