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ABSTRACT

For mentoring to remain as one viable component of quality teacher induction, the roles of mentors, the benefits of mentoring and the obstacles to effective mentoring must be scrutinized and questions about the overall value of mentoring must be addressed. In the study discussed in this paper, 24 teachers who served as mentors for beginning teachers were asked, in a first phase, to describe and categorize their ideas of the mentor role, and benefits of and obstacles to effective mentoring. The 687 ideas that they named were collapsed into 55 elements representing those ideas. The same teachers were then asked to give weighted rank to the 55 elements. In general, the study supported the perspectives of most practicing mentors. Mentor roles were represented as providing emotional support, information about overt matters such as formal policies, and covert matters such as the school culture, and general assistance with teaching skills and classroom management. Mentoring was viewed as especially beneficial for the beginning teacher, but also for the mentors; and since few obstacles to mentoring had been encountered, subjects approached this area from a hypothetical point of view. Nine tables display additional information. (LL)

How Mentors Rank Mentor Roles, Benefits of Mentoring and Obstacles to Mentoring

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Introduction

Support of programs for beginning teachers persists in the mid-1990s despite strained budgets (Furtwengler, 1993). Although varying in goals, structures, resources and institutional affiliation, most programs include mentoring as a central feature (DeBolt, 1992; Huling-Austin, 1990). The selection and training of mentors, the roles they assume and the kinds of activities in which they engage also vary considerably. In some cases, veteran teachers volunteer to serve as "buddy teachers" with little or no reduction in teaching responsibilities (DiGeronimo, 1993); in other cases, teachers are freed from their regular teaching assignment to serve as full-time mentors (Dollase, 1992; Ganser, Freiberg & Zbikowski, 1993). Furthermore, many teacher educators and school officials recognize that mentoring is a new role for experienced teachers that calls for knowledge and skills related but not identical to those associated with effective teaching, instructional supervision and staff development (Aston, 1992; Bey & Holmes, 1990; Bey & Holmes, 1992).

For mentoring to remain as one viable component of quality teacher induction, the roles of mentors, the benefits of mentoring and the obstacles to effective mentoring must be scrutinized, and perplexing questions about the overall value of mentoring must be addressed. Can mentoring support school reform initiatives or does the pairing of a veteran teacher with a beginning teacher promote the status quo? Can mentoring, based

on an implicit job differentiation among teachers, survive in a profession that historically has been unstaged (Lortie, 1975)? Does the structure of schools allow for mentoring (Little, 1990)?

The study reported in this paper contributes to research on mentoring by examining the value that 24 mentors ascribe to various roles of mentors, benefits of mentoring and obstacles to effective mentoring. As knowledge about these key features of mentoring and mentoring programs expands and becomes available to teacher educators and school district officials, the structure of assistance programs for beginning teachers that include mentoring can be improved, contributing ultimately to a better entry into the profession of teaching.

Methods

Subjects

Twenty-four teachers who served as mentors for beginning teachers participated in this study. They worked in ten different public school districts ranging in enrollment from less than 400 to more than 100,000. Eleven subjects worked in an urban school district and 13 subjects worked in a non-urban school district.

Insert Table 1 about here

Seventeen subjects participated in one form of mentor training

and six took part in two forms of mentor training. The training ranged from brief workshops to university courses in mentoring. One subject reported no training. The subjects served as mentors for one to eight beginning teachers. See Table 1 for additional information.

Design and Procedure

This report is based on the second of two meetings with each subject. During the first meeting (December 1991 - March 1992), I asked subjects to describe that sorts of things they do in serving as a mentor for a beginning teacher (Mentor Roles), what they see as being the benefits of mentoring (Benefits of Mentoring) and what they believe to be the obstacles to effective mentoring (Obstacles to Mentoring). I also asked them to categorize these elements and to create a name for each category. All together, the subjects generated 285 elements for Mentor Roles, 217 elements for Benefits of Mentoring and 185 elements for Obstacles to Mentoring. During subsequent analysis, I collapsed these elements into 55 elements, 20 associated with Mentor Roles, 21 associated with Benefits of Mentoring and 14 elements with Obstacles to Mentoring (Ganser, 1993).

