Meeting the Graduating Teacher Standards

The Added Benefits for Undergraduate University Students Who Mentor Youth

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Abstract

Although research has clearly demonstrated the benefits of mentoring for mentees, much less is known about how mentoring impacts mentors and, in particular, their professional development. Using a mixed-methods design, this study investigated the impact that mentoring youth had on the professional development of first- and second-year university students, primarily preservice teachers. Researchers collected quantitative data from twenty-eight undergraduate university student mentors pre- and post-program, as well as twenty-nine ninth-grade mentees post-program. In addition, a focus group was conducted with six mentors post-program. The data analyses were guided by the Graduating Teacher Standards: Aotearoa New Zealand (GTS), which outline what a beginning teacher should know at the conclusion of a professional teacher education degree program. The results indicated that mentoring had a positive impact on mentors' development of the values, skills, relationships, and knowledge required to satisfy the GTS. The implications of these findings are discussed within the context of professional development.

Keywords: teacher education, youth mentoring, professional development, Graduating Teacher Standards

Meeting the Graduating Teacher Standards

It is widely accepted that mentors can contribute significantly to the positive development of youth. More specifically, research has indicated that mentoring effectively reduces school absenteeism, involvement in aggression, and initial drug and alcohol use, as well as promotes more positive attitudes toward school (Grossman and Tierney 1998; LoSciuto et al. 1996). Mentoring is defined as "an enduring relationship between a novice [mentee] and an older, more experienced individual [mentor] who provides guidance in a particular domain" (Evans and Ave 2000, 41). DuBois and colleagues (2002) conducted a meta-analysis examining mentoring programs' effectiveness and identified characteristics of the most-effective programs, including building strong relations between mentees and mentors; using mentors from "helping" backgrounds; providing ongoing training and support to the mentors; basing programs on theory and research; and targeting at-risk (versus typical) youth.

Clearly, mentoring can benefit mentees (e.g., Grossman and Tierney 1998), although less is known about how mentoring impacts mentors. Recently, the idea that the mentoring relationship can equally benefit both mentees and mentors has been increasingly acknowledged (Ragins and Verbos 2007). Eby et al. (2006) noted that for mentors, the results can range from short-term relational benefits, such as personal rewards from helping others (Gilmour 2007), to long-term career benefits, such as gaining and applying career-related knowledge (Bolton 2007). However, most research in the area tends to focus on workplace mentoring; little research examines the professional development benefits of mentoring youth upon the mentors. This article attempts to address that gap in the literature by exploring how mentoring youth can contribute to preservice teacher mentors' professional development.

Professional development, as conceptualized here, is based on the Graduating Teacher Standards (NZTC 2007). Beginning in 2002, the New Zealand Teachers Council developed a set of seven standards that outline areas of competency beginning teachers should possess after completing teacher education programs. The seven GTS (see table 1) cover a range of knowledge, practices, values, and relationship skills teachers need to work effectively in New Zealand's K–12 schools. The impetus for developing GTS came from the Education Standards Act (2001), which charged the council with the responsibility for providing professional leadership in teacher education. More specifically, the council develops and monitors the standards governing the teaching qualifications that allow preservice teachers to obtain provisional registration and then apply for full

registration two years later. Additionally, the GTS helps ensure quality assurance, because all providers of initial teacher education are expected to align their programs with the GTS.

Table 1. Graduating Teacher Standards NZTC 2007

Standard	Description
Professional Knowledge	
Standard 1	Graduating teachers know what to teach.
Standard 2	Graduating teachers know about learners and how they learn.
Standard 3	Graduating teachers understand how contextual factors influence teaching and learning.
Professional Practice	
Standard 4	Graduating teachers use professional knowledge to plan for a safe, high-quality teaching and learning environment.
Standard 5	Graduating teachers use evidence to promote learning.
Professional Values and Relationships	
Standard 6	Graduating teachers develop positive relationships with learners and the members of learning communities.
Standard 7	Graduating teachers are committed members of the profession.

In New Zealand, preservice teachers typically complete a three-year bachelor of education degree, which incorporates classroom placement each year. As noted by Osguthorpe et al. (1995), classroom placement can not only contribute to the *professional development* of preservice teachers but can also facilitate *educator preparation*, *curriculum development*, and *research and inquiry* (p. 5), improving both teaching practices and student achievement (Holmes Group 1986). Others (e.g., USDOE 1996) have indicated that youth mentoring may be one additional avenue in which preservice teachers make theory-to-practice links. It is therefore posited here that the experience of working closely with youth in "real-life" contexts through mentoring may help a preservice teacher gain the skills and knowledge required to meet the GTS.

