DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 357 015 SP 034 459

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TITLE The Perceptions of School Principals about a Mentoring Program for Newly Hired Urban School Teachers.
PUB DATE 2 Apr 93
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Diversity in Mentoring Conference of the International Mentoring Association (6th, Atlanta, GA, April 2, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; *Beginning Teacher Induction; Beginning Teachers; Cooperative Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; Interviews; *Mentors; *Principals; Program Development; *Program Effectiveness; Questionnaires; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews variations in formats and outcomes of mentoring programs for beginning teachers and then reports on a study of an urban mentor teacher program from the perspective of principals. The program's most distinctive feature was the collaborative process used in its development and implementation. The initial concept was formulated at the bargaining table where it won the support of both the teachers' union and the central administration. Eighteen qualified teachers were released from their teaching duties to become full-time mentors. Each was given 6 days of training and was assigned to work with 10 new teachers at 2 to 9 different sites. Mentors were assigned to work with new teachers according to their certification level, but their specific teaching experiences did not always match the beginning teachers' subject area or grade assignment. Questionnaires completed by 103 principals and interviews with 18 principals examined the level of participation in the program, principals' sense of involvement, mentor role, principal role, and suggestions for the program. Data reveal the principals' strong support of the program, although they expressed feelings of being inadequately informed about the program and having had less involvement in it than they would have liked. (Contains 23 references.) (JDD)

The Perceptions of School Principals About a Mentoring Program for Newly Hired Urban School Teachers

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This paper was prepared for presentation at the 1993 (Sixth) Annual Diversity in Mentoring Conference of the International Mentoring Association, Atlanta, Georgia, on April 2, 1993.

Criticisms and reactions to this paper are invited by contacting

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The Perceptions of School Principals About a Mentoring Program for Newly Hired Urban School Teachers

Mentoring programs for beginning teachers have proliferated during the past twenty years, and in many school districts they have become the central feature of induction-year support (Neuweiler, 1987: Hadaway & Reinhartz, 1993). Besides school districts, many states require support for beginning teachers, often in the form of mentoring programs and sometimes tied to certification requirements (e.g. Connecticut Beginning Educator Support and Training Program, Florida Beginning Teacher Program, Oklahoma Entry-Year Assistance Program) (Sclan & Darling-Hammond, 1992). Professional organizations representing teachers are generally supportive of mentoring programs. Finally, many teacher educators view mentoring beginners as the most critical issue they face (Buttery, Haberman, & Houston, 1990).

Mentoring Programs–Variation in Formats and Outcomes

As mentoring programs have grown in number and in visibility, various formats have emerged. For example, programs can be placed on a continuum from loosely structured (e.g., casual identification of a veteran teacher to serve as a beginner's "buddy") to highly structured (e.g., formal appointment of an induction "team" including a mentor, a building or district administrator, and a representative of higher education) (Klug, 1988; Moore, 1990). Differences also exist regarding the institutional ownership of programs. While some programs exist only at a building or district level, others represent collaborative efforts between schools or districts and colleges or universities, state departments of education,

cooperative educational agencies, and teachers' unions. (DeBolt, 1992; Reiman, Head, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1992).

Variation in programs is evident with respect to other aspects of mentoring including mentor selection, mentor training, pairing of mentors with beginning teachers, types of mentoring activities, allocation of time and resources for mentoring activities, relationship of mentoring to evaluation and licensing, and incentives. Finally, depending on the specific program, the goals of mentoring can vary greatly. Huling-Austin (1990b) identifies five typical goals:

(1) To improve teaching performance

(2) To increase the retention of promising beginning teachers during the induction years

(3) To promote the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers by improving teachers' attitudes toward themselves and the profession

(4) To satisfy mandated requirements related to induction and certification

(5) To transmit the culture of the system to beginning teachers. (p. 539)

Over the years, the interest in and support of mentoring programs for beginning teachers has evolved beyond simply viewing such programs as desirable alternatives to a "sink or swim" entry into teaching. For instance, mentoring is increasingly recognized as one way to reduce the attrition rate of new teachers, estimated to be 40 to 50% during first seven years of their career, and with two-thirds of these leaving teaching within the first four years (Huling-Austin, 1990b). This problem of attrition is more pronounced in urban

settings where new teachers may leave at a rate far greater than 50% (Huling-Austin, 1990b; Haberman & Rickards, 1990). Whereas some evidence is also emerging that relates mentoring to improved teaching behaviors (e.g., California Department of Education, 1992), a strong link between mentoring and increased student learning has not yet been established.

