Analysis of a Mentoring Program to Change Attitudes
Related to Turnover of Special Needs Teachers

by
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Jaimie Eson-Brizo under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Fischler School of Education and Human Services and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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God has given me the opportunity to achieve this goal. Without Him, I would not be here, nor would I be able to contribute to society.

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I hope that I have been able to inspire others to fulfill their goals. Maintaining focus and motivation has been the key to completing this program. I was able to work a full-time job, as well as two part-time jobs, plan a wedding, lead a Girl Scout troop, participate as a member of my church choir, and graduate within 2 years.

Abstract

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Teachers/Teacher Persistence/Teacher Attrition/Teacher
Turnover

High teacher turnover was a problem at the preschool for
students with autism where this study took place. The primary
purpose of this project was to create and implement a mentor
program that would effectively decrease turnover rates of
newly hired teachers. The secondary purpose was to determine
whether newly hired teachers changed their attitudes about
work after becoming involved in a mentor program.

The researcher developed four research questions as a
foundation for the study:

1. What are the reasons for high teacher turnover at the
school under study?

2. What are the components of an effective mentoring program
for newly hired teachers?

3. What is the best way to implement a mentoring program for
newly hired teachers?

4. How effective was a pilot mentoring program in changing
attitudes and helping keep newly hired teachers from leaving
the school?

The mentor program involved semistructured interviews, class
observations, individual support and training, and group
support meetings. A pre- and postprogram interview
questionnaire enabled participants to respond to direct
questions and the researcher to acquire information to
measure change in behaviors and opinions. The researcher
compared participants' attitudes before and after being
mentored and also compared pre- and postprogram classroom
observation outcomes.

As a result of the mentor guidance and training, the
teachers began to use more effective instructional
strategies and felt that they were supported. Four of the 5
participants decided to remain teaching at the subject
preschool, and 1 decided to enter nursing training.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Teacher turnover refers to changes in a teacher's assignment from 1 school year to the next. Turnover includes three components: leaving teaching employment, moving to a different school, and transferring from an assignment in special education to one in general education classroom (Billingsley, 2004b). The results of research in this area have created a push to support changes in education.

Developing a qualified workforce and creating a work environment that sustains special education teachers is an important challenge. This problem has serious consequences for students with special needs. These consequences include inadequate experiences, reduced achievement levels, and insufficient competence of graduates in the workplace (Billingsley, 2004b).

Furthermore, Ingersoll (2001), a nationally recognized pioneer in this field, stated that very little research has been conducted on teacher turnover because of a lack of data. Another limitation is that teachers in exit surveys do not always provide the real reason for leaving. Because research in this area is critical, this researcher undertook further research anticipating that she might be able to identify some of the real reasons for teacher turnover.

Billingsley (2004b) expressed the importance of understanding the factors that lead to attrition. Once these factors are understood, changes may be made to enable a decrease in the number of teachers leaving schools and particularly those leaving the field of special education.

Nature of the Problem

Although enrollment of students with disabilities is increasing, there continues to be a shortage of special education teachers. Fewer personnel programs prepare special educators for positions, especially in rural areas. Additionally, higher attrition rates exist among special educators. Ludlow, Conner, and Schechter (2005) suggested that as many as 100% of teachers leave special education nearly every 3 years. One of the main reasons is that they experience a greater sense of isolation and lack of support. Having no special education teacher or an unqualified teacher providing instruction for students with special needs is unfair and harmful and has an impact on the type of instruction given to this unique population of students (Billingsley, 2004a).

The problem is that the subject preschool for students with autism is facing high teacher turnover rates. This school is adjacent to a typical preschool that is not experiencing such high rates of turnover. The contrast is

evidenced by the number of ads being placed for teachers in the field of exceptional student education on each organization's Web site. Although the subject preschool for autistic children had an ad on its Web page about 4 months out of the year, the other preschool had none during that school year.

Based on data from the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) administered in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, Luekens, Lyter, and Fox (2004) reported that, at one school, 7.4% of all public school teachers left the teaching field, and 7.7% moved to a different school, for a combined total turnover rate of 15.1%. According to the American Educational Research Association's Panel report edited by Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005), the annual attrition percentage for special education teachers (6.8%) in the 1993-1994 school year was higher than that of the general education teachers (6.6%). Data from the TFS for the following year demonstrated that about twice as many teachers left special education teaching (15.3%) as left general education teaching (7.0%). The panel reported that special education teachers leave the teaching profession each year at almost twice the rate of general education teachers.

A higher rate of attrition was found among beginning teachers. When examining the TFS, Leukens et al. (2004)

noted that, in the 2000-2001 school year, 8.5% of teachers left the teaching field within their first 3 years, whereas teachers with 4 to 9 years of experience left at a rate of 6.5%. The estimated rate of leaving (a) during the first 3 years was 25.5%, (b) during the first 4 years was 32.0%, and (c) during the first 5 years was 38.5%. Moreover, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) indicated, "Almost half [of America's teachers] may leave during the first five years" (p. 24).

Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) stated that attrition and transfer rates were similar in special and general education and increased substantially from 1991-1992 to 2000-2001. School migration appeared to be stable throughout the years, but was higher in special education than general education. Annual turnover was high and increased to approximately 1 in 4 teachers (25.6%) by the 2000-2001 school year.

Evidence suggested that retention is unlikely to increase without dramatic improvements in the organization, management, and funding of public schools. Boe et al. (2008) contended that teacher retention has increased so much that it has become a national crisis. This trend may be seen throughout the United States (see Appendixes A and B).

Increased teacher turnover creates a problem for

children, as school administrators lower their standards and are forced to hire less qualified teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Some probable causes for teacher attrition have been identified by Ingersoll and Smith as inadequate time to complete work, poor salary, dissatisfaction with their career or school, and poor administrative support. The results of increased teacher attrition have led to a teacher shortage.

Background and Significance of the Problem

This research study took place at a university-based preschool. The subject preschool provides programming to 157 young children with autism and 9 typically developing children. The children with autism are admitted through the public school system's preschool identification process and must meet the department of education's educational eligibility standards for autism. These students represent the full range of the autism spectrum and have cognitive functioning ranging from mentally handicapped to average intelligence.

The students with autism are funded under a contract with the preschool's public school district, and students in the state's Voluntary Prekindergarten program are funded under a contract with the Early Learning Coalition in the county. The coalition advocates that all children between

birth and school age should receive access to early care and education in order to ensure success in school. Thus, the Voluntary Prekindergarten program was designed to prepare the state's children for kindergarten and to develop the skills they need to become good readers and successful students.

The subject preschool facility has 17 self-contained classrooms that range in class size from 6 to 10 children based on functioning level and one integrated classroom with 18 students, 9 highly functioning students on the autism spectrum and 9 typical 4-year-old children in the Voluntary Prekindergarten program. The mission of the preschool is to support the healthy development of young children with autism as well as provide support to their families.

At the subject preschool, six new teachers were hired for the 2006-2007 school year to fill six classroom vacancies. For the 2007-2008 school year, nine teachers were hired to fill nine of the 18 classroom positions. For the 2008-2009 school year, four new teachers were hired to fill the available vacancies. Six teachers were replaced at the start of the 2009-2010 school year. One of these teachers was a participant of the mentoring program during the 2008-2009 school year, but left to pursue a career in nursing.

Attrition occurred for multiple reasons. Two teachers stated that they left after the 2008-2009 school year to complete their internship. The other three teachers stated that they left to seek higher salaries and work in a more professional environment. The high rate of teacher turnover was a problem because it affected the morale of the remaining school personnel (Ingersoll, 2001).

Generally speaking, if a less qualified teacher were hired because the school was unable to fill a position with a highly qualified teacher, students most likely would be affected. Billingsley (2004b) cautioned that, to cope with the shortage, some districts might reduce services offered to students or raise class sizes. Clearly, attrition ultimately affects children.

Research Problem

The purpose of this study was to create and implement a mentor program that would help decrease rates of teacher turnover. The researcher anticipated that the results of this study would demonstrate that newly hired teachers who were given support during their initial year of teaching would be less likely to leave their profession.

Research Questions

Four research questions formed the foundation of the study:

1. Is high turnover related to the staff's attitude about work?

2. What are the components of an effective mentoring program for newly hired teachers?

3. What is the best way to implement a mentoring program for newly hired teachers?

4. How effective was a pilot mentoring program in

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this applied dissertation, the following terms were defined.

Attrition refers to one to teachers leaving the education profession (Feng, 2005).

Autism was legally defined in 1997 and refers to a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction. It is usually evident before the age of 3. This disability adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics associated with the disability are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotypic movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual sensory experiences (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997).

Functional level refers to the decision-making element that controls central processing and expression. It

regulates thinking processes, behaviors, and performance
(Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow, & Coleman, 2006).