New Zealand is culturally diverse. While the majority (68%) identifies as New Zealand European, indigenous Māori represent the largest minority group (15%), with Asian (9%) and Pacific peoples (7%; e.g., Tongan, Samoan) also representing significant minority populations (Statistics New Zealand 2008), particularly in Auckland, where that research is based. The nation's cultural diversity is acknowledged in the GTS via the inclusion of specific standards that deal with developing effective practices in diverse school settings (i.e., Standards 1, 3, and 6; table 1). Awareness of diversity is particularly important given that Māori and Pacific youth in New Zealand are twice as likely to leave school with no qualifications, tend to

underperform academically (MYD 2003), and face more disparities in poverty, health, and unemployment (MMA 2000; MPIA 2003) compared to their European and Asian counterparts. As a result, Māori and Pacific youth are often a special target of many interventions intended for at-risk youth; research has indicated that youth mentoring can be effective in addressing some of those disparities (Farruggia et al., forthcoming). One such program is the MATES (Mentoring and Tutoring Education Scheme) Junior program.

The MATES Junior Program

MATES Junior, a school-based program based in Auckland, provides mentoring to young people at risk for difficulties in the transition from middle school (grade eight) to high school (grade nine). Mentoring sessions are held on a two-hour weekly basis, ten weeks pre- and ten weeks post-transition.

Mentees are identified by their teachers based on level of need (i.e., academic or social). Mentors are preservice teachers (i.e., education majors) or bachelor of arts or science students interested in youth-related careers (e.g., youth social work). Mentors are paid an hourly rate for their time spent formally mentoring but are not compensated for training, travel time, or any contact outside the formal session. Matching is based primarily on identified common interests, for matching on ethnicity or gender has been shown to have limited impact on program effectiveness (DuBois et al. 2002).

In general terms, the program goals are to facilitate positive transitions for the mentees by building academic and social confidence. Further, the program aims to contribute to the mentors' professional development by providing direct work with youth and quality training over the course of the program. To address the latter, mentors attended a series of four training sessions that addressed such topics as adolescent-development theory, information on the mentees' cultural contexts and community needs, and opportunities to meet with school leaders and teachers. The MATES Junior program uniquely provides mentoring during the transition process (i.e., pre- and post-) and utilizes the skills of preservice teachers.

Purpose of the Study

Using the Graduating Teacher Standards as a framework and the MATES Junior program as a vehicle, the purpose of this study was to determine whether mentoring youth benefits mentors' professional development. Specifically, we sought to examine whether mentoring provided university students majoring in education and related fields with the opportunity to develop the values, skills,

relationships, and knowledge relevant to the GTS. We were additionally interested in discovering whether mentor training supported professional development.

Method

Research Design

The research utilized a mixed-methods design (Denzin and Lincoln 2000), allowing us to capture a deeper understanding of the ways in which mentoring contributes to preservice teachers' professional development. To explore pre- and post-program change, we utilized a pre-test/post-test design. Additionally, we employed a focus group format to provide in-depth understanding of whether the mentoring experience contributed to the professional development of the mentors post-program, as captured by the GTS.

Participants

Two groups of participants took part in this study: 1) mentors who were university undergraduate students in their first or second year of study; and 2) mentees who were mainstream ninth-grade high school students.

Undergraduate university student mentors. Thirty-one mentors took part in the program; all completed pre-test measures, while twenty-nine (94%) completed post-test measures. (Two participants could not be contacted after multiple attempts. One further mentor was excluded from the study because her mentee had declined to participate in the research.) Of the twenty-eight (90%) included in the study, the majority were females (n = 25, 89%; males: n = 3, 11%) and their mean age pre-test was 24.31 years (*SD* = 7.77). Most identified themselves as New Zealand European (n = 15, 54%), with eight (29%) East/Southeast Asian, three (11%) Pacific Islander, and two (7%) indigenous Māori. Twenty-three (82%) were preservice teachers majoring in education, and the remaining five (18%) were bachelor of arts or science students interested in youth-related careers. Three mentors worked with more than one mentee due to mentors dropping out, and five withdrew from the program before completion for personal reasons.

The six mentors (19%) who participated in the focus group were mixed in gender and ethnically diverse. Four mentors had completed the program, while two had not because their mentees withdrew before completion.

