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Mentoring and Being Mentored:
The Story of a Novice Teacher's Success

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the growth of Chris, a novice teacher who, after two years of near-failing evaluations, successfully received tenure following his third year of teaching. His progress seemed related to the quality of his relationships with different mentors; those who invested time in observation and non-judgmental discussion provided the greatest opportunities for growth. An unanticipated factor in Chris' success was his participation in a university-based program for children, where he served, under supervision, as a mentor for two preservice teachers. As their mentor, in what became a mutually-beneficial relationship, Chris reinforced his new-found knowledge and skills and learned to better assess his own teaching. Among those who worked with Chris, additional reciprocal mentoring relationships developed.

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The Story of a Novice Teacher's Success

Introduction

Chris called my office at the university to introduce himself at the beginning of his second year of teaching. Enthusiastic and outgoing, with a kind face and a head covered with dreadlocks, this young man spoke intelligently about teaching and played his string bass well. He explained that he taught stringed instruments to fourth, fifth, and sixth graders in two local elementary schools. Like other string teachers in that district, he traveled between buildings, spending half the day at each school. Students came in groups of 3 to 25 to the orchestra room from their regular classroom for 30-minute classes twice a week. Chris told me he had called to offer to help out in our university's String Project. Finding myself responsible for supervising ten undergraduates teaching classes and individual instrument lessons to over 100 elementary-aged children enrolled in the String Project, I eagerly accepted his offer to assist "however [he] was needed."

A month later, Al, the music supervisor in Chris' school district, called to tell me that he had just heard that Chris was working with me in the String Project. He declared that, although Chris could "talk a good story," his teaching was "a disaster," and that I would have "real trouble" if I let him serve as a model for the undergraduate teachers. I was caught off guard by Al's assessment, and decided to change my original plan to have Chris supervise a group of undergraduates. Instead, I asked him to assist with a class taught by Ann and three preservice teachers.

Ann had 14 years experience as a string teacher and taught full time in Chris' district. She served as a model teacher for the undergraduates in the String Project, and I learned that Al had

recently asked her to be Chris' district mentor. Al hoped that Chris would use Ann as a resource and "pick up some ideas" from observing her teaching in the String Project. The district had no formal training for the mentor's role. Ann explained,

Al asked me to work with Chris—he does that sometimes. But he didn't tell me anything specific about Chris. When I started teaching, I had a mentor who didn't do anything for me, so I wanted to be different. I called Chris. We talked on the phone some, and he asked about music and some district paper work. It wasn't till later that Al told me he was worried about Chris.

Al believed that Chris "talked to Ann a good bit."

In the String Project, Ann and I observed that Chris interacted well with the children, moving easily around the classroom and assisting individuals. We commented to each other often about Chris' intelligent contributions to discussions in Project teacher meetings. He sounded like he had a good grasp on principles of classroom management and appropriate pedagogical techniques, and we were pleased to think that he was improving. Yet, when I ran into Al from time to time during that year, he consistently reported that, in his observations, Chris "had no clue" about teaching elementary strings. Al claimed that he sincerely wanted Chris to succeed, but was not convinced it would be possible to "save him."

One day in late April, Chris stayed after the String Project classes to help me clean up. He said it had been a difficult day. Al had come, unannounced, to observe his class, and had been quite critical in his comments to Chris afterwards. Chris admitted he was not as prepared for that class as he should have been, but he felt Al's evaluation had been both unfair and unnecessarily harsh. He was clearly discouraged, because Al had told him that, unless his teaching improved substantially, he was in danger of not being offered a contract for a fourth year, the official time of tenure in the district. Chris asked if he could work with me over the summer to develop better

plans for how to teach his classes. By this point, I was intrigued with the discrepancies among Al's, Ann's, and my own perceptions of Chris' teaching, and agreed to meet with him.

Related Literature

The first years of teaching are a time of transition for a beginning teacher, and successful management of these transitions may be a crucial factor in whether new teachers choose to remain in the teaching profession (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991). Novices, experienced primarily in the role of student, must now begin to function in the role of teacher (Kagan, 1992). After serving as student teacher in another person's classroom with support from a cooperating teacher and/or a university supervisor, new teachers find themselves fully in charge of their own classroom. Although the classroom appears to be a familiar setting, novices may discover they are unaware of or uncertain about the unwritten cultural rules of their school (Krueger, 1985; Sabar, 2004).

A number of school districts offer induction programs to ease novice teachers' transition (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999). Many of these programs, whether mandated or voluntary, assign experienced teacher supervisors or mentors to provide ongoing support to beginning teachers as they face the challenges of the first years (Conway, 2003). Although these programs have been shown to be helpful, they have not guaranteed success. Potential problems may include a mismatch between mentor and mentee styles (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O'Brien, 1995; Strong & Baron, 2004), misunderstanding of the mentor's role or power relationships (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996; Wildman & Niles, 1987), and lack of time or other limitations of a particular institutional context (Edwards & Ogden, 1998; Wang, 2001). Mentors selected by novices themselves, serving as an unofficial adviser or friend, may be more influential than mentors assigned by the school or district (Hebert & Worthy, 2001).

