Mentor and New Teacher Self-Perceptions Regarding the Effectiveness of a Statewide Mentoring Program

Anna Schwan, Cheryl Wold, Andrea Moon, Alan Neville,
& Janeen Outka, Northern State University

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the impact of mentor and new teacher pairings on the self-reported benefits of a statewide mentoring program for new teachers. Participants included 147 new teachers and 89 mentors in a Midwestern, rural state. Teacher demographics included all grade levels, different content areas, job alike and job not-alike pairings, and in-district and out-of-district pairings. Results indicated that the most similar pairings, i.e. same district and same position, reported the most positive mentoring experience. Several themes were identified by the mentors and new teachers as being benefits of the experience. Major themes identified by mentor teachers included reflection, positive interactions, collaboration, improved instruction, and improvement. Major themes identified by new teachers included improved instruction, collaboration, positive interaction, improvement, direction, and sense of community.

Keywords: *mentoring, new teachers, mentor/mentee pairings*

As teachers continue to flee the profession, school districts deliberate the reasons for attrition and work to cope with the cost associated with replacing a teacher. The nation was short 110,000 teachers for the 2017-2018 school year (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas, 2016), and about 8% of teachers leave the profession every year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Research suggests that teachers require three to seven years of experience in order to be considered highly qualified (Long, 2010), yet many teachers never make it that long. Shaw and Newton (2014) reported that over one third of teachers quit within the first five years.

While it is impossible to retain every teacher who enters the field, it is prudent for school districts to study and work to prevent teacher attrition as much as possible (Callahan, 2016). Research has shown that establishing organized meaningful mentoring programs can be beneficial in reducing some of the reasons that teachers leave the profession (Breaux & Wong, 2003; Callahan, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2012; White & Mason, 2003). Lipton and Wellman (2018) highlighted the many benefits of a mentoring program, stating that,

> Novices who participate in high quality induction programs that include a comprehensive mentoring component have consistently shown that they increase beginning teacher retention, improve student achievement, and reduce the waste of financial and human resources

associated with teacher turnover. Beginning teachers that are supported early in their careers have increased effectiveness in their classrooms, higher satisfaction, and greater commitment than those that do not experience these supports. (p. xv)

Mentoring programs vary greatly in their structure and content (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; Israel, Kamman, McCray & Sindelar, 2014; Polikoff, Desimone, Porter, & Hochberg, 2015; & Radford, 2018). Defining mentoring and the components that make up a successful program is critical for success. According to Ingersoll and Strong (2011), "Mentoring is the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools" (p.203). Radford (2017) defined the role of a mentor stating that mentors "need to be reflective practitioners, know how to facilitate adult learning, as well as observe and provide feedback (p. 3). Zachary (2012) declared the mentoring process to be one where the "mentor and mentee work together to achieve specific, mutually defined goals that focus on developing the mentee's skills, abilities, knowledge, and thinking; it is in every way a learning partnership (p. 3).

In 2011, Ingersoll and Strong compiled the results of 15 empirical studies conducted since the 1980s on the effects of mentoring programs, and suggested that mentoring is based on Zey's mutual benefits model:

> This model is based on the premise that individuals enter into and remain part of relationships to meet certain needs, for as long as the parties continue to benefit. Zey extended this model by adding that the organization as a whole (in this case the school) that contains the mentor and mentee also benefits from the interaction. (p. 203)

New teachers, as they become submerged in the job and isolated in their classrooms, have the tendency to forget some of the rewarding reasons for entering the teaching profession. State and local policy makers have renewed the emphasis on mentoring as a main strategy to address new teachers' isolation, frustration, and attrition (Kardos & Johnson, 2008). Kent, Green, and Feldman (2012) discussed mentoring as essential for helping new teachers experience a resonating success that encourages retention. In addition, the current body of literature has emphasized the critical importance of mentoring in recent years (Lipton & Wellman, 2018; Radford, 2017; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; & Flanagan, 2006). Specifically, participants in mentoring programs have experienced gains in student achievement which increases self-efficacy and higher job satisfaction (Ingersoll & Strong, 2012).

The number of teachers who need to be replaced each school year is startling. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) found that the number of new teachers hired rose from 50,000 in 1987-1988 to 200,000 in 2007-2008. In 2018 an estimated 112,000 teaching positions went unfilled (Yan, Chiaramonte, & Lagamayo, 2019). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) reported:

> A high rate of teacher attrition is a primary contributor to teacher shortages nationally. The profession has a national attrition rate about 8% annually, and research shows that the number of teachers leaving each year accounts for close to 90% of annual teacher demand. Furthermore, less than a third of national teacher attrition is due to retirement. In other words, each year schools nationwide must hire tens of thousands of teachers as a result of beginning and mid-career teachers leaving the profession. (p.1)

Mentoring provides many benefits for new teachers. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) found that, "Almost all of the studies that we reviewed showed that beginning teachers who participated

in some kind of induction had higher satisfaction, commitment, or retention" (p.225). Additionally, they found that these beginning teachers kept students on task better, developed good lesson plans, used effective discussion techniques, had positive classroom environments, adjusted instruction appropriately, and managed classrooms effectively. As a result, most of the studies reviewed indicated that when new teachers participated in mentoring programs their students showed greater academic gains.

