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ABSTRACT
         This study used a Vygotskian theoretical perspective in an
ethnographic examination of how early childhood teachers and directors in
Taiwan learn through mentoring within their school context. The study focused
on mentoring relationships between a preschool director and five teachers in
Taiwan. Primary data sources included interviews of the director and
teachers, videotaped weekly meetings, audiotaped conversations between the
director and the teachers, and teacher journals. Additionally, observations
were conducted daily over 3 months, with a focus on how teachers and the
director found opportunities for informal mentoring throughout the preschool
daily schedule. The findings indicated that what teachers learned echoed the
director's role and philosophy. Much of the content considered in the
mentoring relationships related to the child-centered philosophy of the
program, the lifelong curriculum focus, and the spirit of open education.
Teachers' comments suggested that they thought the director was a good mentor
but sometimes a less than effective administrator. Conversations between
director and teachers were very common, and the schedule provided numerous
opportunities for communication. The director also led book discussions with
teachers, thus providing an opportunity for teachers to acquire professional
knowledge and for the director to observe teachers' learning progress and
professional development. Because various means of communication were
available, teachers could choose a means of communicating with the director
that most reflected their needs. (Contains 51 references.) (KB)

Mentoring for Early Childhood Teachers and Directors in Taiwan

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Abstract

Mentoring has been viewed as an essential component of reform in teaching since the 80's. In general, the scope of mentoring research on teacher learning is limited to the individual mentor-protégé relationships; few studies examine the impact of school contexts on teachers' learning or offer a theoretical basis for advocating the mentor's role. This study proposes a Vygoskian theoretical perspective for the teacher's learning. The purpose of the study is to examine how teachers learn through mentoring within their school context. By studying particular mentoring relationships between a preschool director and five teachers in Taiwan, the study likes to offer a theoretical basis for advocating the mentor's role and teachers' learning. Rather than investigating teacher's learning in individual mentoring relationships, the study examines teacher's learning in a wider social context by situated learning and view school as a learning community. According to the research data, we found what the teachers have learned would be an echo to the director's role and philosophy. The data also showed that the different needs of different teachers had been satisfied by the different ways of communication among different members. Members of this community could learn from each other and provided emotional support. As research has pointed out, through working in collaboration, it provides a sense of community among teachers. This is essential to teachers' growth, as individual and as a group (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1986). This kind of environment not only makes teachers feel better about their practice but it also reaps learning gains for students (Darling-Hammond, 1998) and parents (Dodd & Konzal, 1999).

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Mentoring for Early Childhood Teachers and Directors: Vygotskian Interpretation in Teacher Learning

Introduction

The present study is based on Vygotskian perspective to examine teacher learning through observation and the analysis of mentoring interactions in practice. The study collected data in a preschool in which a director and teachers worked cooperatively and closely in Taiwan. The director of the preschool has her own particular philosophy in early childhood education. She has a widespread reputation as mentor in training beginning teachers and teachers new to her philosophy. The director is seeking to create a collaborative community between teacher, classroom, student, and family. The preschool in which she now works has been set up by parents from the previous preschool. The researcher of this study had worked with the director for one year as a beginning teacher at the previous preschool in Taiwan. The job that the director has done in early childhood education and adult education (including teacher training and parental involvement) has been very impressive.

Teaching reform is one of the most important elements of education reform and how to accomplish it has become a significant issue in the last three decades. There have been many discussions and propositions of reforms, for example: higher standards for entry into the field, better salaries, merit pay, and career-ladder plans. However, these reforms are insufficient. For example, Tharp and Gallimore (1991) pointed out that reforms seeking to improve teaching through salaries differentials may suppress conditions that would foster better teaching: "Because teachers' skill development depends heavily on collaborative support and exchange, competitive rewards will thwart efforts to improve" (Rosenholtz, 1986, p. 518; cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). These policy reforms can only provide a better living environment for the teachers, but they do not guarantee the teachers' professional growth.

Mentoring has viewed as a key component of reform in teaching during the 80's. In general, the scope of these mentoring researches on teachers learning is limited to the individual mentor-protégé relationships and little of them examine the impact of school contexts on teachers' learning. Some educational researchers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992) have argued that a teacher's professional growth is a highly personal event so that individual activities, such as mentor programs in which teachers work in a one-on-one situation, may be a viable option to achieve the reform goals. However, a better understanding of how a teacher learns from mentoring is in the specific setting in which the beginning teacher is placed. However, there is a relative lack of studies that focus on observation and analysis of mentoring interactions in practice (Glickman & Bay, 1990; McIntyre, Hagger & Wilkin, 1993; Williams, 1996). Moreover, instead of offering a theoretical basis for advocating the mentor's role, proponents have preferred to find easy acceptance for it based on empirical results derive from studying the mentor-

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protégé relationship. These proponents cite its potential for providing support for beginning teachers as well as providing new professional responsibility for experienced teachers (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles & Niles, 1992).

There is a wealth of theories relating to children's learning. However, little has been applied and interpreted in teacher education and training, even though teachers as well as children have various learning needs. Viewing teachers as learners allows theories of learning to be viewed as viable for teacher education and teacher training. Current research proposes a Vygostkian theoretical perspective for teacher's learning. It provides an idea that we should not study teacher learning in isolation, we must also examine the social context of teacher's learning. When we investigate how mentoring relationships can be a beneficial component of teacher's learning and how teacher's learning occurs, we also need to consider teacher learning in a broader social context.

The purpose of the study is to examine how teachers learn through mentoring within their school context. Rather than look at educational accomplishments of a director or a particular preschool, the study wishes to offer a theoretical basis for advocating the mentor's role and teachers' learning. Rather than investigating teacher's learning in individual mentoring relationships, the study examines teacher's learning in a wider social context by situated learning and views the school as a community of learners. The study addresses the following questions:

1) What are the mentor' s conceptions of her role and philosophy in the preschool?
2) What kinds of social engagements do the director and the teachers find productive way for teachers to learn?
3) What teachers learn through mentoring in the preschool?

Theoretical Perspective

The idea that a child can learn through collaboration with adults or peers that are more capable is well known in children education. A teacher's role is viewed as assisting students in their ZPD usually. However, teachers, like their students, have ZPDs, too. They also require assisted performance (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Such a definition of learning can guide mentoring firmly rooted in theory. The approach of Vygotskian theoretical perspective can offer a rigorous theoretical basis for mentoring in order to examine teacher learning through mentoring. There is little research that rooted the process of learning in Vygotskian theory and been applied to teacher education (see, for example, Manning & Payne, 1993; Samaras & Gismondi, 1998) and teacher training (see, for example, Tharp & Gallimore, 1991).

