

Teacher Induction: Exploring Beginning Teacher Mentorship

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Induction programs, including mentorship, serve to bridge the transition from pre-service to in-service teaching. This study explored the mentorship experiences of Saskatchewan beginning teachers. Analysis of interviews identified three themes: assigned/unassigned mentors, engaged/disengaged mentors, and single/multiple mentors. One moderating theme also emerged: the compatibility of the mentor and beginning teacher. The combination of themes provides preliminary support for an alternative model of mentoring based on learning communities and founded on the concepts of strong and weak ties and the constructivist model of knowledge.

Key Words: theoretical model, mentor relationship, multiple mentors, learning communities

Les programmes d'insertion professionnelle, dont les programmes de mentorat, servent à faciliter la transition entre la formation initiale à l'enseignement et la pratique d'enseignement. Cette recherche porte sur les expériences de nouveaux enseignants en Saskatchewan. L'analyse des entrevues effectuées a permis d'identifier trois thèmes : mentors attitrés/non attitrés, mentors actifs/peu impliqués et mentor unique/mentors multiples. Un autre thème entre également en ligne de compte : la compatibilité entre le mentor et le nouvel enseignant. La combinaison de ces thèmes fournit un cadre préliminaire pour un nouveau modèle de mentorat axé sur des communautés d'apprentissage et fondé sur les concepts de liens étroits et faibles et le modèle constructiviste du savoir.

Mots clés : modèle théorique, relation au mentor, mentors multiples, communautés d'apprentissage

Despite being well prepared and committed to teaching, beginning teachers (BTs) are often disillusioned by their initiation into the teaching profession (Le Maistre, 2000; McPherson, 2000). The process of teacher induction attempts to bridge the transition from pre-service to in-service (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). The most common and essential component of teacher induction is mentorship (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Corbell, Reiman, & Nietfeld, 2008; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). Designed to induce communication and development of skills among BTs, mentorship provides appropriate support and resources. Previous research has found that mentor support positively influences BT satisfaction in the teaching profession and workplace (Carter & Francis, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2003). Depending upon jurisdiction, both formal and informal professional development and mentorship programs have been established, but few models of mentorship exist.

The province of Saskatchewan does not currently regulate a mandatory, formal teacher induction program. Mentorship policies, which are decentralized to each school division, are usually implemented at the school level at the discretion of the principal. To develop a theoretical model of mentorship and to explain the process of induction for Saskatchewan BTs, this study examined mentorship experiences from the perspective of 12 Saskatchewan BTs in their first classroom teaching position following graduation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have suggested various models of career development for teachers (e.g., Berliner, 1988; Fuller & Brown, 1975). Stage theories propose that teachers progress through a linear continuum of developmental stages (e.g., Berliner, 1994) with the first two years of teaching commonly referred to as the time of survival (Huberman, 1989). Researchers have suggested that the experiences of BTs in the first years of teaching have long-term implications for teaching effectiveness, job satisfaction, and career length (Bartell, 2004). More recently, teaching career cycle models have extended stage theories to better represent the dynamic and diverse nature of BT experiences (Fessler, 1985; Huberman, 1992; Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000). Career cycle theory recognizes that BT experiences are highly contextual, influenced by the broader society, the cul-

ture of the teaching profession, the nature of a teacher's work, school related factors, and the communities in which the schools are located (Lynn, 2005; Steffy et al., 2000). As these contexts change, so will individual teachers' professional priorities, activities, and relationships (Lynn, 2005). For example, a good workplace, as characterized by competent administration, opportunities for professional development, and strong professional learning communities (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; McNeil, Hood, Kurtz, Thousand, & Nevin, 2006) can reduce uncertainty and increase the opportunities for teachers to achieve success and satisfaction (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Many beginning teachers report an inability to cope, and describe feeling isolated (Stanulis, Burrill, & Ames, 2007), as well as frustrated, anxious, demoralized, and overwhelmed by the demands of the profession (O'Neill, 2004; Rogers & Babinski, 1999; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). Beginning teachers also report a lack of mentorship (Hebert & Worthy, 2001). Teachers may perceive their first years of teaching as negative because of the unrealistic expectations and beliefs teachers themselves have about teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Marso & Pigge, 1987), or alternately, because of the unrealistic expectations that school administrators place on BTs (Allen, 2000; Romano, 2008). Many BTs enter their first year of teaching with the same teaching load and responsibilities as teachers with many years of seniority (Angelle, 2006). Beginning teachers may also be given the most difficult classroom assignments (Danielson, 2002; Ganser, 1996). Furthermore, BTs are often expected to perform the same duties and responsibilities as experienced teachers with the same level of expertise, efficiency, and efficacy as experienced teachers (Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1989).

