

Learning to Mentor: Evidence and Observation as Tools in Learning to Teach

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how an experienced teacher learned to mentor as she attended ongoing professional development and worked with first- and second-year teachers across one school year as part of a university/district pilot induction partnership program. The mentoring component emphasized mentoring that was both responsive to beginning teacher needs while also challenging them to develop a framework for their thinking and asking them to consider new perspectives about what it means to teach effectively. Throughout the year, the mentor learned the value of gathering evidence from the beginning teacher's practice to guide her continued learning, and about observation as a tool for mentor and beginning teacher learning. The findings focus on both the conceptual and practical aspects of mentoring within an induction program, including differentiation, developing a repertoire of mentoring practices, and learning in and from the practice of mentoring.

Researchers have called for studies of induction programs that focus on both practical and conceptual issues related to how induction is done and what induction could be (Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003; Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Mentoring is a common element in many induction programs to help novices navigate the transition between university and school and to support the ongoing process of learning to teach. The conceptualizations of what mentors should know and be able to do, however, is not commonly agreed on by those in the field. Consequently, preparing mentors can differ based on the induction purposes and the context in which the mentors develop their practices.

Much of what beginning teachers learn during their first year depends on the opportunities in their school context to continue to learn (Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Worthy, 2005). It is critical to develop induction support targeted toward helping beginning teachers accelerate their development in order to have an impact on student learning early in their careers.

Furthermore, the quality of interactions between beginning teachers and their colleagues can play a critical role in the success of novice teachers (Johnson & Kardos, 2004). Without any preparation, though, an assigned mentor often becomes a "buddy," someone who is available for advice and explaining school procedures, but visits to the new teacher's classroom and conversations about teaching and learning are not expected (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). In such a case, mentoring might improve retention, but we would not expect it to improve effectiveness (Stanulis & Floden, 2009).

Our alternate approach to induction is to provide mentors with substantial and targeted preparation. This "educative" mentoring places emphasis on engaging beginning teachers in joint inquiry with a mentor to help novices understand the importance of learning from practice while providing tools useful for studying teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1998).

Induction programs designed by school districts and with school districts in collaboration with a university have been described in earlier research (Beerer, 2002; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; McGlamery, Fluckiger, & Edick, 2002; Stanulis, Burrill, & Ames, 2007). However, examples of ways in which university-based induction leaders and district mentors work together to develop a conceptualization of mentorship while engaged in the practice of mentoring are rare. The purpose of this study was to examine how an experienced teacher learned to mentor as she attended ongoing professional development and worked with first- and second-year teachers across one school year as

part of a university–district pilot induction partnership program. This action research served to inform the continuing development of the mentoring component of this induction program.

Induction Program Context

This study involved a collaborative partnership between a midwestern urban school district and Michigan State University, a Teachers for a New Era institution (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2001), to create a comprehensive induction program to support beginning teachers. As the induction director, one of us (Stanulis) led the design and implementation of the professional development, as well as the research in the induction program. One of us (Ames), an experienced teacher and doctoral student, studied Debbie and the beginning teachers in the field across 2 years. During this time, Ames became a coach to Debbie, providing her feedback and support in the development of her practice.

This study was situated within the mentoring component of the program. University induction leaders and the district’s human resource managers recruited and interviewed current classroom teachers for mentor positions. Each mentor was released from teaching one day each week to work with 3 beginning teachers in the novices’ classrooms. Mentor-novice matches were based on teaching responsibilities related to content and/or level—secondary science, English, and math; special education; and elementary education. Mentors participated in mentor study groups for 6 hours each month along with 6 full days of professional development during the school year. Preparation of mentors focused on how to help novices enhance student achievement through development of effective instructional practices, including developing worthwhile content, strong classroom management and ways to motivate, and scaffolding student learning (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Stanulis & Floden, 2008). Key readings included Stanulis (1994), Feiman-Nemser (2001a), Helman (2006), and Stein, Smith, Henningsen, and Silver (2000). The beginning teachers also attended a monthly beginning teacher study group led by their common mentor.