Migration refers to teachers moving from one school to
the next (Feng, 2005).

Retention refers to teachers who remain in the same
teaching assignment and the same school where they taught
during the previous year (Billingsley, 2004b).

Self-contained is a programmatic term defining a
homogeneous setting of students with common needs and
abilities or both (California Department of Education,
2005).

Transfer refers to the growing number of teachers who
are switching from teaching children with special needs to
those in general education. This term also refers to the
number of teachers who stay in the field of special
education, but transfer from one position to another,
whether it is in the same district or not (Billingsley,
2004b).

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Attrition in the teaching occupation is relatively high across the nation. The annual rates of attrition have continued to steadily increase. Ingersoll (2003) reported that the National Center of Education Statistics indicated that the teacher attrition rates rose from 14.5% in the 1988-1989 school year to 15.7% in the 2000-2001 school year. However, turnover rates of teachers were relatively equal when compared to the rates of those who transferred and those who left the field of education altogether.

When compared to other fields, teachers are a large occupation group. Canada has 500,000 teachers in its schools. Teachers are one of the largest work groups in the entire workforce (Levin, 2008). In the United States, teachers account for about 4% of the workforce, one of the reasons that teacher turnover is being targeted (Ingersoll, 2001). Ingersoll stated that two times as many teachers as nurses and five times as many teachers as lawyers or professors are in the workforce. Furthermore, since the 1980s, the demand for teachers has increased and since 1984 the number of students enrolled in school has risen. Additionally, the number of teachers retiring at an early age increased around that time, creating an even greater

need for teachers.

The annual turnover rate in the teaching field during 1998 was 11%. Furthermore, other fields that are dominated by women, such as nursing showed a 12% turnover rate in the same year. More recent statistics for the 2003-2004 school year indicated a 16.9% turnover rate for teachers in elementary and secondary grades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

According to Harris and Adams (2007), similar fields, such as social work, have shown a 14% turnover rate. The fields of health care (nursing and social work) and education are often grouped together as they have many things in common. Both fields are large, regulated industries that serve the public. Individuals working in these fields are often viewed as caretakers. Because the fields are similar and are largely composed of women, they are likely to attract similar kinds of workers. Harris and Adams reasoned that, if they could learn about the similarities among these groups, they could help solve the turnover problem.

Causes of Turnover

Some reasons for teacher turnover are that teachers are leaving for child-bearing or child-rearing reasons (Harris & Adams, 2007). When general turnover rates were examined,

Harris and Adams found (a) that college graduates had lower turnover rates than noncollege graduates and (b) that female teachers were less likely to leave or transfer than male teachers. The rates of turnover seemed to be equal for the young and old.

Ingersoll (2001) stated that teacher turnover may be correlated with the traits of the individual teacher. Some of these traits are gender, age, education, and specialty field. Younger individuals who are right out of college and older teachers who are ready for retirement tend to leave their job at higher rates than others (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Cochran-Smith and Zeichner also reported that rates of attrition tend to be higher among males than females and noted that teachers who leave have higher levels of degrees and training than those who remain. Ingersoll (2001) added that rates of turnover were higher in the area of special education (10%) and the fields of mathematics and science (11%). Chu and Fu (2005) found that younger, unmarried individuals with entry-level positions tend to be less satisfied with their jobs.

According to Keller (2003), new teachers leave the profession at higher rates than experienced teachers. Feng (2005) indicated that the fewer years of experience a teacher had, the more likely they were to leave. The

percentage of teachers who leave their teaching position doubles for those who have taught for 2 years or less.

Ingersoll (2004) found that 26% of the teachers who took the TFS indicated that they left the teaching field due to dissatisfaction. Those teachers further identified the reasons for dissatisfaction as poor administrative support, lack of teacher influence and autonomy, classroom intrusions, inadequate time to prepare, poor salary, student disciplinary problems, lack of opportunities for professional advancement, poor student motivation, and large class size. The results showed that 46% of teachers who participated in the TFS responded that they were not being fairly compensated for their work, 34% of them responded that that they were not being supported by their administrators, and 22% of them responded that they wanted to work with students who were motivated to learn.

Attitude plays a large role in work satisfaction. Employees who are driven to work and enjoy their work are more likely to be enthusiastic about it. According to Snir and Harpaz (2004), such individuals showed a lower level of absenteeism and turnover. On the other hand, individuals who showed a high level of stress and anxiety at work were more likely to develop hostile interpersonal relationships. These individuals also demonstrated decreased job satisfaction and

work performance and higher levels of voluntary turnover and absenteeism.

Consequences of the Turnover

Turnover is a problem because it affects the overall morale of school personnel. Ingersoll (2001) stated, "Schools have traditionally been identified as a key example of organizations characterized by their uncertainty" (p. 505). School leaders depend on commitment and cohesion among their staff members. However, the commitment has been missing due to turnover. Therefore, less routine is found among schools as a whole, as well as in the individual classrooms.

Harris and Adams (2007) contended that the rise in teacher turnover decreases the overall quality of the teachers who remain teaching. This is the case because the teachers who leave are usually the most capable ones. Given the steady increase in the turnover rate of teachers, society may soon be faced with a teacher shortage.

Washburn-Moses (2005) stated that attrition creates expenses for a school and for a district and affects students. She added that having a decrease in teacher attrition results in an increase in student learning and teacher quality. Ingersoll (2001) argued that, besides typical staffing problems, a decrease may occur in a

school's performance. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) noted that a decrease in school performance has a direct impact on the stability, coherence, and morale of an organization. When those factors decrease, so does an organization's performance. Other reasons given for decreased performance are that high turnover inhibits cohesiveness between staff members, decreases a sense of community among the faculty, and makes retaining teachers difficult. The process appears to cause a revolving door.

Decreasing Turnover

In examining methods for limiting attrition, Washburn-Moses (2005) stated that teachers of children with special needs need to be provided with opportunities to interact with general education colleagues. Billingsley (2005) stated that such teachers need to know that their principals are supporting them. Such support may involve recognizing a teacher's efforts and providing teachers with personal and direct contact on an ongoing basis. Feedback also plays an important part. Teachers need to feel that they are part of a school's team.

Whitaker (2002) noted that another way to support a teacher is to provide new teachers with mentors. According to Whitaker, studies have been indicated that teachers have found mentoring interactions to be beneficial, even more so

than teacher trainings or workshops. Mentoring provides teachers with support and guidance, as well as encouragement and collaboration. Such interactions help the mentee gain a sense of belonging and increases teacher persistence. Furthermore, mentoring increases job satisfaction and efficacy and results in job retention (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Billingsley (2005) stated that professional colleagues have also helped to minimize stress and burnout. As a result, administrators should encourage such relationships and provide opportunities for these relationships to occur. For instance, processes for problem solving should be developed in order to enable teachers to assist once another in creating solutions to problems with individual students. Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harniss (2001) are major researchers in the field of professional development and coaching. They noted that teachers want (a) to be provided with opportunities to continue learning and (b) to learn stress management skills and time management skills in order to be better prepared for the real world of dealing effectively with their students.

Teacher Induction Program

The Council of Exceptional Children (2001) is an organization that is dedicated to improving the educational

success of children with disabilities. Because new teachers
need to feel emotionally supported, the council has drafted
a program that provides beginning teachers with support to
enable them to endure daily frustrations with difficult
students, as they learn the new system and as they discover
and develop their teaching styles. Because training may
sometimes be overwhelming, beginning teachers need help in
order to generalize the skills that have been taught during
training and to apply them in the classroom environment. The
experienced mentor uses his or her knowledge to teach these
skills to the new teacher. Doing so empowers the novice and
leads to better teacher retention.

Billingsley (2004a) focused on the need for support and
mentoring for first-year teachers. He stated that this
period is crucial as teachers are at high risk of leaving
during this time. Billingsley (2004a) noted that mentoring
may address issues such as difficult parents, lack of
support, apathy, education plans, the understanding of
curriculum, school routines, and student behaviors.
Billingsley (2004a) pointed to these as key concerns and
listed them as training options.

This researcher provided support to the participants as
she made herself available to them throughout the program
and after the program. She encouraged them to come to her

when they needed to resolve a situation, when they needed
something explained, or even when they only needed someone
to talk to about issues and successes. Smith and Ingersoll
(2004) found that mentoring provides a collaborative and
encouraging attitude that helps the new teacher acquire
these and other skills.

An induction program is very similar to a mentoring
program. However, it differs from in-service trainings and
preservice trainings as it is designed to be the link
between basic training and teaching. Preservice training
tends to refer to training received before employment,
whereas in-service training refers to the periodic training
received during employment. According to Smith and Ingersoll
(2004), an induction program should result in a "student of
teaching" becoming a "teacher of students" (p. 683).