Mentoring programs can be related to the professionalization of teaching (Ornstein, 1988; Raelin, 1989). Mentoring serves to empower veteran teachers by providing them with an integral and formalized role in inducting newcomers into the occupation. Nevertheless, some scholars believe that mentoring activities generally have little influence on beginning teachers, given the structure of schooling and the nature of teaching as an occupation (e.g., Schlechty & Whitford, 1989; Little, 1990). Huling-Austin (1990a) suggests that induction support may not be enough to offset weak teaching skills or poor working conditions. Weiner (1989) suggests that efforts to improve teaching in urban schools are undermined by "conditions that sabotage everyone's success" (158). As appealing as mentoring is, Daresh and Playko (1990) note that "the use of mentors has become so widespread that it has become viewed as a kind of panacea for dealing with many existing limitations on professional roles" (45).

Mentoring and School Principals

Regardless of their exact configuration, mentoring programs can create a perplexing situation for school administrators, particularly school principals. Principals are often key figures in the implementation of mentoring programs (Huling-Austin & Murphy, 1987; Kling & Brookhart, 1991). Typically they are involved in the identification and selection of

veteran teachers to serve as mentors, and in the matching of mentors and beginning teachers. In most situations, principals are also called upon to facilitate mentoring activities. For example, sometimes they can arrange the schedules of beginning teachers and their mentors so that they have opportunities to meet with one another regularly and to visit one another's classroom for observation and peer coaching. When schedules cannot be altered, principals may use resources to provide for substitute teachers or to substitute for beginning teachers or mentors themselves.

Perhaps the greatest concern that principals have about mentoring is the potentially problematic relationship between their role as instructional supervisors of beginning teachers and the role of mentors, especially as related to evaluation. Although in some mentoring programs mentors are officially part of the summative evaluation of beginners (e.g., Oklahoma Entry- Year Assistance Program), in general they are intentionally distant from this process. On the one hand, mentors may not have enough preparation in instructional supervision to practice it effectively. On the other hand, and more importantly, confidentiality between mentor and beginner, so critical in fostering open and honest communication between them, usually prevents the mentor from sharing relevant information with the principal.

As mentors assume a significant role in teacher induction, principals may view them as supplementing or even replacing them in some supervisory tasks (Moore, 1990). The dilemma for principals is to avoid shirking their responsibilities for the instructional supervision of teachers working in their building, while taking advantage of mentoring as

perhaps a better way to foster professional development. This may place principals in a quandary, since the best source of information regarding the progress of a beginning teacher--the mentor--may not be available because of confidentiality considerations. As is true with other educational innovations (e.g., site-based management and peer coaching), mentoring creates new roles which may not correspond to the traditional roles and responsibilities of principals.

Structure of the Urban Mentor Teacher Program

Assuming that principals have some direct or indirect role in mentoring programs, we looked at one mentoring program through the eyes of principals. The Urban Mentor Teacher Program (UMTP--a pseudonym) was implemented in January, 1992, in a large urban district. The program's most distinctive feature was the collaborative process used in its development and implementation. There are several identifiable elements of this program which differentiate it from other programs, and which attend to the specific needs of teachers in an urban setting.

Most mentoring programs are designed and implemented by people other than teachers, and are funded through staff development budgets (Huling-Austin and Murphy, 1987). Although teachers invariably support mentoring programs and are sometimes consulted in the implementation process, it is generally the responsibility of school or district administrators to monitor the programs. However, in the UMTP, the initial concept was formulated at the bargaining table where it won the support of both the teachers' union and the central

administration. The collective bargaining process established funding for the UMTP and appointed an administrative body responsible to both groups.