Effective mentoring programs require a systematic approach for training and professional development. The Texas Teacher Mentor Advisory Committee (TTMAC) discussed seven critical components of a successful mentoring program which include mentor selection, mentor assignment, mentor training, mentor roles and responsibilities, program design and delivery, funding and accountability (TTMAC, 2015). Barrera, Braley, and Slate (2010) stressed the value of a mentoring program with specific goals, and Darling-Hammond (2009) noted the importance of utilizing highly qualified teacher mentors as means of retaining teachers. Similarly, White and Mason (2003) found that highly qualified mentors led to greater student achievement, enhanced teacher enthusiasm, and better student behavior.

The pairing of mentors and new teachers also impacts the program's success. Flanagan (2006) found that the pairing of mentors and new teachers is important, "Three main criteria for the match surfaced: (a) the mentor and mentee should be in close proximity; (b) they should be in the same subject area, or; (c) the same grade level" (p. 140). Hobson et al. (2009) reported, "... that the success of beginning teacher mentoring is, in part, a function of the way mentors are selected and paired with mentees" (p. 211). Mentor and new teacher pairings have been significant in past studies (Abell, 1995; Hobson, 2009; Kardos & Johnson, 2008; & Lozinak, 2016).

The purpose of this study was to identify mentor and new teacher self-reported perceptions, derive themes, and discuss the impact of mentor and new teacher pairings. A growing body of literature indicates that the relationship between mentor and new teacher poses benefits for both (Huling & Resta, 2001; Hanson & Moir, 2008; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Jewell, 2007). The primary focus of the aforementioned studies emphasized the benefits of serving as a mentor, but research that investigates mentor and new teacher pairings is somewhat limited, and thus prompted our investigation.

Research Questions

1. What were the self-reported perceptions of mentors and new teachers participating in a statewide mentor program?
2. What is the relationship between mentor and new teacher pairings and their self-reported perceptions?
3. How many new teacher participants in this study remained in the teaching profession at the beginning of the following school year?

Methods

The intent of this study was to investigate mentor and new teacher self-perceptions of their participation in a statewide mentoring program. Mentors and new teachers participating in a formal statewide mentoring program during the 2018-2019 school year, who enrolled in a university course for graduate credit, were surveyed. Qualitative data were collected from a questionnaire that consisted of six open-ended questions provided to the participants near the end of the school year and mentoring partnership. The questionnaire, which was given to the participants as a paper

copy and collected by the instructor of the university course was purposely developed to investigate mentors' and new teachers' perceptions. The researchers' role in this study was not to discover the meaning but rather to interpret, organize, and represent meaning (Merriam, 2002). Participants' identifying information appeared on the questionnaire, but the data have been handled in a way that carefully preserves confidentiality.

Researchers read the responses several times and reflected on how to organize the data based on themes identified in the literature. This process was originally identified as "sensitizing" (Blumer, 1954) and described by Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, and Tomlinson (2009) and Orland-Barak and Hasin (2010) implying that the data were read with regard to the literature in this area. Two of the researchers initially reviewed 25% of the total responses independent of the research team to establish inter-rater reliability in identifying the themes.

Each individual researcher listed themes and grouped them based on similarities. The dominant themes that emerged were documented along with supporting quotations from the questionnaires. The team met to discuss individual findings, utilized the constant comparative method for creating categories and themes (Merriam, 1998), and came to a consensus about overarching themes that prevailed throughout responses of mentors and new teachers. The researchers then read new literature based on the overarching themes, and compared new findings to those already established in order to validate and/or further investigate.

While the open-ended questions were not specifically aligned to articulated objectives of the state-wide program (The purposes of the statewide mentoring program were: 1) direct classroom observation and consultation; 2) assistance in instructional planning and preparation; 3) support in implementation and delivery of classroom instruction; and 4) other assistance intended to enhance the professional performance and development of the beginning teacher), they were intended to gather useful information about the success and efficacy of the program and to derive whether or not the purposes carried out proficiently by the program. Questions were structured to capture efficacy rather than logistics, and they were designed to broadly encompass the purposes of the mentor program. Questions for the mentors and new teachers were identical. Six open-ended questions posed to new teacher and mentor participants:

   1. Please describe how your participation in the SDDOE Mentor Program positively impacted you and your teaching.
   2. Please describe how your participation in the SDDOE Mentor Program positively impacted your students.
   3. Please describe how your participation in the SDDOE Mentor Program positively impacted your district, colleagues, families, and/or community.
   4. Please describe BOTH the benefits and challenges of working with a new teacher/mentor who was in your building.
   5. Please describe BOTH the benefits and challenges of working with a new teacher/mentor who teaches the same grade levels as you.
   6. Please describe BOTH the benefits and challenges of working with a new teacher/mentor who teaches the same content area as you do.

Participants

Participants in this study included a sample group of 147 new teachers and 89 mentor teachers who applied and were selected to participate in a statewide mentoring program during the

2018-2019 school year. The purposes of the statewide mentoring program were: 1) direct classroom observation and consultation; 2) assistance in instructional planning and preparation; 3) support in implementation and delivery of classroom instruction; and 4) other assistance intended to enhance the professional performance and development of the beginning teacher.