While all beginning teachers may share concerns of classroom management, isolation, physical exhaustion, difficult teaching assignments, or problems with administrators (Rust, 1994; Sabar, 2004; Veenman, 1984; Weiss, 1999), novices in the so-called “special” areas at the elementary school level (the arts and physical education) may experience additional concerns. Researchers have explored the particular problems of novice teachers in music (Conway & Garlock, 2002; DeLorenzo, 1992; Haack, 2003; Krueger, 1996) and physical education (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Napper-Owen & Phillips, 1995). Such concerns may include travel to multiple schools; large classes that include mainstreamed students with special needs; teaching assignments which, while legal under a K-12 license, are outside their expertise; and lack of respect for their content area from administrators, staff, and community.

Several studies have focused on factors that contributed to the failure of novice teachers (Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; O’Sullivan, 1989; Schmidt & Knowles, 1995). Fewer researchers have reported on factors contributing to the success of beginning teachers (Bullough, with Baughman, 1993; Hebert & Worthy, 2001). More studies of individual failure or success may suggest ways to better support novices as they negotiate the transition from student to teacher.

Research Questions

This study explored Chris’ experiences in his third year of teaching, as he worked with formal and informal mentors to improve his own teaching and simultaneously served as a mentor for two preservice teachers. Questions guiding the study included:

- What concerns did Chris’ mentors identify? What strategies did Chris and his mentors use to address these concerns?
- What concerns did Chris identify in the preservice teachers’ teaching? What strategies did Chris and his mentees use to address these concerns?

- What relationships were evident in Chris' simultaneous roles as mentee and mentor?
- What contributed to Chris' growth and ultimate retention as a teacher?

Method

Al planned to retire the end of Chris' second year of teaching, and David, an experienced teacher in the district, took over as district supervisor. I offered to assist David in working with Chris during his third year of teaching, additionally requesting permission to conduct a research project with them. The district granted approval for the research, and I worked with Chris that year, both in his school settings and in the String Project. David and I made an effort to communicate about and coordinate our work with Chris.

I met with Chris four times during the summer preceding his third year of teaching, transcribing our two-hour sessions. I conducted monthly observations of his work in his assigned elementary schools, making notes, video and audio tapes of both his teaching and of our discussions. Tapes and transcripts of conversations with David, Al, and Ann provided contrasting perspectives on Chris' growth during the year of the study.

Other participants in the study were Anna and Sarah, two rather shy sophomore music education majors that I hired to teach in the String Project. Neither had taught class lessons before the year of the study, although Sarah had observed and assisted in Ann's String Project classes the previous semester. Working in the String Project, Chris participated in teaching twice-weekly 45-minute classes for 15 children who had never before played a string instrument. This was a setting similar to Chris' classes in his schools although, in the String Project, the pupil-teacher ratio was vastly different, with Chris, Anna, Sarah, and myself, all doing part of the teaching. For the remainder of the first semester, in our post-class discussions, I led the group in thinking out loud about what had happened that day and "sharing my thinking" (Harwood &

Wiggins, 2001, p. 33) as we developed plans for future classes. I taught the first four class sessions of the semester myself, while the others observed and assisted individual students in establishing correct posture and motor skills for playing the instruments. For the next month, based on our post-class discussions, I wrote scripted lesson plans, assigning Sarah, Anna, Chris, and myself each a section to teach, emailing the plans to the teachers to rehearse or revise before the next class. After that, Chris gradually began to assume leadership for the discussions, and we assigned each person to develop a plan for what they would teach the next week. During the second semester, I had to teach a university class during the lesson time, so Chris took full responsibility for leading the discussions and lesson planning. Through the year, I observed, recorded, and made notes about Chris' teaching in the String Project, as well as made observations and tape recordings of the advice he offered to Sarah and Anna. I collected samples of Chris' lesson plans for his teaching in his schools, and of his email discussions with the preservice teachers about their plans for the String Project classes.

Data Presentation

What concerns did Chris' mentors identify? What strategies did Chris and his mentors use to address these concerns?

Following the phone call I received from Al assessing Chris' teaching in his second year as "a disaster," other informal conversations with Al revealed concerns on a wide range of topics. He admitted that the students "loved" Chris, but that Chris did not seem to know how to help them improve their playing skills. Al also felt that Chris provided a poor musical model for the children with his weak violin playing. Because enrolling large numbers of students in optional music classes such as band or strings was viewed by the district as an indication of quality teaching, Al was concerned about the high percentage of children who had dropped out

of Chris' classes by midyear. But he was even more puzzled by the fact that Chris had accepted only one of Al's invitations to observe other teachers or attend professional development opportunities. Al interpreted Chris' lack of follow-through as an unwillingness to improve himself.

When Chris and I met in June following his second year of teaching, he showed me the formal district "growth plans" he had been given by Al. They were based on Al's observations during the previous year, and outlined the criteria for improvement against which Chris would be evaluated in his third year of teaching. Chris' stated goal for his work with me was to develop strategies to address the issues outlined in the growth plans. Although Al had discussed a number of other issues with Chris during the year, including concerns about his content knowledge and musical skills, the written growth plans revealed the following priorities:

1. Develop specific lesson plans for all fourth grade classes, scope and sequence based on the district orchestra curriculum.
2. Develop a strategy to consistently monitor students' playing posture and bow stroke, concentrating on weight, speed, and contact point.
3. Develop and maintain a specific written log for each student's progress, 4th through 6th grade, to foster individual progress. The following are to be included in the student log: attendance, instrument, full practice log, test results, developing the use of a rubric to measure individual student achievement based on performance skills.