Induction Programs

Induction, a socialization process (Rippon & Martin, 2006), comprises how a teaching community acculturates its new teachers (Wong, 2004; Wong, Britton, & Ganser, 2005). According to the Ontario College of Teachers, (OCT), "planned and sustained support for new teachers, in an induction program, helps them during their transition from student to full-fledged professional and is vital to keeping them in the profession" (n.d.). Induction programs vary as to their purpose (Ingersoll & Smith,

2004) and as such, the type of support BTs receive in induction programs varies widely (Davis & Higdon, 2008). Specific definitions of induction usually refer to formal and highly structured staff development programs that take place during the beginning years of a teacher's career (Wong, 2004; Wong et al., 2005). For example, teacher induction can be defined as the support and direction provided to BTs in the first few years of teaching (Bartlett, Johnson, Lopez, Sugarman, & Wilson, 2005). However, induction may also involve fairly informal socialization processes that vary from school to school (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

A variety of organizations deliver induction programs. Many North American BT induction programs, which are government mandated, involve assigned mentors with the program delivered through a university-state governing body partnership. An example of such an approach is the province of Ontario (Cherubini, 2007), with its recently implemented New Teacher Induction Program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

Although induction programs appear to improve teacher quality, which has been shown to be one of the best predictors of student success (Davis & Higdon, 2008), lack of funding (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008) and an under-conceptualized, narrow view of how to support and develop BTs (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999) often cripple their implementation. Furthermore, research on the "character, quality, and effects of induction programs and policies remain limited" (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008, p. 5).

Mentorship

Studies of teacher induction define mentorship as the mentoring of novice teachers by experienced teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). More specifically, mentoring has been defined as:

[C]reating an enduring and meaningful relationship with another person, with the focus on the quality of that relationship including factors such as mutual respect, willingness to learn from each other, or the use of interpersonal skills. Mentoring is distinguishable from other retention activities because of the emphasis on learning in general and mutual learning in particular. (Salinitri, 2005, p. 858)

Other researchers have identified mentoring as a significant factor in increasing feelings of job satisfaction (Carter & Francis, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Evertson & Smithey, 2000) and reducing feelings of isolation experienced by BTs (Schlichte et al., 2005). As with induction programs, the characteristics and composition of mentorship programs vary widely (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Furthermore, the roles, knowledge, and skills associated with being a mentor range from informal colleague to trained, knowledgeable advisor (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d.).

Numerous studies have examined mentorship programs to describe their effective characteristics (e.g., Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, & Cowan-Hathcock, 2007; Serpell, 2000). Results suggest that compatibility between a mentor and BT becomes an important factor in effective mentoring (Russell & Adams, 1997) as does the desire on the part of a BT for a mentor to provide both instructional and emotional support (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). In her study of the support for BTs and their mentors and their challenges, Certo (2005) identified the need for additional research documenting both positive and negative mentorship experiences, a call that has been answered in the study reported here.

Despite more than 500 published education or management journal articles focusing on mentorship during the years 1987-1997 (Russell & Adams, 1997) and many more since that date, few established mentorship models exist. Many mentorship programs inadvertently draw on the apprenticeship model (Hargreaves, 1988) where an expert teacher passes on knowledge and skills to a protégé. However, the apprenticeship model has been criticized because it fails to recognize the existing expertise of the protégé, encourages deference to a mentor regardless of a mentor's expertise, encourages conformation to existing practices, and prohibits the development of new approaches to teaching and learning (Rippon & Martin, 2006). Anderson and Shannon (1988) proposed an alternative model of educational mentorship. Their early model, based on the premise that mentoring in education was "fundamentally a nurturing process" (p. 40), defined the functions of mentoring as teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and befriending. Maynard and Furlong (1995) conceptualized the role of teacher mentors as a three stage developmental process: (a) working as a collaborative teacher, (b)

acting as instructor through observation and feedback, and (c) positioning oneself as a co-enquirer, promoting critical reflection on teaching and learning. Feiman-Nemser (2001) proposed “educative mentoring” (p. 17) which consists of emotional support (i.e., a comfortable relationship and environment for the protégé) and professional support based on understanding of how teachers learn. Spindler and Biott (2000) support an adaptable view of mentorship where the relationship adjusts from “structured support” to “emerging collegueship” (p. 281).

Glazer and Hannafin (2006) introduced a model for teacher induction that focuses on relationships between teachers in their professional learning development. Their model examines how to initiate collaboration and collegial support within a professional teaching community. Elements of collaboration among teacher colleagues may involve sharing and even creating learning activities (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; McCotter, 2001). One important finding is that mentors, in addition to their regular workload, are expected to provide the emotional and developmental support BTs need, but may not be willing to do so (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006). Although previous research suggests numerous benefits for both mentor and protégé based on collaborative efforts, these models of mentorship falsely assume that mentors would always be willing to aid BT development.