Program requirements included a commitment to a two-year formal mentoring relationship, yearly participation in a one-day kickoff event for mentors and their new teachers, yearly participation in a one-day mentor training event for mentors, yearly participation in three webinar trainings for mentors, a minimum of 34 mentoring contact hours each year, of which 18 were required to be face-to-face hours, and yearly attendance at a two-day culminating mentor academy event for both mentors and new teachers.

The statewide mentoring program funded travel costs including transportation, meals, and lodging for mentors and new teachers to attend the mentor training, kick off events, and the summer academy. Mentors and new teacher partners who worked in different cities were also provided with travel costs for up to four round trip visits to each other. Additionally, mentors were paid a $1,500 stipend for each year of service as a mentor. Through a state department of education collaboration, both mentors and new teachers who successfully completed two years of the mentor program and all requirements herein were granted automatic renewal of their state teaching certificates.

Mentors selected for participation in the statewide mentoring program were required to have a minimum of five years of teaching experience, one of which was within the last seven years in a school or other education-relation field, and to have a valid teaching certificate. New teachers were required to be within the first two years of teaching. Upon selection, mentors were matched with new teachers based on the following factors: geographic location, same building or district, job-alike position, or administrator request. Furthermore, participants of this study elected to enroll in a course for college credit and submit responses to the researchers' open-ended questions as part of the course requirements.

Data Collection

Data were collected at the culmination of the 2018-2019 statewide mentoring program cycle. As part of the requirements for obtaining college credit, participants responded to the researchers' open-ended questions knowing that their responses would be used in this study. The researchers developed a clear response protocol and provided a template on which to respond to ensure accurate and credible responses. Participants willingly provided their responses and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was carefully followed to ensure that confidentiality was preserved. No teacher names or school districts were identified.

Data Analysis

Researchers analyzed and interpreted the data using Creswell's (2012) six-step process, which has been identified as an effective qualitative methodology. First, the responses of the participants were analyzed by hand. Each researcher read their participants' responses numerous times and highlighted key words, such as collaboration, as they examined the detailed descriptions. Next, researchers reviewed the data to gain a general sense of the data. At this point, the researchers determined that sufficient themes could be derived from the current responses and no additional data would be needed. During this step, the responses were divided into text segments to identify codes, while at the same time examining these codes for any overlap and redundancy. Once these

codes were identified, the researchers returned to the data once again to determine if any new codes emerged. During this process, specific quotes of the participants were highlighted that supported the codes that had been identified. In the next step, these codes were used to narrow the data into five to seven relevant themes. Next, using an Excel spreadsheet to track the codes, the researchers tallied the exact numbers for each theme and tables were developed to represent the findings. Once this information was identified, the researchers interpreted the findings to discover the meaning compared to the literature on mentoring. Finally, the results were validated through member checking (Creswell, 2012).

Results

The analysis of the data revealed significant benefits for both new teachers and mentors. The researchers identified six dominant themes (by highest percentage) that emerged from new teacher responses: improved instruction, collaboration, positive interaction, improvement, direction, and sense of community as reported in Figure 1. The researchers then identified five dominant themes (by highest percentage) that emerged from mentor responses: reflection, positive interaction, collaboration, improved instruction, and improvement as reported in Figure 2. Sample statements from new teachers and mentors can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
New Teacher and Mentor Theme-related Statements

New Teacher	Mentor
Experience gave me new perspectives	Reflect on my own teaching
Experience directly benefited my students	New and refreshing ideas for my classroom
Helped me develop confidence	Positive energy is contagious
I gained a confidant	Sense of wanting to help each other
Having a designated person took pressure off	Gained new teaching strategies
Helped me learn the nuances of school and district	Exposed me to out of the box activities

Note. Bulleted statements from new teacher and mentor teacher comments that were related to major themes identified from aggregate.

New Teacher Themes
Improved Instruction

Improved instruction was identified as a dominant theme by the new teachers. Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, and Tomlinson (2008) identified the following benefits for mentees: reduced feeling of isolation, increased confidence and self-esteem, professional growth, and improved regulation and problem-solving capacities. Additionally, they noted that mentees have reported benefits such as behavior and classroom management skills, as well as the ability to manage their time and caseloads. These findings are consistent with some comments from our new teachers such as:

> My mentor made sorting out some management logistics with a new math curriculum easier. She also helped me open up and try new things throughout the year with management...Having her there to help guide me in reflecting on my teaching by watching my videos was crucial because she was able to point out some things that I never would have

seen or caught both good and bad to help make my instruction more effective. (New teacher respondent 120)