Although some research used Vygotsky theory to examine teacher's learning, they did not examine learning in a broader social world within which these contexts are produced. They did not examine mentoring in a holistic perspective—a process that encompasses sociocultural experiences. Lave and Wenger (1991) noted that learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. Tharp and Gallimore (1991) stated that, "Teaching will not be reformed until schools are reformed. Schools will not be

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reformed until it is understood that schools must be a context for teaching, and that context must itself be a teaching context". From a sociocultural perspective, we cannot look at teacher learning in isolation, we must also look at the context of teacher learning. An essential feature of this human development is that higher-order functions develop out of social interaction. Vygotsky argued that a child's development cannot be understood by a study of the individual. We must also examine the external social world in which that individual life has developed.

To examine teacher's learning and thinking, the recent research applied different tenets from Vygotskian theory to teacher education and training. One of these approaches uses self-regulation in teacher education. According to Vygotsky (1978), the regulation of behavior is a verbal/semiotic process, which develops from a social transaction into an intrapsychological transaction. Behavior is first regulated by the utterances of a more capable other (in social transaction); then by self-directed speech of the learner; finally, the self-directed speech goes "underground" and becomes steadily more silent, rapid, and abbreviated (Watson & Tharp, 1988). Gallimore, Dalton, and Tharp (1986) investigated teachers' cognitive activity under three teaching conditions: stress, learning a new skill, and implementing new instructional materials and strategies. They hypothesized that teachers would engage in self-directed speech under each of these conditions to monitor their performance. Their hypothesis was confirmed. More recently Manning and Payne (1993) outlined five of the Vygotskian tenets that comprise a theory of self-regulation and bridge these tenets to teacher education goals. They concluded that "self-regulated teaching is characterized by (1) higher levels of psychological functioning (both cognitive and affective), (2) proactive teaching based on metacognitive thought processes, and (3) the continuing and spiraling reconstruction of knowledge based on social interaction and scaffolding procedures at the teacher preparation level and the "classroom-teaching-among-students level".

Lave and Wenger (1991) situate learning in certain forms of social coparticipation. Rather than asking what kinds of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning take place. Samaras and Gismondi (1998) investigated preservice partnerships and the cooperating teacher's role in a practicum experience by five tenets. These tenets are (1) situated learning, (2) socially shared cognition, (3) joint activity, (4) the zone of proximal development, (5) culture, context, and cognition. The analysis suggested that socially shared cognition in field work and course work makes a significant difference in enhancing preservice teachers' sense of what it means to teach in terms of using partnership for cognitive and collegial support, perspective-taking, social negotiation, and ownership. Moreover, McCaleb (1994) calls for a community of learners through collaboration among teachers, students, and their families and communities that embraces the diversity of cultures and languages that families pass on to their children. Through working in collaboration, it provides a sense of community among teachers. This community is essential to teachers' growth, as individuals and as a group (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993).

Situated learning focus on the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it occurs. Learning occurs during situated activity or in authentic settings, i.e. in classroom settings with contextual and interactional episodes and cues (Samaras & Gissmondi, 1998). Guskey (1986) noted that the association of theory to practice is meaningless until teachers see the differences that their teaching makes in children's learning.

Literature on Mentoring

The relationship between trainer and trainee became to as mentor and protégé in the late 70's. It has become a topic of interest to many researchers in the 80's and is currently in the spotlight, on the practical level as well as the theoretical level, in the 90's.

Some research has pointed out that teachers work in isolation and struggle during the first year (Gratch, 1998; Little, 1990; Sarason, 1982). Teaching in the U.S. is a highly personal, often private activity. Making decisions for their own students is a valued aspect of teachers' work. When teachers do interact, they rarely discuss or request assistance with significant problems in their classrooms (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). The research showed that many novice teachers receive little assistance from senior colleagues (Wildman, Niles, & McLaughlin, 1986), and often have no one specifically assigned to provide guidance support. This kind of culture against the possibility of shared standards and limit teacher's learning. However, teachers need support to advance their professional development. Katz (1972) pointed out that teachers need on-site instructor's assistance and support in the first few years of their teacher career. "On-site instructors may be senior staff members, advisors, consultants, or program assistants who know the beginning teacher and her teaching situation well" (p.2). Joint work and assisted performance are the basis of mentoring that could promote the value of learning with and from colleagues. Clawson (1980) observed that mentor-protégé relationships are mutual in that both parties make a commitment to common goals, and the relationships are comprehensive in their breadth of influence. Gehrke and Kay (1984) pointed out that, the relationships between mentors and protégés are open, informal, and interact. They share a variety of professional or career concerns by working together.

The existing research on mentoring tended to examine teacher's learning in one-on-one situation (Hawkey, 1998; Stanulis, 1994; Gratch, 1998) and emphasized the benefits of mentoring relationships (Gehrke, 1984; Bova & Phillips, 1984). They focus on what mentor can give and what protégé can learn. In addition, most of them did not examine the social context for teacher's learning to take place and explain how new teachers fit into the new environment. For example, Stanulis (1994) investigated one mentor's experience working with a student teacher. The mentor emphasizes helping student teachers internalize a disposition for life long learning and reflection. The mentor consistently asks questions to help the novice think back and forward in her teaching. She defines reflection as being to talk about why one makes a teaching decision and why that teaching decision is appropriate for particular children. Levinson (1978) stated "the mentor relationship is one of the most developmentally important

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relationships a person can have in early adulthood" (p. 97). Becoming a mentor benefits not only the mentor and the protégé, but also serves the various professions, which benefit from the teaching and learning of skills and values (Bova & Phillips, 1984; Tauer, 1998, Samaras & Gismondi, 1998). Moreover, the development of staff can increase students' learning (Joyce, Showers & Rolheiser-Bennett, 1987).

Although some research emphasized beginning teachers need individualized assistance (Fuller, 1969), others believe that novices learn best in communities where they can work with experienced teachers and other educators on the messy of reforming teaching (Darling-Hammand, 1998). It is realistic to expect that a good mentor program will improve teaching performance. However, there is no reason to believe that induction programs would be strong enough to overcome major problems related to the school context (Huling-Austin, 1986). Problems that are a part of the larger system need to be dealt with directly rather than left to be resolved through mentor programs. It is important to provide the new teacher with general information about the district and to orient him or her to the school context (Tauer, 1998).