Furthermore, induction programs have several purposes.
They combine workshops with support systems, orientation
seminars, and mentoring. Mentoring provides guidance to
beginning teachers. Many programs developed for new teachers
have come to be known as mentoring programs, as this appears
to be the most fundamental approach to helping new teachers
(Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

The researcher used the information provided by Smith
and Ingersoll (2004) as the basis of the mentoring program

developed in this study. The weekly meetings provided support for the newly hired teachers. The topics discussed during Month 2 provided the teachers with short seminars that gave them information in areas where they had difficulty. The observations and one-on-one meetings with the researcher helped provide mentoring to the participants.

A school in California used an induction program titled Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment to provide support and education for the success of new teachers during their first 2 years of teaching. The requirements of this program included orientation sessions, observations, and weekly meetings that provided support and coaching for the novice teachers. Skills covered included how to create an effective environment for student teaching (New Teacher Center, n.d.).

The National Education Association Foundation (2008) indicated that successful mentors should focus on helping new teachers expand skills, strategies, and knowledge that are useful in different teaching situations and settings. Mentoring should be conducted in stages, so that new teachers are not overwhelmed with too much information. During Stage 1, the mentor should focus on practical skills and information such as where to order supplies, how to organize a classroom, and where to find instructional resources. During Stage 2, mentors should help new teachers

with their teaching skills and classroom management skills.
In Stage 3, mentors should focus on helping the new teacher
gain a deeper understanding of the needs of students by
focusing on individual instructional methods. A good mentor
should work with a new teacher to determine what level of
assistance is needed and when to provide it.

A key to a successful mentoring program is selecting
the correct mentor candidate. Moir and Bloom (2003)
recommended that, to be eligible to be a mentor and to be
given the opportunity to mentor, a candidate should receive
three letters of recommendation and undergo a rigorous
interview process. Billinglsey (2005) described a good
mentor as an individual who is committed to the task of
helping beginning teachers find success and gratification in
their new work.

Because Billingsley (2005) described effectively what a
good mentor should do, this researcher was able to provide
effective mentoring to the participants. As the dissertation
study and mentor program were a high priority, the
researcher committed herself to creating an effective
mentoring program. As such, she served as a model for good
work habits. For example, she got her work done accurately
and on time, came to work on time, and did not miss any time
from work. Additionally, she provided training on reducing

teacher burnout to help the participants find gratification in teaching and create a less stressful environment at work.

Billinglsey (2005) advised that a good mentor understands that persistence is an important trait for new teachers as well as mentors. Additionally, the good mentor keeps logs that document conferences and meetings in order to have information readily available to the mentee. This individual provides empathy for the new teacher and instructional support. Furthermore, good mentors do not always have the right answer but are always willing to look for the best possible answers and solutions. With this attitude, a mentor models a commitment to pursue professional growth and openness to learn. Finally, a good mentor communicates hope and optimism to the mentee.

In creating an effective mentor program, this researcher kept logs of teacher and mentor meetings, notes on teacher observations, and records of training presentations. Furthermore, this researcher provided information to teachers whenever necessary and was willing to do the research needed to provide updated information to the teachers during trainings.

Once a mentor is chosen, this individual must spend about 1 to 2 hours a week with the new teacher and offer a seminar to new teachers once a month. Moir and Bloom (2003)

maintained that such programs not only provide guidance and

support to new teachers, but also provide veteran teachers

with the opportunity to play a new role within the school.

This role contributes to the retention of employees and

produces new leaders with skills and a passion that may help

change the culture of a school. The new culture creates

school leaders and educators who help teachers to persist in

the profession because they are committed and dedicated.

    Students deserve competent and caring teachers, just as

new teachers deserve competent and caring administrators.

Research on mentoring programs indicated that, if

administrators take the time to develop the skills of new

teachers, then these administrators ensure the successful

development of students (Moir & Bloom, 2003).

    New teachers have found that such programs help them

develop their personal skills of observation, conflict

resolution, negotiation, and communication. Additionally,

these programs help them to develop their own style of

teaching (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001). Such a

program allows the new teacher to be evaluated in a

nonjudgmental way, provides opportunities for growth,

provides a nurturing program that allows new teachers to

network, and gives them an opportunity to develop their

personal goals. Overall, the program increases work

satisfaction and leads to increased teacher retention (Brock & Grady, 2006).

Smith and Ingersoll (2004) stated that induction programs offer several outcomes. The first is that teachers' attitudes change by increasing job satisfaction, efficacy, and commitment. The second is that retention and turnover rates decrease. In the case of this study, the researcher found that, after the mentor program was implemented, the participants felt more confident and effective. As a result, they were able to complete their work more accurately, felt less stressed, and learned methods of decreasing teacher burnout. Mentoring led them be more committed to their job.

Teaching Styles

Zhang and Sternberg (2006) proposed two approaches to teaching. The first is a transmission approach and is teacher focused. Teachers using this approach are content oriented and emphasize the reproduction of correct information. Its proponents tend to be engaged in teaching activities such as lecturing about facts and requiring students to reproduce what they have learned in detail.

The second approach is conceptual change and is student focused. Teachers using this approach are learning oriented and concerned with students' conceptual change and growth. Proponents of this approach tend to provide students with

intellectual autonomy and chances to make their own decisions. They create a learning atmosphere in which students are allowed to evaluate different viewpoints and are encouraged to focus on the bigger picture or global perspective of issues during learning activities.

The values of the subject preschool include supporting healthy learning by respecting each child's needs and incorporating the beliefs of his or her family when planning the child's individualized education program. Furthermore, each teacher must develop creative ways of teaching each child and ensuring that each child's individualized education goals are met, even if the teacher must use individualized teaching methods. In addition, the teachers at the subject preschool are encouraged to give children choices, challenges, and opportunities that provide them with experiences that enable them feel competent while promoting their individual developmental growth. This practice boosts the child's self-esteem and confidence and maximizes the learning process. Clearly, the school's administrators promote the conceptual approach that values student change.

Summary

According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2001), a shortage of special education teachers exists.

First-year teachers are at risk for leaving the special education. In an effort to keep as many special educators as possible, schools must provide them with the necessary support and guidance, especially as they encounter daily decisions about how to teach, plan, handle paperwork, evaluate, manage student behavior, coordinate activities with others, and work with parents. Because the Council for Exceptional Children has stressed these topics, they were included as choices for trainings in this study. Participants were also given an opportunity to choose topics that were most relevant for them, topics such as functions of behavior and decreasing teacher burnout.

Mentoring programs directly address many concerns. They provide support to beginning teachers so that they may (a) negotiate the needs of the student and classroom and (b) reduce the sense of isolation that they feel. Such programs help teachers to generalize the skills that they master in preparation programs and apply them to their daily classroom environment. These programs help new teachers feel appreciated and supported and are an integral part of the organization. Additionally, mentoring encourages feedback between veteran and new teachers, thereby enhancing their communication skills (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study was conducted to determine whether a mentor program would increase retention among new staff members at the subject preschool serving children with autism. The study was undertaken to encourage participating teachers to continue to teach at the school during the 2009-2010 school year. The mentor program involved interviews, class observations, individual support and training, as well as group support meetings.

Semistructured interviews were used in order to determine the attitudes of 5 newly hired teachers before undergoing a mentor program. After being given some time to adjust to the environment and their new role, the newly hired teachers were mentored for 12 weeks. At the end of that time, they responded to another semistructured interview to enable the researcher to record any attitude changes.

Four research questions formed the foundation of the study:

1. Is high turnover related to the staff's attitude about work?

2. What are the components of an effective mentoring program for newly hired teachers?

3. What is the best way to implement a mentoring program for newly hired teachers?

4. How effective was a pilot mentoring program in helping develop newly hired teachers?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher administered a semistructured interview to the newly hired teachers for the 2008-2009 school year. Each research question was correlated to at least one interview question. The answer to Research Question 1 was determined by responses to Questions 10 to 12 on the initial interview questionnaire, with the mentees having an opportunity to share their current attitudes about the job.

Research Question 2 was aligned with Question 1 on the postprogram interview. Participant responses helped the researcher to determine how the mentee's perspective about work changed as a result of the program. Research Question 3 was aligned with Question 6 on the follow-up interview. Research Question 4 was addressed by Question 5 on the follow-up interview.

The interview questionnaires were developed in this manner so that insight might be gained about the attitudes of the participants before undergoing the mentor program (Stoner, Parette, Watts, & Wojcik, 2008). Their attitudes were recorded to determine whether their attitudes were

similar to those of a teacher who was likely to remain teaching. After the researcher administered the initial interview questionnaire, she implemented a mentor program and evaluated its effectiveness through the postprogram interview questionnaire.