During the second meeting (May 1992 - June 1992), I asked subjects to complete a weighted ranking of the 55 elements. The order in which I presented each of the three groups was randomized and the order of the elements within each group was also randomized. I clarified the prompts upon request. Below is

an example of an element from each group:

Mentor Roles: Assist BT [Beginning Teacher] in communicating with parents; parent-teacher conference

Benefits of Mentoring: For BT [Beginning Teacher]- Fitting into school or district staff; learning about politics and expectations

Obstacles to Mentoring: No incentives or rewards for experienced teacher to serve as MT [Mentor Teacher]

To facilitate the ranking procedure, I first asked subjects to eliminate from consideration those five elements from the 20 Mentor Roles elements that they considered the least important. Likewise, I asked them to eliminate six elements from the Benefits of Mentoring group and four elements for the Obstacles to Mentoring group. Finally, I asked the subjects to distribute 100 points among the remaining elements in each group (15 elements for Mentor Roles, 15 elements for Benefits of Mentoring and 10 elements for Obstacles to Mentoring) according to how important they believed each element to be, with the only stipulation being that each element be assigned at least one point and that the points assigned to each group total 100.

Results

The ranking, weighted values and standard deviations for the Mentor Roles, Benefits of Mentoring and Obstacles to Mentoring elements are reported in Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4,

respectively.

Only five of the 55 elements were not eliminated by at least one subject before the assignment of points. In the Mentor Roles group, R4 (Provide Beginning Teacher with information about policies and procedures) was assigned a minimum value of one point, R3 (Inform Beginning Teacher about school culture and climate) was assigned a minimum value of three points and R1 (Provide Beginning Teacher with support and encouragement) was assigned a minimum value of six points. One element in the Benefits of Mentoring group, B2 (For Beginning Teacher-help with discipline and classroom management), was assigned at least one point by each subject and one element in Obstacles to Mentoring group, OB3 (Mismatch between Beginning Teacher and Mentor Teacher with respect to teaching assignment and teaching ideology), was assigned at least one point by each subject.

Additional information is also presented in Tables 5 to 9. Table 5 and Table 6 present information about statistically significant correlation ($p < .01$) between elements. Tables 7 to 9 display the ranks of the 55 elements (by group) after the first meeting with the subjects and after the second meeting. Rank during the first meeting is based on frequency of citation (Ganser, 1993), whereas during the second meeting rank is based on assigned points.

Discussion

Mentor Roles

As Table 2 indicates, the subjects assigned nearly half their points (49.55) for Mentor Role elements to the six most highly rated elements. This pattern represents the typical portrait of mentors as providing emotional support, information about overt matters (e.g., formal policies) and covert matters (the school culture), and general assistance with teaching skills

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Insert Table 2 about here

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and classroom management. Many remaining elements, though less valued, are related to these three general areas. For example, R16, R15 and R8 are components of support, information and teaching skills, respectively.

The relatively low value given to mutual classroom observation (R9, 5.83) and mentor training (R14, 3.58) may represent limited resources allocated to these highly recommended components of mentoring programs, just as the lowest ranked element (R20, 0.63) may reflect pairing mentors and beginning teachers after the semester has already started. Finally, that the subjects placed little value on the beginning teacher's professional development (R18, 1.50; R19, 0.88) may indicate that the limited time available for mentoring activities is spent on matters believed to be more pressing and more important.

