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ABSTRACT

In 1974, the University of Wisconsin Whitewater introduced a university-based mentor program for beginning teachers in its service area. A decision was made at the end of 1999-00 to re-direct the focus of the program from sponsoring a stand-alone mentor program to supporting districts in creating or improving their own mentor programs. This paper examines how a school, college, or department of education can build the capacity of teachers, principals, and district personnel in ways that respect the host of variables that differentiate one district from another and still empower those responsible for new teacher mentor programs with the rich information and research available regarding best practice and research on mentoring and mentoring programs. This includes: providing up-to-date information about mentor program design; setting reasonable expectations; conducting a new teacher support audit; providing mentor training and support in various formats; providing outsiders for mentor training, program meetings, and program evaluation; assisting collaborative programs for school districts; providing showcases of mentoring programs; and ratcheting up general expectations for mentoring. (Contains 27 references.) (SM)

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ED 452 168

Building the Capacity of School Districts to Design, Implement, and Evaluate New Teacher Mentor Programs

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Building the Capacity of School Districts

to Design, Implement, and Evaluate New Teacher Mentor Programs

Mentor programs for new teachers have never been more widespread than they are today. Formal mentor programs began to emerge about 30 years ago and have nearly tripled during the past 25 years (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). The interest in mentor programs is reflected in numerous recent reports and publications, including those of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Scherer, 1999), the George Lucas Educational Foundation (1999), the National Alliance of Business (Koppich, 2001), the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), and Recruiting New Teachers (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Moreover, mentor programs have become an international phenomenon (e.g., Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997).

Mentor programs are designed to offset beginning teaching as a disheartening "sink or swim" experience that serves neither new teachers nor their students. Mentor programs will be an even more integral part of staff development in the future as the number of teachers entering or re-entering the profession increases due to a number of trends (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998, 1999). These trends include a wave of retirements of teachers hired during the 1960s and 1970s, increasing enrollments in many parts of the United States, and state and national initiatives to reduce class size.

Effective mentor programs can reduce the high attrition rate of beginning teachers. Reduced attrition contributes to the success of

school improvement and change efforts by ensuring a more stable faculty over time. The growing emphasis on student achievement means that the work of teachers will be more scrutinized than ever before, and beginning teachers most certainly will not be exempt from the public's microscope. In addition, allocating limited staff development resources to teacher mentor programs demands proof that their impact extends beyond "feels good" mentoring or "smile" evaluations to enhancing student achievement or, at the very least, to influencing the performance of teachers in ways that reflect research on effective teaching (Sparks & Hirsh, n.d.).

Mentor programs are sponsored by several types of organizations, including individual schools and school districts, consortia of schools, and teacher associations (Huling-Austin, 1990; Gold, 1996). In addition, mentor programs are an outreach effort of many schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDE) in higher educaition. For example, in October 1999, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education and the Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund sponsored an invitation forum on the role of higher education in beginning teacher induction programs.

Most typically, mentor programs are sponsored by local school districts. In these programs, mentors are classroom teachers whose work assignment typically is not reduced, although they may be provided with a small stipend for their service as a mentor (Ganser & Koskella, 1997). In contrast, some large, urban school districts design new teacher mentor programs based on teachers who are reassigned to serve as full time mentors (Ganser, Marchione, &

Fleischmann, 1999). In some cases, full time mentor programs are affiliated with colleges or universities (e.g., Omaha Public Schools); in other cases, the programs are a project of the school district itself (e.g., Baltimore Country Public Schools, Milwaukee Public Schools).

Many university-based mentor programs for new teachers are based on partnerships with a single, large school district (Basinger, 2000). For example, the University of New Mexico partners with the Albuquerque school district and the Chicago School District works in association with several local colleges and universities in offering its Mentoring and Induction of New Teachers (MINT) program. Other programs sponsored by higher education serve new teachers in several districts. For example, the University of California at Santa Cruz is home to the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project that supports new teachers in several area school districts (Gless & Moir, 2001). The Project is funded by the state of California along with local school district matching funds.

Mentor programs sponsored by colleges and universities often require enrollment in graduate credit courses. In some cases, this may be cost-prohibitive for school districts or for teachers. In addition, the geographical isolation and the size of many smaller, rural school districts may restrict their participation in university-based programs that require a large number of participants and tuition income to be financially feasible.

In addition to school districts and SCDEs, other organizations sponsor new teacher mentor programs. Examples include consortia of

school districts (e.g., Cooperative Educational Service Agencies in Wisconsin) and teachers' associations (e.g., National Education Association, 1999, 2000).