Participants

The participants included 5 teachers, 3 of whom were hired in August 2008 and 2 of whom were hired as vacancies became available within the school during the 2008-2009 school year. The first vacancy occurred in October 2008 and the second in January 2009. The 5 teachers were newly hired to teach at the subject preschool for autism during the 2008-2009 school year. All of the participating teachers were females whose ages ranged from 22 to 35. These teachers were selected because the study focused on those who were newly hired to teach during the 2008-2009 school year. To retain their anonymity, the individual participants are referred to as Participant A, B, C, D, and E.

Participant A taught in a private school prior to teaching at this school. She worked with children in first and second grade. She stated that she left her previous employer due to unplanned life changes. Participant B began teaching when she was employed at this school.

Participant C taught high school in a public school setting prior to teaching at the subject preschool. She left because she sensed a lack of recognition from administrators and saw little opportunity for professional development. The researcher believed that the mentor program would provide her with an atmosphere that would provide her with recognition and the trainings would provide Participant C with opportunities for development.

Participant D worked as a teacher of music and dance for typical and autistic children prior to working at this school. She indicated that she left because she wanted to gain more experience in the field of autism. Participant E had worked in a public school teaching kindergarten and first grade. She indicated that she left the former school because she was seeking personal change.

The mentor who participated in this study had been an employee at the subject school for nearly 5 years. She met the qualifications of the state and was certified as a professional teacher. The mentor's age fell within the age range of the new teachers. These qualities helped the mentor to build rapport with the mentees (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001). Moreover, having an experienced mentor allowed the participants to know that the mentor would provide accurate information.

Instruments

A qualitative, structured interview was used in this study to enable the researcher to learn the perspectives, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of the participants. According to Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2004), structured interviews provide a researcher with "multiple realities" (p. 348). Although personal interviews require more time than a survey to complete, interviews allow a researcher an opportunity for in-depth probing of the subject and for gaining a greater wealth of information. Interviews also allow a researcher to obtain further clarification from the participants when ambiguous topics are being discussed.

The interview questions were predetermined in order to ask questions that would be relevant to the research questions. In order to carefully record the information obtained during the interview, the researcher took notes throughout the interview (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). The researcher planned to shred written material in an industrial paper shredder after the data were accurately recorded and the results were determined. This procedure assured that the confidentiality of the participants would not be compromised.

The researcher used interviews to acquire the necessary

information from the participants. They responded to a series of closed-form questions that had yes-and-no answers and a set of short-answer choices. These questions were then followed by open-form questions to allow the participant to provide additional feedback (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

In a study by Stoner et al. (2008), qualitative methods were used in order to gain the perspectives of 5 participating teachers. The exact method used was a semistructured interview. This method allowed the researchers to explore the perspectives and gain insight into the feelings and emotions of the participants. This method also allowed for the researchers to ask for clarification or additional information.

Gubrium and Holstein (2008) stated that the active semistructured interviews are desired forms of data collection for qualitative research. The semistructured interview allows the participant to share his or her deepest thoughts through personal and dramatic experiences. Such information provides a unique and in-depth view of the participant's experiences. Serge (2004) noted that a researcher assumes that participants are honest and that such honesty enables a researcher to form his or her own judgment about the participant's perspectives. Because this researcher assessed the attitudes of 5 teachers and worked

with them directly, she selected the semistructured
interview for the study.

The researcher developed the questions for the
interview questionnaire (see Appendix C) that was approved
by the subject school's review board. Included in the
questionnaire were short, open-ended questions requiring 2
to 3 word responses, as well as questions that could be
answered using a Likert rating scale. Additionally, the
initial interview questionnaire had some questions that
provided the researcher with background and demographical
information about the participants (Fitzpatrick et al.,
2004).

In order to learn the reasons for the high turnover at
the subject preschool, the researcher met with the
participating teachers and conducted an initial interview.
With the information from the interview and the support of
her supervisor, this researcher was able to implement a
mentor program for newly hired teachers. The components of
the mentor program included strategies that have been
demonstrated to be effective in other induction and mentor
programs. Strategies included those used by the Beginning
Teacher Support and Assessment in California that provided
an orientation session, observed the teacher in the natural
work environment, and provided weekly meetings (New Teacher

Center, n.d.). Furthermore, these strategies included the use of assistance and support in developing a relationship between the mentor and mentee (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

In order to present information to the participating teachers without taking up much of their planning time, the researcher met with them once a week for 30 minutes. This time allowed them to receive four short trainings during Month 2 of the program. The researcher also spent time on an individual basis with the participants to learn about their history, their expectations of the program, and the effects that the program had on them.

Finally, the researcher observed the teachers in their classrooms at the start of the program and near the end of the program. After the observation, the researcher created a sheet of suggestions, ideas, and concerns. This information was shared with the teacher on an individual basis the week following the observation. The program allowed adequate time for the participants to receive training, as well as support from the mentor.

Once the mentor-mentee relationship was established, the trainings were given on understanding data methods, team building, avoiding burnout, learning behavior basics, and lesson plans using the program titled Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research. These trainings were

based on the topics on the list of trainings (see Appendix D) provided to the participants.

Each individual was asked to choose at least eight topics that she judged were most relevant to her. The selected topics of the participants were compared to find similarities. Topics that were selected by more than two of the participants were chosen for discussion during weekly meetings. These trainings helped to provide the newly hired teachers with strategies for effective communication and beginning teacher needs such as curriculum, student assessment, planning, and classroom management.

The Week 1 meeting was used to establish rapport and gain consent. The Week 2 meeting was used to conduct the initial interview. The researcher structured the interview by using a specifically created form to guide the collection of data (Fink, 2003). Weeks 3 and 4 were used for the initial observation and feedback sessions. Weeks 5 to 9 were used for training. During Weeks 10 and 11, a second observation was conducted and feedback was provided to the participants. Week 12 included a final interview and a closing discussion (see Appendix E).

The classroom observation allowed the new teacher to receive immediate feedback about her instructional style and classroom management techniques (Brock & Grady, 2006). To

judge how effective the mentor program was in keeping newly hired teachers from leaving the school, the mentor conducted a postinterview on the last week of the mentor program.

The original national TFS survey was developed in 1987. Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, and Weber (1996) presented the original results and questions found in the survey. The purpose of the original national survey was to gather information about teachers and to estimate possible changes in their positions. The original survey was administered to 4,798 full-time and part-time teachers who taught in public and private school serving students in kindergarten through Grade 12.

This researcher developed 17 questions that were adapted from the TFS that was created by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education (Boe et al., 1996). The researcher studied the TFS to create a set of questions for a semistructured interview that would meet the needs of the teachers at the subject preschool. Because this TFS did not address the needs of a preschool teacher working at this school, it had to be adapted in order to be used for this study.

Boe et al. (1996) reported that the original Schools and Staffing Survey was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics and included four questionnaires,

one each for the school, the principal, the teacher, and the school district. The surveys varied for the private and public school teachers. The original survey for teachers focused on a teacher's current status, teaching experience, teacher training and certification, teaching assignment and workload, teacher's perception of teaching, compensation and incentives, and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

The researcher adapted some questions from the original Schools and Staffing Survey in developing an interview questionnaire that would specifically meet the needs of preschool teachers at the subject preschool. Although the original survey was developed and mailed to participants and involved a follow-up telephone call, the adapted questionnaire created by this researcher was developed to be a semistructured interview (Boe et al., 1996). Through the adaptation of this survey, the researcher looked at similar functions; however, she focused mainly on learning what changes in attitude had occurred as a result of participating in the mentor program, changes that could help prevent future teacher turnover.

Boe et al. (1996) reported that, when the TFS was readministered in 1988, only 25% of those taking it were special education teachers, and 75% were general education

teachers. For the purposes of the current study, the questions were reformatted in order to administer them to the 5 participants during an interview. In other words, these 5 participating special education teachers represented 100% of the results. The original TFS served to provide estimates of the numbers and attributes of teachers in public and private schools; the adaptation served similar functions. The adaptation provided demographical attributes and the attitudes of the participants in this study. Furthermore, using the adaptation, the researcher was able to examine the sample and learn the number of teachers who intended to continue teaching in the upcoming school year.

Procedures

This researcher gave the 5 newly hired teachers some time to adapt to their new environment. Once they understood the routines and policies and procedures of their new workplace, the researcher met with them as a group to give them a letter of consent that contained debriefing information, risks, and requests for their continued participation. All 5 individuals chose to participate in the study and signed the consent form. The following week, they participated in initial individual interviews. Then, the researcher implemented the mentor program. Once the participants reached the end of the 3-month program, they

underwent a postinterview. The researcher reviewed the data from the interview to determine whether the teacher's attitudes about work had changed as a result of the mentor program. The results helped the researcher to assess the likelihood that these teachers would continue to work at this school.

The researcher provided the mentoring to the participants, as she was one of the few teachers at the subject school that fit the criteria created by the Council for Exceptional Children (2001). The criteria were that the mentor must be a special education teacher having taught at the same school with the same population, must volunteer to be committed to the success of the beginning teacher, and must have 2 to 3 years of successful student education teaching experience.