Table 1
Focus of Mentor Study Groups: Vision of Effective Teaching¹

Worthwhile Content

- Engaging students in challenging content, where students learn to support ideas, make connections, and elaborate understandings
- Engaging students in rigorous tasks that provide for analysis and interpretation of text materials
- Planning deliberate instructional *balance* (direct instruction and group/individual application time), instructional *density* (strong authentic tasks with high expectations; time to discuss and process), and *scaffolding*
- Planning a structure for setting up and maintaining cognitively challenging learning tasks/experiences
- Providing opportunities for students to talk, collaborate, and explore content by engaging students in active reasoning to support claims
- Knowing the content beyond the current lesson
- Understanding that the quality of the time students spend engaged in their work depends on the quality of the tasks they are expected to accomplish

(table continues)

¹ Table 1 is influenced by the work of Ames & Manning, 2002; Ball, 2000; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Stein, M. K., Smith, M. S., Henningsen, M. A., & Silver, E., 2000; and Tomlinson, 2003.

Table 1 (continued)

Excellent Classroom Management that Engages Students

- Creating thoughtfully planned routines during the day, including morning meetings, transitions, routines for group and independent work
- Creating environments that stimulate curiosity; students are absorbed in the work
- Planning for time that is well managed and pacing that is effective for the students' learning. Closure is included in lessons, and much time for interaction, questioning, and discussion is planned.
- Paying deliberate attention to the verbal and nonverbal classroom environment and to developing relationships with and among students
- Managing many different kinds of tasks and activities during the day (small group, whole group, one-to-one work with students, discussions, and seat and project work)

Strong Motivation and Scaffolding of Student Learning

- Developing an environment of high expectations where students move from dependence to independence in task completion
- Motivating students to spend the time needed to learn complex ideas and solve problems they find interesting
- Anticipating frustrations, segmenting tasks, providing hints and other mechanisms for students to move from guidance to independence
- Beginning lessons with a "launch" that invites students into a topic and arouses curiosity

Conceptualizing Mentoring

Our goal in developing the mentoring component of the induction program was to develop mentoring that was both responsive to beginning teacher needs while also challenging them to develop a framework for their thinking and asking them to consider new perspectives about what it means to teach effectively (Stanulis et al., 2007). Our goal was to support experienced teachers in constructing mentoring practices that were educative. Educative mentoring involves a shared vision of good teaching that guides the work of the mentor, an image of how beginning teachers learn to teach, a repertoire of mentoring strategies and skills, and adopting a stance of a learner (Feiman-Nemser, 1998).

Learning to Mentor in and From the Practical Work of Mentoring

Learning to mentor is not necessarily a natural extension for veteran educators who are accustomed to teaching children, not adults (Orland, 2001). Guiding the learning of colleagues involves strategies related to adult learning and interpersonal skills, situated within a variety of political, cultural, and historical contexts. Plus, to engage in mentoring aimed at improvement of teaching practice, mentors need to learn ways to work inside beginning teachers' classrooms to observe and provide subject-specific feedback, analyze student work, coplan engaging tasks, assist a novice in identifying areas for growth, probe to clarify ideas, model problem solving, help novices connect practice to student achievement, and explore questions rather than provide answers (Stanulis, 2006). These sorts of activities provide ways to use teaching practice as a site for inquiry in support of teacher learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999) where teachers can learn in and from their teaching practice in collaboration with others.

Methods*Purpose of Study*

This study examined, together with a mentor, a research associate, and the induction program leader, ways in which a mentor learns in and from the practical work of mentoring as she works with

first- and second-year teachers across an entire school year as part of a university–district pilot induction partnership program. The questions we examined included:

1. How does an experienced teacher develop her conceptualization of mentoring within the frameworks advocated by this induction program?
2. How does the mentor enact those ideas in her mentoring to create opportunities for the beginning teachers to learn about their teaching practice?

Participants

The mentor, Debbie (pseudonym), has taught elementary grades (2nd, 3rd and gifted) for 13 years in the district. Debbie had experience leading professional development for her colleagues and supervising preservice teachers in her classroom, but she had not received much training for these roles.

Nicole and Carl (pseudonyms) were two of Debbie’s assigned mentees. Nicole was beginning her second year of teaching. Due to fluctuating student numbers, she was displaced to a first-grade position in a Reading First school. Reading First is a grant program where the U. S. government distributes money to states, on a competitive basis, for reading assessments, materials, and professional development to help schools effectively teach reading to at-risk students. Carl was entering his first year of teaching. He was a second-grade teacher in a K–3 school that served a special population of students who had been recommended for retention.

Action Research

This study was a collaborative project between the university induction leader, research associate, and the elementary education mentor in the university–school induction program. We engaged in action research as inquiry where all participants communicate and collaborate to examine issues in context (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Such an approach involves an ongoing, dynamic, and complex process of “observation, reflection, and action” (Stringer, 1996, p. 17) in which researchers and participants discuss issues that arise from the data and propose possible actions. In our study, this meant engaging in ongoing, collaborative conversations involving the researchers and the mentor. These conversations served as a time for the mentor to debrief, problem solve, and plan for her mentoring while giving the researchers an inside look at the learning involved.