Mentors' roles

Mentors are excellent experienced teachers or providers who have worked in the field for a significant time and training in child development, early childhood education, and the teaching of other adults (Whitebook & Bellm 1996). Moreover, Tauer (1998) points out that " Mentors are expected to provide socialization and instructional assistance to the new teachers and are encouraged to set up regular meetings and carry out peer observations".

Protégé's roles

Protégé usually means beginning teachers or new teachers. Odell (1986) found that experienced teachers who are new to a school system do not have remarkably different needs from of first year teachers. They are new to teaching and to the school. They are seldom aware of the school culture, norms, and expectations. They need assistance from administrators and colleagues. Experienced teachers also have training needs, since learning is a life long process and teachers have different development needs. Therefore, The present study defines protégé as a teacher who need mentor's help in his or her professional development that includes preservice teachers, beginning teachers, "new to system" teachers and experienced teachers.

Methodology

This study used ethnographic approach to collect data in a preschool. The study focused on who initiates the contact, when, where, how, under what conditions, for what purpose, and with what outcome.

I observed the preschool daily from January to March. The observations took place from morning to afternoon. The observations traced the director and each teacher individually for several days at the beginning of the data collection. The tasks of observations were to find out how informal mentoring meeting happen, how the teachers and the director found opportunities to talk and making sense of the preschool's daily schedule.

Field Entry and Data Collection
<u>Getting permission</u>

When I went to Seed Preschool, Director Chen introduced me to the teachers in the weekly meeting and to the parents in the weekly letter. She told the teachers to accept me as a part of their school life. She also told me to participate in their school life together.

<u>Schedule for observation and interview</u>

Before interviewing Director Chen and the teachers, I decided to use participant observation (Spradley, 1980; Corsaro, 1985) to be accepted and trusted by the participants during the data collection process throughout. The first step of my data collection was observation; my role was an observer at first week. I went into their classroom and observed their schedule and classroom activities. When the teachers and I became more familiar, my participation in their life increased. In the next semester, Director Chen and the teachers were comfortable with my data collection strategies. They talked to each other naturally with the appearance of my audiotape and me. In this phase, they viewed me as a part of Seed school. My role became a friend and helper.

Setting

The study selected a preschool in which the director and the teachers worked cooperatively and closely in Taiwan. The study was conducted in Seeds preschool in Tainan, Taiwan. Tainan, which is an ancient city with rich cultural heritage, is the fourth largest city in Taiwan. The preschool was located near National Tainan Teachers College. The director Chen had regular cooperation relationships with this college. The Seeds preschool had 3 classrooms, 5 teachers, and 46 students in all aged between 3 to 5-year. Two classrooms were for 4 to 5 years old and the other one was for 3 years. The parents' background was middle class. Most parents' occupations were teachers. The percentage of children attending preschool was over 90% in Taiwan. Usually, both parents needed to work and the birth rate was low (about 1.5 per family) in Taiwan. Parents needed day care center and liked to send their kid to preschool or kindergarten to have social interactions with other kids. Thus, children's preschool or kindergarten experiences were common in Taiwan. The number of public preschools and kindergartens were less than private school. The ratio of public to private preschools was 3:7. Some public preschools and kindergartens used lottery to decide who could enter their school. The private preschools and kindergartens were ubiquitous in Taiwan. The researcher worked with the director for one year and had maintained contact since. Many early childhood educators of other preschools and kindergartens in Tainan came to visit this preschool to learn how to conduct the learning areas teaching and environment.
Teachers in this particular school had high job switching rate, as it was a private school. Public schools typically had the better salary, fewer jobs requirements and shorter working hours than private school, therefore this phenomenon was quite ubiquitous in Taiwan. Therefore, most teachers in this preschool were new and needed a lot of professional support. This preschool provided a very good opportunity to study teacher's learning.

Participants

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Director Chen was a kindergarten teacher for nine years before becoming a director of a preschool. After one year as a director, she took a 6-year break to look after her children before returning to school eight years ago. Director Chen was invited to be the director of Seed Preschool set up especially for her by the parents from her previous preschool three years ago.

The teacher education programs in Taiwan

Preschool and kindergarten teachers were becoming more professional in Taiwan. Teachers needed to major in early childhood department in college or they needed to take an exam to enter a teacher program and take courses in early childhood education. There were three different types of teacher education programs for training preschool and kindergarten teachers in Taiwan:

Type1: The teachers from this program major in early childhood education in a 4-year Teacher College. Usually, these teachers are more prepared in professional knowledge and theories than the following two types.

Type2: Graduates from universities can take an exam to enter a teacher program which majors in early childhood education. Teachers from this group will only be in contact with early childhood education for one year; their professional knowledge and practical experiences are less than the other two.

Type3: These teachers major in early childhood education for 3 years in a vocational high school, followed by 2 years in a college and another 3 years of night school, before becoming a qualified teacher. In general, this type of teachers has more practical experience than the other two, because they had work with children during their practical training since high school and while being a teacher after graduating from college.

Since 1997, teachers were required to be a student teacher for one year after graduation before they could take an exam to get their teacher credential.

Introducing the teachers

There were five teachers in Seed Preschool, HY, RB, CF, LJ and EL. Three of them were experienced teachers and two are first-year teachers.

Table 1:

Name	Age	Education	Occupational History	Class for this year
H.Y.	28	Type 3	Traditional preschool: 4-year Seed preschool: 3rd year	Age: 4-5 Number: 15
R.B.	26	Type 3	Traditional preschool: 2-year Seed preschool: 3rd year	Administrative teacher
C.F.	27	Type 2	Student teacher: 1-year Seed preschool: 2nd year	Age: 4-5 Number: 15
E.L.	27	Type2	Student teacher: 1-year Seed preschool: 1st year	Age: 3 Number: 16 Partner: LJ
L.J.	29	Type 2	Student teacher: 1-year Seed preschool: 1st year	Age: 3 Number: 16 Partner: EL

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Data Sources and collection

The primary data sources for this research included interviewing the director and the teachers, videotaped weekly meetings, audiotaped conversations between the director and the teachers and teacher journals.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed inductively; using the content analysis of open-ended data: the concept book approach (Mostyn, 1985) to immerse myself to the tapes to find out patterns and establish categories and themes.