A list of 13 possible topics was given to the new teachers during Week 3 to determine what topics were of interest to them. On an individual basis, teachers selected the top eight topics for training purposes. After each teacher completed her list, the results were examined and discussed with the group. Any topic that was selected by at least two of the participants was a possible training topic. Because eight topics met this standard, a group discussion helped to narrow down the topics. This discussion led to the

top six choices that all the teachers agreed were necesssary training topics.

The topics included classroom obervation skills including understanding the functions of behavior and record keeping, consultation strategies including collaborating with parents and team building, advising skills including ways to avoid burnout, and problem solving skills including communicating with administration (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001). Other topics included discussions of school policies, online tour of school and its Web page, online tour of network shared drive, an explanation of data sheets, cross-referencing assessment with children's goals, writing measurable goals for individualized education plans, understanding the functions of behavior, and other assessments. A final blank was left so teachers could write in an option that was not found within the list.

This information served as a guide for the information that was to be provided to the participants during the mentor program. It allowed them to choose the skills that they needed to master to be better prepared as classroom teachers. Additionally, making decisions about the trainings that they would receive allowed the teachers to feel that they were an integral part of the organization and the program (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001). Weekly

informal meetings were set up between the mentor and the new teachers for the duration of the program to enable the participants to receive training on the selected topics.

During the initial month, the participants completed an interview that helped determine their initial attitudes, experiences, and knowledge. They also received an informal observation within the classroom that allowed them to collaborate with the mentor about their teaching techniques (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001). The observaton was based on a checklist (see Appendix F).

The mentees were given trainings during Month 2 on the topics that they had chosen. These included avoiding burnout, understanding the functions of children's behavior, cross-referencing the goals of the individualized education plan and the lesson plans using Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research, and team building with staff. Once the program was completed, the subjects were told that they would have the opportunity to schedule informal meetings with the mentor as often as they needed assistence (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001).

This researcher anticipated that teachers who received mentoring would be more likely to have a brighter outlook at work and would be more likely to stay another year. She also anticipated that the results of the survey might indicate

that teachers were likely to have more optimistic attitudes after undergoing a mentor program (Council of Exceptional Children, 2001). Furthermore, the researcher believed that a mentor program would decrease the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession because they would not feel as though they were not being supported (Whitaker, 2002). Moreover, a mentor program would allow teachers the opportunity to share some of their daily stressors in a supportive environment.

The initial interview was administered within a week of the project being approved and was the starting point of the 3-month mentorship. Near the end of the 3-month period, another interview was conducted in order to determine whether teachers received the necessary support to achieve success and pursue an occupation in their chosen teaching field.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this study, the researcher determined the attitudes of 5 teachers who participated in the mentor program. The study used an initial interview and a follow-up interview in order to gather qualitative data from the participants. These data were used to determine whether the participants changed their attitudes and perspectives about the school as a result of the mentor program.

A total of 5 new teachers were selected to participate, and all of them consented to participate in the program. These participants were all women who ranged from 29 to 35 years of age. All of them were certified to teach exceptional students. Furthermore, all of them were hired to teach in that area at the subject preschool in the 2008-2009 school year.

Research Question 1

To answer Research Question 1, the researcher determined the reasons for the high teacher turnover at the subject school. During the initial interview, teachers were asked to indicate five possible steps the school's administrators might take to encourage teachers to remain teaching at the school.

Participant A selected these steps as her top five:

provide higher salaries and better benefits, reduce the
paperwork burden, reduce teacher workload, give special
recognition to excellent teachers, and provide better
resources and materials. Participant B selected these steps
as her top priorities: provide higher salaries and better
benefits, reduce the paperwork burden, reduce teacher
workload, provide merit pay or other incentives, and improve
opportunities for professional development.

Participant C selected these steps as her top
priorities: provide higher salaries and better benefits,
reduce the paperwork burden, provide more support for new
teachers through a mentoring program, reduce teacher
workload, and increase recognition from administration for
teacher performance. Participant D selected these steps as
her top priorities: provide higher salaries and better
benefits, improve opportunities for professional
advancement, deal more effectively with student discipline,
give teacher more authority in her own classroom, and reduce
the paperwork burden.

Participant E selected these steps as her top
priorities: deal more effectively with student discipline,
provide better resources and materials, give special
recognition to excellent teachers, reduce the paperwork
burden, and provide more support for new teachers through a

mentoring program. In summary, a majority of the teachers
indicated that reducing the paperwork burden and providing
higher salaries and better benefits would help decrease
turnover rates in the subject school.

Research Question 2

To answer Research Question 2, the researcher asked the
participants what they believed to be the most useful
components of an effective mentoring program for newly hired
teachers. After undergoing the 3-month program that included
trainings, observations, one-on-one meetings, and group
discussions, they were asked to evaluate which tools were
most helpful for them. When teachers were asked what they
judged to be the components of an effective program, 4
participants stated the trainings were very useful. These
results were similar to those found by Brock and Grady
(2006) who indicated that teachers need to be given
opportunities to continue learning. In this study, the
trainings provided the 5 participants with information that
helped them learn about stress management and time
management skills.

Participant A stated that she did not always know where
to start and that the trainings provided her with starting
ground. Participant B stated that she taught herself a lot
of the skills that she needed to know and was glad to have

the trainings to reinforce her self-growth. Participant C stated that the trainings helped to simplify some of the steps she had been using. Participant D simply stated that the trainings were the most useful component of the program. Participant E stated that the observations and feedback were very much appreciated.

Research Question 3

To answer Research Question 3, the researcher asked the participants to identify what they believed was the best way to implement a mentoring program for newly hired teachers. The Council for Exceptional Children (2001) stated that in order to retain teachers of children with special needs, school leaders should provide them with support and guidance as they encounter daily decisions, handle paperwork, evaluate the students, manage behaviors, coordinate activities, and work with parents.

The participants were asked to provide suggestions for the best methods of implementing a mentor program. In response, Participant A stated that she would like to see "more training for new teachers." She added that more "team building activities in order to increase unity, [and] more support and appreciation" were needed. Participant B stated that she would like to see a "list of things to do in order to summarize the priorities of the teaching position."

Participant C was not sure how to best implement a mentor program but noted that the program "should have started in August." Participant D stated that she would have liked the program "to be longer." Participant E stated that she did not have any suggestions. The results of this study proved to be similar to those of the Council for Exceptional Children (2001).

Research Question 4

To answer Research Question 4, the researcher asked how effective a pilot mentoring program would be in changing attitudes and in helping newly hired teachers to continue teaching at the school. When teachers were asked how the program affected their perspective of working at the subject school, Participant A stated that the "program helped clarify questions and provided a good overview for me." Participant B stated, "I learned new things that are helping me now and will continue to help me in the future." Participant C stated, "The program helped me know that I am not the only one overloaded." Participant D stated, "The program provided me with a support system that I have not experienced since I began working at this preschool." Participant E stated, "I feel less overwhelmed; however, I still feel some changes need to be made within the school environment." Clearly, the mentor

program increased efficacy and work satisfaction (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Conclusion

In the final analysis, although each participant stated it differently, they all shared similar feelings about their work environment. The participants identified common elements among themselves, and the study yielded results that were similar to those of Smith and Ingersoll (2004) and Council for Exceptional Children (2001). Thus, this researcher believed that the results were reliable (Fink, 2003). Being able to identify common elements is an indicator of interrater reliability. Fink stated that this term refers to "the extent in which two or more individuals agree in their ratings of given items" (p. 50).

Moreover, the questionnaire used for the survey was valid. According to Fink (2003) validity is "the degree to which a survey instrument actually measures what it purports to measure" (p. 50). Based on face validity, this survey asked all the questions needed in order to provide answers to the research questions being measured for this research study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine whether teacher attitudes had an affect on the rates of teacher turnover and whether the turnover rates among the staff members who participated in a mentor program would be reduced after the implementation of a mentor program. Many of the participants indicated that, if they left, it would be due to low salary and poor benefits; increased paperwork burden; lack of support for new teachers; a lack of recognition for excellent teachers; and a lack of resources and materials. One participant left the school in order to go into the nursing field. More specifically, they noted that support from administrators and a mentor, as well as decreased paperwork would decrease staff turnover rates.

Teachers who participated in the mentor program indicated during the initial interview that they expected to remain teaching at the subject preschool for an average of 2.2 years. During the postinterview, teachers indicated they were likely to stay for an average of 2.4 years (see Appendix G).

Speaking specifically, Participant A stated that she would remain at the subject school for 1 year. During the postinterview she stated she would stay for 2 years.