Benefits of Mentoring

Table 3 shows that the subjects assigned nearly half their points (47.03) to the top six Benefits of Mentoring elements. Furthermore, five of these six elements (the exception being B3) are benefits for the Beginning Teacher. In fact, the subjects judged the benefits of mentoring for the Beginning Teacher (sum

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Insert Table 3 about here

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of B1, B2, B4, B5, B6, B8, B10, B11, B17, B20, B21 = 59.92) to be almost 2½ time greater than the benefits of mentoring for Mentors (sum of B7, B9, B13, B14, B16, B19, B20 = 24.22). In comparison, relatively little value is ascribed by the subjects to benefits for school children (B3, 7.83) or benefits for the school or the school district (sum B12, B15, B 18 = 8.92). It should also be noted that the subjects rated two costly benefits of some formal mentoring (financial incentives for mentors and college credits associated with a program) very low (B19, 0.88; B21, 0.79). For the subjects, far more important benefits of mentoring for Mentors include reflection (B7, 6.42) and professional renewal (B9, 6.00).

Obstacles to Mentoring

The weighted ranking of Obstacles to Mentoring elements is displayed in Table 4. Five elements represent fairly concrete and quite readily discernible problems that can undermine the

potential effectiveness of mentoring program (sum OB1, OB2, OB3, OB5, OB12 = 47.92). Another four elements represent possible obstacles to mentoring, but they are more subtle and may be more

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Insert Table 4 about here

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difficult to detect than the first group (sum OB6, OB7, OB13, OB14 = 22.67). The remaining five elements are related to program definition, structure and support (sum OB4, OB8, OB9, OB10, OB11 = 29.42).

Many subjects expressed more discomfort and difficulty in assigning points to Obstacles to Mentoring elements than was the case for Mentor Role elements or Benefits of Mentoring elements. Several subjects commented that they had encountered few problems during their mentoring experience, and so they approached this portion of the meeting from a hypothetical rather than experiential point of view.

Correlation Among the Elements

Analysis of the data indicates that there are statistically significant correlations ($p < .01$) between 22 pairs of elements, as displayed in Table 5 and Table 6. Ten of these correlations are positive and 12 are negative. These 22 pairs represent approximately 1.85% of the total possible pairings.

Insert Table 5 about here

In some cases, the high correlation makes sense. One example of this is the positive correlation between R11 [Provide Beginning Teacher with information about job (benefits, insurance, extracurricular activity opportunities, etc.)] and B17 (For Beginning Teacher-information about the job). A second less

Insert Table 6 about here

obvious example is the negative correlation between B13 (For Mentor Teacher-satisfaction of helping someone) and B17 (For Beginning Teacher-information about the job). The second example suggests that mentors' level of satisfaction may decrease as their interactions with beginning teachers focuses more on employment matters and less on curriculum, teaching, motivation, etc. Another positive correlation that makes sense is between R6 (Help Beginning Teacher with teaching skills) and R8 (Help Beginning Teacher with lesson plans and materials). At the same time, it is also difficult to account for some correlations. For example, the positive correlation between R7 (Help Beginning Teacher in communicating with parents) and B19 (For Mentor Teacher-financial rewards, college credits) is hard to explain, as is the negative correlation between B3 (For children-improved

teaching by Beginning Teacher) and B9 (For Mentor Teacher-learning new ideas, renewal).

In many cases, the correlation between elements is provocative, suggesting informative connections between various facets of mentoring and mentoring programs. For example, there is a negative correlation between R13 (Familiarize Beginning Teacher with facilities) and both R6 (Help Beginning Teacher with teaching skills) and B2 (For Beginning Teacher-help with discipline and classroom management). This suggests that the time mentors may spend in showing beginning teachers the school's physical plant (which might be taken care of by someone else) takes away from the time that they can spend together talking about more central features of teaching. Another pair of curious positive correlations exists between B7 (For Mentor Teacher-Reflection and introspection about teaching) and both OB1 (Roles/responsibilities of Beginning Teacher and Mentor Teacher unclear) and OB12 (Lack of incentives or rewards for Mentor Teacher). This suggests that mentors may become more reflective about their work despite a lack of extrinsic incentives or even a clear definition of their roles as mentors. As a final example, consider the positive correlation between OB3 (Mismatch between Beginning Teacher and Mentor Teacher with respect to teaching assignment and teaching ideology) and R6 (Help Beginning Teacher with teaching skills). It is generally recommended to avoid pairing veteran teachers and beginners who do not teach at or

near the same grade level. or in the same content area, and who do not share a similar philosophy about children, learning and teaching. However, this correlation challenges that notion, suggesting that such a mismatch may in fact be productive.