Research Results

By studying a preschool context, the present paper examined teachers' learning through mentoring relationships. Some parents, who believed Director Chen's educational philosophy, established the Seed Preschool, and thus the role and philosophy of Director Chen was influenced the dominant culture of the Seed Preschool. Therefore, it was necessary to explore Director Chen's role and philosophy of the Seed Preschool before examining the teachers learning through mentoring relationships. The first step was to illustrate the atmosphere of the Seed Preschool, and then to examine how this learning community was constructed, and what kinds of social engagements provided productive contexts for teacher learning.

Mentor's role and philosophy

The present paper presented the mentor's role and philosophy from Director Chen's and the teachers' perspectives. The portrayals of Director Chen and five teachers illustrate the issues and situations in their mentoring relationships.

The director's and the teachers' perceptions of the mentor's role and philosophy in the preschool

From Director Chen's past experiences of being a kindergarten/preschool teacher and her religious beliefs, Director Chen learned several important things. Unlike the majority of Taiwan's people, Director Chen was a Christian. She said that her religious beliefs made her have more understanding of people's inner needs. She also obtained a lot of information about people's growth and learning issues from her church including magazines, books, audio and videotapes. She introduced useful information to the teachers and parents from these sources.

The things that she learned from her previous experiences and that became her philosophy for her preschool can be categorized into four main points: 1) no hierarchy 2) child centered philosophy 3) lifelong curriculum 4) the spirit of open education.

No hierarchy: the first main point shapes the mentor role of Director Chen. The present paper will discuss this point from the director's and the teachers' perspectives. Director Chen viewed her role as sharing experiences with the teachers. She believed there should be no hierarchy within mentoring relationships. As a director, she felt that the hierarchy in the preschool should not be too heavily emphasized. She said:

> It is not a big deal to be a director. In fact, I am just more fortunate than others to be in a better environment with opportunities to learn. I am just sharing my experiences with teachers...

Do not take me as a director. I am just passing my knowledge and experiences to new teachers.

CF talked about how she feels about Director Chen's role and agreed with Director Chen that there was less hierarchy at Seed Preschool. She felt frustrated when she was a student teacher in another preschool. She did not know how she performed in her prior job nor how to make her teaching better. After coming to Seed Preschool, she could ask questions of Director Chen. Although Director Chen might not be able to answer all of her questions, they could discuss the questions together. She felt good about having an expert who understood her problems and could give her some suggestions.

Director Chen actively sought to minimize hierarchy by often reminding teachers that they should not take things personally when approached with suggestions. In fact, she often encouraged them to approach her with suggestions and feedback. In an interview with Director Chen, she said:

> Everyone is an individual human being; sometimes your experiences have not achieved certain levels. Now, someone can talk and discuss with you when you have problems. You should appreciate this opportunity.

Thus, Director Chen tried to create an open atmosphere in the work site for the teachers.

In the interviews, the teachers agreed that Director Chen was someone who could listen to you and discuss questions with you. However, they also mentioned that the director had her own strong opinions on some issues. CF said:

> There is no problem in ways of communication, but Director Chen has her strong opinions. Although she says that's just her opinion, she still... Her decision is still negotiable. After giving her some negative feedback, she will have second thoughts and might change her decisions.

HY said:

> Director Chen tries to create an atmosphere so that the teachers are able to talk to her about everything. Therefore, she can accept whatever things you want to say to her...
> I usually accept her suggestions for two reasons. Firstly, her suggestions usually are rather reasonable. Secondly, she is the director.

EL said:

> I feel that Director Chen is approachable. Although I rarely talk to her, I still feel that she is someone who can listen to you and consider your opinions. However, I also feel she has her own strong opinion.

RB said:

> I feel she has great respect for the teachers. I feel very good while communicating with her.

LJ said:

> Director Chen is approachable. She also gives me a lot of suggestions and instructions... When she gives you suggestions about a task, you are very much left on your own to decide if you want to perform the task according to her suggestions. In fact, I feel free when I work here.

The teachers all agreed that Director Chen tried to promote no hierarchy, but they still viewed her as the director, a position that included authority over them.

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We could conclude that the "no hierarchy" that Director Chen was promoting is a non-threatening hierarchy. Due to different position responsibilities, sometimes the director and the teachers could not come to a common agreement. CF explained that:

> She uses a higher standard to ask us to perform in teaching and school activities. She has many ideas and plans, but we are the ones putting the plan into practice.

She felt that sometimes this led to some difficulties in communicating with the director. Although the teachers sometimes felt difficulty in communicating with Director Chen, they did not respond with their negative opinion immediately. The teachers would try to follow the director's suggestions first and then ask for other teachers. They would discuss with the director again, if they found it was hard to put a plan in practice or found that other teachers had the same complaint.

Director Chen also suggested that it would be good for administrators to go out of their offices and observe teachers and students around the school. It would enable them to better understand the problems and needs of the school members. It would also help to establish a good rapport between the administrators and the teachers. As Apple and Beane (1995) point out: "the most powerful meaning of democracy is formed not in glossy political rhetoric; but in the details of our lives".

The following three sections outline key points in the educational philosophy of the director. These topics constituted much of the content considered in the mentoring relationships.

Child-centered philosophy

Director Chen emphasized a more child-centered philosophy of teaching and learning compared to other Taiwan preschools. The child should be the focus of early childhood education; i.e., teachers should put more emphasis on a child's life and respecting each child's individuality rather than emphasizing a teaching strategy. She said:

> Many early childhood educators cannot blend themselves into the children's world. Their world is very much divided from that of the children...

Director Chen practiced her philosophy in daily life and showed the teachers what she meant about her educational philosophy. The teachers recognized this influence.

LJ mentioned the impression that she had about Director Chen:

> The attitude, the dialogue between the director and the child is very natural. Unknowingly, I have learned this from her in daily life. It's great! Director Chen is very good in this. Although she is a director, she can get along well with children and talk to children in their language naturally. Many directors cannot do this.

This was also the first requirement when Director Chen mentioned how she hired a teacher. She said:

> I focus on if a teacher can respect children, get along well with children and see the value of a human life. I feel that teaching skills and curriculum are not so important. These influences on a child's future are

not as important as the influence of a teacher' personality. If a teacher can love and have concern about a child's life, I can nurture her to become a more experienced and skillful teacher... If they are willing to learn and have the attitude, I can teach them. I have confidence in this part.