Other models of mentorship have emerged to assist in the understanding of the direct supervision of BTs. Ralph (2002) developed the Contextual Supervision Model to assist supervisors and cooperating teachers to mentor “pre-service teachers to develop their instructional repertoire” (p. 191) and to improve specific skills. Contextual Supervision specifically addresses the need for supervisors to vary their role according to their protégés’ stage of development. Although useful within the context of pre-service supervision, this model has limited applicability when the direct internship experience ends.

The difficulty in establishing a mentorship model may be due to the lack of research focusing on the design and process of mentorship, in comparison to the many studies that examine the outcome of mentorship programs (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). It is imperative that mentorship programs not only focus on the negative or positive outcomes of the programs themselves but also on the components of mentorship, espec-

ially the characteristics and quality of the mentor (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008). The importance of establishing a mentorship model is a crucial step in providing a structured means to compare and investigate the effectiveness of current mentorship implementations.

This study evolved from a larger mixed method program of research examining the experiences of BTs in Saskatchewan (Hellsten et al., 2008). In this study we investigated mentorship experiences of BTs in their first classroom teaching position following graduation.

State of Mentorship in Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan education system is comprised of a diverse population with a range of learning environments. The provincially-funded education system consists of approximately 174,000 students with an 18 per cent Aboriginal student population (Saskatchewan Learning, 2007). Because the students are spread over 759 schools across the province (Saskatchewan Learning), the Ministry of Education has to be flexible in devising a learning delivery system that is equally effective in remote environments, rural communities, and urban areas. The state of BT mentorship in Saskatchewan is unregulated. Compared to required teacher mentorship programs such as the New Teacher Induction Program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) regulated by the Ontario Ministry of Education, the province of Saskatchewan lacks a province-wide teacher induction mentorship program. The results from a survey of BTs in Saskatchewan show that the majority of BTs identified having a mentor as an important asset in their first year of teaching (Hellsten et al., 2007).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants in this study included 12 purposively selected BTs who were 2005-2006 graduates of the University of Regina or the University of Saskatchewan teacher education programs. We contacted all 2005-2006 education graduates employed as a teacher in some capacity in Saskatchewan (e.g., classroom teacher, substitute teacher, etc.) and invited them to participate in the study. All education graduates received an initial questionnaire designed to aid researchers to select a maximum variation sample for the 12 case studies. We stratified case study partici-

pant selection by pre-service teacher education program (50% secondary and 50% elementary trained), gender (20% male), Aboriginal heritage (20%), and current school location (25% from each of rural, urban, northern, and band schools). Because Saskatchewan teacher education programs graduate approximately 20 per cent First Nations teachers and approximately 20 per cent male teachers, we selected the case study sample to represent these proportions.

Final case study selection included five teachers with a secondary education degree. Of these secondary teachers, four teachers were females and one was male, representing both rural and northern Saskatchewan locations. Four of the secondary teachers taught in a public division with one teacher employed by an "other" (e.g., conseil scolaire, separate) division. Another five participants received either an elementary or a middle education degree. The gender representation was exactly the same as for the secondary teachers. Two of the teachers were employed in a rural setting; three were employed in an urban school. Two of the elementary/middle school teachers were employed in the public system; three were employed in the separate system (i.e., publically-funded Catholic system). Two additional teachers received their teaching degree from an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program in Saskatchewan. Of these additional two teachers, the female teacher was employed in the provincial public system in a northern school; the male was employed in the provincial public system in an urban environment.

Data Collection

All BTs participated in a one-hour interview in the spring of their first year in the teaching profession. We conducted interviews via telephone with the use of an audio recording device. The interview process was scripted with the questions constructed prior to the interview. The questions used in the interview probed respondents in detail regarding 10 specific themes including BT reflections about (a) their employment situation, (b) their initial teaching experiences, and (c) their preparation and support during their transition to teaching. The specific questions related to this study are included in Table 1. We employed transcription software and double verification processes to ensure the accuracy of the

transcription, and all participants had an opportunity to alter their transcripts to ensure that they accurately reflected their experiences.

Table 1: Interview Questions

1	Can you tell me about the kinds of support you have received as a beginning teacher?
2	Have you had a mentor? What has that mentorship experience looked like?
3	What kinds of support have other people in the school given to you?
4	Have you received the support you felt you needed? Why (or why not)?
5	What additional supports, if any, might have been helpful?
6	Where or who would you go to now if you needed supports or advice about your teaching?

Thematic Analysis

Following the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006), we used thematic analysis to identify repeated patterns of meaning from the experiences of all twelve BTs of various backgrounds while also speaking to the differences in the set of interviews. Thematic analysis has been recently embraced as a qualitative method in its own right (Joffe & Yardley, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006) rather than just a process used with qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998). We used a deductive approach to thematic analysis in that we were cognizant of the existing literature (Boyatzis). Despite our overt biases, we also worked to ensure that the coding of the transcripts and the interpretations made from the codes were “data driven” and constructed from the “raw information” contained in the transcribed responses to the interview questions (Boyatzis, pp. 30-31). Furthermore, to limit personal biases and enhance the trans-

ferability of the study, we employed investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978) to interpret the same body of data (Decrop, 1999). Four researchers with separate but complementary backgrounds independently reviewed and coded the transcripts. We illuminated discrepancies and obtained consensus following discussion.