Comparison of Ranks during First and Second Meetings

As described above, the 55 elements presented to the subjects during the second meeting were derived from 687 ideas about mentor roles, benefits of mentoring and obstacles to mentoring which they suggested, in a totally open-ended format, during the first meeting.

Insert Table 7 about here

Tables 7 to 9 display the ranks of the 55 elements during the first meeting (based on frequency of mention) and during the second meetings (based on assigned points). As indicated in

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Insert Table 8 about here

Tables 7 to 9, the correlations between the two sets of ranks are moderately positive, ranging from 0.76 for Mentor Roles to 0.47 for Benefits of Mentoring. Accounting for the change in rank is a matter of conjecture, but it seems reasonable to suggest that it is related to at least two features of this study. The first

Insert Table 9 about here

is the collapsing of the original group of 687 ideas into 55 elements representing them. The second is that whereas during the first meeting the procedure for gathering the data was open-ended, during the second meeting the procedure was much more controlled, and subjects were called upon to rank elements presented for their consideration rather than to "brainstorm" their ideas about mentor roles, benefits of mentoring and obstacles to mentoring.

Reflection

In general, this study supports the perspectives of most practicing mentors about their roles and what they believe are the chief benefits of mentoring and the primary obstacles to mentoring. What is more important, the 24 subjects represent experienced teachers who take on mentoring as an additional responsibility. In comparison to full-time mentors, who are far fewer in number, most mentors' preparation for mentoring is probably less intense and the time they have available for mentoring activities is certainly more limited. In spite of these circumstances, the subjects of this study view mentoring as very beneficial, especially for the beginning teacher, but also for the mentors. This is important, since large budgets to

support more involved mentoring programs are seldom available, and the future of mentoring lies with teachers who are willing to serve as mentors in addition to their other work assignments. To put off implementing mentoring programs until the ideal situation arises (e.g., beginning teachers are hired well in advance of the start of the semester, mentors have extensive training before they are assigned to a beginning teacher, mentors and beginners have ample opportunity to meet together before the year begins, etc.) is to endanger the existence of one reasonable form of assistance to beginning teachers which offers many benefits, even in less than ideal situations.

Table 1

Characteristics of Subjects

	n	Gender		Teaching Experience in Years (mean)	Urban or Non-Urban Distr		Number of beginning teachers served (mean)	Type of mentor training cited by subjects[1]					
		M	F		U	Non		A	B	C	D	E	F
All subjects													
	24	**6**	**18**	**15.00**	**11**	**13**	**2.04**	**10**	**2**	**4**	**10**	**3**	**1**
By assignment													
Elementary	9	1	8	17.78	1	8	1.89	6	1	1	5	0	0
Middle	5	3	2	15.00	4	1	3.40	3	0	0	1	1	1
High	5	2	3	12.40	3	2	1.40	0	1	1	3	1	0
Special Ed	5	0	5	12.60	3	2	1.60	1	0	2	1	1	0

[1]A = University-based mentoring program as mentor
B = University-based mentoring program as a beginning teacher
C = School district
D = Educational service agency
E = Supervision of student teaching course
F = No training

Note. Three elementary school mentors cited Training A and Training D, one elementary mentor cited Training A and Training C, one middle school mentor cited Training D and Training E, and one high school mentor cited Training C and Training D.