In Seed Preschool, children were the most important factor that influenced Director Chen when making decisions e.g., she assigned the teachers to teach in different classrooms according to their personality before considering the teachers' preferences. Compared to adults, children were vulnerable and needed to be protected. Teachers were adults; they could adjust themselves to fit into the environment. Therefore, Director Chen would consider what was best for the children first.

Lifelong curriculum

Director Chen said that she was not only doing early childhood education but lifelong education. She said:

I am doing a lifelong curriculum. I feel this is more important, because it involves many things. This is what we do not have in Taiwan's curriculum. I feel that things like inner needs could influence everything about human development and personal values. If you can satisfy a child's inner needs, he will become a happy person. They know themselves well and feel safe. I believe that by satisfying a child's inner needs, they would be able to handle their life easier... That is why.I would spend more time in communicating with parents to correct their thinking. Thus, children will be happy their whole life. Therefore, I would prefer to spend time to talk to parents and to make things clear.

Director Chen was not only working on early childhood education, she also contributed to adult education with teachers and parents. She believed that the learning of adults could enhance the learning of children. Parental involvement was an important issue that Director Chen was concerned about. However, the present paper focused on the mentoring relationship and did not explore this topic specifically in the interview, but from weekly meetings and conversations between the director and the teachers, it was found that parental involvement was an important component emphasized in mentoring situations.

Because of Director Chen's religious beliefs, she believed that children should live a comfortable life in early childhood. Children were sensitive; they could sense when adults were relaxed or unhappy. Hence, the personality of a teacher was very important, as it could affect the children under her care. Making adults and children lived happily and comfortably together was her goal. When the teachers worked in the Seed Preschool, they not only did a teaching job, but they also went through a self-reflection process. They needed to understand how their personality or character could influence their interactions with children both in and out of the classroom. Through the interactions with children, the teachers could find their constraints and limits. HY had changed a lot since started working in Seed Preschool for a third year. Her previous experiences in a traditional preschool for four years were very different from Seed Preschool; thus, she had a hard time fitting into Seed Preschool. She said:

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I feel that I can get along well with children from this year (her 3rd year in Seed preschool). Some of them start coming to me of their own initiative... I have changed the way I get along with people and deal with things. I can feel the growth of myself and the relaxation of my spirit. I am learning how to become a happy person.

Director Chen also told me that HY had a difficult time in Seed Preschool in the past two years since she was strict with the children. Director Chen was happy to find that HY's heart became softer and she could enjoy the time with children this year.

Spirit of open education

The open education that Director Chen conducted in Seed preschool was influenced by the open education of America in 1970's. She believed that all facets of the child—intellectual, social, emotional, and physical—were interrelated and insisted that education should consider the context of the child's entire life. The emphasis on the whole child led the teachers to create a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect and acceptance, in which the child was free to be honest and open in his relationships, without fear of criticism (Lillian, 1974). Like students, teachers were permitted to be honest, angry, loving, upset, tired and happy—to be real. She was herself and thereby a teacher. Teachers in the open classroom would respect children as individuals, manage the environment, provide materials, consolidate children's experience through language, provide direct instruction, encourage children's activity and independence (Ronald, 1972). This open spirit guided Director Chen in leading the teachers, parents and children to learn together at the Seed Preschool together.

When I asked Director Chen how she kept the teachers learning, her answer brought out her deep faith and experiences with open education. She explained that if you can really make yourself completely open, the challenges from the classroom would keep coming. Teachers would keep learning because they could find new things from contact with different parents and children. For example, she said:

When teachers developed a new teaching topic in the classroom, they did not like to repeat their previous experiences. You would have better ideas to share with children because, when you were facing different children, you would have different interactions from previous ones and bring out different results.

LJ thought she knew what open spirit and democracy were before she came to Seed Preschool. She said:

I think it should be respect for human beings—a respect of children, teachers and parents. I find I can respect adults easily, but it's very hard for me to respect children initially. I would like to ask children to follow my ways. Later, I felt that I should respect, love and care for them rather than asking them to follow my ways.

Director Chen believed that the teachers would love the spirit of open education when they understood it. Director Chen always encouraged the teachers not to be constrained by the school environment or their previous

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experiences but to create new possibilities or ideas in teaching and learning. She reminded the teachers to have an open mind to keep learning.

Due to several roles that overlapped at the same time, Director Chen felt the constraint of limited time. She was a director, mentor, consultant, mother, and wife. She said that she did not have enough time for the teachers since she needed to spend time in administrative tasks, one day in another preschool, and also being a mother and wife. Therefore, she regularly left the preschool earlier than the teachers to pick up her kids. To use her time effectively, she devoted most of her time in educating the teachers, children and parents rather than spending time on trivial administrative duties.

Contacts with the mentor
How do the teachers feel about their mentoring relationships with Director Chen?

The experiences of the teachers' contacts with Director Chen were varied. Although most comments were positive, there were also some negative comments. It showed that Director Chen was a good mentor, but might be not as good being an administrator.

HY felt that Director Chen was not good in organizing big school activities and administrative things. She also said Director Chen changed her mind by seeing things happen in practice:

> Director Chen does not think ahead, but she would talk to you when she saw something that happened in practice. When you talked to her in a theoretical context, she might not agree with you, but she is very flexible after you have a problem in putting a plan in practice. She can change her decisions.

From the observations, sometimes the orders of Director Chen were lacking in details and made the teachers feel confused. Although she was perhaps not good in organizing the school systematically, she was very flexible in changing her decisions and willing to hear the teachers' opinions. Hence, the teachers had space to create their own rules.

Many teachers said they feel Director Chen had great respect for the teachers and was helpful in their learning. CF mentioned that Director Chen could respect each teacher's individuality. It was good for her to have an expert to discuss things with when she had problems. She mentioned that she might not be a preschool teacher if she did not work with Director Chen. This was the second year for CF in Seed Preschool. CF would talk to the director when she felt confused. After she made things clear with the director, she had confidence to continue her job and to establish her own teaching style. LJ said that Director Chen taught her many things and cared about the teachers. Although she talked to Director Chen rarely, she came to this school with the intention to learn since she was a first year teacher, thus, she was willing to accept the director's suggestions. RB appreciated that Director Chen kept giving her encouraging and positive feedback. For example, on her teacher journal, the director wrote:

> You must have confidence in yourself and believe your love can bring caring and happiness to children. This is a beautiful thing. As for your teaching skill, if you are willing to learn and keep doing self-reflection, you will be as good a teacher as you like.