FINDINGS

Overall, most BTs were content with their first year teaching experiences in their first year, yet faced challenges surrounding workload and feelings of isolation. The overarching theme to emerge from the data was the diversity of the BT experience in Saskatchewan with respect to mentorship. Further investigation into the interview transcripts revealed different themes in how BTs perceived mentors. Three major categories emerged from the interviews: (a) whether the mentor was assigned to the respondent; (b) whether the mentor was engaged in the mentorship process; and (c) whether the BTs had single or multiple mentors. One dominant moderating factor also emerged: the compatibility of the mentor and BT. Despite the diversity in mentoring experiences including both perceived positive and negative experiences, all BTs reported that they had learned from their mentorship experience. For example, despite a perceived *negative* mentoring experience, one BT indicated that the mentor demonstrated questionable teaching practices and thus the BT learned “*what not to do.*”

Assigned Versus Unassigned Mentors

The first theme to emerge was the difference between having an assigned mentor versus an unassigned mentor. The effectiveness of an assigned mentor for BTs in this study appeared to be moderated in part by whether the BT believed the mentor had a compatible personality. The following excerpt provides an example of how an assigned mentor and beginning teacher were able to form a productive working relationship: “*So my mentor, which is something that this school also offers, has been really great in giving me advice and just being someone to kind of bounce ideas off for that.*”

Because the compatibility of mentors and BTs cannot be easily predicted, the use of assigned mentors did not always result in favourable experiences. A BT speaking about being assigned a mentor explains:

My mentor right now – she has about, I think, about four years of experience teaching but I feel like she doesn't have the emotional maturity or experience that I need as a first year teacher. I need somebody that has a lot more experience to be able to give me ideas of how to handle situations or what to do.

But this BT, who did not believe the assigned mentor was particularly helpful and who was frustrated by this overall mentorship experience, still did not perceive the experience as detrimental. Instead of dismissing the idea of mentorship outright, the experience pushed the BT to actively seek out and identify an alternative, unassigned mentor with more experience. Assignment of mentors may not work for all BTs and thus some BTs may actively seek the help they need if the mentor to whom they were assigned was unable to help.

In comparison, experiences of BTs who did not participate in a formal mentorship program were quite different. These BTs were required to establish their own support structure and to seek their own resources. The following is an example of how one BT who lacked a formal mentorship program effectively identified unassigned mentors.

I don't have, like one particular mentor at the school here but I guess the staff is so very helpful; anybody I go to is more than helpful. So I kind of, and being in all different grade levels, I just use, depending on what area I have questions about, I go to that teacher and they're all more than willing to help as well as the vice-principal and the principal. So, I probably have about ten mentors.

This example demonstrates the positive outcome of a natural support system within a school that did not participate in an assigned mentorship program. The support offered by the staff of this particular school was sufficient to help the BT without a reliance on one single mentor. Such a scenario provides a beginning teacher with multiple role models to emulate. Furthermore, having multiple mentors may allow for more comparisons, contrasts, and higher levels of reflection on the part of the BT.

The benefits of not assigning mentors may lead to more independent development for BTs and perhaps when (and if) a mentor is identified, a more genuine mentorship relationship. However, such situations may be beneficial only when there is a supportive staff within a school and when BTs are able to identify potential mentors.

I think I've created more of a rapport with quite a few of the different teachers, so depending on what the situation was. . . . If it was a student that I was having trouble with, I'd go to the Special Ed teacher. If it was another staff member, I'd go to them or the principal. That sort of thing.

In addition, where formal mentorship programs existed, there appeared to be an expected structure and curricula to the mentorship experiences that were often lacking in informal mentorship experiences. Thus, informal mentorship experiences may be of lower quality than the experiences of BTs participating in formal programs. Although one particular BT was able to identify two mentors and believed that the mentorship activities were extremely helpful to her personal development as a beginning teacher, the quality of the mentorship experience was in retrospect, quite poor. Her experience was limiting: *"I spent the entire summer photocopying [the contents of] their filing cabinets."*

The lack of an assigned mentor may be detrimental to the development of BTs if they are unable to identify the support they need. The lack of assigned and/or formal mentorship prompted the following reflection:

At first I was feeling very overwhelmed. I didn't feel that I had a lot of support from my administration. But that was the way that they deal with things. They don't really have a mentorship program here. Their philosophy is we don't want to tell new staff all that much because it forces them to speak with other staff members to find out what they need to do.