In 1974, the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, a regional, comprehensive university with a current enrollment of approximately 10,000, introduced a university-based mentor program for beginning teachers in its service area (Ganser, 1994, 1995). Throughout its history, the program has received state and national recognition, and has served as a model for other programs. A decision was made at the end of 1999-2000 to re-direct the focus of the program from sponsoring a stand-alone mentor program to supporting districts in creating or improving their own mentor programs.

This decision was made for several reasons. First, over time some school districts developed a cadre of trained mentors and beginning teachers who participated in the program and then used their expertise to institute a local program. Second, a policy of revenue caps in the state has resulted in significant reduction in the resources available for staff development activities, including participation in University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's mentor program. Third, two years ago the state department of education began a grant program in support of mentoring programs that require the collaboration of two or more school districts.

Interest in formal mentor programs for new teachers has never been higher in Wisconsin than it is today. One reason for this is that beginning July 1, 2004, a significantly different teacher licensing system will go into effect. The new system introduces an

"Initial Educator" license category that requires school districts to provide beginning teachers with a "qualified mentor" and "support seminars" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2000). Both the mentoring activities and the support seminars must reflect ten Wisconsin Teaching Standards that are closely aligned with the principles advocated by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC).

How can a school, college, or department of education best serve the needs of local school districts in designing, implementing, and evaluating effective mentor programs for new teachers? How can a SCDE build the capacity of teachers, principals, and district personnel in ways that respect the host of variables that differentiate one district from another and still empower those responsible for new teacher mentor programs with the rich information and research available regarding best practice and research on mentoring and mentor programs?

Providing Up-to-Date Information about Mentor Program Design

New teacher mentor programs now enjoy a history spanning a generation of teachers. There certainly are benefits in that history based on experience in designing and implementing mentor programs. At the same time, there are some dangers, perhaps less obvious, that accompany thinking about a form of staff development that already has existed for many years. An important role for SCDEs is to assist school districts in taking advantages of this history without being limited by it.

Establishing or improving mentor programs based exclusively on the principles of "first generation" mentor programs runs the risk of ignoring what has been learned about mentoring and mentor programs over the years. Today's "secondary generation" mentor programs, for example, may include: (1) "electronic mentoring," (2) "just in time" mentor training, (3) "co-mentoring" or "team mentoring," (4) multiple year programs, and (5) defining the mentoring learning community as one that extends beyond the school to include the community, professional organizations, and teacher associations. "Second generation" mentor programs, regardless of organizational sponsorship, should take into account the features of traditional mentor programs but not be limited by them (National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1999).

Setting Reasonable Expectations

Schools, colleges, and departments of education can help school districts to be honest in deciding what is and what is not reasonable to expect of their new teacher mentor programs. Too often, more is expected than is reasonable, especially given the limited resources allocated to mentor programs and the tremendous impact of other factors on effectiveness and success of new teachers.

The success of new teachers generally depends on three different factors, and it is important to understand the relationship of mentoring to those factors. First, new teachers walk into their assigned schools with pre-existing knowledge, skills, and dispositions. What they know and what they are able to do is already established. Is it reasonable to expect a mentor program (which

generally translates into the mentor) to affect, significantly, new teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions? Put another way, is it reasonable to expect a mentor program to "fix" a new teacher who should never have been hired in the first place? Hardly, unless mentoring is redefined as "teacher education" or "remediation" and is provided with the resources necessary to meet those goals.

The second factor associated with new teacher effectiveness and success is workplace conditions. The history of teaching suggests that new teachers are often given the most challenging assignments as veteran teachers "pull rank" based on seniority (often supported by contractual agreements). Under these conditions, is it fair to expect a mentor or a mentor program to have significant influence on those dimensions of a new teacher's assignment (e.g., abilities of students assigned, schedule of classes, etc.) related to teacher effectiveness?

In addition to the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of new teachers, and the workplace conditions they encounter, a third factor associated with their effectiveness and success relates to induction support. Whereas "induction support" can include a formal new teacher mentor program, it is certainly broader than that and can include such elements as orientation meetings, workshops and training, professional development plans and portfolios, classroom observations, and peer group support (Sweeny, 2001). Given this context, it is reasonable to expect a mentor program to augment but not replace of other forms of induction support.

Conducting a New Teacher Support Audit

Schools, colleges, and departments of education can support school districts intending to create new teacher mentor programs by guiding them in first conducting a "new teacher support audit" (Ganser, 2000). The first step is to determine what already exists within the school and within the school district by way of support for new teachers without the existence of a formal, new teacher mentor program. This support can be in the form of job responsibilities already in place for administrators (e.g., principal, director of curriculum and instruction, director of human resources, staff developer) and for teachers (e.g., team leader in a middle school or department chairperson in a high school). The support can also be in the form of programs (e.g., orientation, staff development in general, building initiatives).