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EL found there were many things to learn and improve after she worked with Director Chen. From her prior experiences, she was used to working alone in the classroom without intervention of administrators. She felt confident working by herself. However, when she worked with Director Chen at the beginning, she felt upset because the director had many suggestions for her. She spent several months adjusting herself to get used to it. In fact, the teachers' different responses influenced the way Director Chen chose to interact with them, e.g. she talked to HY and EL less and less since these two teachers were negative when the director talked to them. Thus, Director Chen chose to talk to LJ more since LJ and EL were in the same classroom, and she communicated with HY through the teacher journal to avoid giving them direct pressure. The mentoring relationships were shaped and reshaped by the interactions between the director and different teachers.

What kinds of support and constraints did they have from the director?

In this interview question, all the teachers agreed that the director was supportive of teachers' learning and teaching. Director Chen was very responsive to the teacher's needs or suggestions, i.e., in last semester; Director Chen discussed with the teachers how to reduce the workload of the teachers. She approved the idea that teachers could reduce the frequency of writing in the teachers' journal. Moreover, the teachers wanted to have more time to prepare the next day's teaching materials or to have a recess in the afternoon. Considering the preschool's budget and the teachers' needs, Director Chen hired two senior students from the teachers college to work part time in the afternoon. Thus, the teachers were able to have more time to prepare their teaching materials or school-home written communication. In fact, if the budget were sufficient, Director Chen would satisfy the teachers' teaching needs.

Mostly, the teachers did not feel constraint from the director; they could do what they wanted to do. HY said: "There are so many things I need to learn. I do not feel constraints from the director here. The only constraint is that the preschool does not have enough of a budget". LJ said, "Your vision becomes very open here and that includes your teaching materials, ideas and creations. Director Chen would not constrain you in teaching". CF said, "I can do what I want to do after I inform Director Chen. She would let you go and try your ideas. Mostly, she is supportive".

Most teachers did not feel constraint from Director Chen except EL. This was her first year as a preschool teacher. She felt constrained when Director Chen gave her suggestions about something that she had already finished. She was used to having more freedom in her own classroom as a teacher. She thought that Director Chen gave her too many suggestions. It made her start second-guessing what Director Chen would like before she and LJ did something. It also made her feel less self-confident. I found the feelings of EL to Director Chen were paradoxical from the interview. For her, teachers should learn from their experiences and mistakes, but Director Chen would give them suggestions before EL found something wrong. On the other hand, EL thought it was not good for children if she did something wrong with them. Moreover, she was not worried about what she wrote on the home-school journals to parents as Director Chen

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would read them carefully and give the teachers suggestions. She felt good that the director gave the teachers suggestions to make things become better, but also felt disturbed when the director gave her suggestions. However, when I interviewed her again in the next semester, she had changed her attitude after she worked with Director Chen for over 7 months. She felt that she was a part of the school and could make her own decisions after considering Director Chen's suggestions. It did not bother her so much.

Constructing a learning community

In order to construct a community, people must talk to each other. John Dewey (1916) argues that forming a community requires communication. For him, communication is " the process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession (p.11)." Communication is identical with social life, and from it people can learn. Through conversations, the director and the teachers actually could teach each other. Without good communication people are unlikely to develop the common understandings needed to improve schools and strengthen communities. The writer Robert Bellah speaks of "real communities" as "communities of memory." As people tell stories of a community, they identify with them and feel they belong (Dodd & Konzal, 1999, p.31).

People were used to talking and sharing experiences with each other in Seed Preschool. Through different ways of communications, people of Seed Preschool constructed a community together. They felt they belong to this community by sharing experiences with each other. There were different ways of communications among people of Seed preschool including informal ways (i.e. individual conversations) and formal ways (e.g., teacher journals, weekly meetings and the teachers taking turns leading a book discussion in weekly meetings).

In Seed Preschool, I found that the conversations among the director, the teachers and children were very common. Children were a favorite topic of conversation for that the director and the teachers. Director Chen and the teachers knew every child well. They knew every child's personality and family background through weekly meetings, informal conversations with parents, and daily observation in the preschool. The teachers also shared the interesting dialogue of children with each other and in weekly meetings.

The whole school community, including children, had various opportunities to get to know each other (e.g. lunch break, Children's Theater and outdoor activities). Those arrangements gave everybody chances to know and talk to each other. The director had lunch with the teachers and children in the dining hall daily. During lunchtime, she observed the interactions between the teachers and children. She also talked and read storybooks to the children frequently. Members of Seed Preschool interacted over time; they shaped and were shaped by daily communications and they constructed local knowledge that became common knowledge within the community.

Opportunities to learn

<u>Ways of communications:</u>

According to the research observations, Director Chen observed teachers in the daily routines and mentored the teacher according to their questions and

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situations. There were several ways for Director Chen to come to understand the teachers' needs including 1) Daily observation 2) Individual conversations 3) Teacher journal 4) Weekly meeting 5) The teachers taking turns leading a book discussion in weekly meeting. These ways of communication provided opportunities for Director Chen to observe and talk to the teachers. Therefore, the director could mentor the teachers based on their needs.

Director Chen was asked how she found out about the teacher's learning progress and their different learning needs. She answered that it was very natural for her to know the teachers' different learning needs since they spent time together in the preschool. She said:

> How could you not know their learning needs and progress if you live with them everyday in the preschool?

From these various ways to communicate, Director Chen had many opportunities to observe and talk to the teachers. For example,

> From leading a book discussion, you can find that the content that the teachers present in the discussion are varied e.g., the book "The Models of Preschool Teachers" that CF chose last time is very good. The point that she brought out in the discussion is very good, too. That is what I would like to share with the teachers, too. However, the book that HY shared with us is "Froebel" and another one I forgot the name of the book, they are not so suited to our teaching environment. As for EL, the book she shared this week is good, but she was very nervous. It looked like she wanted to introduce the whole in a limited time. You can tell she is still a novice. CF can pull out the important theme that she can connect to and share with everyone, however, the way that EL did this was to summarize the whole. It sounds like a reading report in college, not a sharing. You still need to listen to it instead of telling her how to do it. From leading a book discussion, you can tell the teachers' personal growth in early childhood education.

Here, we found that the book discussions not only gave the teachers an opportunity to acquire professional knowledge, but also gave Director Chen an opportunity to observe the teachers' learning progress and professional development.

The functions of communication: What kind of interactions between the teachers and the director is most beneficial to teachers learning?