Similarly, one BT stated:

No, I didn't have anything like that [speaking about a mentor]. Whatever I had was whatever I, myself, reached for. It wasn't anything that was set up through the school or the division or anything like that. I guess I had a personal mentor, I don't know if that's just another teacher in the school that I could visit with after school, just, you know,

sometimes when you're really frustrated, things like that. But it wasn't somebody that we scheduled that every Wednesday afternoon we got together or anything like that.

This particular BT was also one of few teachers to comment on the perception that mentoring was only for those teachers who were experiencing difficulties. The BT went on to say: *"I guess a mentor probably would have been nice. But it wasn't something that, I guess, no one ever thought that I needed. I guess no one thought that I ever looked like I was frazzled everyday."*

Engaged Versus Disengaged Mentors

Whether or not a mentor was engaged in the concept of mentorship was evident in the manner of support provided to the BT. An example of an engaged mentor would be someone possessing the ability to build a relationship between the two teachers that was not limited to resource sharing. An example of such a relationship is described below:

I'm teaching her class this year and it worked perfectly because we had that bond and she trusted me and left everything. She didn't take one thing out of that classroom. So that made it easier for me as a first-year teacher in the K to 6 system . . . she made me feel really welcome. She graduated maybe three years before me and knew how it was going into a new school . . . so when I arrived for my internship she had a present there for me and let me know that if I needed anything she would be there. Oh and she also taught my son and during my pre-internship I actually borrowed resources off her.

The mentor in this example actively volunteered her time to induct the BT into the teaching profession. The BT felt welcome to ask for help. However, there was a definite history to the relationship between the two colleagues that spanned a variety of roles. Perhaps this level of active engagement and the level of trust were unusually high. Engaged mentors also participated in a more passive manner.

I came into the classroom and my mentor had given me a bunch of material that I could use and had lots of resources and ideas and suggestions and there are always people to bounce ideas off with that. The unfortunate part of teaching physics is that I'm the only one so there aren't a lot of people who I can go to and say, well what do you do for this? But the board has also been really good and the school itself has been really good about encouraging first year teachers to go to different schools and observing other teachers in our teaching areas, which is something that I should probably do before my first year is

up. So they have said, if you take a day to go to observe somebody who teaches like yourself, we'll cover your sub and get everything arranged for that.

In this instance, the mentor was not as inviting and personal as in the previous example. Although the BT had a mentor who was not skilled in the subject that the BT taught, an alternative was offered for the BT to acquire the knowledge she needed to excel in teaching in her own subject area.

Engagement of mentors may not necessarily be reflected in the BT's satisfaction. Although an incompatible relationship would surely prompt disengagement from the mentor, getting along with a mentor may not necessarily demonstrate an engaged mentor. One BT's mentor was the vice-principal. Although this BT had a compatible relationship with the mentor, the mentor was not engaged in the mentorship experience, prompting the BT to feel lost and unsupported:

I don't have any other teachers to get the material from. But it would have been nice to maybe know if someone else taught English in another school.... And, at the beginning of the year I didn't know anybody.

The BT positively adapted to this negative mentorship experience by actively seeking out her peer group and finding sources of support through resource sharing with her peers.

I didn't know I could do that, but then we had a congress in October and as I met new teachers and I realized that some of them were teaching the same stuff that I had and that might have been 6 – 7 years, or something like that, I kind of used them as a resource for books and stuff like that.

The level of mentor engagement was not under the BT's control. As was demonstrated in our interviews, BTs appear to have their own adaptation strategies to the type of mentorship they receive. Although connection to an engaged mentor would logically lead to a better outcome, connection to a disengaged mentor may not always be detrimental because BTs may see the flaws of their mentors and seek alternatives or learn to speak out when such problems arise.

Single Versus Multiple Mentors

Regardless of whether mentors were assigned or unassigned, some BTs observed that they were influenced primarily by one mentor on their staff, while others noted that more than one mentor impacted their first year experience. Such an experience had an effect on the BT's level of engagement, potentially reducing the cloning effect of a single mentor to influence teacher thinking and pedagogy, an influence often resulting in activities such as copying resources in filing cabinets or finding discipline techniques. This engagement appeared to take place when mentors had different approaches to their teaching, as described below:

Every time I have a question about anything, they are the first two I go to and it's really great too because they have very different teaching styles and so I try to find a balance between the two of them and obviously my own. Put all together, it's just really interesting to see how the three different classes, doing the same material and the same everything else are different.