Through negotiations, the union and the administration agreed to use a portion of the negotiated salary package to fund the first year of the UMTP. This agreement between the parties and their willingness to reduce individual salaries to fund the program dramatically underscored their shared recognition that beginning teachers in their district, especially those who have little or no experience in an urban setting, deserve structured induction assistance (Lagana, 1970; Skager, 1978; Gelman and McGoldrick, 1980). The union and the administration also agreed to form a Mentor Board, composed of representatives from the teachers' union, central administration, principals and classroom teachers, to oversee the program. This board became the governing body of the UMTP. Board responsibilities included designing the program, establishing criteria for choosing mentors, screening and selecting mentors, identifying beginning teachers eligible to work with mentors, monitoring the day-to-day functioning of the program, evaluating and refining the program and disseminating information about the program. This type of shared responsibility between a teachers' union and a school district's administration is rare, not only in mentoring programs, but in other educational endeavors.

Another distinctive feature of the UMTP is the nature of the mentor assignment. In most cases, mentors teach in the same subject area or at the same grade level, and in the same school, as the beginners with whom they work. Because of the large number of newly hired teachers in the district, these typical pairing strategies were not feasible. Therefore, the

agreed upon structure of this program called for identifying 18 qualified teachers who would be released from their teaching duties to become full-time mentors. Each of these mentors was given six days of training and was assigned to work with ten new teachers at two to nine different sites (Mean = 4.44).

The district in which the UMTP is located serves more than 100,000 students and employs more than 5,000 teachers. In the initial year of the program, more than 400 teachers were hired in the district, most for the fall semester and a small number for the spring semester. Although the new hires averaged seven years teaching experience, most were new to the district and new to urban teaching.

Teachers having more that five years of experience were not considered "new" teachers to be offered the opportunity to work with a mentor. In addition, individual schools, not beginning teachers, were randomly selected for participation in the UMTP. In part, this was to optimize mentors' accessibility to beginning teachers, but it also reflected the limitation on the number of beginning teachers to be served in the program. Of those eligible, 180 new teachers volunteered to work with a mentor; 12 eligible new teachers declined to do so.

Mentors were assigned to work with new teachers according to their certification level (elementary school, middle school, high school). However, their specific teaching experiences did not always match the beginning teachers' subject area or grade assignment. Each mentor was assigned to work with ten new teachers. Mentors were responsible for scheduling their work days to best meet the needs of the teachers with whom they worked,

and they were given broad latitude to decide upon appropriate mentoring activities. In addition, a weekly meeting was held for all mentors to share their mentoring experiences, ideas and suggestions. There were no provisions for supervision of the mentors, although they were encouraged to contact an assigned member of the Mentor Board when necessary. A representative of the mentors attended all monthly Mentor Board meetings.

Data Collection

As noted above, in most mentoring programs identified in the literature, the principal plays a prominent role. In the UMTP, however, most of these duties were assumed by either the Mentor Board or the mentor. In this study, we sought to explore how the principal's role as educational leader may have changed because of the presence of a mentor and how principals felt about any changes that may have occurred.

We used two sources of information to answer these questions. First, each principal in the district (n = 146) was sent an anonymous, nineteen-item questionnaire in April, 1992. Completed questionnaires were returned by 103 (71%) principals in May, 1992. The questionnaire asked principals to specify their years of experience in education, both as teacher and as administrator, and to specify how many years they had served as a principal in the district. The principals were also asked to indicate the level of the school in which they are principal, and whether a mentor had been assigned to work with any new teachers in their school. The principals were also asked to rank their level of involvement in eight

aspects related to the organization and implementation of the mentoring program. These aspects were:

(1) Composition and selection of the Mentor Board

(2) Definition of Mentor Board role in the program

(3) Selection of schools participating in the program

(4) Selection of mentors participating in the program

(5) Training of mentors participating in the program

(6) Selection of beginning teachers participating in the program

(7) Day-to-day operation of the program

(8) Program evaluation.