After I had met with Chris for two 2-hour sessions to discuss specific pedagogical strategies to address these concerns, I met with Al and David to discuss the review process for Chris' third year. The meeting was during David's first week as district supervisor and Al's last week in that role, and its main purpose was to prepare David to take over Chris' supervision and evaluation towards tenure during the following year. I was invited to attend, based on our agreement that I would also work with Chris during the year. Al began by showing us Chris' file, which included paperwork from all his observations. The conversation, which lasted nearly two

hours, included Al's amplifications of Chris' problems and David's questions about the evaluation process. In this wide-ranging discussion, I identified two main categories of concerns: Chris' teaching strategies and classroom routines, and his understandings of lesson planning and assessment. Within each category, I discuss both Al's assessments at our initial meeting, and David's, Ann's, and my on-going observations throughout Chris' third year of teaching.

Teaching strategies and classroom routines. I give examples of three areas of concern discussed in our observations of Chris: basic classroom procedures, reinforcement strategies, and discrepancies between Chris' apparent verbal knowledge of teaching and his implementation of that knowledge.

Al listed a number of concerns with Chris' ability to effectively run a classroom. Initially, he saw no "visible routine" in Chris' classes. The students entered the room, took out their instruments and sat wherever they wanted, leaving their instrument cases scattered all over. Al described one class, similar to what David and I later observed.

Even during the middle of class, you know. [Chris]'d be talking to someone and someone else would just get up and walk to the other side of the class. [He'd say], "Well, don't do that." [The student would say,] "Oh, OK," and then just kept on going. Whatever he said, there was absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing to the kids that he was trying to discipline them.

A second concern Al expressed was the strategies Chris employed to motivate and reinforce student learning. Chris had once taken Al's suggestion to observe Joe, a respected and experienced elementary string teacher in the district. Joe displayed a high-energy teaching style, using games, competitions, and candy rewards to motivate students to achieve at a high level. Al described Chris' application of the games he learned from watching Joe as completely inappropriate, saying that both he and Joe try to help young teachers understand that "giving candy is not the issue. The issue is getting them to *want* the candy, and they're working towards

the goal that you're making to get the candy" (7/8, p. 5). Al thought that Chris was reluctant to "make the students feel bad," so he gave candy rewards to every child, whether or not they did what he expected. In my observations, it seemed that little real learning or change in behavior resulted from these games, and that instructional time was wasted in choosing teams and discussing with students whether a point was deserved. David commented that it took "advanced skills" to use games as effectively as Joe did, and even Al admitted that, after years of sending young teachers to watch Joe, "it works for a lot fewer people than I would have thought." Chris remained convinced throughout the year that the students enjoyed the games.

A third puzzle for Al, Ann, David, and I was the apparent disparity between Chris' stated ideas about teaching and his implementation of them. In String Project faculty meetings, when the undergraduate teachers raised concerns about classroom management, Chris offered them good verbal advice, using similar words to those Ann or I might offer. We all agreed that Chris appeared open to suggestions. However, we were often mystified to observe his applications of his own advice or of our suggestions. Al described a suggestion he had given Chris.

He had chairs [in the room], and [the kids] were sitting down and just kind of haphazard. The first time I said, "You know, Chris, it's best to have beginners stand up in the beginning." And I came back, and there were no chairs. So then it was just this helter-skelter because the kids were moving all the time because they had to stand [in one place for the entire 30-minute class]. . . . So, I mean, it's been like every, every step. Oh no, I didn't think that you would really interpret it that way!

Al once addressed the issue head-on.

I've had teachers where it was like they had no intention of doing what we were asking them to do. But they said, "Yes, yes, yes," so we felt comfortable walking out. I said, "Chris, I don't think you're one of those people, I really don't. But something's missing here. And you're not getting it."

By the end of the year, Al noted that Chris had " a straight row [of chairs], spaces between, [instrument] cases on the right hand side, so it's more structured than what it was. . . . And so

I'm trying to help him with the routine, the repetition, keep things going, and he's used some of that and I think it's helped him."

Understandings of lesson planning and assessment. One of Chris' growth plans identified the need to develop "specific lesson plans for all fourth grade classes." The other two focused on monitoring and recording students' progress. To address Al's growth plan for written lesson plans, Chris wanted to use his summer work with me to write at least a semester's worth of lesson plans for his fourth grade classes, and to have those to show to David at the beginning of the school year. He reasoned tht he needed "brief-not full-out scripted plans" to outline the year.

Because when you start putting in [state-mandated] testing and missing days [for assemblies and field trips], it's usually around 11 to 13 classes [per quarter], I guess. And sometimes I need to review because something happened, fire drill or something, . . . [and] I know I'll mess up at some point and need to reteach those things. But, uh, I think having 20 for the semester would be what I'm looking to do.

Early in the summer, it became evident to me that Chris had very little understanding of how to create either daily or long-range plans with his students. The district had an established music curriculum, which Chris looked through before meeting with me for the first time. However, the district book provided little more than a general outline for instrumental music classes, so the individual teacher had to determine the bulk of the instructional sequence and materials.