Engagement from multiple mentors occurred in a deeper way for this BT, who was employed in two schools. In one school, she was involved in a learning community of teachers, focused on a student learning goal. In the other, there was no learning community. She noticed a difference:

We sat down at the beginning of the year, the principal said let's see your smart goal and . . . now I'm kind of checking my smart goal, "Where am I?" Then we set up an interview when we got back, (we needed to answer) "so how did it work, where did you go, how did you do it. Did you change anything?" So we do a lot of that there where there's a lot of talk about, (such as) "how does this work for you" and even amongst the staff that just happens – "so, what are you doing in your classroom, how's it going, what are you doing?" In the other school, and a lot of it is a time thing, you know there isn't a time in which the whole staff is sitting around the staff table or, you know, even a good portion of the staff.

Being exposed to more than one mentor provided exposure to different styles of teaching and different approaches, an experience that affected the professional learning of one participant. For example, one BT was assigned a mentor who was very similar in age and experience. This rela-

tionship did not appear to stimulate learning for the beginning teacher. She then found herself another very different, unassigned mentor:

I currently confide in and talk to a teacher who has almost forty years experience and I would prefer her only because, and she doesn't even teach in my area, only because she has that much experience and that much emotional maturity that I need.

From these cases, whether the mentors were assigned or unassigned, engaged or disengaged, the opportunity to be exposed to more than one mentor appeared to influence the BTs' engagement and personal learning. The BTs were engaged in inquiry and in making intellectual decisions about the different approaches to find what worked best for them.

DISCUSSION

Thematic analyses identified the following moderating themes: (a) engaged/ disengaged mentors, (b) assigned/unassigned mentors, and (c) single/ multiple mentors. In this article, we have explored how these themes identify areas that need considerable attention to improve the teacher induction processes in Saskatchewan. The discussion of these themes also creates a space for the consideration of the professional learning community model as a process for successful teacher induction.

Previous research suggests that unwilling or uninterested mentors are unlikely to provide effective mentoring (Normore & Loughry, 2006). In a similar manner, disengaged mentors, even mentors who are unintentionally disengaged, are unlikely to be effective. Traditionally mentors have been expected to be engaged, but in reality, some mentors may be unwilling to take on this additional responsibility (Glazer & Hanafin, 2006). Similar to Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan (2001), one BT in our study found that because she appeared to be competent and in control, others in the school "*forgot she was new,*" and did not initiate mentorship relationships or provide support. Although the potential mentors may not have perceived a need for mentorship in this case, potential mentors may also have been reluctant to take on the responsibility. Thus mentorship models such as contextual supervision do not even come into play because the environment does not facilitate such relationships.

What is needed is an environment where a group of mentors surround an inductee, rather than just a single mentor as suggested by the apprenticeship model. Assuming that one person has the knowledge to induct a newcomer may create a situation where a BT defers to the mentor and feels compelled to become just like the mentor. Allowing the BT to learn from a variety of mentors creates an opportunity for learning, discernment, and dialogue. This situation is beneficial not only for the BT, but also for the experienced teachers as well.

A trade-off occurs between the formality of a mentorship program and its effectiveness, especially if the formal mentorship program's focus is not centred on student learning (Spindler & Biott, 2000). Previous research has found that BTs who did not participate in formal mentorship programs found teaching to be a less desirable profession than those who did participate (Huling-Austin & Murphy, 1987). In contrast, some research has suggested that informal mentorship, such as having an unassigned mentor, tends to provide more psychosocial benefits when compared to more formal relationships (Sosik & Lee, 2005). Perhaps, then, less structured models need to be considered in the area of teacher induction. The fact that one participant perceived a very positive experience as a result of experiencing a natural, unassigned, multi-mentor environment points to the idea that the issue is not whether a mentor is assigned or unassigned, but perhaps, instead, whether a participant is in a single versus a multiple mentor environment.

Our study did not identify a clear preference on the behalf of the BT for assigned/unassigned mentoring. Beginning teachers appeared to learn regardless of the type of mentorship relationship they experienced even when they purposefully chose not to engage in a mentorship relationship. This lack of preference, however, must not be confused with the perception that an unassigned mentor versus an assigned mentor created no difference in the level of participant learning. Following an unsuccessful mentorship experience, one BT in our study adopted a "*closed door*" mindset and attempted to learn on her own – a survival technique that Chubbuck et al. (2001, p.374) argue is not always effective.

It is also possible that BTs are unable to accurately judge the quality of their mentorship experiences. Beginning teachers may be unaware of the potential for learning that effective mentorship and induction ap-

proaches offer, and thus inaccurately judge their own experiences as being of higher quality than they would otherwise be. One BT in our study believed that her experience of having access to the filing cabinet of her mentor was *“extremely helpful to her personal development as a beginning teacher.”* As Carver and Feiman-Nemser, (2008) declare, *“A comprehensive and effective approach to induction must offer more than help finding paper for the copy machine”* (p. 5).