Data Collection

Throughout the year, we collected data in different ways to gain multiple perspectives on how the mentor conceptualized and enacted her mentoring with the beginning teachers. First, we conducted observations in several settings. The researchers attended biweekly mentor study groups (6 hours each month); observed one mentoring cycle (preobservation conference, observation of lesson, postobservation conference) with each of the beginning teachers; and observed the beginning teachers’ classroom instruction three times during the year. For each observation, we took field notes, recorded dialogue, and obtained artifacts (e.g., handouts, lesson plans, mentor–beginning teacher observation logs). These observations provided common experiences involving the mentor’s learning and her work with the beginning teachers for the researchers and mentor to use in their work together.

We also gathered data through interviews with the mentor, which were audiotaped and transcribed. As the year progressed, these interviews turned into sharing and planning sessions that helped to shape the mentor’s practical work. Finally, the mentor recorded her reflections in a journal she shared with the researchers at our meetings. These reflections provided us access to the mentor’s thinking as she worked through her first year as a mentor.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an iterative process in that our study was influenced by the data collected and the findings that emerged from the mentor's work with the beginning teachers, which often led us to a shift in focus or direction (Merriam, 1998). On many occasions, the mentor had a chance to dialogue with us, examine her conversations with the beginning teachers, and uncover recurring themes about her learning through the construction of data analyses. Therefore, these opportunities to reflect influenced the development and enactment of the practical work of mentoring.

To examine how the mentor learned throughout the year, we reviewed the mentoring observation and interview data during the study and after, summarizing our developing interpretations with analytic memos. We then reread the multiple sources of data, first making notes and forming initial codes (Creswell, 1998). We labeled tentative themes and then reread the data to look for discrepancies between the data and our findings. We then returned to the data again to construct individual cases that illustrated the way the mentor's conceptualization of mentoring, her work with individual beginning teachers, and her participation in ongoing mentor professional development influenced her learning.

Findings

This project has provided an insider's look into the complexities of learning to mentor that focuses on both the conceptual and practical aspects of mentoring within an induction program. In the sections that follow, we provide cases that illustrate the mentor's learning as she worked throughout the year with two beginning teachers.

The Value of Evidence

In October, Debbie began her work with Nicole, using part of her release day for meetings during lunch or planning time. Debbie had learned through the university-led study groups about the importance of building professional relationships with novices that would support her in mentoring that involved observation and feedback, coplanning, and analysis of student work. During this time, Debbie was thinking about how to focus her work with Nicole in a way that could move her practice forward. In this initial period of her mentoring, she was looking for cues from the beginning teacher and the mentor study groups to guide what she decided to work on with Nicole.

During the first weeks of school, Debbie noticed that Nicole's self-esteem was floundering due, in part, to pressures exerted upon her to follow a scripted program in the Reading First context. Nicole had administrators, literacy coaches, and colleagues sending different messages about what requirements to follow while also expecting this novice to produce immediate increases in student test scores. The way the Reading First curriculum was being implemented in a prescriptive manner was sidetracking the development of this teacher's reading instruction and stifling her developing identity as a teacher. Debbie knew that she needed to step in to help Nicole develop her own voice as a teacher.

Nicole expressed frustration as she learned about the guidelines structuring her literacy instruction:

I just found out today that... (I) have to do a 2-hour literacy block, and I was doing my writing during that time, and they told me today that writing does not count; it has to be reading only. So now I have to go and figure out how I'm going to fit that in, and, so, it's been challenging.

Nicole had different staff in her school—administrators, literacy coaches, and colleagues—telling her what requirements to follow and demanding increases in student test scores.

As Debbie wrote in her mentoring journal:

Part of my stance in mentoring Nicole is to counteract the messages she gets from the Reading First coach, whom she finds abrasive and caustic. Nicole has a fragile self-confidence, and her reflective talk is permeated with self-doubt, so I feel I need to bolster her self-view.

The professional development in mentoring provided by the university emphasized data collection and learning to distinguish between evidence and opinion. Debbie began to integrate this approach to mentoring by gathering evidence of strengths in Nicole's literacy practice in an effort to show Nicole how her teaching impacted student engagement and learning.