Participant B originally stated that she would remain for 2 years, but after the program she stated she would stay for 3 years. Participant C stated that she would stay 5 years, but decided after the program that she would only stay for 1 year. Although she indicated this during the postinterview, she still remains a teacher at the school. Participant D stated that she would stay for 4 years. After the program, she decided to extend her stay to 6 years. Finally, participant E stated before the program began that this would be her last year as she would be moving on to a different field.

Observations of the Study

This researcher asked the participants to identify their feelings about their current position during the preprogram interview. Participant A stated, "I enjoy ABA more. This does not pay much. It is hard especially when you have a family." Participant B said, "I am happy within the classroom, but believe that the school could be more organized in areas such as politics." Participant C said, "I feel overwhelmed. I am always trying to catch up." Participant D stated, "Although the kids are fulfilling, I feel overworked and underpaid." Participant E stated, "I am happy within the classroom, but feel that it is dysfunctional outside of the classroom."

When asked the same question after the program, Participant A responded, "I love the kids, but it is a lot of work." Participant B said, "Good, busy, and happy." Participant C answered, "It is very hard some days, but the good outweighs the bad when I look at it as a whole." Participant D replied, "I am happy within the classroom, but feel overwhelmed with all the work and lack of unity." Participant E stated, "I have never worked in a micromanaged environment such as this before. It makes for an unhappy environment! The turnover rate is too high!"

Many teachers indicated they were unhappy outside of the classroom, but happy within their classroom environment. Billingsley (2005) presented a model that involves several interrelated systems working together to influence career decisions of special educators. The system includes these two elements: the microsystem and mesosystem. The microsystem involves a teacher's immediate setting and daily interactions occurring as a result of student and teacher characteristics. On the other hand, the mesosystem of a school includes the interrelations among the administrators, the level of support found within the school, and the interrelations among the variables in the workplace. Even if the teachers are happy within their microsystem, the way the mesosystem and microsystem work together may affect their

decision to continue teaching at the subject school.

Discussion of Study

Some areas of the study were changed during the mentor program in order to provide more accurate results. The study was originally going to include 4 participants; however, another participant was added to the group as some changes occurred within the structure of the classrooms in the subject school. The study was also originally intended to have one observation at the start of the program with six trainings to occur throughout the duration of the program. However, the researcher found that having a second observation would provide needed postprogram data. Classroom observations are a method of evaluating instructional effectiveness and are used for summative evaluations as well as formative evaluations (Bernstein, 2008). With the postprogram data, the researcher was able to determine the effects of the training and mentoring program in relation to the teaching style of a participant.

In the second observation, Participant A was noticed to have better behavior management skills. Participant B showed better organization skills. Participant C had a better handle on some of her children's behaviors. Participants D and E had a better understanding of the methods used to collect data. Clearly, the second observation indicated that

the teachers were able to apply the information presented in the trainings to their daily routines and teaching methods.

The second observation also indicated that the teachers used a student-focused approach as they taught. They allowed the students to grow and change through experiential learning. This method is encouraged by the leaders of the subject preschool. The conceptual change or a student-focused approach allows children to be challenged, make choices, and develop new experiences (Zhang & Sternberg, 2006).

Arreola (2007) indicated that a teacher should be directly involved in determining the time, place, and conditions under which observations are conducted. Therefore, the researcher asked teachers to choose a preferred date, activity, and time within Week 4 and Week 10 for the mentor to observe their classes. Participant A indicated she needed help during circle time. Participants B, C, D, and E indicated needing help during their centers. The mentor observed participants during these desired times.

During the initial 30-minute observations, the mentor looked at areas that included classroom and behavior management, physical classroom structure, schedules and zoning plans, teamwork, teaching style, and methods of data taking (see Appendix F). During the initial observation, the mentor determined what was currently being used in these

areas. Additionally, the mentor made recommendations based on the observations of these areas. During the second observation, the mentor determined whether changes were made based on the recommendations given in the initial observation for those areas.

These behaviors and activities were noted during the initial observation. Participant A had a child who exhibited a lot of out-of-seat behavior and attention-seeking behaviors. Although the teacher had a well-planned agenda for her circle time, it was becoming chaotic due to these behaviors. Participant A was also having a difficult time effectively managing and communicating with her classroom staff.

Participant B needed help arranging some of her centers. She was particularly focused on her independent work station and the treatment and education of autistic and related communication handicapped children, familiarly known as the TEACHH method. This method is an early intervention program that helps children acquire literacy skills and gain independent functioning skills. It focuses on the autistic child's tendency to become attached to routines, difficulty with organizing ideas and shifting attention, and focuses on the child's preference for visually processing information. The process involves a series of tasks that the child can

complete independently (Mesibov, Shea, & Schopler, 2005).

Participant B stated that she observed some children playing with the velcro during this routine and that this activity was distracting them from completing the work system.

Participant C noted that she was dealing with many behaviors during her afternoon centers. She needed to find a way to change the classroom routine so that she could provide more teaching opportunities in the mornings.

Participant D presented some concerns with her discrete trial sheets. The use of discrete trials is a common method employed in applied behavior analysis as a treatment for working with children with autism. Thiessen et al. (2009) stated that, in using this instructional method, "a teacher provides an antecedent (instruction plus prompts) for a child to respond to, for which the teacher provides immediate and appropriate consequences" (p. 361). Participant D said that using discrete trials was difficult for her during centers, as she was dealing with some defiant behaviors from other students. She wanted to learn how other teachers were taking data and performing discrete trials.

Participant E also needed help with her data-taking techniques. She stated that she wanted to know what other systems were in place. The mentor noted that she needed help transitioning her students between activities, as they were

showing some defiant behaviors.

In the 30-minute individual discussion about these observations, the mentor explained to Participants A, B, C, D, and E--all of whom showed some concerns about student behavior--the importance of incorporating sensory techniques into their teaching styles. These techniques include providing out-of-seat activities as breaks between centers or giving children visual or oral input if they bite or have self-stimulatory behaviors (Murray, Baker, Murray-Slutsky, & Paris, 2009).

By the second observation, all participants were effectively using these techniques. This approach is imperative as many students in the autism spectrum disorder have sensory issues. If these issues are ignored, they may become problematic behaviors. These behaviors may be seen in the forms of inattention, distractibility, fidgeting, acting without thinking, and aggressive and defiant behaviors. Over the course of the program, teachers were able to incorporate some of the meaningful replacement behaviors recommended by Murray et al. (2009) into their daily routines in order to decrease problematic behaviors.

The 30-minute training session on data taking helped Participants D and E to gain a better understanding of data-taking techniques and to structure their data taking

differently. The 30-minute training session on building teamwork within the classroom was particularly helpful to Participant A as an increase in communication among the staff was seen during the second observation. Finally, the 30-minute training session on the functions of behavior helped all the participants to pinpoint the derivatives of some of their student's behavior. Knowing why the children were behaving the way they did helped teachers to develop techniques that would decrease these behaviors. Thus, in the second 30-minute observation, changes reflecting the education received in the trainings and discussions on the first observation were evident.

Participant A ran a circle time that was free from distractions. The child exhibiting behaviors in the first observation was no longer exhibiting these behaviors. The seating arrangement had been changed in order to decrease distractions. An additional observation was that Participant A received a new set of paraprofessionals. This change in staff members resulted in an increase in effective communication and teamwork.

Participant B was able to create an independent work area that was free from distractions and provided alternate behaviors for the students who felt the need to pick at the velcro. She provided them with stickers to reinforce their

completing their independent work routine. Providing alternate behaviors helped decrease the negative behaviors (Murray et al., 2009).

Participant C provided her students with two sessions of work time in the mornings in order to compensate for her children's afternoon behaviors. This provided the children with an opportunity to maintain focus and make the most out of their learning environment.

Participant D worked on her methods of data taking and was able to find new ways of redirecting behavior so that her centers could run smoothly. Additionally, she trained her staff on appropriate methods of taking data so that she did not feel overwhelmed when running discrete trials.

Participant E provided techniques in order to inform her students that a transition was approaching. This warning helped decrease behavior displays within the classroom. This participant also had the opportunity to view other methods of data taking and found that her method worked best enabling her to meet the needs of her classroom.

Limitations

The study was limited because of a small sample of teachers in a school environment that was very different from a standard public school. This school is privately funded; thus, it had some resources that other schools might

not have. Furthermore, bias may have played a role in the results of the study because the researcher also served as the mentor for the participants.

The researcher was aware of her ethical responsibility as a practitioner; therefore, she made an effort to become aware of her beliefs and how they might affect her work. Additionally, she was ethically responsible for trying to ensure that her beliefs did not influence her participants. She did this by remaining objective throughout the study, taking care not to share her personal reactions and not to disclose her personal values. As much as the researcher tried to eliminate bias by remaining neutral when presenting trainings and asking questions in the interviews, some biases might have influenced the results of the study. Some bias might have occurred as participants tended to want to know what the mentor was thinking to see if it was similar to what they were thinking and to validate their opinions (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007).