The second step in conducting a "new teacher support audit" is to determine what support, in terms of people or programs, already exists outside of the school and school district. Organizations providing this "external" support can include state departments of education, teacher associations, professional organizations, and even service organizations within the community that may help newcomers to become familiar with the community (e.g., Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, Lions Club).

The third step is to decide how a formal mentor program can augment the various forms of induction support already existing within and outside of the school and school district. Such an approach to designing a mentor program is valuable in several ways. For one

thing, this process, when carefully carried out, prevents unintended duplication of services. In addition, it prevents simply shifting pre-existing responsibility for induction support from one part of the system to the mentor program. As specific example, it should be known if someone is already responsible for informing new teachers regarding the procedure for obtaining a bus for a field trip before assuming that mentors need to explain the procedure. There is no net gain in induction support if explaining the procedure for obtaining a bus is just shifted from someone already responsible for that to the mentor. When all is said and done, a new teacher mentor program should be a value-added dimension of induction support, not just a shifting of responsibilities.

Providing Mentor Training and Support in Various Formats

Mentoring shares much in common with teaching, especially in the area of communication skills, and in serving as a cooperating teacher for student teachers or as a peer coach for a colleague. However, mentoring is a different professional role for teachers. An important part of effective new teacher mentor programs is the provision of adequate training to mentors (Ganser, 1996). The need for high quality training is evident when it is accepted that being a good teacher is a necessary but insufficient condition for being a good mentor. Moreover, as the expectations for mentoring increase from providing emotional support, assistance with policies and procedures, and superficial instructional assistance to influencing the practice of new teachers in significant ways, the need for good mentor training becomes all the more important.

Colleges and universities can assist school-based mentor programs by providing mentor training and support in various formats and at various times. With respect to format, mentor training might be offered as a graduate credit course with periodic class meetings or as workshops that may or may not qualify for graduate credit. The course meetings or workshops might be held at the college or university, at a single school site, at school sites in different district, or some combination thereof. Finally, the training might be based on traditional face-to-face classroom format, or on a format that includes e-mail, distance-learning, or web-based instruction.

In terms of timing, basic mentor training on such topics as beginning teacher development and the needs of beginning teachers can be provided early, even to teachers who have been selected as prospective mentors prior to the need for their service. After prospective mentors have been selected for active mentoring, additional training might be offered that more closely reflects the goals of the mentor program and program activities. SCDEs can help school districts to avoid "front-loading" the training by pointing out the value of "just-in-time" training. For example, helping mentors to become more proficient in classroom observation techniques can reasonably be postponed from summer training to training in September or October shortly before mentors are likely to begin visiting their protégé's classroom. Staggering training over a semester or even an entire year is more challenging in terms of scheduling, but it is far more effective in terms of training.

Finally, colleges and universities can advise school districts with respect to mentor support. Mentor training is necessary and incorporated into programs, whereas mentor support is often minimized or ignored altogether. As in the case of any professional role, preparation for mentoring cannot anticipate all situations. Without on-going support, well-intentioned mentors may find themselves frustrated and feeling left to fend for themselves. To offset this, a college or university can support a local school district mentor program by facilitating mentor "staffings" when mentors gather together with one another to discuss challenging situations they face as mentors. Such meetings can also provide a vehicle for on-going mentor training and development.

Principals should also be viewed as a target for mentor training so that they can provide informed leadership in promoting mentoring in their schools. For many principals, formalized mentoring is a form of staff development that was largely ignored in preparing for administration (Ganser, 2001).

Providing "Outsiders" for Mentor Training, Program Meetings, and Program Evaluation

Even in the highest quality district-based new teacher mentor programs, there is a useful role for faculty from colleges and universities as "outsiders." For instance, mentor training can be conducted effectively by school personnel, to be sure, but after time this training can become too provincial and sometimes an unintended mechanism for transmitting district biases and limitations. In this respect, utilizing the services of qualified trainers from outside the

school district from time to time, can keep the mentor training "honest" and reflective of best practice.

In a similar way, SCDEs can augment a local school district mentor program by providing facilitators for program meetings intended for mentors and their protégés, for mentors alone, or for protégés alone. In spite of the best of intentions, mentors or protégés in any school district, may be less straightforward with school district facilitators than with outsiders. The value of outsiders is perhaps even more evident in the case of program evaluation. Here, too, faculty members from a college or university may bring to bear on the mentor program not useful ideas for program evaluation but also a greater degree of objectivity.