Ninth-grade mentees. Thirty-two mentees took part in the program. However, only thirty (94%) completed post-test measures in ninth grade post-transition; one declined and another could not be located because the student had been removed from school due to

immigration issues. One further student was excluded because his mentor did not complete post-test measures. Of the twenty-nine mentees who participated in the research, their mean age pre-test was 12.52 years (*SD* = .51), and the majority were males (n = 19, 66%; females: n = 10, 34%). Mentees were culturally diverse: thirteen (45%) identified as indigenous Māori, with seven (24%) Pacific Islander, six (21%) New Zealand European, two (7%) Asian Indian, and one (3%) Cambodian. Seven (24%) did not complete the program.

Procedures

The research was announced to the mentors before the start of the first training session, consents were secured, and pre-test data were collected. Three additional training sessions occurred throughout the program. To evaluate the quality of the training, mentors completed training-feedback surveys after each training session. At the completion of the program, mentors completed post-test measures and were invited to take part in the focus group. Eight mentors were available to take part in the focus group, and six (19%) attended. (One was sick and another withdrew at the last minute.) The low participation rate was more than likely due to limited availability of the mentors, due to work and educational commitments. However, the mentors who did participate were considered to represent a good cross-section of potential participants as noted above in the "Participants" section. The focus group was conducted using a semi-structured schedule designed to address the goals of the program. With the mentors' signed consent, the focus group discussions were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and verified for accuracy. Focus group participants were not asked to comment on the transcripts.

Mentees completed surveys following their final mentoring sessions. In all instances, youth and parental consent was secured. To avoid bias (as recommended by Littell, Corcoran, and Pillai [2008]), all mentors and mentees, including those who withdrew from the program, were invited to participate in all stages of the research. The rationale was that including only "successful" participants has the potential to inflate positive effects artificially.

Survey Instruments

For the quantitative component of the research, the survey instruments addressed demographics and attendance, youth-related issues, career development, and training evaluation.

Demographics and attendance. Mentors and mentees completed demographic information including gender, age, and ethnicity; attendance was recorded at each training session.

Measures related to the youth. The Attitudes about Youth Scale (Herrera et al. 2007) assessed mentors' pre- and post-test perceptions of youth. The seven-item scale uses five response categories from 1 = *none* to 5 = *all or most* and demonstrated adequate reliability (α = .69). A sample item included: "In your opinion, please indicate how many youth in New Zealand *respect adults*."

Mentees reported on the mentor-mentee relationship quality, post-test only, using an adaptation of the Parental Warmth and Acceptance Scale (Greenberger, Chen, and Beam 1998). This eight-item scale, which uses four response points from 1 = *disagree* to 4 = *agree*, had acceptable reliability (α = .71). A sample item included: "My mentor really understood me." For the three mentors who mentored more than one youth, a composite score used the highest evaluation recorded at each variable.

Career measures. A single item developed for the study measured career certainty, pre- and post-test. Mentors were asked first to specify the career they would like to pursue and then indicate "How certain are you of this career choice?" using four response categories from 1 = *not certain at all* to 4 = *very certain*. To measure career preparation pre- and post-program, mentors responded to the following question using three response categories, 0 = *no*, 1 = *somewhat*, and 2 = *yes*: "Will/has being a mentor prepare/ed you for this career?"

Training measures. Mentors evaluated the quality of each training session using an adaptation of the Perceptions of the Quality of Training Scale (MENTOR 2008). This scale addresses issues relating to training design (e.g., "The training was well designed"), material (e.g., "The materials and handouts provided useful content both in the session and for future reference"), and utility (e.g., "The training has helped in preparing me to work effectively with my mentor"), using four response points ranging from 1 = *disagree* to 4 = *agree*. A subsample of items was used across all four training sessions, and additional items tailored to the session content were added. Overall mean scores were calculated for each training session and for all training sessions combined. The mean evaluation of the first training session and the overall evaluation across all training sessions were used in the analysis. The scale had acceptable reliability (training 1: α =.73, training 2: α = .88, training 3: α = .90, training 4: α = .83).

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The focus group schedule was developed to address three key areas of interest identified through the program goals, including professional growth, training, and the mentor-mentee relationship.

Following the thematic analysis procedures described by Braun and Clarke (2006), the transcripts were read several times and key points relevant to the program goals were noted. Initially, themes were developed independently of the GTS; however, when a review of the GTS showed parity, and consequently the GTS was used as a template in presenting the results. Excerpts were grouped into one of four main themes: professional knowledge, practice, values, and relationships. All excerpts within those main themes were then examined and subthemes generated.