The study was also limited by the project's time frame that was determined by the approval process. Because the approval was completed near the end of January, the researcher began the program in February. Ideally, a mentor program should begin earlier in the year in order to provide training to teachers and help them be successful during the

rest of the school year. By February, teachers have already taught themselves many of the things they need to learn and have already formed their opinions about the school and their commitment to teach or not to teach at the school for another year. However, several participants mentioned that the trainings were useful, regardless of the month when they were presented.

Some limitations included other factors affecting turnover within the United States of America. Many companies were facing a hiring freeze, especially members within the education field. States were also facing hiring freezes for teacher positions as the legislatures cut funding. Some districts were freezing hiring, cutting staff, and compiling lists of other substantial budget cuts that might be necessary. As a result of the uncertainty of the job market, many beginning teachers were opting to stay in their present positions.

Postal and Matthews (2009) stated that the state legislature decreased the budget for education by too much. They added that without help, state educators would have to continue to cut millions from their budget. The result would be lay offs, salary cuts, schools being closed, and an end to some athletic programs. With such high numbers of job loss, teachers were holding onto their jobs. This meant that

teachers who intended to leave a school would most likely stay because they might not have other teaching opportunities available to them.

The original TFS survey contained some questions that this researcher was able to use to survey the teachers at the subject preschool; however, it presented certain challenges that did not work in the subject work environment. For example, the TFS called for follow-up telephone calls. This researcher believed that, because she worked in the environment, an interview might be beneficial as it would provide teachers with a method to expand their answers, develop a relationship with their mentor, and share in an open environment. However, this approach might have hindered the teachers from answering honestly, as they might have believed that the researcher would share their answers with the school director.

Furthermore, the original TFS survey was created for teachers who taught students in kindergarten through Grade 12 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). This researcher taught in an environment dedicated to preschool children. Another challenge was that the subject preschool had a much smaller sample size when compared to that of the original TFS survey. The survey was created for schools averaging as low as 400 students and as high as 700

students. Because the original TFS survey was intended for participants with a large range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, using the original survey might not have offered very reliable information. At the time of this study, the subject preschool had 17 female teachers and 1 male teacher who ranged in age from 22 to 37 and who were mostly single. For this reason, the researcher had to adapt the original TFS survey to fit the needs of this smaller school.

Further limitations of this study were that access to past employees was not available. This was an impediment as those employees would have been able to provide valid information about their reasons for leaving, reasons for the school's turnover, and their thoughts about a mentor program. Moreover, as the interview questionnaire and mentor program were being created and implemented by a current staff member, it might have reflected some bias.

Delimitations

Because the focus of this study was on the newly hired teachers, the study did not look at some of the reasons that other teachers in previous years gave for leaving. Understanding these reasons would have allowed the researcher an opportunity to gain information that would have added to the structure of the mentor program.

Furthermore, this study did not cover some of the factors related to turnover among the general education population as this study was developed for a preschool dedicated to the education of young children with autism.

Recommendations for Further Research

The mentoring program provided the subjects with support and facilitated the transition process. However, support is not the only thing that determines whether or not a teacher persists as a teacher in a school. In order to determine the turnover rate, a researcher should take a closer look at the number of stressors that these teachers encounter on a daily basis. Some of the stressors mentioned by the participants during the initial interview included a heavy paperwork burden, low salary, being micromanaged by administrators, and feeling unappreciated. Future studies should look at these factors as they relate to teacher turnover.

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Appendix A

National Teacher Turnover Statistics

National Teacher Turnover Statistics

Number and percentage of 1987-88, 1990-91, 1993-94, and 1999-2000 public and private K-12 teachers who did not teach in the same school the following year, by turnover categories

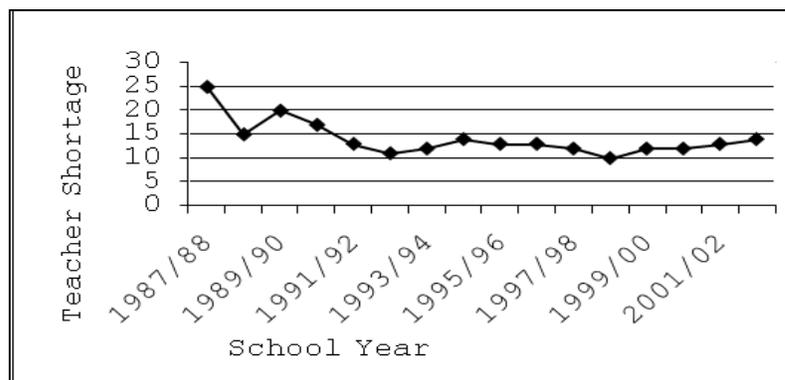| Turnover categories	1987-88		1990-91		1993-94		1999-2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total turnover at the end of the year	391,000	14	383,000	13	418,000	14	546,000	16
Transfers at the end of the year	218,000	8	209,000	7	205,000	7	269,000	8
Leavers	173,000	6	174,000	6	213,000	7	278,000	8
Retired	35,000	1	46,000	2	48,000	2	66,000	2
Took other job	64,000	2	56,000	2	90,000	3	126,000	4
Went back to school	11,000	#	13,000	#	8,000	#	12,000	#
Left for family reasons	48,000	2	33,000	1	35,000	1	47,000	1
Other	14,000	1	25,000	1	30,000	1	26,000	1

Rounds to zero.

Note. Data from "Current teacher questionnaire and Former teacher questionnaire," by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2005, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Copyright 2005 by U.S. Department of Education. Reprinted with permission.

Appendix B

Teacher Shortages for Preschool and
Kindergarten Students With Disabilities

Teacher Shortages for Preschool and
Kindergarten Students With Disabilities

Percentage of teacher shortages for students aged 3-5 with
disabilities by school year

Note. The data from "Twenty-fourth annual report to Congress on the
implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act," by
Office of Special Education Programs, 2002, Washington, DC: U.S.
Department of Education. Copyright 2002 by U.S. Department of Education.
Adapted with permission.

Appendix C

Interview Questionnaires

Initial Interview Questionnaire

The interview began with an introduction statement such as, "Hello, my name is Jaimie, and I am conducting an interview concerning reasons for teacher turnover, as well as your past experiences and your perception of your current environment. To learn more about this, I would like to ask you a number of questions about your motivation to come to work and how long you intend to be employed here. The information you provide will be very helpful to future teachers at this preschool. Your name will not be recorded or used nor will any other identifying factors. The interview will take about 30 minutes. Do you have any questions? May we proceed?"

(Answers to the following will be recorded on an interview summary form.)

1. What is your birth date? __ /__ /____ (MM/DD/YYYY).
   What is your chronological age in years? ___
2. What is your current marital status? Are you…
   a. Single__
   b. Married __
   c. Divorced/Separated __
   d. Widowed __
3. Do you have any dependents (i.e. children, spouse)? Yes/No
   If so, how many? __
4. How long do you plan to remain teaching at your present school? (Answer in school years.) ___
5. What do you expect to be your primary occupation during the next school year (2009-2010)? You may select one or more answers from the following.
   a. Teach Prekindergarten
   b. Student
   c. Unemployed
   d. Care for family members
   e. Work in a nonteaching (i.e. administrative) occupation in the education field
   f. Work in an occupation outside of the educational field
6. Do you hold a valid teaching certificate in this state in your main teaching area? Yes/No
   If so, what type of certificate(s) do you hold?
   _____
7. Are you currently teaching at the same school you taught at last year? Yes/No

If yes, move on to number 9.
If not, please indicate what kind of school you
taught at previously: Public, Private, Charter.
Which grade level did you teach? _____
Which subject area(s) did you teach? _____
Of the following list, indicate what reason(s) you
had for leaving by ranking your top five options
using 1 as most the most important and 5 as least
important:

a. poor opportunity for professional development__
b. lack of recognition from administration__
c. lack of resources and materials for your
   classroom__
d. inadequate support from administration__
e. lack of influence over school policies and
   practices__
f. lack of control over your own classroom__
g. intrusions on teaching time__
h. inadequate time to prepare lesson plans__
i. poor student motivation to learn__
j. class size was too large __
k. poor salary __
l. lack of teacher support system __
m. travel time between work and home __
n. lack of personal growth __
o. other: _____

8. Please indicate what degree(s) you hold and what your
   major was for each degree.
   a. Bachelors _____
   b. Masters _____
   c. Doctorate _____
   d. Specialist _____
   Indicate what your primary reason was for getting that
   degree(s)?
   a. to increase teacher salary
   b. for professional development
   c. to teach another field
   d. for a nonteaching position
   e. become proficient in a field of choice
   f. other: _____