Assisting Collaborative Programs for Small School Districts

A mentor program in a school district hiring 500 new teachers is far more visible and has a far greater economy of scale than a mentor program in a school district that hires only a handful of teachers. With a small number of new teachers, a formal mentor program soon becomes invisible and, in effect, an informal program with little to distinguish it from naturally occurring mentoring that can emerge in any kind of organization.

In light of this, SCDEs can provide a very valuable service by assisting small school districts organized collaboratively. This can include mentor training; facilitating meetings for mentors, protégés, and for mentors and protégés; and program evaluation. In addition to creating a program that is "visible," such collaborations allow the sharing of ideas about effective mentoring across districts.

Providing "Showcases" of Mentoring Programs

A very useful, although often overlooked, role of colleges and universities in supporting district-based new teacher mentoring programs is providing a venue for sharing of information. In arranging for a "showcase" of local mentor program, SCDEs can provide a great service to school districts in their area. These showcases can be organized in different formats. On the one hand, showcases can be organized in terms of complete programs; that is, showcases can be organized to allow districts to provide a complete overview of their new teacher mentor programs. On the other hand, showcases can be organized topically. In this case, several school districts are asked to describe certain aspects of their programs, such as mentor selection, mentor training, and matching of mentors to protégés. Naturally, a combination of the complete program and the topical subject formats is possible as well.

Ratcheting Up Mentoring

At the onset of the 21st century, expectations for new teacher mentoring programs have increased dramatically from a generation of teachers ago. Staff development resources are scrutinized far more today. Teacher induction support today demands attention to issues extending far beyond adjustment issues ("How do I arrange for a field trip?" or "When is that State test given?") to enhancing the performance of teachers ("Am I making progress in meeting INTASC Principle #5?"). In light of this, it is safe to say that the general expectations for mentoring have racheted up considerably from where they were even a decade ago (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). To meet

these new demands, schools, colleges, and departments of education have an opportunity to serve not only school districts mounting mentoring program but, more importantly, the next generation of teachers.

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Suggested Resources on New Teacher Mentoring

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Mid-Western Educational Researcher, Volume 12, Number 4 (Fall 1999)
Theory into Practice, Volume 39, Number 1 (Winter 2000)

A. Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development

ASCD sponsors the Mentoring Leadership and Resource Network. For more information, visit http://www.mentors.net

B. International Mentoring Association

This organization, sponsored by Western Michigan University, approaches mentoring very broadly, including community mentoring of at-risk youth, student mentoring in K-12 and higher education settings, and mentoring in business, industry, health care, military, and K-12 schools. For more information, visit: http://www.wmich.edu/conferences/mentoring/

C. National Staff Development Council

The Mentoring Applications Network is a special interest group of the National Staff Development Council. For more information about this network, contact Raymond J. Dagenais, Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, at: rjdag@imsa.edu

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Mentor Training and Support
Sharing Workshops for New Teachers and for Mentors

Tom has trained mentors for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, for school districts and Cooperative Educational Service Agencies in Wisconsin, for the Baltimore (Maryland) County Public Schools, and for the Ministry of Education in Bermuda. He served as a consultant for organizations in Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Wisconsin, Jamaica, and Sweden. Tom has facilitated "Sharing Workshops for New Teachers" at conventions and conferences, and for school districts.

Tom has been involved in mentoring and mentor programs for beginning teachers since 1989. His doctoral study focused on five beginning teachers throughout their first year of work. He has made presentations on beginning teachers, mentors, mentoring, and mentoring programs at meetings of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Educational Research Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Association of Teacher Educators, International Mentoring Association, Kappa Delta Pi, Mid-Western Educational Research Association, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Council of Teachers of English, National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NEA), National School Board Association, and National Staff Development Council.

Tom's articles have appeared in many publications, including *A better beginning: Supporting and mentoring new teachers* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999), *Clearing House, Contemporary Education, Educational Forum, Journal of Staff Development, Kappa Delta Pi Record, National Association of Elementary School Principals Streamlined Seminar, National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin* and *Practitioner, The High School Magazine, New Teacher Advocate, Schools in the Middle*, and *The Teacher Educator.* Many of his papers are accessible through the U. S. Department of Education ERIC system.

Tom directs the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater *Beginning Teacher Assistance Program.* From 1990 to 2000, the program was offered as a service to local school districts. Today, the program focuses on building the capacity of school districts to design, implement, and evaluate their own mentor program.

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