We identified the compatibility between a mentor and BT as a moderating theme in our study. Previous research suggests that effective mentorship requires a degree of compatibility between mentor and protégé (Russell & Adams, 1997) to avoid personality conflicts (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Because the process of matching BTs with mentors is considered to be very important in traditional mentoring, research suggests that for optimal outcomes BTs should be paired with mentors who teach the same subject(s) and/or grade(s) in the same school as the beginning teacher (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Normore & Loughry, 2006). Unfortunately, BTs are seldom paired in such a manner (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003) and it is unlikely that the Saskatchewan context would readily allow for such optimal matching. Part of the reason for the lack of matching could be attributed to the lack of a provincially-mandated (formal) mentorship program or the location and size of a school. Because many BTs in Saskatchewan find employment in rural and/or northern areas of the province (Hellsten, Ebanks, & Prytula, 2008), they do not always have access to another teacher of the same grade/subject within the school or even within close proximity. In addition, the compatibility of a single mentor and a BT appears to be essential to the success of the mentorship experience. Attempting to develop single mentors to achieve this support seems uncertain, at best. This situation begs the question as to why a single mentor is even considered for a successful mentorship program, and again suggests the need to consider a learning environment with multiple members that focuses on student and teacher learning, and that lasts longer than one year.

Despite the popularity of induction programs and mentoring, Levine (2006) suggests that it is rare to find induction programs that are effective. Part of the reason behind this ineffectiveness may be that the focus of induction varies from place to place, and teacher induction programs

have historically focused on helping BTs feel more comfortable in a school culture (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Huling-Austin, 1990). However, feeling more comfortable does not automatically make BTs better or more effective teachers (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Thus, there is a need to develop mentors who provide support not only on the relationship side of things but also for the learning side or the “complex and thought-provoking conversations that surround the practice of teaching” (Stanulis et al., 2007, p. 144).

As previously stated, the traditional definition of mentorship is the process of “creating an enduring and meaningful relationship with another person, with the focus on the quality of that relationship including factors such as mutual respect, willingness to learn from each other, or the use of interpersonal skills” (Salinitri, 2005, p. 858). Despite this understanding, several participants in our study described enriching BT experiences that occurred not because of a single mentor, but because of more than one mentor.

Through working with multiple learners, or social learning, individuals develop ties with colleagues, which can be considered either strong or weak (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Strong ties are those that describe close relationships with colleagues who have similar goals, and with whom they work closely (compatible relationships). Those relationships that make up weak ties are those with colleagues who are less connected (incompatible relationships); however, weak ties are those relationships from which new information is often learned. Weak ties, often controversial, result in conflict that can create conditions where teachers must examine and re-examine their narratives, resulting in new professional knowledge. The danger in having too many close ties is that work is rarely challenged, resulting in stagnation of professional knowledge. On the other hand, the danger in having too many weak ties is that work may remain isolated and conflict might be high. An educator with a balance in strong and weak ties would then have the best of both worlds – stability and comfort, as well as conflict and challenge.

In addition to an expanded opportunity to learn, having multiple mentors who differ in teaching styles and methods requires BTs to bridge the gap between theory and practice and also to bridge the gap between different experienced teachers. The relationship also moves

from a personal level of observation to an interpersonal interaction among more than two members. The opportunity to learn is no longer restricted to BTs. Rather than being isolated in their classrooms or acting only as role models, mentors are now engaged with other experienced teachers. At this point, authentic mentoring is distinguishable because of the emphasis on learning and mutual learning (Salinitri, 2005), indicating that both the mentee and the mentor are learning. Parallel to the concept of interpersonal capacity building (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), learning takes place when a BT engages in conversation, reflection, and new intellectual understanding. It is critical that these conversations occur between people who are similar thinkers, resulting in relationships with strong ties that affirm personal beliefs and practices, as well as with people who are unlike thinkers, resulting in relationships with weak ties that challenge beliefs and practices. The reflection that happens from strong and weak ties opens new dialogue and professional conversations, and from these conversations, learning takes place.

Johnson and Birkeland (2003) state that this learning has the potential to exist in the workplace, and that such a workplace can reduce the uncertainty and increase the opportunities for teachers to achieve success and satisfaction. Such a model for effective mentorship already exists through the learning community model, where a BT is inducted as a member, parallel to all other teachers, and learns along with them through conversations and reflections, focused on student learning goals. The learning community model helps to build a strong commitment to professional learning for all staff members (Watkins, 2005) and reduces many of the identified barriers to success through traditional mentorship programs, such as engagement and compatibility issues, so that mutual learning takes place. The results from the interview transcripts provide preliminary support for an alternative model of mentoring (figure 1) based on learning communities founded on the concepts of strong and weak ties (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000) and the constructivist model of knowledge (Palmer, 1998). In this model, all learners are teaching and learning to effect a positive change in student learning. No one educator is more important than the other, regardless of what position the person may be in, whether administrator, classroom teacher, mentor, or mentee. All educators are connected to each other through strong and weak ties

(indicated by bold and narrow arrows). Again, strong ties exist between like thinkers, affirming beliefs and practices, and weak ties exist between unlike thinkers, challenging beliefs and practices. Through the constant action of conversations and reflection, learning takes place, both within the student, and within the teachers.