To help enact this plan, Debbie drew on the language suggestions provided by the mentoring professional development she regularly attended. Sentence and question stems for paraphrasing, clarifying, suggesting, mediating, and offering nonjudgmental responses provided Debbie with a framework to guide her language choices in the moment during feedback conversations with Nicole. These conversation starters included ways to help mentors restate, clarify, analyze, or make suggestions to beginning teachers in their conversations. For example, Debbie could restate by saying, "What I hear you saying is ..." or "As I listen, you seem to be saying...." Debbie could get more information from a novice by clarifying through questions such as, "Can you give me an example to help me understand?" or "What similar concepts have already been explored with this class?" Debbie could help the novice analyze possibilities by asking, "In what ways is this task well suited to your students? How do you know?" or "What are the important ideas/processes involved in this problem?" Debbie could make a suggestion to the novice by saying, "We could coplan together so I can help you with..." or "You might want to consider...."

At the same time, Debbie provided Nicole with language options for engaging in conversations with those trying to influence her instruction. For example, at a December preobservation conference, Nicole shared with Debbie that a colleague had given her a management book. This was an unsolicited resource that made Nicole doubt her teaching abilities:

Nicole: I don't know if they are thinking my management is bad.

Debbie: Ask her what she means.

Nicole: I feel like I'm not doing anything right.

Debbie: You are doing things well, and we need to build on your successes.

In this conversation, Debbie challenged Nicole to speak up for herself and attempted to strengthen Nicole's self-esteem by mentioning her teaching successes. Debbie wanted Nicole to construct an identity as teacher, one that allowed her to see herself as a professional with valuable knowledge and experience.

Evidence of the impact of Debbie's work with Nicole surfaced in February when Nicole shared what happened when someone from the state Reading First office came in to show Nicole how to implement small-group instruction:

Nicole: We were talking about writing, and she said, "She can pull these groups [for small-group instruction] and all these people can pull groups." And I said, "Well, that's not realistic. When I'm in there all by myself I want to see what it looks like for me as myself." And she said, "Well, so what do you want to see?" I said, "Well, I want to see it, but I want to see it in a realistic setting."

Within this episode, Nicole demonstrated that she had begun to assume the stance Debbie had suggested throughout the year: When someone is doing something that you do not think is right, speak up and ask questions. After this meeting, Debbie wrote in her journal: "Perhaps she [Nicole] has turned a corner in confidence." For not only was Nicole asserting herself in conversations with Reading First administrators, Debbie also found that Nicole's postobservation reflections contained more positive self-talk.

As emphasized in the mentor professional development, part of Debbie's work as mentor involved helping Nicole articulate her own vision of good teaching that included the Reading First curriculum blended with Nicole's own beliefs about and prior knowledge and experiences with effective literacy instruction. Explicit in mentor preparation was the notion that teachers needed a vision of good

teaching that they are mentoring toward, and that the vision needed to be articulated and owned by the beginning teacher. In February, Debbie remarked how their conversations focused on Nicole's emerging strategies of literacy:

Things went well with Nicole's observation and postconference. She...was very excited about forming and implementing her groups. She was concerned about a child who lagged way behind in the small group.... We talked about what kids could do who were done and had reread the text more than once.

By the end of the year, Nicole made a critical shift in defining the development of her literacy instruction. She told Debbie that the following school year she would like to work on how to meet Reading First guidelines but also make the curriculum more her own. In this way, Debbie helped Nicole learn how to "finesse" or make sense of the connections and differences between one's own beliefs and the demands of the teaching context (Pardo, 2006).

More importantly, Debbie had gone beyond acting as a buddy, who might only give Nicole a pat on the back when times were tough. The in-the-classroom time, year-long relationship, and evidence collected allowed Debbie to support Nicole in defining her own vision of teaching. When colleagues threatened her professional identity, Debbie kept Nicole focused on how she was succeeding with her students. Without this targeted support based on collecting specific evidence situated in Nicole's own practice, Nicole may have continued to feel that her voice was not valued, to further doubt her teaching abilities, and to follow through with thoughts of leaving the profession as many new teachers do (Ingersoll, 2004). But through this process, Debbie learned that she, too, needed some mentoring as she took on the new role of mentor.