Collaboration

Collaboration was an expected theme identified by new teachers, as one would presume new teachers to benefit from collaboration with an experienced teacher. Bieler (2012) noted, "today's new teachers may have a different disposition toward collaboration" (p. 48) and that they "longed for collaboration" (p. 48). This collaboration is different from the more traditional closed-door approach. Many of the new teachers described collaboration in various ways such as brainstorming ideas, bouncing ideas around, and talking problems out with another teacher. One of the new teachers identified yet another important benefit of collaboration for the students: "In a less direct manner, I think it is good for our students to see we are continuing to develop ourselves as a professional and working together with other teachers. The mentor program is an easy way to model collaboration and self-improvement" (New teacher respondent 101). "My mentor and I worked collaboratively to improve our teaching and our classrooms" (New teacher respondent 86). One new teacher found herself better collaborating with other teachers as a result of the program:

> With this program, I was able to obtain many new relationships with not only my mentor, but also other teachers I observed within our district! It has helped me to reach out to other educators within my community, not only the educators I work with on a daily basis. (New teacher respondent 19)

Positive Interaction

New teachers described positive interactions as an important theme as well. Hobson et al. (2009), noted that one of the most commonly identified benefits for new teachers was the positive interactions between during the mentoring experiences which were described as, "the provision of emotional and psychological support, which has been shown to be helpful in boosting the confidence of beginner teachers, enabling them to put difficult experiences into perspective, and increasing their morale and job satisfaction," (p.209). One new teacher wrote, "Being in the Mentor Program impacted me and my teaching positively by initiating conversations between myself and a veteran teacher" (New teacher respondent 108). Another described the positive interactions in this way:

> Through the mentoring program I have gained a confidant. I feel as though I can communicate with my mentor about anything, personal and professional, that comes along with the job. Being a new teacher can be stressful, and it was reassuring to know that I regularly had someone to talk to about any issues I was struggling with." (New teacher respondent 104)

"Having another teacher invested in what I am doing is amazing" (New teacher respondent 73). "Thank you so much for this program. My mentor has become a treasure in my life. I appreciated her guidance this year and look forward to another year with her" (New teacher respondent 94).

Improvement

Mathur et al. (2013) found new teachers involved in mentoring programs gained improved decision-making ability. An unexpected by-product of improved decision-making abilities is the connection to higher job satisfaction among new teachers (Mathur et al., 2013). One new teacher noted, "My participation in the mentor program has helped me grow more confident in all areas associated with being an educator…" (New teacher respondent 109). New teacher respondent 101 explained the improvement theme this way, "As mentioned above the increased experience I gained directly benefitted my students." Another new teacher explained, "Overall, I feel I have grown faster as a teacher through the mentor program than I would have without" (New teacher respondent 19). "Meeting with my mentor leaves me feeling affirmed in what I am doing for my students" (New teacher respondent 56). New teacher respondent 89 commented:

> The Mentor Program has positively impacted both myself and my teaching by providing me with the resources necessary to be successful. By providing me a designated mentor to work with, I have gained valuable knowledge in my content area (ELA) and in the management of a classroom.

Direction

Direction was an additional theme voiced by new teacher respondents. One of the new teachers in this study wrote:

> The program helped make the first year of teaching easier by knowing I was not doing it all alone, and make the second year enjoyable because I could see myself growing as a teacher and improving in my teaching techniques. It gave me the confidence I needed to know that I was going in the right direction and that if I struggled with something I could ask questions to help ease my stress and anxiety. (New teacher respondent 105)

Another new teacher described the direction theme in this way, "Participating in the [state] Mentor Program has provided me with a positive direction and start to my career" (New teacher respondent 110). New teacher respondent 55 commented, "My mentor helped me prioritize what is important in my classroom." New teachers found it important to be able to seek content-related advice. One teacher noted:

> She also has a lot of insight into the content area, giving super helpful suggestions when needed for content-specific things. I can ask for suggestions for things like that from teachers in my own district, but their ideas may not work for my content area. (New teacher respondent 90)

Sense of Community

New teachers identified sense of community as another consistent theme. New teachers spend their early career challenges in professional isolation (Johnson and The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers 2004; Kardos and Johnson, 2007). Faculty relationships can be formed and strengthened through mentoring programs. These programs set the stage for teachers to speak with one another and reflect on their practice (Mathur et al., 2013). A new teacher participating in

this study commented, "Being able to build a relationship with my mentor before the start of the school year helped give me a sense of belonging within the school district, which made it easier to connect with other staff and students" (New teacher respondent 82). New teacher respondent 108 described the community theme by writing, "Through these meetings, we were really able to hear about new ideas, get a pulse for how our colleagues are doing, share struggles and positives, and just learn more about one another." Another new teacher explained the sense of community theme this way:

> My participation in the Mentor Program gave me someone to help navigate the challenges faced when dealing with community members and families. I was able to have a better sense of the duties required of me not just for my students, but for the entire community. (New teacher respondent 62)

Traditional defining of a mentoring program has commonly encompassed benefits to the mentee (Bieler, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Pitton, 2006; Shields & Murray, 2017). Lozinak (2016) explains that the relationship between mentor and mentee should be carefully derived, but the sometimes unintended education of the mentor has not been traditionally discussed in Western educational literature (Weinstein, 2014). While assimilating new teachers into schools is critical, the mentoring experience can be extremely advantageous and rewarding for both the mentee and the mentor. Molitor (2014) found that mentors who received training directly related to understanding the role of the mentor reported several benefits including increased confidence, reflection, networking, and relationship-building. Mathur et al. (2013) also found that mentorship program helped mentors with their ability to reflect on their own teaching. This opportunity for reflection on professional practice leaves veteran teachers feeling refreshed (Lafluer & White, 2010). Mentors often find the experience not only to be rewarding to them as a person but as well as for their practice as a whole (Lafleur & White, 2010).