The various means of communication served different purposes for each individual teacher's learning process. The teacher could choose her own appropriate way to communicate with Director Chen, as did Director Chen.

For Director Chen felt that the best way to communicate with the teachers was through individual conversation. She believed that she could get her points across more quickly and clearly if she talked with the teacher directly. To her, it was the most effective way to communicate with teachers. The function of weekly meetings was to provide the school with a common goal. It was an opportunity for open discussion on public matters and current issues. Director Chen thought that the function of a teacher journal was limited because she could not respond to the teacher's questions quickly and effectively, but she still thought that writing in

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the teacher journal was necessary for a teacher's self-development. She emphasized that teachers should do self-reflection constantly, especially new teachers.

For HY and EL, they preferred to communicate with Director Chen through the teacher journal rather than communicate with Director Chen through individual conversation. HY felt that she could express her meaning better by writing than oral speaking. EL was afraid to speak out in front of a person of authority. As for CF and LJ, they both liked to communicate with Director Chen through individual conversation. They thought that it was the best way to solve their problems effectively. RB was a special case; when she was a teacher in Seed Preschool, she used to communicate with Director Chen through the teacher journal during the first two years, because she was also afraid of talking to Director Chen directly. However, when she became the administrative teacher in the third year, she preferred to communicate with the Director Chen through individual conversation. Thus, she could discuss many things with Director Chen directly and deal with things more effectively. Another reason was that she now spent more time with the director and had overcome her fear of talking to the director.

The teachers all agreed that the weekly meetings served as a learning opportunity. Through the weekly meetings, the teachers could learn from each other by sharing their experience and problems such as subject matter and how to deal with special students' problems. The teachers would take turns to present reading materials related to education and lead a discussion based on it in the weekly meetings. It also provided a good opportunity for the teachers to read and learn new professional knowledge.

These different ways of communication provided different degrees of opportunities for the teachers to learn. A good learning community offered their members many different ways to participate. Different teachers, different students, different parents had their own learning styles, preferences, and needs (Dodd & Konzal, 1999). We could conclude that the wider the variety of opportunities for communication between the mentor and protégés, the more protégés will learn through mentoring relationships.

Pattern of interaction and discourse

From the daily observations of the researcher, analysis of the mentoring process between Director Chen and the teachers revealed a pattern of interaction and discourse that always involved problem-solving. In analyzing the data, the following general pattern was found:
1. Director Chen or the teachers initiate contacts with a question.
2. Director Chen or the teachers provide suggestions or answers.
3. The teachers try it out in practice.
4. Results: positive or negative.
5. Opportunity for the teachers to share the result to the director or other teachers.
6. Director Chen or other teachers give the teacher a new suggestion for negative results or positive feedback for good result.

The following episode, from a weekly meeting during the first week of second semester, was presented as an example of the nature of the interactive and discursive events that occurred in a context of problem-solving. This particular example was chosen because the problem that arose followed a mentoring process between Director Chen and a teacher. Moreover, the researcher captured the result of this event when it happened in LJ's classroom and the discourse that followed when she shared her finding with Director Chen. During this episode, the discussion revealed the ways that mentoring took place in the context of a problem. Furthermore, it showed the ways that Director Chen tried to help the teachers in solving their problems with a firsthand knowledge of the child and the context. After the problem appeared to have been resolved, it was followed up by a sharing among the teachers and the director.

Example 1: February 24, 2000

During the weekly meeting, LJ asked director Chen a question.

1. T: Director Chen, that stuffed doll, she keeps saying that's her doll.
2. D: Which child?
3. T: Wein.
4. D: Oh, That polar bear.
5. T: She hugs that polar bear everyday. No one can touch it. "That's mine" (Tl imitates Wein's speaking). I talked to her several times.
6. D: You can tell her that the stuffed dolls belong to Seed Preschool now.
7. T: But she still thinks that...she can't accept what I am saying. She still thinks it's hers.
8. D: So her mother..., in fact, her mother made a mistake here. If you want to donate your kid's stuff, you should discuss with your kid first and then make a conclusion together. You shouldn't use adult's thinking, such as: Um, the stuffed doll is bad to my kid's health, it will cause allergy and asthma, so you give it away. Wein doesn't understand what happened here.
9. T: Yeah, so she still acts like this sometimes.
10. D: You can encourage her mother. When her mom comes to pick her up, you can tell her to discuss this with Wein again at home. Let Wein know why she donated the stuffed dolls to school. You talked to Wein at school, but her mother didn't deal with this at home. Wein can't realize her stuffed dolls were donated to school because that is bad for her health in the first place. The stuffed dolls are bad for kids' allergies and asthma.
11. T: Yeah, this kind of disease can't be healed.
12. D: Yeah.
     On February 15, 2000, LJ told Wein's mom to discuss with Wein about her stuffed doll at home.

March 1, 2000, during learning areas time: Director Chen came to LJ and EL's classroom and observed how children play in new learning area. LJ was observing Wein's behaviors. Wein looked at a kid hugging a stuffed doll for a while and then talked to that kid: Could I borrow your doll for a while? LJ found Wein changed her attitude. LJ talked to Director Chen immediately:

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13. T: Wein is so polite. She can say, " Could I borrow your stuffed doll?" She really changes her behavior after I talked to her mom.
14. D: So you did talk to her mom?
15. T: Yeah, it looks like her mom talked to her at home.
16. D: Yeah, she lacked that discussion before. Therefore, she thought the dolls still belonged to her. After her mother talked to her at home, she has this kind of consciousness.
17. T: Yeah, she is so polite! (LJ is happy to find the change of Wein).

LJ asked Director Chen a question initially (line1) without details. However, the director identified the situation quickly after she knew whom the teacher was talking about (line 4). She also saw that the child hugged a polar bear in the preschool. Then, LJ explained her situation in solving this problem. Based on her descriptions, Director Chen gave her a suggestion. When the director found the first suggestion could not work, she gave LJ another suggestion. As Katz (1972) pointed out, an on-site trainer can give teachers suggestions quickly by observing the teacher and the child or by an extended give-and-take conversation between the teacher and the trainer. In fact, this was how Director Chen found out the teacher's needs. She knew what the teachers had done and what they had not done yet through their conversation, identified their needs, and gave appropriate suggestions (line 8 & 10). From this example, we find that Director Chen took into consideration the family background when she tried to solve a child's problem. This was a typical strategy that she often used.