Observation as a Tool for Mentor and Beginning Teacher Learning

Debbie also spent time each week in Carl's classroom, talking with him and observing him during his first year of teaching. Carl's responses were different from Nicole's: He only asked questions when prompted and replied, "Yep, I already do that" to any ideas Debbie suggested. This concerned Debbie. In her journal, she wrote: "The lessons I observe with Carl are all about prescribing the learning, following an algorithm or fitting responses into a pattern." Debbie's vision of good teaching included students constructing meaning in addition to learning rules. She wanted to help Carl reconsider his assumptions about teaching and learning, but she wasn't ready to be direct. As she said during a December mentor study group, "I'm learning this way of talking. We tend to be superficial." So, at that time, Debbie felt she did not have the words she needed for her work with Carl.

Engaging in collegial conversations that involve goal setting, idea generation, open sharing, and active listening is not a norm in the teaching profession, in part due to the isolating nature of individual classrooms in most schools (Lortie, 1975). As Debbie wrote in her journal after a discussion of these issues in the mentor study group, "There is very little in our culture that models it. The language, the parameters, the interactions, they are all new and different." Coming out of the university, the novices are accustomed to the didactic dynamics of being instructed.

Debbie recognized that it was not easy to discuss personal, long-held beliefs. Her relationship with Carl was still quite new and she was hesitant to confront him about his instruction. As Debbie told us in an interview:

I haven't been that pointed with him. I feel like he might back off easy if I pushed him too hard, and that he would back off and say, "I'm good, back off, don't talk to me, leave me alone." So, I am very cautious with the words I say to him.

Therefore, in February, 6 months into their work together, Debbie purposefully made choices about how to continue to build trust with Carl, while at the same time finding ways to help him think about his instruction and his students' learning in new ways.

In the next few weeks, things began to change for Debbie. At the ongoing mentor study group meetings, the induction leaders and mentors read and discussed an article about an exemplary mentor (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b). In her own reading of the article and the ensuing discussion, Debbie connected to the description of the mentor being cautious at first about starting difficult conversations about practice. She realized that she had been timid about Carl's reaction to being pushed, and her mentoring could evolve into something stronger and more confident, just like the mentor in the article. She understood this as being given permission to be where she was in her mentoring and to grow, change, and try to be more accountable in promoting talk around improving practice.

In addition, Debbie was deeply frustrated by Carl's satisfaction with the status quo. She realized that the indirect and subtle mentoring she had been providing was not helping him to improve his teaching practice. She began to draw a parallel between her own beliefs about teaching and her mentoring. Since Carl did not appear to be learning anything from her mentoring, she knew she needed to rethink her approach in order to reach him, just as she did with students who are not learning. Debbie felt Carl had been deflecting her questions and suggestions, and she wanted to gain more skill in leading conversations with Carl that included direct feedback about ways in which his observed practice was not matching effective teaching practices.

To pursue this goal, Debbie drew another parallel, this time between herself and her beginning teachers. The observation and feedback she provided for the beginning teachers validated what they did in the classroom while challenging them to do more. Debbie said, "I need someone to watch what I do, to collect evidence, and see I'm doing okay." She wanted someone to coach her in developing mentoring skills. With this request, the induction leaders assigned themselves to the mentors as coaches who would observe and provide feedback on their mentoring.

This support made a difference for Debbie; she had someone to talk with about her developing ideas about her work as a mentor. Her coach provided support through evidence of mentoring strengths and discussions about possible strategies to use. This was particularly helpful for Debbie's work with Carl. She was able to gain confidence in her assessment abilities when her coach agreed with her perceptions of Carl's instructional difficulties. This helped her to move ahead with her plans of challenging him to think more about ways to change his instruction to focus on student understanding.

Debbie decided to point out to Carl what she saw in her observations. She told him, "You are teaching them the process, not the thinking. What part of your lesson involves teaching for conceptual understanding so they understand why they are doing those things?" At this point, Debbie felt that Carl did not have "a good answer for me," but she still perceived a breakthrough with him because she had confronted him and he had not backed away.

As the year progressed, it seemed that no matter how Debbie attempted to have more substantial conversations with Carl about the complexities of teaching, their talk stayed within cliché remarks about district concerns or anecdotal stories about the students. In many ways, Debbie felt defeated. So, she took a different tactic during their final classroom conversation in May. She told him, "I am not here as your mentor today. I just want to talk. Debbie to Carl. Friend to friend." First, she explained how she appreciated his strengths as a teacher: effective classroom management and the great relationships he developed with his students. Then Debbie told Carl that he needed to do more for his students. She said, "There is so much to know and do that you can't possibly know it all, but you don't let me help you." She had wanted to see him teach reading, but he said he didn't teach reading, that the students just practiced reading. She asked him how he knew what the students were practicing, what comprehension strategies they used if he did not meet with them individually or in guided reading groups.