Mentor Themes

Reflection

A consistent benefit articulated by mentors was increased reflection. Participants indicated that mentoring has given them an opportunity to reflect on their current practice, their students, and teaching in general. A teacher's ability to analytically reflect is a critical attribute in the intricate world of teaching (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). Finding time to systematically reflect is difficult, and providing opportunities for experienced teachers to practice this skill is a realized benefit of the mentoring program for the mentors. The quotes below indicate an embrace of those opportunities.

> I love being able to have time set aside for classroom observations, collaboration,and reflection. Mentoring makes you take a second look at yourself, strategies and overall best practices that you have become out of touch with as you have been doing things "your way" for so long. (Mentor respondent 95)

> I learned that when teachers stop reflecting, they stop learning and therefore they stop being effective as teachers. This idea haunted me. While I do not believe that after only a few

years of teaching, I have stopped reflecting, this experience allowed me new tools to be able to reflect more widely, more deeply, and more personally. (Mentor respondent 90)

The mentoring program helped train me to better understand how to help teachers. Not only a mentee, but also other teachers in my district. An unintended result, I was able to reflect and examine where I needed help too. I've been able to network… and also learned plenty from my new teacher the past 2 years. (Mentor respondent 85)

Positive Interaction

A constructive relationship between mentors and new teachers prevails as a dominant outcome in this study as well as in other studies of mentor programs (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Wong, 2004; Sparks, Tsemenu, Green, Truby, Brockmeier, & Noble, 2017), and collegial interaction is extremely important for a positive environment (Hall & Hord, 2006). The comments below indicate positive interaction as a benefit for mentors.

I was able to include some new technology with my students, who benefited from keeping the material new and engaging. I ensured the interventions were research-based and were implemented with fidelity, even to a higher degree than I had been doing previously. I looked to keep material fresh and exciting and to find new material, instead of reusing some from many years, so that my new teacher could also see how to bring in outside supplemental materials to meet individual needs. I also feel my students got a refreshed and rejuvenated teacher out of me by my interactions with my new teacher. (Mentor respondent 89)

Collaboration

Mentors' partnerships with their new teachers provide extraordinary valuable reciprocal interactions (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000), and numerous mentors indicated that collaboration was a positive outcome of their experience in the program. Crafted conversations and collaborations provide an opportunity for mentors to share knowledge, gain new ideas which increases self-esteem (Ford & Parsons, 2000). Mentors describe their experiences with collaboration in the quotes below.

The mentor program utilizes our professionalism, our skills and our experiences to help ignite and keep new teachers motivated and encouraged to stay in the profession. My involvement in the mentor program has brought other teachers into my life to collaborate with and to discuss fresh ideas to bring back to our classrooms and communities. (Mentor respondent 88)

Anytime you step out of your regular routine it forces you to look at things in a different manner. I was inspired by my mentee to try some new approaches in my classroom. Together we explored what worked, what didn't, and used what we discovered to enhance our teaching. Our students benefited from our collaboration. (Mentor respondent 52)

Improved Instruction

Mentors who commented that the mentoring process improved instruction identified acts such as conducting new research, implementing engaging teaching strategies, producing more authentic assessments, and carefully constructing learning outcomes. Mentors appear to recognize their impact as a role model and as a result, improved their own instruction. Mentors stated:

> Going with my "new teacher" and observing other classrooms was a terrific way for us to see other ways of teaching. We observed a teacher that teaches art with a more Teaching Artistic Behavior (TAB) approach. After observing her and a more veteran teacher in a different district, we then met and were able to communicate what is working about the two different styles of teaching and what might not be the most beneficial part of how they taught or the way it was taught. Then we could take some aspects of what we were seeing and integrate them into our own classrooms. (Mentor respondent 68)

> I have found that working with my mentee has made me reevaluate some of my methods and has helped me to add more variety to my teaching. It has been great for me to have a younger teacher to work with that is closer to the age of the kids I am working with. The added perspective has helped me a lot. My students now receive better instruction from both myself and my mentee as we work together to continually improve our craft. I think this was guided and refined by the mentor program. I believe I would have done a lot of the same things to help him as a new teacher to be more successful, but the Mentor Program has provided guidelines and topics of discussion that have steered this process in a more effective direction. (Mentor respondent 1)

Improvement

Overall improvement emerged as an overarching theme among mentors, referencing benefits such as obtaining new ideas and strategies from their mentees as well as enjoying the increased collaboration involved in mentoring. Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, and Tomlinson (2008, p. 208) identified the following benefits for mentors: positive impact on professional and personal development and learning through self-reflection or critical reflection on their own practice. Haack (2006) found that mentoring can be a win-win exchange for both parties in that "youthful creative energy and idealism for wisdom and experience" (p. 4). The quotes below give an example of the restoration experienced by two of the mentor participants.