Quantitative Results

The mean scores of all measures (table 2) were examined using SPSS. For pre-test measures, mentors reported positive attitudes toward youth, career certainty, and career preparation. To explore pre- and post-test change, we utilized paired-samples *t*-tests and also examined correlations between variables. The results indicated a significant increase in positive attitudes toward youth; no increases were found for career certainty or career preparation. Interestingly, as shown in table 2, the correlations between pre- and post-test measures were significant for attitudes toward youth, and career certainty approached significance, but there was no association for career preparation. This lack of association reflects mentors' changing their beliefs about the career benefits of mentoring, but not consistently.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and relationships among pre- and post-test variables

Variable	Pre-test *M* (*SD*)	Post-test *M* (*SD*)	*r*	*t*-statistic
Youth				
Attitudes toward youth	3.45 (.40)	3.60 (.36)	.57**	2.24*
Mentor-mentee relationship quality		3.75 (.34)		
Career				
Career preparation	1.89 (.32)	1.75 (.52)	.06	-1.28
Career certainty	3.61 (.77)	3.68 (.48)	.34+	-.49
Training				
Attendance		3.06 (1.00)		
Quality at session 1		3.55 (.27)		
Overall quality		3.51 (.32)		

Note: $+p = .07$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$

Next, we looked at the mentor-mentee relationship quality reported by the mentees. Overall, mentees reported high-quality relationships with their mentors, with little variability (table 2).

Examining the overall rating of the four mentor-training sessions combined, the mentors reported that the training was of consistently high quality, reflected by the small standard deviation in quality ratings. Overall, attendance at training was high (M = 3.06), although there was a fair amount of variability (SD = 1.00). Further, training quality at session one was strongly associated with the overall ratings of training (r = .65, p < .001). Interestingly, attendance at training over the four sessions was not associated with the rating of quality for session one (r = .02, p > .05), reflecting the likelihood that the lack of attendance at future training was not due to the quality of the first training session.

Next, we investigated how mentor training and the quality of training were associated with all post-test measures. As shown in table 3, high attendance at training was associated with higher-quality levels of mentor-mentee relationships (as reported by the mentees). In addition, it was also positively associated with beliefs about career preparation, meaning that mentors who attended more training sessions were more likely to believe that mentoring was preparing them for their careers. There were no significant associations found between training quality and post-test measures.

Table 3. Correlations among training variables with youth and career variables

Variable	Training	
	Attendance ***r***	**Overall rating** ***r***
Youth		
Attitudes about youth		
Pre-test	.08	-.27
Post-test	-.06	-.09
Mentor-mentee relationship quality	.42*	-.04
Career		
Preparation		
Pre-test	.02	-.01
Post-test	.61**	.09
Certainty		
Pre-test	.25	.27
Post-test	-.06	-.18

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01

Qualitative Results

Professional Knowledge

Mentors' discussion of *Professional Knowledge* was grouped into one of three subthemes. The first subtheme, *theoretical knowledge*, focused on the utility of the knowledge gained through the training sessions, particularly concerning cognitive development during adolescence. For example, one mentor commented, "I found the talk about how the brain develops and that was such an eye opener."

The second subtheme was knowledge related to *developing learning strategies*. A few mentors related how they had designed curriculum that catered to the educational needs of their mentees, such as exploring interesting ways to communicate mathematical problems using three-dimensional shapes.

In the final subtheme, *context and diversity*, mentors stressed how cultural differences, special needs, and gender can impact learning relationships. For example, two female mentors who were matched with male mentees noted that they needed to learn to apply different techniques and approaches when communicating with boys. As one mentor said:

> I didn't realize because girls talk a lot but he was a boy and he was talking just to please me. . . . I just found that [talking] wasn't that helpful because that's not what he wanted to do—and boys, and you just sitting there [playing games], your presence, you're still connecting even when [you're] not talking.

Professional Practice

The second main theme, *Professional Practice*, incorporated two subthemes. The first, *using evidence to promote learning*, focused on how mentors used assessment tools or information to guide their curriculum development. The second subtheme, *implementing learning strategies*, was based on mentors relating how they applied the knowledge gained through program training and course work to facilitate learning: "Well[,] for me it gave me a chance to practice what we've been learning here at [university] on a little one-to-one basis so it gave you that confidence. . . ."

Professional Relationships

The next main theme focused on the relationship skills and knowledge gained through the mentors' participation in the program. The first subtheme was *collegiality/professional cooperation,*

which related to relationships with other professionals, such as teachers and administrators. Most mentors, unfortunately, said they had little or limited contact with their mentees' teachers. Interestingly, from this experience several mentors noted that sharing information among professionals is in the best interest of a young person's learning and development. For the one mentor who was able to develop a relationship with her mentee's teacher after he had transitioned to high school, she reported how that helped her communicate more effectively with her mentee.