At this point, Carl's students arrived at the classroom door, back from lunch, and as Debbie said goodbye, she left him with an action plan to complete as an end-of-the-year reflection and a beginning

to their second year of work together. When they met a week later for dinner, Debbie was astounded to find that Carl's action plan matched the one she had created for him. He was willing to admit he needed to learn more about how to teach reading. She could hardly believe it. Being extremely direct had been the strategy that finally worked in getting her message to him.

Table 2
Conceptualization of Debbie's Mentoring

Tools and Ideas Learned During MSU Mentor Preparation	Tools and Ideas Applied to Practice of Mentoring
Learning to observe by looking for evidence	Observing for evidence and data collection
Learning to hold critical conversation using conversation sentence starters	Holding conversations with beginning teachers, asking probing questions, using data gathered during observations
Learning about mentoring as a practice to be studied and learned	Applying mentoring "stances" such as coplanner, cothinker, finding an opening, and pinpointing problems
Learning to confront difficult situations in order to move a beginning teacher's practice forward	Holding conversations with a beginning teacher who avoided conversations about literacy practice
Learning to help beginning teachers find their own unique voice and principled reasons for teaching decisions	Holding conversations about what is worthwhile and working in a young teacher's practice
	Designing Debbie's own vision of "differentiated" mentoring based on the beginning teacher's specific context of teaching and vision of teaching
Learning about research-based image of a vision of effective teaching	Talking with novices about their vision of good teaching and how to move toward realizing this vision in their practice
Learning about her own practice as mentor	Having a MSU coach observe Debbie as she mentored, collecting evidence and providing feedback about her practice

Discussion and Implications

Together, as we studied the data, we realized ways in which Debbie was blending her ideas about teaching and learning with the ideas presented in her mentor professional development. Debbie took very seriously the questions and concerns that each beginning teacher had as the starting point for figuring out ways to approach her work. A hallmark of Debbie's work was differentiation, which meant she needed to bring a flexible repertoire of mentoring strategies to her work with each novice. With Nicole, Debbie wanted her to see her teaching strengths in order to build instructional practices consonant with both the Reading First mandates and her prior knowledge and experiences. With Carl, Debbie wanted him to recognize that learning to teach is an ongoing process while also nudging him toward a broader view of good teaching. Debbie also took her own learning as a mentor seriously. She wanted help in developing that repertoire of mentoring strategies and enacting those strategies in her work with the novices.

In both the mentoring of the beginning teachers and the mentor, observation and evidence were important elements in supporting the development of teaching practice and the work of mentoring. For

Debbie, this meant that she was able to bring together her prior beliefs, knowledge, and experiences; the ideas she learned through her mentor professional development; and the interactions she had with the beginning teachers to enact her work as mentor. In addition, the mentoring Debbie received allowed her to take on different roles as she and the coach pursued different ways to proceed with each beginning teacher. Talking about the beginning teachers' needs and how to help them gave Debbie a chance to do more than "rehearse" in her head. She had someone to dialogue with, someone who could voice support and alternative courses of action. These collaborative conversations also extended into the mentor study groups where professional readings and individual cases were discussed and mentoring strategies developed.

Since mentoring conversations (one-on-one or in a study group) can help facilitate mentor learning opportunities, we agree that mentors need their own time to "learn about, discuss, try out, and reflect upon how these conversations are put into practice" (Helman, 2006, p. 80). Mentoring as a learned, professional practice involves the study of ways in which teachers learn, tools for helping engage one another in continued learning to teach, and reflective analysis of what is being learned. This experience has implications for helping induction providers take seriously the learning needs of teachers who mentor as well as beginning teachers as learners.

As we begin analysis of data from this work, we see areas where we need to continue strengthening both as professional development providers and as researchers. This study focused on one mentor teacher's development across the school year. Through this study, we realize there is much we have to learn about the specific contexts in which beginning teachers are placed as they continue their learning about teaching. Future research needs to document beginning teacher learning within their context, as well as student learning, in order to inform educators about the effects of this intervention on teacher and student learning. Within our professional development, we need to make use of what we have learned from studying mentors such as Debbie, and we need to use this rich data to construct cases of mentor teacher learning. In this way, we can inform the development of more mentors. Such mentoring cases, like Debbie's experiences with Ca il, could become part of caæ-based instruction that allows mentors to examine difficult situations and experiment with possible strategies to try in their work with beginning teachers.

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