> Because of my revitalization as a reflective practitioner, my students were positively impacted. As my new teacher and I were constantly evaluating lessons, parent interaction, classroom environment and more, I took these new ideas and revelations into my classroom. I believe that my students next year are actually the ones that will have benefited the most, because so much of what we talked about this year sparked new and exciting ideas for the upcoming school year. (Mentor respondent 90)

> My participation in this year's mentor program allowed me to gain new insight and appreciation for teaching again. I think, after a few years of teaching, we forget all of the nuts and bolts that went into getting us to where we are now. The first year brings up a lot of

"how to" situations and reflection points for your new teacher. During this program I was forced to rethink many situations and theories that I had about why I do what I do in the classroom. As a result of my new teacher talking through and asking questions about her year, I was able to take into consideration a viewpoint that was different than my own. This viewpoint opened my eyes to different ways that I could be doing things in my classroom. I also found that my new teacher had several ideas in which she shared that I absolutely loved. (Mentor respondent 4)

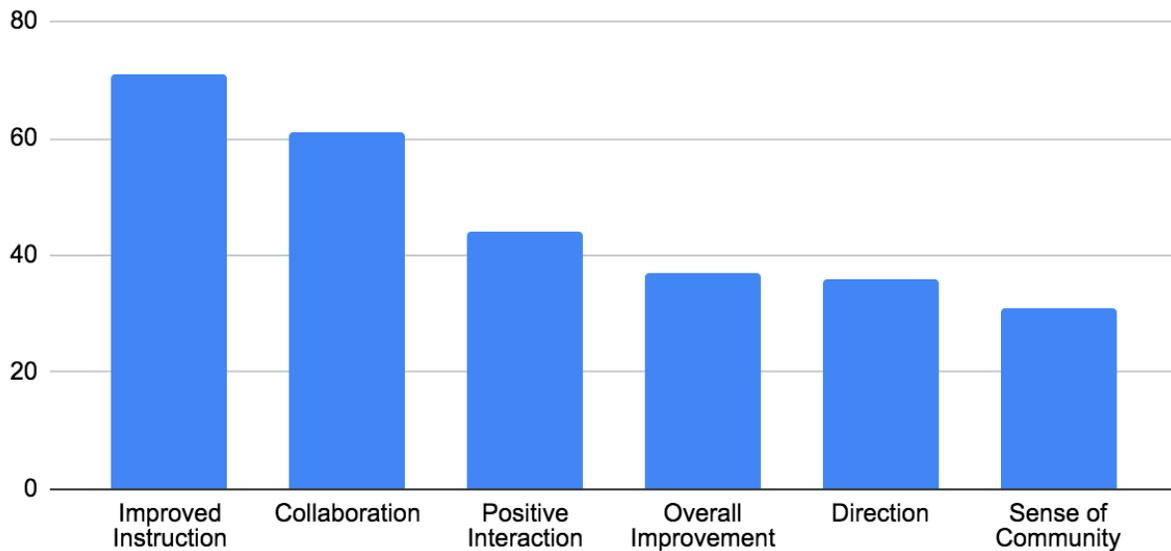**Figure 1. New Teacher Self-Reported Benefits of Mentoring**

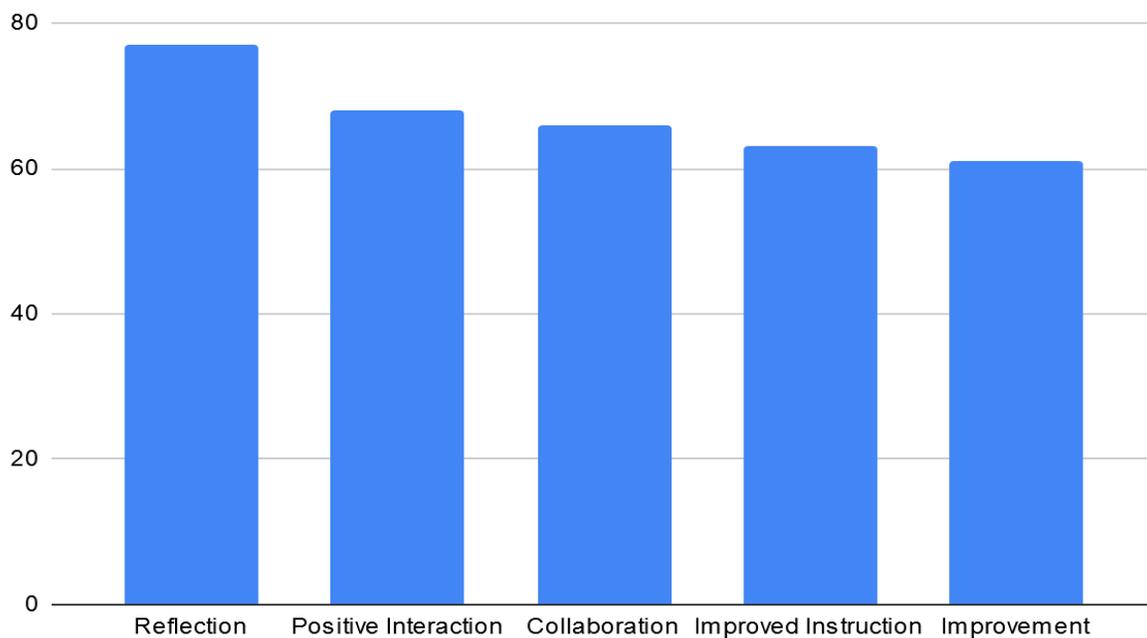**Figure 2. Mentor Teacher Self-Reported Benefits of Mentoring**