Table 2

Weighted Ranking of Mentor Roles (n=24)

Rank	Element number	Element description	Mean	SD
1	R1	Provide BT[1] with support and encouragement	11.67	3.62
2	R2	Meet with BT regularly	8.67	4.05
3	R3	Inform BT about school culture and climate	7.58	4.61
4	R4	Provide BT with information about policies & procedures	7.38	2.83
5	R5	Help BT with discipline and classroom management	7.33	3.09
6	R6	Help BT with teaching skills	6.92	3.15
7	R7	Help BT in communicating with parents	6.29	3.68
8	R8	Help BT with lesson plans and materials	5.88	3.60
9	R9	Observe BT in classroom and be observed by BT	5.83	3.21
10	R10	Develop friendship with BT	5.29	4.42
11	R11	Provide BT with information about job (benefits, insurance, extracurricular activity opportunities, etc.)	4.42	2.59
12	R12	Provide BT with information about special education	3.96	3.04
13	R13	Familiarize BT with facilities	3.88	3.52
14	R14	Participate in mentor training	3.58	3.60
15	R15	Provide link between BT and other personnel	3.17	3.21
16	R16	Protect and guard BT, serve as buffer	2.67	2.94
17	R17	Help BT in ordering supplies, materials	2.50	2.98
18	R18	Attend programs and inservice sessions with BT	1.50	2.02
19	R19	Inform BT about professional organizations, workshops	0.88	1.57
20	R20	Help BT set up classroom, bulletin boards	0.63	1.71
			Total = 100.03	

[1]BT = Beginning Teacher

Table 3

Weighted Ranking of Benefits of Mentoring (n=24)

Rank	Element number	Element description	Mean	SD
1	B1	For BT[1]-support and encouragement	10.33	3.77
2	B2	For BT-help with discipline and classroom management	8.08	2.24
3	B3	For children-improved teaching by BT	7.83	3.60
4	B4	For BT-help in transition from college to work and to remain in profession	7.54	4.30
5	B5	For BT-help in teaching skills	6.67	4.11
6	B6	For BT-avoiding learning by trial and error	6.58	3.31
7	B7	For MT[2]-Reflection and introspection about teaching	6.42	8.02
8	B8	For BT-help with policies and procedures	6.17	3.09
9	B9	For MT-learning new ideas, renewal	6.00	3.39
10	B10	For BT-fitting into school and school district	5.46	3.19
11	B11	For BT-help with curriculum and materials	5.29	3.95
12	B12	For school/school district-improved competency of staff	4.63	3.24
13	B13	For MT-satisfaction of helping someone	4.58	3.32
14	B14	For MT-the challenge of a new role	2.92	3.15
15	B15	For administrator-reduced need for BT to go to administrator for help, information, etc.	2.83	2.60
16	B16	For MT-honor and recognition, self-esteem boosted	2.46	3.13
17	B17	For BT-information about the job	2.13	2.76
18	B18	For district-improved image, good public relations	1.46	2.13
19	B19	For MT-financial rewards, college credits	0.96	2.10
20	B20	For BT and MT-learning about other schools, districts	0.88	2.05
21	B21	For BT-college credits	0.79	1.91
			Total = 100.01	

[1]BT = Beginning Teacher

[2]MT = Mentor

Table 4

Weighted Ranking of Obstacles to Mentoring (n=24)

Rank	Element number	Element description	Mean	SD
1	OB1	Lack of time for meetings and classroom visits	13.63	7.31
2	OB2	Other responsibilities interfering with mentoring	11.08	6.10
3	OB3	Mismatch between BT[1] and MT[2] with respect to teaching assignment and teaching ideology	10.88	4.65
4	OB4	Lack of administrative support	9.83	6.07
5	OB5	Lack of physical proximity	8.79	5.87
6	OB6	Low level of commitment from BT and/or MT	8.54	5.85
7	OB7	Personality conflicts between BT and MT	8.29	7.30
8	OB8	Goals and purposes for mentoring unclear	5.46	6.39
9	OB9	Structure of mentoring program	5.29	5.24
10	OB10	Roles/responsibilities of BT and MT unclear	5.21	5.88
11	OB11	Mentor teacher selection	3.63	4.52
12	OB12	Lack of incentives or rewards for MT	3.54	5.67
13	OB13	Negative attitude of other teachers or administrators toward mentoring	2.96	3.80
14	OB14	New, uncomfortable role for MT	2.88	3.59
		Total =	**100.01**	