They also were asked to identify up to three of these areas where they felt their involvement was most needed. Principals were encouraged to add comments regarding their perceptions of the mentoring program. All questionnaire responses were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

Second, based on an offer included with the survey, 18 principals (13 elementary, 3 middle school, 2 high school) agreed to be interviewed by telephone. Eleven principals indicated that there were one or more beginning teachers in their building participating in the UMTP, whereas 7 principals indicated that their schools were not involved in the UMTP because (1) there were no new teachers in their building, (2) eligible new teachers in their building declined to work with a mentor or (3) their building was not selected for

participation in the UMTP. Based on random assignment, we interviewed the 18 principals in late May or early June, 1992. The interviews averaged 15 minutes in length, and they were tape-recorded and transcribed for content analysis. Questions were designed to give the principals the opportunity to clarify or elaborate responses to questionnaire items. The principals were asked to give their impressions of the UMTP and to describe their awareness of the structure and workings of the UMTP. They discussed the role of the mentor and the relationship between that role and their own role as principal. Finally, principals were given the opportunity to state what they felt were the strong and weak points of the UMTP, to give their assessment as to the effectiveness of the program, and to offer their suggestions for improvement.

Results

Survey Results

Participation. Of the 103 principals who responded to the 19-item questionnaire about the mentoring program, 50 (49%) had UMTP mentors in their building during the first semester of the program. Of the 53 who did not have UMTP mentors in their building, 28 (53%) reported that this was because their school was not chosen to participate in the program, 18 (34%) indicated that there were no beginning teachers in the school and 7 (13%) said that beginning teachers in their buildings chose not to participate. When asked to indicate whether they would like to participate in the program next year, 93% of all the principals surveyed said yes, including 91% of the principals who did not have UMTP mentors in their buildings.

Sense of involvement. The principals were asked to indicate how involved they felt in the eight aspects of the program (described above) on a scale of 1 (no involvement) to 5 (extensive involvement). Overall, they indicated that they had little involvement in the program. Means for the eight aspects varied only slightly, from a low of 1.12 on "Selection of mentors participating in the program" to a high of 1.35 on "Selection of beginning teachers participating in the program."

In responses to the item in which principals indicated up to three aspects of the program where their involvement was most needed (see Table 1), two stand out. Seventy percent of the principals included "Selection of beginning teachers participating in the program" and 59% included "Program evaluation" among the top three aspects.

Interviews results

The 18 principals interviewed elaborated on their role and that of others in the UMTP, while offering comments on the program and reflections on the process of becoming a teacher.

Role of the mentor. In general, the principals found the mentors to be a helpful supplement to their staffs. They commented on the value of beginning teachers having "an ear" for their concerns, someone who could help them by modeling useful teaching techniques or offering suggestions for classroom management. As one principal put it when asked to identify positive results of the program, "I think that . . . the objective is to give help and role models for a lot of the teachers just out of college."

Principals tended to contrast the mentor role with the roles of other school staff members such as building principals, central office supervisors, and curriculum specialists. Some of the supervisory and specialist positions had been recently eliminated. Several were grateful that services once provided by these central office representatives were now being provided, though in a less intensive way, by the mentors.

Role of the principal. Most of the principals said that they wanted to be actively involved with the mentoring program at least in regard to the selection of beginning teachers. Several noted that some beginning teachers were better prepared than others. Some said that beginning teachers might or might not be willing to have another person in their classroom.

Several principals saw the mentor as an extension of their own role, someone who could assist in supervising beginning teachers when the principal lacked time. Lack of time was frequently mentioned.

Respondents were divided on the amount of involvement they wanted with the day-to-day operation of the UMTP. Some acknowledged the need to allow mentors to deal with beginning teachers in complete confidentiality. Others maintained that they, as principals, bore ultimate responsibility for whatever happened in their schools, and therefore they needed to stay in communication with the mentors regarding the progress of the beginning teachers. Most of the principals who had beginning teachers participating in the UMTP did not report extensive or regular communication with the mentors, saying that their contact with mentors were informal. Several made a point of emphasizing their effort to remain in

the background as mentoring took place, whereas others desired more contact with the mentor.