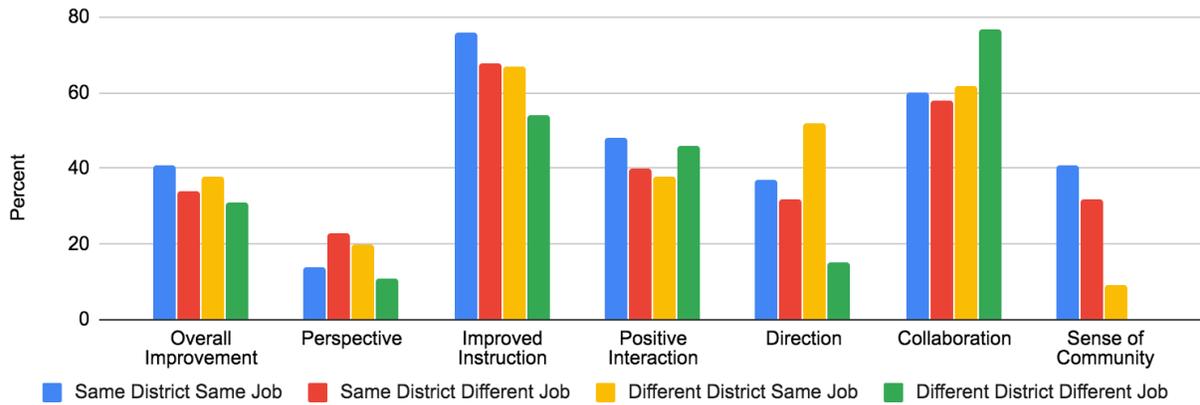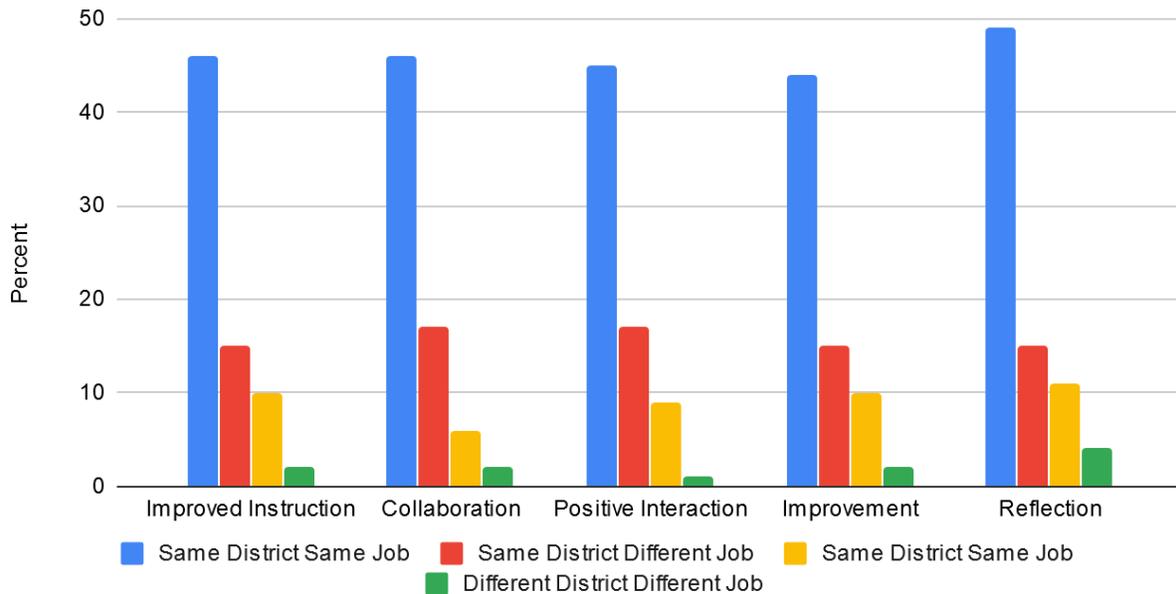**Figure 3: New Teacher Comparisons by Pairings**

Figure 4: Mentor Comparison by Pairings

Impact of Pairings for New Teachers

New teachers paired with mentors in the same district and who had the same or similar job identified the following themes more frequently than the other new teacher participants: overall improvement, improved instruction, positive interaction, and sense of community. New teachers paired with mentors in the same district, but with different jobs identified the theme of perspective more frequently than the other new teacher participants. New teachers paired with mentors in a different district, but the same or similar job identified the theme of direction more frequently than the other new teacher participants. New teachers paired with mentors in a different district, but with different jobs identified the theme of collaboration more frequently than the other new teacher participants.