[1]BT = Beginning Teacher

[2]MT = Mentor

Table 5

Correlation Among Values Assigned to Elements[1]

Element number	Roles	Groups Benefits	Obstacles
R2	- R20	.....	.....
R6	+ R8, - R13	.....	+ OB3
R7	.....	- B1, + B19	+ OB12
R8	+ R6	.....	.....
R10	.....	+ B13	.....
R11	.....	+ B17	.....
R13	- R6	- B2, + B13	.....
R20	- R2	.....	.....
B1	- R7	- B21	.....
B2	- R13	.....	.....
B3	.....	- B9	.....
B7	.....	.....	- OB3, + OB10, + OB12
B8	.....	+ B17	.....
B9	.....	- B3	.....
B13	+ R10, + R13	- B17	.....
B17	+ R11	+ B8, - B13	.....
B19	+ R7	+ B21	.....
B21	.....	- B1, + B19	.....
OB3	+ R6	- B7	+ OB6
OB5	.....	.....	- OB13
OB6	.....	.....	+ OB3
OB7	.....	.....	- OB11
OB10	.....	+ B7	.....
OB11	.....	.....	- OB7
OB12	+ R7	+ B7	.....
OB13	.....	.....	- OB5

[1]Pearson r. + = positive ($p < .01$) - = negative ($p < .01$)

Table 6

Correlation Pairs Among Values Assigned to Elements[1]

Positive Correlation (p <.01)		Negative Correlation (p <.01)	
R6	R8	R2	R20
R6	OB3	R6	R13
R7	B19	R7	B1
R7	OB12	R13	B2
R10	B13	B1	B21
R11	B17	B3	B9
R13	B13	B7	OB3
B7	OB12	B13	B17
B7	OB10	OB5	OB13
B8	B17	OB7	OB11
B19	B21		
OB3	OB6		

[1]Pearson r.

Table 7

Comparison of Ranking for Mentor Roles

Element	Meeting #1	Meeting #2
R1	1	1
R2	8	2
R3	3	3
R4	2	4
R5	5.5	5
R6	8	6
R7	13.5	7
R8	4	8
R9	10.5	9
R10	17.5	10
R11	8	11
R12	10.5	12
R13	15.5	13
R14	17.5	14
R15	5.5	15
R16	13.5	16
R17	12	17
R18	15.5	18
R19	20	19
R20	19	20

Spearman rho: $r = 0.76$ ($p < .01$)

Table 8

Comparison of Ranking for Benefits of Mentoring

Element	Meeting #1	Meeting #2
B1	1	1
B2	11	2
B3	15.5	3
B4	8	4
B5	18	5
B6	5	6
B7	6	7
B8	7	8
B9	2	9
B10	4	10
B11	11	11
B12	20.5	12
B13	3	13
B14	11	14
B15	14	15
B16	11	16
B17	15.5	17
B18	18	18
B19	18	19
B20	11	20
B21	20.5	21

Spearman rho: $r = 0.47$ ($p < .05$)

Table 9

Comparison of Ranking for Obstacles to Mentoring

Element	Meeting #1	Meeting #2
OB1	1	1
OB2	6.5	2
OB3	5	3
OB4	2.5	4
OB5	6.5	5
OB6	10.5	6
OB7	2.5	7
OB8	8.5	8
OB9	10.5	9
OB10	8.5	10
OB11	13	11
OB12	14	12
OB13	12	13
OB14	4	14

Spearman rho: $r = 0.60$ ($p < .05$)

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