When EL found the child changed her behavior, she shared her finding to Director Chen immediately (line 13-17). Sharing is a good way for people to know what happens in their community. The writer, Robert Bellah, speaks of "real communities" as "communities of memory." As people tell stories of a community, they identify with them and feel they belong (Dodd & Konzal, 1999, p.31). In fact, in Seed Preschool, the teachers not only shared their feelings with the director; moreover, they shared feelings with other teachers. Beginning teacher often feel that opportunities to share feelings with other teachers who are novices may reduce some of the inadequacy and the frustration (Katz, 1972).

What was learned

A director is an important factor that influences preschool teachers' teaching and learning. According to the research data, we could find that what the teachers have learned echoes to the director's role and philosophy. HY learned how to emphasize the emotional aspect of education in her teaching and how to get along well with children in the preschool. How to become a happy person was her future goal. RB had improved a lot in her self–confidence through interactions with Director Chen, parents and children. She had learned how to communicate with parents and explored the spirit of open education. She found that her heart became softer. CF had more understanding in open education and felt confident about her teaching style. She could always know where her edge was through interaction with Director Chen and children. She was learning how to be a professional teacher and not to bring her personal emotion to this job. LJ was

exploring the spirit of the open education. She had changed her attitude in how to respect children and to look at things from the children's point of view. She could now relax and enjoy the children in the preschool. EL learned how to get along well with children and how to deal with some problem children's behaviors. As Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba (1990) suggest, The teachers learned to adapt to the culture of this particular school in which they teach. The data also showed that the differing needs of teachers had been satisfied by the multiple paths for communication and various community members. Members of this community could learn from each other and provided emotional support. The teachers worked collaboratively and were good friends, too. A supportive school atmosphere and opportunities for exploring, questioning, feedback, reflection, and collaboration can enhance the development of new knowledge for teachers (Marshall, 1992). Director Chen built a school climate where teachers and parents trusted and respected each other so that everybody could be included in the school's learning community. As research has pointed out, working in collaboration provides a sense of community among teachers. This is essential to teachers' growth, as individuals and as a group (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1986). This kind of environment not only makes teachers feel better about their practice but it also reaps learning gains for students (Darling-Hammond, 1998) and parents (Dodd & Konzal, 1999).

Discussion

The study wishes to offer a theoretical basis for advocating the mentor's role and teachers' learning in a wider social context instead of examining teacher's learning in individual mentoring relationships. The research results support the theoretical perspectives of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and school as a community of learners (Dodd and Konzal, 1999). Instead of simply looking at the educational role of a director or at a particular preschool, this study provides an insight into how and what teachers learn through mentoring relationships at their work site. The research results provide a picture of inservice teachers learning through mentoring relationships in four ways. First, wider social engagements can provide more opportunities to satisfy the different teachers' learning needs. Second, a good learning community can provide a safe environment for teachers so they can explore, question, receive feedback, reflect and collaborate. Third, with supportive, caring, responsive and respectful mentoring relationships, teachers will be willing to learn with mentors. Fourth, teachers can learn to adapt to the culture of the particular school in which they teach in a learning community.

Unlike most of the mentoring research that focused on one-on-one situations (Hawkey, 1998; Stanulis, 1994; Gratch, 1998) or emphasized beginning teachers that needed individualized assistance (Fuller, 1969), the present paper suggests that teachers' learning needs to be examined in their school context and views the school as a community of learners. A mentor is someone who knows the teacher, her teaching situation and the school context well (Katz, 1972). Moreover, the research results suggest that different learning opportunities can satisfy teachers' varied learning needs and a non-threatening hierarchy, with open, supportive and

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respectful relationships between the mentor and protégé may be assist in teacher learning. This study differs from the research of Tharp & Gallimore (1988), although both are based on a Vygotskian perspective. In their research, the relationships between teachers and consultant/trainer were more stressful since they interacted through formal training activities (e.g. observation and conference activity settings). Teachers may have felt pressure in this kind of environment. Teachers, in this setting, might not want to express their weaknesses or problems in front of their trainer who would evaluate their working performance. Moreover, the opportunities for trainer and teacher to meet or talk together needed to be arranged before hand. Teachers might not be able to get timely feedback when they really needed the help.

The research results discussed here can provide several ideas to teachers and mentor programs in the United States because American teachers are used to working independently and mentor programs operate in one-on-one situations. Furthermore, American teachers tend to work in isolation and learn by themselves. The present study suggests that the role of principals or administrators can promote a collaborative learning community in the schools. They can help teachers to build a community that involves members of the school, including teachers, students and parents, learning together. The role of administrators in promoting schools as a learning community is an important issue that is worthy of future exploration. Due to the timing of research processes, the present study did not collect data from the beginning of the school year to observe how new teachers fitted into this preschool and how this learning community was constructed from their first contact. This would also be an interesting topic for future research. In addition, the scope of the study focused on the mentoring relationships of the director and the teachers. The present research did not discuss the parents of this community, although they are an important part of Seed Preschool. If we view the school as a community of learners, it is necessary to include parents, as Dodd and Konzal (1999) point out, teacher professionalism is defined as learning with and from parents. Other interesting issues in the future are how to help teachers, parents and administrators to work in a community.

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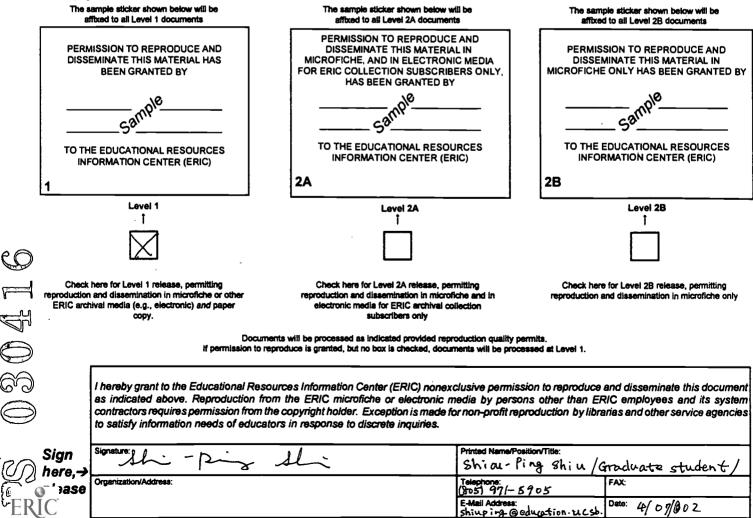
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