As well as developing relationships with teachers, another subtheme captured the importance of communicating effectively and establishing a *relationship with mentees' families*. A few mentors noted that as such relationships developed, family members demonstrated a greater interest in supporting their young person's involvement in the program.

The final relationship subtheme involved building *relationships with mentees*. As noted by one mentor:

> For me it was learning to communicate but also interacting at a different level, like a deeper level . . . learning how to really connect with someone that age and to do that you've got to know what's important to them and respect what's important to them.

Mentors said that as those connections developed, their mentees demonstrated greater self-confidence, and some began to understand and articulate decisions and consequences.

Professional Values

The final main theme captured the *Professional Values* gained through mentoring. The first of two subthemes focused on how taking part in the program helped to *solidify career goals*. For example, one mentor discussed developing an interest in working with young people with special needs, while another spoke of refocusing her career goals on teaching as opposed to social work. The second subtheme involved gaining *confidence with youth*. Here most mentors confirmed how, through mentoring, they had become confident about teaching in junior high school, whereas previously they had focused on primary-school teaching.

Discussion

Through the qualitative results, mentors in MATES Junior clearly articulated how mentoring youth had extended their knowledge, provided opportunities to practice what they had been taught,

enabled them to make "real-life" connections with youth, and solidified their professional values, capturing most aspects of the GTS. Those findings are further supported by significant positive changes in mentors' attitudes about youth, pre- to post-test, providing further evidence of the benefits of mentoring for professional development (Bolton 2007; Eby et al. 2006).

It should be noted that five of the twenty-three mentors were not preservice teachers, but all were planning for careers in youth-related fields. This suggests that the benefits of mentoring can apply beyond teacher education and facilitate professional development across a range of disciplines, and it confirms prior research suggesting that programs in helping fields produce more effective mentors (DuBois et al. 2002).

Although the qualitative results indicated that for some the mentoring experience seemed to clarify career-related goals, the quantitative results did not show a significant pre- to post-test change. For career certainty, the qualitative results provide some insight into this finding, as reflected in one mentor's decision to reevaluate her initial career choice. It was interesting that pre- and post-test career preparation was not associated, indicating that the mentors' expectations seemed to differ from their actual experiences. Further research is needed to reveal which aspects of the mentoring experience specifically help individuals prepare for their careers, and it may also provide a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms that best promote the GTS.

Both the qualitative and quantitative results also indicated that training contributed significantly to mentors' professional development. The focus group highlighted that through training, mentors gained important skills relating to the GTS, such as professional knowledge and insight into what makes youth "tick." Further, in the quantitative results, mentors rated the overall quality of the training very highly with little variation in their ratings. Of interest, the mentees reported that training quantity (i.e., the more sessions they attended), and not quality, was associated with developing higher-quality relationships (there being little variation in training evaluations). That finding does not, however, suggest that training quality is unimportant. Instead, it appears that quality ongoing training throughout the program is more important, as also reflected in the strong association between training attendance and post-program career preparation. Those findings link to previous research indicating that training is a key component of an effective mentoring program (DuBois et al. 2002).

Limitations and Implications

Although this research contributes significantly to understanding the benefits of mentoring to mentors, there are limitations to its application. First, due to the small sample size, the results may not be generalizable, and significant effects may have gone undetected. In addition, the views expressed in the focus group represent a subsample of mentors, and they therefore may not accurately reflect the experiences of the majority. Further, because there was no control group, it is difficult to determine to what extent pre- and post-test changes are attributable only to mentoring rather than to general changes over time. Finally, changes were measured only in the short term, before the mentors became practicing teachers. It would be prudent for future research to explore changes over more time.

Conclusion

The strengths of the study are threefold. First, by employing mixed methods, we were able to capture a well-rounded understanding of how mentoring contributes to preservice teachers' professional development. Second, by utilizing a pre-and post-test design, we were able to examine changes over time. Finally, the study reflects the point of view of not only the mentor but also the mentee.

In summary, the results suggest that programs effective for youth can also be effective for mentors, benefiting both. Further, mentoring can help facilitate the theory-to-practice links that are sometimes difficult to replicate in a classroom-textbook setting. Within the New Zealand educational context, mentoring youth can also contribute to developing specific standards that deal with developing effective practices in diverse school settings among diverse youth (Alton-Lee 2003).

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