Chris wrote outlines for the first 10 lessons over the summer, and checked them with me before the school year started. Then he showed his plans to David at their initial meeting in August. David acknowledged that Chris had "done a lot of work" and, that by having "thought this much through," he had completed "half the battle" (8/5, p. 1). He added, "You've got lots of good ideas. This is all good stuff, but I couldn't do all this in a half an hour class." David observed Chris at least every other week during the fall semester. In October, he noticed that still, "by the time [Chris] got to what I would call the meat of the lesson, it was over. He only did

a couple bars of the piece,” so he told Chris, “You need to pare it down. You spent 15 minutes of the lesson on one thing.”

Chris also seemed not to understand the role of assessment in the reciprocal processes of lesson planning and teaching (Schmidt, 2005). Al told David and me that Chris did not seem to notice when the students responded incorrectly to his instructions. Initially, Al had spent time with Chris correcting some basic misconceptions he observed, such as giving him content-specific information about correct posture and instrument position. Once Al felt they “got that straightened out pretty well,” he still observed that “nine out of ten [students] were wrong,” despite Chris’ now more appropriate verbal instructions to them. David commented that, although Chris had “enthusiasm in spades,” it sounded like the real problem might be that Chris did not “know what he wants at the end of the day—at the end of the first five minutes even.”

In their initial meeting, David pointed out that, in Chris’ lesson plans, what he considered a key ingredient in a successful lesson was missing.

I said to him, I said, “You’ve got lots of good things here, but what’s missing, what I don’t see here is any checking for understanding.” . . . He seemed to understand when I drew it out for him. I said, “This is a loop. You’re only going half way if you don’t check back with the student.”

To accomplish this in his own elementary classes, David had individual students play for him while the other students practiced individually. David frequently suggested to Chris that he use this method of assessment, but Chris never implemented his suggestion. However, we both observed that Chris gradually began to be more aware of students’ performance and classroom behavior, and to assess them and respond more appropriately.

Recognizing these concerns, from the beginning of Chris’ third year, David followed Al’s suggestion to have Chris submit his weekly lesson plans to him. In February of his third year, Chris described the effect of this request from both supervisors.

[Now] we're actually past the point where my growth plan said I had to be doing that. But I'm still doing that because—it seems to be with David that he is actually *looking* at them, I guess. Because with Al, I'd turn them in and I'd ask him about them and he'd be like, "Yeah, got 'em," and that would be about it. Plus, I was doing physical copies, like running them off and giving them to him. With David, I'm emailing them to him. Like I did it today [Friday], printed out myself a copy and emailed them to him. If he sees something that he wants to ask a question about, he'll email that back to me so I get it on Monday before I go through all my lessons. And generally, he's got good comments about them. So I feel like the lesson plans have been better. And I don't feel like I have to sit there and stare at them, you know. I think it's the whole thing, once you write it down, then you know it and you don't have to stare at it. So that's been working. I feel pretty good about it.

David and I each went to one of Chris' concerts at different schools in December. We agreed that "the kids played in tune, and [their instrument positions] looked good, and they sounded good."

What concerns did Chris identify in the preservice teachers' teaching? What strategies did Chris and his mentees use to address these concerns?

Chris took a serious and thorough approach to his role as mentor and developed his own job description as he went. Early in the year, he contributed readily to post-teaching discussions led by me, offering insights from his experiences in his own schools. By the end of the first month, Chris began making notes during class to use as a basis for his suggestions in our after-class discussions with the preservice teachers. Not unexpectedly, one of the pervasive concerns for Sarah and Anna was keeping the students quiet. Chris also often stressed putting responsibility on the students for their learning and behavior, and pacing of instruction.

Classroom management. Initially the children, all of whom were home-schooled, followed instructions obediently. However, as they adjusted to the class setting, they began to talk to each other and to their instructors, and to make noise with their instruments while the teachers gave instructions. By the middle of the first semester, Chris often focused his comments on ideas for managing the noise level in the classroom, writing in the notes he made for Sarah and Anna "catch phrases" they could use.

The first one that I always say is, “I’ll wait.” And “Show me” [*both said authoritatively*]. That one’s really easy, instead of “Can you do this?”–“Show me.” . . . Then, these are some reverse things. If you see that it’s kind of noisy, say, “I like the way Julie’s sitting quietly,” or “Zach looks ready to start,” or “I like the way such and such is raising their hand.” Sometimes, going the opposite way, acknowledging what is right, because they *do* want to please you. And then the last one I wrote, for kind of being quiet, you can say, “I need ears.” So those are some tricks for your bag of tricks, some different phrases that might help.

An important issue for Sarah and Anna was addressing students who were less than fully cooperative. As Chris and I suggested various management strategies, Anna confided that she “[didn’t] like being the mean one,” and Sarah agreed. Chris readily identified with them. “I had some trouble with that at first too. I didn’t want to be the big mean guy, especially since I’m trying to keep all my kids liking orchestra [so I can keep my enrollment up]. But you have to. . . . You’re the authority figure.” He continued, describing how he sometimes would take a child’s instrument and “put it in the case for them.”