Impact of Pairings for Mentors

Mentors paired with new teachers in the same district and who had the same or similar job identified the following themes more frequently than the other mentor participants: improved instruction, collaboration, positive interaction, improvement, and reflection.

Retention of New Teachers

"Beginning teachers have the highest turnover rate of any group of teachers" (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014, p. 24). Perda (2013) found that more than 41 percent of new teachers leave teaching within five years. Hellsten et al. (2009) noted that support and success in the first few years in the professional lifespan of a teacher are critical to long-term success. Providing new teachers with mentors is one strategy in supporting new teachers and combating high rates of attrition. Mentoring has shown a positive impact on new teachers, and current research shows more evidence of mentoring programs for new teachers (Porumb, 2015). "Beginning teachers with a same-subject mentor are less likely to leave their school and to leave teaching after one year" (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 33). Of the 147 new teacher participants of this study, there was a 93% retention rate in teaching within the state.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the pairings new teachers and mentors in a statewide mentoring program. This research study attempted to answer these three research questions:

1. What were the self-reported perceptions of mentors and new teachers participating in a statewide mentor program?
2. What is the relationship between mentor and new teacher pairings and their self-reported perceptions?
3. How many new teacher participants in this study remained in the teaching profession at the beginning of the following school year?

Research Question 1: Mentor pairings appeared to have a positive effect on the perceptions of mentors when the mentor and new teacher were more similar than different. The satisfaction was greater when the pairings resulted in individuals working in the same district and in a similar job. More dissatisfaction was reported when the two were in different districts and different jobs. This study examined the perceptions of participants in relation to whether the new teacher and mentor were job similar or not, and if the new teacher and mentor worked in the same district or not.

Research question 2: Mentor pairings appeared to have a positive effect on the perceptions of new teachers when the mentor and new teacher were more similar than different. The satisfaction was greater when the pairings resulted in individuals working in the same district and in a similar job. More dissatisfaction was reported when the two were in different districts and different jobs.

Research Question 3: Participating in a statewide mentoring program had a positive effect on the retention of new teachers. Almost all (93%) of the new teachers participants of this study remained in the same job in the second year.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was that some participants interpreted the questions differently and as a result provided additional information not related to the specific question. Researchers had to sort through these lengthy responses to find the relevant information. Another limitation was that it is not possible to determine whether the mentoring program had a causal effect on the findings as the results of this study involved self-reported perceptions. There could have been other unknown factors influencing the results such as the experiences and characteristics of the mentors and new teachers. A final limitation was that a comparison group was not used, such as those who did not receive mentoring. However, it is important to note that the main focus of this study was the pairing of mentors and new teachers and the perceived outcomes of such pairings.

Implications for Future Research

Many studies have addressed the relationship between mentoring and student achievement. Most research has concluded that the connection between mentoring and achievement is difficult to quantify. In this study, attitudes were examined due to the evidence supporting the link between job satisfaction and attrition rates for new teachers. Our findings were consistent with previous research on the benefits and challenges of mentoring programs. It is important to note this study focused on mentoring relationships and growth rather than district induction activities like new employee orientation. Another significant aspect of this particular study was that it analyzed the pairing of new teachers and mentors. The pairings had a positive effect on both mentor and new teacher experiences. Effects such as enhanced collaboration, improved instruction, poignant reflection, and an overall sense of positive interaction were noted by participants in the study.

Further research examining the impact of mentor pairings in regard to the following demographic areas: grade span, specific subject content, district building organization would be suggested. In addition, further investigation into the impact of same building and/or district pairings, possible constraints pertaining to remote geographical location, and content area would enhance research of this important retention topic.

Districts looking to implement mentoring programs should consider the effect of pairings and must be cognizant of providing appropriate training for participants and careful articulation of expectations and goals. With any type of structured mentoring program it is essential that adequate resources are allocated to support sufficient time for mentors and new teachers to collaborate and reflect on instruction for the purposes of fostering teacher retention.

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Dr. Andria Moon teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in elementary education, early childhood education, and educational leadership for the Millicent Atkins School of Education at Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota. She also serves as the Teacher Education Department Chair and Associate Dean. Her research topics include early childhood education, literacy, educational technology, mentoring, and school culture.

Dr. Alan L. Neville currently serves as Superintendent of the Waubay School District in Waubay, SD. He is a member of the South Dakota Department of Education's Mentor Development Team. He is a veteran of the United States Army.

Dr. Janeen Outka is a School Improvement Specialist, advising districts in comprehensive improvement and strategic planning. She is a member of both the statewide Teacher Mentoring Development Team and SD Commission on Teaching & Learning and is an adjunct instructor at Northern State University and the University of South Dakota.

Dr. Anna Schwan is an Assistant Professor of Education at Northern State University in Aberdeen, SD. In addition to teaching, she coordinates the MSED in Educational Studies and the MSED in Teaching and Learning programs. Her research focuses on principal effectiveness, teacher retention, culturally responsive teaching, and student motivation and amotivation.

Dr. Cheryl Wold is an Associate Professor at Northern State University, Aberdeen, SD. Dr. Wold primarily teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in special education. Her main research interests are special education, educator preparation programs, and PK-12 education.