Communication within the program. Principals reported that they were less well-informed than they wanted to be about the program, particularly the design of the program and the criteria by which beginning teachers and schools were selected for participation.

Suggestions for the program. With great consistency, and whether they had a UMTP mentor working in their building or not, the principals interviewed expressed strong support of the UMTP and recommended that it be expanded in one or more of three ways, described here in order of frequency. The first recommendation was that participation in the UMTP be made available to all newly hired teachers, even those with previous teaching experience. The second recommendation was that the UMTP be expanded to include serving newly hired teachers in their second and third year of employment. The third recommendation what that the UMTP be expanded to include serving any teacher in the district, regardless of number of years of teaching experience.

Discussion

At face value, the UMTP is a powerful statement of commitment to providing beginning teachers with a more viable and humane alternative to a "trial by fire" induction into teaching. The price tag alone, nearly $1,000,000 a year (mostly in salaries and fringe benefits), represents a substantial investment in the professional development of 180 new teachers. Moreover, the UMTP demonstrates the ability of the administration of a large urban school district and the teachers' union to collaborate in a highly visible district-wide

program. In fact, a member of the Mentor Board reported that during contract talks, the UMTP was the first item agreed to by the negotiators, and that it was agreed to quickly.

The UMTP also stands out as one of the more unusual approaches to mentoring inasmuch as it frees up experienced teachers to work full time as mentors. In so doing, it avoids the persistent complaint of "No time for mentoring" voiced by mentors in a more typical format (assignment to one beginning teacher with little, if any, provisions for time for conferences, observations, etc.). (Ironically, some of the mentors in the UMTP voiced a different problem of time--not having enough time to visit all their beginning teachers regularly because they worked in as many as nine different schools.) At the same time, the comments of principals of beginning teachers in the UMTP program and principals of mentors in other programs are remarkably similar respecting their role as instructional supervisor and evaluator of teachers in their building. With rare exception, principals readily acknowledge the centrality of confidentiality in the mentoring relationship, yet they desire to have the important insights of mentors to better meet the needs of new teachers on their staff. It is probably for a similar reason, their interest in providing adequate assistance to beginners, that many of the principals interviewed wished they had had more input regarding which new teachers were offered the assistance of a UMTP, especially since the number of newly hired teachers was more than double the 180 beginning teachers that the UMTP was designed to accommodate.

Certainly the strong support of principals for the UMTP, clearly evident in both survey and telephone data, is critical to its success. Moreover, the interviewed principals'

genuine support for a program that enabled experienced teachers in the district to work closely with new teachers was not diminished even though they sometimes expressed feelings of being inadequately informed about the UMTP (sometimes also admitting that information about the UMTP probably had been provided to them but had remained unread) or having had less involvement in other aspects of the program than they would have liked (e.g., selection of mentors and more regular communication with them). Acknowledging, at the time of the interviews, that the UMTP had barely completed its first semester of operation, the principals hoped for its continuation and recommended its expansion. Although the UMTP program is continuing to operate with some minor modifications during the 1992-93 school year, it has not been expanded to include more beginning teachers or to offer assistance to teachers beyond their first year of work in the district. Moreover, at the time of this report, mentors and the members of Mentor Board are greatly concerned that the UMTP may be eliminated in the future because of budget reductions.

Table 1

Principals' choice of most important areas of involvement in the Urban Mentor Teacher Program

Area	n[1]	percent
Selection of beginning teachers *	72	70%
Program evaluation *	61	59%
Selection of mentors	35	34%
Selection of schools	25	24%
Training of mentors	25	24%
Day-to-day operation of the program	23	22%
Definition of Mentor Board role	20	19%
Composition and selection of the Mentor Board	14	14

[1] Principals could select up to three areas.

* Significantly different from other responses $p < .01$.

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