And I’m not mean about it, I don’t make a big stink about it, I keep doing what I was doing, keep addressing the class with the lesson, just set it down and keep going. Because you don’t want to make a big deal out of it and make them feel bad about it, you just need it stopped.

Chris also offered strategies to “get a quick check of who knows it,” such as holding up the number of fingers needed to play F-sharp. “That way you’re not singling anybody out, but everybody can get something out of it.”

Giving responsibility to students. As the year progressed, Chris focused his advice to Anna and Sarah more and more on strategies to help students take “ownership” of their own learning and classroom behavior.

One thing that I picked up from one of our last staff meetings—because I’m always learning too—we’re doing this thing called Conscious Discipline. This wasn’t really as much—for *me*—about discipline as about just giving good instructions. . . . Not saying, “I don’t want this, I don’t want that,” but just saying what you want, setting that expectation out there. And I’m trying to include that more with my teaching, just tell them what you expect and, if they don’t meet it, just say again what you expect out of them. That’s just kind of putting it on their shoulders without having to be too confrontational about it.

He described and modeled how he liked “to partner students up . . . so there is some peer driven learning on what to do when performing..” He advised Sarah and Anna to not “be afraid to give the groups some time to figure things out on their own without you.”

Pacing. Early in the year, David was concerned with Chris’ pacing, observing that he often spent 15 minutes of a half-hour lesson “on one thing.” By March, Chris’ discussions of lesson planning strategies began to reflect his growing awareness that it was the teacher’s responsibility to prioritize lesson goals within the limited instructional time. In the post-class discussions, he reworked and revised the plans, thinking out loud while Anna and Sarah listened and offered their own suggestions.

We’re gonna be throwing a lot at them. Normally you don’t want to add *this* much new stuff, but I think they’ll be able to handle it. So we’ll introduce a little of “This Land is Your Land,” then we need to give them a break with something that they know. I would say this would maybe be a good time to do “Yankee Doodle.” After that, hmm [*pause*]. I’m gonna take out “This Land.” Let’s do the note [identification], and then the D scale, and then “Buffalo Gals,” because that’s more important than “This Land” at this point. And that’s something else to think about when you’re writing lessons—important stuff that you want to make sure it gets done, make sure that you put it at the front of the lesson or else it won’t get done.

With this more specific thinking about planning the lessons, Chris began to suggest multiple instructional strategies for each song. He led Anna and Sarah in analyzing songs for their pedagogical content, designing related warm-up activities, and selecting appropriate teaching strategies from a basic menu with which all three were familiar. Chris continued to delegate writing sections of each lesson plan to Anna and Sarah, asking them to email him with their plans by Sunday evening, so that he could check them and return them with comments on Monday for their use in teaching on Tuesday and Thursday.

What relationships were evident in Chris' simultaneous roles as mentee and mentor?

I discuss three relationships revealed by the data that show connections between Chris' dual roles. First, it seemed that the advice Chris gave the preservice teachers was related to ideas suggested to him by David or myself. Second, Chris' discussions with Anna and Sarah revealed his emerging understandings of the role of lesson plans and assessment in teaching. Third, Chris' growth in the role of mentor allowed him to assess his own teaching in a new light.

Understandings of lesson planning and assessment. In the first semester of the study, as Chris began to offer more appropriate comments, I gradually turned over leadership of the post-class discussions to him, although I continued to direct the lesson planning process for each class. I was not yet convinced from my conversations with David and from my own observations that Chris had improved his own planning and pacing skills to a point where he could help the undergraduates with planning. By November, Chris began to make suggestions to the preservice teachers that indicated his understanding of the purpose of lesson plans was changing to include setting objectives and remaining aware of student responses, strategies that David had been advocating with Chris. When Sarah and Anna sheepishly admitted they hadn't identified objectives in a lesson, Chris responded,

Chris: That's kind of important to do with these. . . . You're the one that knows what needs to be happening. That's the whole thing. I've said this a couple times, but I'll say it one last time, really what makes *me* feel the most comfortable when I'm teaching, with the writing of lesson plans, isn't really the whole lesson plan in front of me. It's myself knowing *what* I'm trying to get them to accomplish. And that really helps with the whole flow of what I'm trying to get them to do.

I was particularly struck, in analyzing tapes from the second semester, to notice that Chris began to think out loud about how the group should structure the next class, discussing options for specific teaching sequences and ways of giving instructions for each song or activity. He led Anna and Sarah in analyzing specific pedagogical challenges, using mentor processes strikingly

similar strategies to David's and my own, even though I was not in the room for these discussions.

Chris: The thing that you're going to—well, let me ask you: What's something big you might want to draw to their attention about this song, to make it a little easier on them or for them to [learn the song]?

Anna: You mean that it's repetitive?

Chris: That's exactly what I was trying to lead you to, it's repetitive. The same measure happens over and over again. . . . You might want to do something to see if you can trick them into noticing that, because if they can see that, it will help them learn it.

Chris' leadership of discussions demonstrated that, over time, he began to think, not just of the next lesson, but of broader goals. The audio tapes reveal his growing skill at brainstorming ideas, revising out loud until a logical sequence emerged, and choosing priorities among competing activities to make the best use of the limited time available.