McNeil et al. (2006) developed a theory of mentorship in which the inducting teacher progresses through five learning stages, beginning with an internal focus where he/she is isolated and dependent, and proceeding to an external one where he/she is a competent educator. Basing the model on the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), over time, BTs are believed to recognize themselves as legitimate members of a school community as they build mastery in teaching skills, assist their learners to become independent, and successfully collaborate with colleagues (McNeil et al., 2006). McNeil's model, however, requires that the mentoring teacher establish an individualized induction plan, collaboration with assigned mentors who are trained, and a community of learners. In contrast, in the proposed model resulting from this study, the centre of the model no longer represents a BT, but instead represents learning as evidenced by both student learning outcomes and mentor and BT learning. The alternative model of mentorship also eliminates the need for the mentoring teacher to develop an individualized plan, because a BT has an opportunity to learn from many different teachers, and is not subject to one teacher's pace or approach. Similar to the centre of a learning community, the centre of this model is student learning goals. This focus keeps conversations on teaching and learning, and allows for multiple perspectives to be shared, discussed, and learned. Sharing a common goal also induces teacher engagement, and provides a benchmark to measure success.

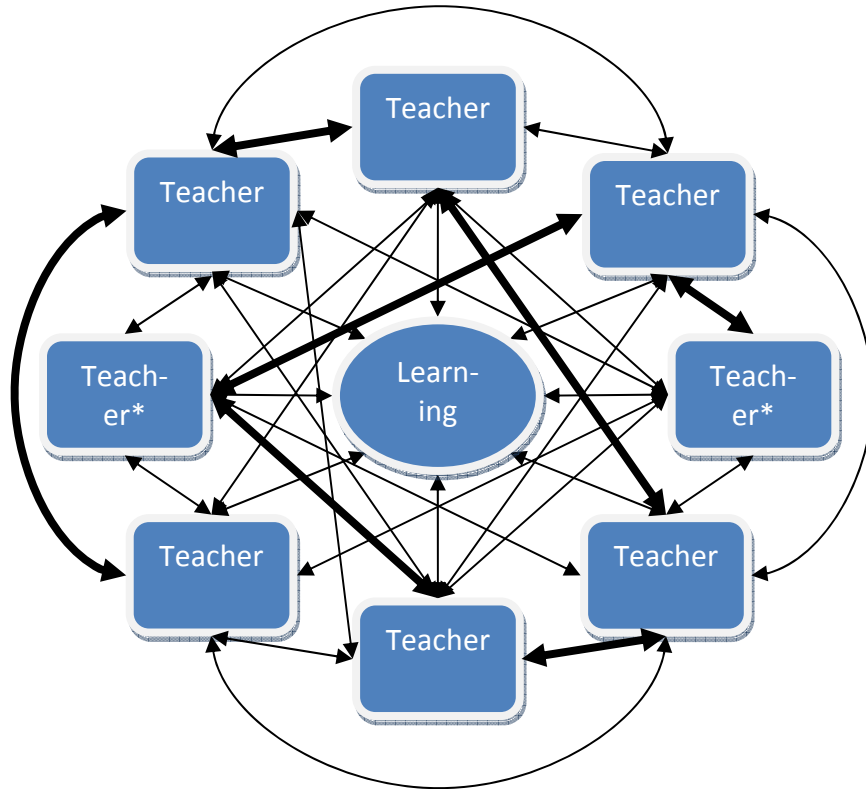


Figure 1. Alternative model of mentorship for Saskatchewan (Adapted from Palmer, 1998).

Several potential benefits occur from this model. The search for the best matched mentor (i.e., subject/grade) is no longer required because the BT (indicated by a * in the Figure) has, in effect, multiple mentors. Multiple mentors, consisting of new and experienced teachers, provide a range of opportunities to share experiences (Algozzine et al., 2007). Mul-

multiple mentors also reduce the potential for disengagement and remove the responsibility of mentorship from one individual. Furthermore, multiple mentors reduce the need for assigned mentorship and take advantage of the positive effects of strong and weak ties (compatible and incompatible relationships). Although personal and emotional support is likely in such a community, intellectual interaction among more than two members is also fostered.

To conclude, in this study we suggest that rather than creating and implementing a province-wide, government-mandated mentorship or induction program, the mentorship of teachers could be developed through an adaptation of the professional learning community model. Based on the learning community model, the process revolves around student learning and setting student learning goals. Mentorship, then, occurs as a teacher learns in community with others how to achieve higher student learning outcomes. Such a mentorship model should initially be introduced to teacher candidates as part of their pre-service teacher education programs with a natural extension to their work life as BTs.

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