9. Are you currently enrolled in a degree program?
      Yes/No
   If so, which one? _____
   What is your reason for pursuing this degree?
   a. increase teacher salary
   b. professional development
   c. teach another field

    d. seeking a non-teaching position
    e. become proficient in a field of choice
    f. other: _____
10. How long do you plan to remain a teacher?
    a. As long as I am able to
    b. Until I am eligible for retirement
    c. Will probably continue until something better
       comes along
    d. Definitely plan to leave teaching as soon as I can
    e. Teaching is my career choice and I plan to stay in
       this field.
    f. Undecided
    g. Other _____
11. Of the following, indicate five possible steps that
    this school could take in order to encourage teachers
    to remain teaching here?
    a. provide higher salaries and better benefits
    b. improve opportunities for professional advancement
    c. deal more effectively with student discipline
    d. give teacher more authority in their own classroom
    e. increase standards for student performance
    f. decrease class size
    g. provide better resources and materials
    h. give special recognition to excellent teachers
    i. reduce the paperwork burden
    j. provide more support for new teachers (i.e.
       mentoring program)
    k. increase parent involvement
    l. reduce teacher workload
    m. provide merit pay or other incentives
    n. improve opportunities for professional development
    o. revise health insurance program to include stress
       reduction seminars and counseling
12. Rate the following topics with very satisfied (1),
    somewhat satisfied (2), somewhat dissatisfied(3), and
    very dissatisfied(4):
    a. salary__
    b. opportunities for professional development__
    c. opportunities for professional advancement__
    d. recognition and support from administration__
    e. safety of environment__
    f. your influence over school policy__
    g. control over your classroom__
    h. professional prestige__
    i. benefits__
    j. procedures for performance evaluation__
    k. teaching load__

      l. availability of resources and materials__
      m. general work conditions__
      n. job security__
      o. professional caliber of colleagues__
      p. intellectual challenge__
      q. student motivation to learn__
      r. school learning environment__
      s. paper work__
      t. student discipline and behavior__
      u. class size__
      v. time to prepare lesson plans__
      w. support from parents__
      x. esteem of society for teaching profession__
      y. overall job satisfaction__
      z. retirement plan__

13. Have you taught before? (yes/no)If so, what kind of students? _____How many years of experience do you have? _____
14. How do you feel about your new position? _____
15. Please indicate which topics you are having difficulty with and what training you feel you need in order to be more successful?
16. If you had a mentor, what do you think their role would be? _____
17. Do you anticipate remaining at this school next year? (yes/no)

This completes our interview. Thank you for taking the time to participate. Please feel free to include any additional comments.

Follow-up Interview Questionnaire

"Hello, my name is Jaimie, and I am conducting an interview on your perceptions of the mentoring program and your perception of your current work environment. To learn more about this, I would like to ask you a number of questions about the mentor program you participated in. The information you provide will be very helpful to future teachers at this preschool. Your name will not be recorded or used nor will any other identifying factors. The interview will take about 30 minutes. Do you have any questions? May we proceed?"

(Answers to the following will be recorded on an interview summary form.)

1. What component of the program did you find the most useful? _____
2. How did an mentor program affect your perspective of working at this school? _____
3. What changes would you have made to the mentor program? _____
4. How long do you anticipate teaching here?
5. How do you feel about your new position?
6. Do you have any suggestions to give about the school or ideas for bettering the implementation of the mentor program?

This completes our interview. Thank you for taking the time to participate. Please feel free to include any additional comments.

Appendix D

Topic Checklist for Mentor Program

Possible Workshop Topics

Directions: Please select the top eight topics that you
would like to be discussed throughout the mentor program.

1. Discuss NOVA policies and forms (i.e. sick days,
   personal days, employee evaluations, etc.)
2. Provide a tour of NOVA webpage, buildings, and the
   different personnel members
3. Understanding data sheets (group vs. individual) and
   graphing sheets
4. Navigating the shared drive
5. Cross referencing the STAR lessons with IEP goals
6. Understanding the functions of children's behavior:
   Applied Behavior Analysis basics
7. Team building with staff
8. Communicating with administration and support staff
   about IEP writing process
9. Collaborating with parents
10. Assessment strategies
11. Organizational skills: Record keeping
12. How to avoid burnout
13. Writing measurable goals
14. Other topic of choice: _____

Appendix E

Weekly Program Outline

Weekly Program Outline

Week	Activity
1	Explanation of program to entire group, distribution of consent forms
2	Initial survey done on an individual basis
3	Group met to select preferred topics for trainings
4	Initial observation
5	One-on-one discussion of observation
6	Training on data taking
7	Training on avoiding burnout
8	Training on team building within classroom
9	Training on understanding the function of behavior
10	Final observation
11	One-on-one discussion of observation
12	Closing meeting for feedback, distribution of post survey

Appendix F

Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist

1. Classroom and behavior management
2. Physical classroom structure
3. Schedules and zoning plans
4. Effective teamwork and communication
5. Teaching style
6. Methods of data taking

Appendix G

Results of the Mentor Program

Results of the Mentor Program

Participants' responses to how long each expects to remain teaching at Preschool before and after mentor program.

Participant	Before Program	After Program	Changes
A	1 year	2 years	+1
B	2 years	3 years	+4
C	5 years	1 year	–4
D	4 years	6 years	+2
E	0 years	0 years	0

When asked what five steps the school could take to encourage teachers to remain teaching at this school, the participants provided the following responses:

Participant A stated the school should provide higher salaries and better benefits; reduce the paperwork burden; reduce teacher workload; give special recognition to excellent teachers; and provide better resources and materials.

Participant B stated the school should provide higher salaries and better benefits; reduce the paperwork burden; reduce teacher workload; provide merit pay or other incentives; and improve opportunities for professional development.

Participant C stated the school should provide higher salaries and better benefits; reduce the paperwork burden; provide more support for new teachers through a mentoring program; reduce teacher workload; and increase recognition from administration for teacher performance.

Participant D stated the school should provide higher salaries and better benefits; improve opportunities for professional advancement; deal more effectively with student discipline; give teacher more authority in their own classroom; and reduce the paperwork burden.

Participant E stated the school should deal more effectively with student discipline; provide better resources and materials; give special

recognition to excellent teachers; reduce the paperwork burden; and provide more support for new teachers through a mentor program.

When asked how the teacher's felt about their current position before the program, the participants answered the following:

Participant A stated, "I enjoy ABA more. This does not pay much. It is hard especially when you have a family."

Participant B stated, "I am happy within the classroom, but feel that the school could be more organized in areas such as politics."

Participant C stated, "I feel overwhelmed. I am always trying to catch up."

Participant D stated, "Although the kids are fulfilling, I feel overworked and underpaid."

Participant E stated, "I am happy within the classroom, but feel overwhelmed with all the work and lack of unity."

When asked how the teacher's felt about their current position after the program, the participants answered the following:

Participant A said, "I love the kids, but it is a lot of work."

Participant B said, "Good, busy, and happy."

Participant C said, "I am happy within the classroom, but feel overwhelmed with all the work and lack of unity."

Participant D said, "It is very hard some days, but the good outweighs the bad when I look at it as a whole."

Participant E said, "I have never worked in a micro-managed environment, such as this before…It makes it an unhappy environment! The turnover rate is too high!"

When asked how the mentor program affected their perspective of working at the school, the participants answered the

following:

   Participant A stated, "The program helped clarify
   questions and provided a good overview for me."

   Participant B stated, "I learned new things that are
   helping me now and will continue to help me in the
   future."

   Participant C stated, "The program helped me know that I
   am not the only one overloaded."

   Participant D stated, "The program provided me with a
   support system that I had not yet experienced since I
   began working at this preschool."

   Participant E stated, "I feel less overwhelmed, however I
   still feel some changes need to be made within the school
   environment."

When asked what changes they would have made to the mentor
program, the participants answered the following:

   Participant A stated, "I would like to see more trainings
   for new teachers. I would also like to increase unity,
   [provide] more support and appreciation."

   Participant B stated, "I would like to be provided with a
   to-do-list of essential tasks and priorities for teachers
   to focus us on a weekly basis."

   Participant C stated, "I would have liked for it to have
   started in August."

   Participant D stated, "I would have liked it to be
   longer."

   Participant E stated, "I have no suggestions."

When asked if they had suggestions for the school, the
participants answered the following:

   Participant A stated, "I would like to suggest providing
   teachers with a planning period. Provide team building
   activities among teachers, staff, and support staff in
   order to increase unity and cohesiveness, such as the
   unity felt within the mentor program."

Participant B stated, "I would like to receive more support and appreciation from administration. Also, I would like it if the administration were more involved." Participant C stated "The school should focus on creating unity within the staff."

Participant D stated, "I suggest that teacher meetings be held on a different day and for teacher to be provided with a planning period."

Participant E stated, "I would like it if there was greater involvement (positive) from the administration."