Relationships in advice received and given. Especially in the first semester, I was puzzled to observe that Chris' comments sometimes addressed the preservice teachers' concerns directly, and other times seemed to be only tangentially related to the topic under discussion. In retrospect, his comments to Sarah and Anna often seemed to reflect recent suggestions given to him by David or me, rather than to be based on what I observed as Sarah's and Anna's needs. For example, after one class, I suggested establishing a "ready position" signal, so the children could show the teachers when their music and instruments were organized and they were ready to listen to the next instructions. I asked Chris if he had a similar procedure he used in his school. He responded with two suggestions, neither of which directly addressed the issue I thought we were discussing, but which were a focus of his own work with David at the time. Other times, Chris' references to what he was learning in his work with David directly paralleled the undergraduates' concerns. He often even used the same words David had used.

By the second semester, rather than simply giving Anna and Sarah advice about things he himself was working on, Chris responded more directly to what he observed them doing. In discussions with me, Chris began to reference his post-class discussions with Sarah and Anna, suggesting that he was more directly connecting his observations of them with things he was learning with David in his own classroom.

And that's what [Sarah and Anna and I] were talking about on that day, was just how you're saying things. Because I told them, it's the same thing that's happening with me right now, in last year to this year. I told them, "What you're putting in your lessons isn't a problem. You're thinking of good things to do. But you've got to make sure that [the students are] getting it, and that's in your delivery of it." . . . And it's funny, you don't really see [the problems] until you look at a recording of it and you go, "I should've told them to raise their hands."

New views of self. The opportunity to serve as a mentor in the String Project clearly made a difference for Chris in his teaching. The chance to observe children responding to teachers closer to his own skill level allowed him to see himself in a different light more easily than observing more "expert" teachers. It was clear that Chris identified with the undergraduates. He often described himself as still learning, saying, "I think I've still got more to do, I have a lot more to do." While David recommended steps for Chris' continued improvement, he felt confident in granting him tenure. By the end of the year, Chris could better articulate how he saw himself in relation to the preservice teachers.

I think also, watching and helping with the String Project from more like a lead teacher position this year helped a lot as far as knowing what people were looking at for me. Because I'd be talking with Sarah and Anna about something and I'd be like, "Ew, I probably did that when David was there." [*we laugh*] I didn't pick that up on my own by myself. So I think that was really big, with this being my tenure year, knowing that I was getting evaluated, it helps to actually look at somebody else doing something and kind of help them out. So I think that by doing these beginning lessons, it straightened out the fundamentals in my own plan also. By watching and evaluating it helps me realize what I was getting evaluated on. So that helped also.

Discussion

Because Al wrote the growth plans against which David was to evaluate Chris, David asked Al, even though he was retired, to observe Chris once in October. Although Chris knew that Al was coming, he did not prepare a detailed lesson plan. The lesson did not go well, and Al told him, “Chris, I’m not your supervisor any more. But if I had to do the paperwork today, I couldn’t recommend retention.” As the October deadline approached for putting Chris on the district’s intensive intervention plan, David felt increasing frustration.

I’ve been out [to observe Chris] a lot. Each time I’m impressed by some things he does, and by the end of the lesson I’m depressed. . . . I just feel like it’s too little too late, like I’m being asked to come in after the disease has progressed and try to cure it. . . . I asked Pam [the other district music supervisor], “What happened to the records for year one of Chris’ teaching?” She checked, and there’s nothing. I feel a little reluctant to make a decision. It’s not a fair question. Here’s the big question—is Chris teachable? I like a lot of things about him, but we’re up against this deadline. He’s had two different supervisors. I don’t like the idea of just canning somebody—a lot of resources and time have gone into Chris. If he took the attitude that, “This year, I’ll just take the pay check, I don’t care about improving,” I’d feel differently. I like his attitude. And there aren’t that many guys in string teaching, and I think a racially mixed faculty is important. . . . He’s trying hard and getting better, but not much. . . . But at the same time, I feel like I’m spending every free moment with him.

Despite David’s misgivings early in the year, by the end of the first semester, we agreed that Chris was making progress little by little. I center this discussion around the fourth research question: What contributed to Chris’ growth and ultimate retention as a teacher? Both Chris and David told me several times about a day that I now identify as the real turning point for both of them. On the day before the October fall break, Chris went to David’s school and, for several hours, “they played through all the music [David] could find, playing on secondary instruments.” Chris told me that he finally began to understand that day how to choose more appropriate music for his students. David reported his own breakthrough in terms of understanding one of the large gaps in Chris’ pedagogical content knowledge.

When I was trying to figure out what was going on, I had him sightread through some music with me. And I would do some phrasing things and he would do them too. That's when I thought, "OK, this guy is a musician. That's not the problem." So then I asked him, "Well, who do you want your group to sound like?" And he couldn't say. I said, "You've never heard a good elementary orchestra, have you?" So I talked to him and found out his hobby was brewery. I said, "Well, you must have some idea what you want it to taste like." . . . That was the "aha!" moment last year. I realized he didn't have any aural concept of the sound he wants to get.

I discuss three other factors that appeared to contribute to Chris' success in earning a tenured position in the district: mentoring style, the availability of multiple resources and models, and ample opportunities to integrate theory and practice.

Mentoring style. Ann, Chris' assigned district mentor, played a minimal role in his growth, as evidenced by her absence in this report. Her schools far from Chris' schools, so she phoned Chris occasionally to "ask how things were going," but had no opportunities to observe Chris' classroom. The contrast between Al's and David's supervisory styles highlights the importance of appropriately matching mentors with mentees (Wang, 2001). Although Al had been an effective mentor for many district teachers, his approach was not helpful to Chris. Al did not always announce his visits ahead of time and, each time he observed Chris, he gave him a different list of things to try, hoping "that one would stick." Because Chris did not appear to seek the help from other teachers that Al recommended, Al concluded that Chris "didn't have a clue" about his problems and was not interested in—or was incapable of—being helped. By the end of Chris' second year, Al saw him as a "lost cause," believing that Chris had so many problems he did not really know how to help him, and I suspect that Chris sensed that Al had largely given up on him.

As a new administrator, David did not want to be responsible for Chris' failure. He invested considerable time in observing and talking with Chris and helping him develop appropriate teaching techniques and materials. I noticed that, beginning from our first meeting,

David asked more questions than Al and kept searching for the root sources of Chris' difficulties, questioning Chris' musical skills, his teaching goals, or whether there might be concerns in his personal life. Following each observation, David gave Chris only a few focused goals for improvement and also communicated those goals to me, so that we would not "overwhelm" Chris with too many disparate suggestions. Even as David struggled to identify the best course of action to take in terms of district protocol, he kept telling Chris, "My goal is to help you become the best teacher you can be. That would make me incredibly happy, to see you blossom." Chris sensed, I think, that David and I believed in him and wanted him to succeed. After an observation in October, David reported to me his frustration with how much time and effort he was investing in Chris, with noticeable, but limited, improvement. However, after David's visit that same day, Chris told me that he thought David was pleased: "I feel like for the first time somebody actually saw me do a good lesson that's been my boss. . . . There's something positive actually I feel like that's finally been seen, that's what I'm doing." David's patience and his faith in Chris contributed to Chris' gradual improvement in his teaching skills.

Mentoring style clearly made a difference to Chris. Six months after the study ended, Chris could finally begin to articulate how he viewed his work with Al.

I just never felt we like were ever on the same page, you know, trying to understand where each other was coming from. Because one of the things that I remember him saying to me was that there was some things I did a lot better than other teachers that was awesome and there was some things that I wasn't doing right and he didn't really know how to help me with them. And I was just like, "OK. So what am I supposed to do about this?" But I don't know, I think the big thing that I think we had a problem with was there were definitely things I needed to get fixed but I don't think there was enough watching what was developing and how I was developing to see how I was getting from A to B. There was just kind of big gaps in there. . . . It'd be like 2 or 3 times a semester he'd come in and there was really no follow up as far as—well, there wasn't any looking back at what the previous lessons were to see how he got there. It was just, "This stuff needed to be fixed." . . . He'd just talk about that one lesson and what went well and what didn't go well with that lesson. So it was helpful for that individual lesson but not really the whole span of what needed to be done. . . . I don't want to bad-mouth Al. There was

definitely validity to the things that needed to be fixed that he was addressing but there wasn't enough follow through for me to really be able to make something work out of all of it. . . . And that's kind of why we didn't match up I guess as well.

Multiple resources and models. During his first years of teaching, Chris was exposed to a wide variety of sources of ideas. He received suggestions from Al and David for content-specific strategies and resources, and participated in district workshops that provided ideas for classroom management. He voluntarily spent time with me during the summer and school year. The year before this study, Chris had observed the String Project classes and teachers, and he continued during the year of the study and the following year as both a mentor and a learner.

David spent countless hours with Chris; as early as October, Chris commented that “David’s probably been in more this year already than I had with Al all last year.” David learned that Chris initially benefited from very specific descriptions and demonstrations of ideas to try. In retrospect, it seems that Chris needed more help than many novices to understand how to integrate all those specifics into a coherent approach to teaching. He admitted to being “confused” when he first tried things he had seen other teachers do, until he could “make it more where [he] felt comfortable with doing it.”

In retrospect, it seemed to help Chris clarify his “confusion” when David or I explained the reasons behind our suggestions, an aspect that I suspect was missing from Al’s recommendations. Chris told Anna and Sarah that he improved his teaching as he “stole from somebody else” until he had “enough tricks in [his] bag that [he could] tweak them the way” he wanted. As he clarified his own philosophical beliefs about teaching and constructed a teaching style that felt “comfortable” to him, he seemed to develop the self-confidence to make his own decisions about whether to incorporate advice from others. I asked whether he always tried David’s suggestions.

I didn't do all of them, I know that. But the ones that I thought were something that would help out with what I was trying to get at, I definitely tried. . . . And it wasn't necessarily that he said it was something that was overwhelming good or bad to do. Sometimes it was just a little bit, “ Well, maybe this group of kids aren't quite there yet to try it that way yet.” Or I may have introduced it in a certain way that his comments may have not made as much sense if he would have known all the other background. So certain things like that I wouldn't always do but if he had a comment, like I said, I could see that, “Yeah, this does makes sense,” I would definitely try those out and make adjustments.

Verbal descriptions and observed practice. One of the reasons that Chris seemed such a puzzle to us, his mentors, was that there was “nothing huge that needed to be changed.” As Chris said, he tended to “lose things in those little in-betweens.” Each of us could identify a number of “in-betweens” that Chris lacked but, despite all the advice we offered, he had unusual difficulties piecing them together into a coherent whole that would help him operate more successfully in the classroom. As we tried to understand Chris’ confusion, we found ourselves puzzled in much the same way as adults, observing Piaget’s classic preschooler who cannot focus simultaneously on both the height and width of the beaker of liquid: How can this person *not* see the problem? It is likely that Chris was caught in the paradox of the beginner, who “cannot at first understand what he needs to learn, can learn it only by educating himself, and can educate himself only by beginning to do what he does not yet understand” (Schön, 1987, p. 93).

I suspect that Chris’ experience of Schön’s paradox contributed to Al’s perception that Chris “didn’t ask intelligent questions” and to our surprise when he seemed to apply our advice in ways we did not anticipate. At the time, I assumed that Chris’ unusual wording when he talked about things that “needed work” in his teaching reflected personal speech patterns with which I was unaccustomed. I simply nodded when he would say things that strike me now as serious theoretical gaps or misunderstandings. For example, I could have probed deeper, in our summer work together, to uncover the thinking that led Chris to say that he could complete a semester’s worth of lesson plans during the summer so “they’ll just be done.”

However, in this study, discussion was not a reliable substitute for direct observation. Chris' perceptions of events in his classroom were made through a novice's lens and, in retrospect, it seems that the imprecision of Chris' wording actually was an indicator of the fuzziness of his thinking. This highlights the importance of mentors having adequate time, not only to meet with a mentee to discuss questions based on the mentee's verbal reports, but to observe the mentee's teaching on multiple occasions. As Chris became more aware of various aspects of his teaching practice, his verbal descriptions of what he was learning or needed to learn also came more clearly into focus.

Implications

Chris' story reveals both his own struggles and successes in learning to teach and the failures and successes of our efforts as both formal and informal mentors. Not surprisingly, this study's data suggest that the quality of formal and informal mentoring Chris received contributed to both his initial failure and his ultimate success. Very specific suggestions and multiple sources of teaching models and ideas, with permission to choose among them, played an important role. In addition, the opportunity to mentor the preservice teachers, even as he himself was struggling with learning to teach, made a crucial contribution to the eventual growth of Chris' skills.

This study's findings support others who urge caution in assuming that mentoring programs are unquestionably valuable (Abell, et al., 1995; Robinson, 2003). The appropriate assignment and training of mentors may be crucial (Wang, 2001), particularly for those teachers most at risk of failure. The mentee's perception of the mentor's support may be vital to the successful growth and retention of a struggling teacher (Stanislaus & Russell, 2000; Weiss, 1999). These findings also suggest the need for more research related to specific signs that might

indicate a particular novice is at risk of failing, and to specific strategies that may help address that need.

The findings also suggest the need for mentors, whether formally assigned or informally arranged, to invest time in listening very carefully to beginning teachers (Richert, 1987), and in comparing what novices say with their observed teaching practices. We were all fooled by Chris' intelligent talk, and failed to listen "between the lines" to identify the discrepancies between Chris' verbal knowledge and his application of it (Russell, 1993). All teachers—consciously or unconsciously—hold deeply rooted philosophical beliefs that are resistant to challenge and change (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991). Chris thoughtfully weighed our suggestions, but made his own decisions with which he felt "comfortable." However, when David and I provided Chris with the reasons behind our suggestions, his adaptations became, in our view, more appropriate. Had any of us questioned Chris in more depth as he nodded his head in agreement with our suggestions in those first two years, he might have gotten the help he needed much sooner (Schmidt & Knowles, 1995).

Although many mentors acknowledge that they learn from their mentees (Davis, 2006?), this study's findings encourage further exploration of and questions related to indicators of potential failure, as well as the concept of mentor as "expert." Chris' work with the preservice teachers proved serendipitous. The opportunity to function in a mentoring role for other beginners helped Chris to articulate and reinforce his growing pedagogical knowledge and skills, to see himself as others saw him, and to better assess his own teaching. Although Chris was still developing his own skill in teaching, Sarah and Anna respected his experience as a teacher and felt he was mentoring them; in return, without realizing it, they actually mentored Chris, in a mutually beneficial relationship. While assigning a novice to mentor preservice teachers may not

often be practical or even advisable, this study's findings do suggest the potential benefits of mutual mentoring by and for new teachers, perhaps in a group setting (Millinger, 2004; Robinson, 2003), in addition to observations of more expert teachers.

Additional reciprocal mentoring roles emerged during the study. David sought advice from both Al and me and, although he did not take all our suggestions, appreciated our perspectives as he learned his new role as district supervisor. In return, David's views helped me better understand how to help Chris as a String Project teacher. Even more powerfully, as Chris developed his own teaching style and strategies, he began to teach me new approaches that made me question and revise some of my own long-established instructional classroom practices. Thirty years ago, Lortie (1975) identified a culture of isolation that is experienced by teachers working alone in their own classrooms. Helping Chris to succeed took an enormous investment of time from a number of people, but promoted an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1986) among all of us who worked with him. Our efforts also prevented a teacher at risk of failing from becoming another number in rising attrition rates (Kimpton, 2003).

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