

# Addressing Sources of Collateral Damage in Four Mentoring Programs

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*This article examines the types of reoccurring problems that can inhibit K-12 mentoring team relationships and intervention strategies to remedy those problems. The study examines 149 mentoring teams in four school districts over a two-year period. Data collection was coordinated by the researcher who was also the trainer for the four school district's mentoring programs. Each year of the study, the survey and interview processes were repeated. From the analysis of data the research team identified a common set of reoccurring problems during both years. Intervention strategies were then identified, introduced and assessed. Results indicate the need for continuous assessment of mentoring programs and mentoring team relationships, financial commitment from the school district, a rigorous mentor selection process, and providing in-service and workshop opportunities for problem solving.*

## Samantha and Eloise

Samantha had worked as a fourth and fifth grade teacher in the same school district for nine years. She had an excellent reputation as a teacher and was excited about the opportunity to become a mentor in the district's new mentoring program. After talking with some of her colleagues and the principal about the new role and responsibilities, she applied for the position as mentor. When the screening process was complete, Samantha was informed that she had been accepted as a mentor for Eloise, a beginning first grade teacher in another elementary school within the district.

Eloise and Samantha met for the first time the day before in-service. They spent time discussing the students, the culture of the school district, the administration and school board, classroom management issues, and a variety of other topics that were on Eloise's mind. That first day seemed quite promising.

Over the next month Samantha and Eloise found it difficult to find time to meet. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that Eloise was in an elementary school that was about a mile away from Samantha's school. Complicating the matter even further was the amount of preparation that was required of both teachers just to begin the school year, in addition to taking on their new roles and responsibilities as mentor and mentee. Eloise needed information and direction from Samantha, but it was not occurring on a regular basis because of distance, lack of time, and both women's daily duties. Although email was a resource for communicating, the server was not always available. Both Eloise and Samantha would have liked release time for observations. Unfortunately, that was not possible. The district had only a small grant that paid for a few mentoring

activities, and release time was not included. What had initially seemed promising was not being given a chance to develop and succeed.

At the close of the school year, Samantha and Eloise reflected on their experience. They characterized their relationship as supportive, even with the limitations that existed. Samantha was not pleased with her lack of being able to assist Eloise, although Eloise did not blame her for that. Both were disappointed and frustrated that they had not been able to meet on a regular basis. They also felt that it was not helpful for the school district to have placed a first grade teacher with a mentor who had no experience teaching at that grade level. In the end, the two teachers were supportive of the mentoring program but recommended some revisions that would be helpful to future mentoring teams.

The story of Samantha and Eloise is illustrative of the discouragement many new teachers and their mentors feel as a result of mentoring falling short of what was anticipated. Regardless of the benefits formal mentoring programs might provide, it is unfortunate that programs often fall prey to problems that inhibit the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship.

The research team recognizes that a majority of mentoring relationships are successful. This was the case in the school districts that this study reports on. Our concern is that regardless of all that a school or school district might do in preparing their new teachers and mentors to have a successful mentoring experience, mentoring practices may still fall short of the ideal. Addressing such failures is the subject of this research study. Our research questions are as follows: (1)What types of problems do mentoring teams encounter in the mentoring relationship? (2)Which problems reoccur on a regular basis? (3)What impact do intervention procedures have on mentoring team members that

For the purpose of this study, “collateral damage” refers to the negative impact on both the mentor and the new teacher during the mentoring process.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

For many new teachers the transition from their student teaching experience to their first teaching assignment can be traumatic. The same can be true for mentors as well. Part of the transition for the new teacher and mentor is dealing with the responsibilities of a new job (mentoring) along with the other responsibilities they have. Trying to acculturate and integrate the changes, complexities and realities of teaching and mentoring, along with dealing with problems that are typically encountered in this new environment can be an overwhelming experience for some (Corley, 1998; DePaul, 1998; Veeman, 1984).

Although there is no single mentoring program design that meets the needs of every school district in every situation, there is, a broad consensus regarding the factors that can negatively impact the mentoring program and mentoring team relationships. The following is a discussion of some of those factors.

## MATCHING AND SELECTION

There are clear indications in the literature that both mentor and new teacher can fall prey to ineffective matching practices (Block and Grady, 1998; DePaul 2000; Huling-Austin, 1992; and Kilburg, 2002; Newton et al. 1994). When school districts limit the number of

matching factors, the result may have a negative impact not only on the mentoring relationship, but the mentoring process as well. Those factors include: work in the same building (Brock & Grady; Ganser, 1995); similar interests and philosophy (DePaul); willingness to work with the new teacher (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; DePaul; Kilburg); strong interpersonal skills (Kilburg); same grade level and subject (Block & Grady; Ganser); experience (Ganser); and expertise in a variety of areas (Brewster & Railsback; DePaul; Kilburg).

## TIME

Lack of time is yet another factor that negatively impacts the quality of the mentoring relationship and can determine, in some cases, whether or not the relationship will be a success or failure (Ganser et al. 1998; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). In a study by the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (1999), “38 percent of protégés who worked with mentors a ‘few times a year’ reported substantial improvements to their instructional skills. That figure jumps to an impressive 88 percent for those who work with mentors at least once a week.” (p.5). Other studies have shown that when mentors and protégés are provided with time to meet, the end result is usually a relationship that exhibits trust, respect and a genuine concern for one another (Arends, 1998; Latham, Gitomer, & Ziomek, 1999; Tauer, 1998). However, when that time is reduced because of building proximity, part-time versus full-time teaching status, busy schedules, or not providing release time, the relationship will very likely be impacted in a negative way and the mentoring experience may be seen as nothing more than a token gesture.

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Emotional support is another factor that can impact the quality of the mentoring relationship. Newton et al. (1994) believes that one of the strongest needs that new teachers have is for emotional support. As new teachers are adjusting to a new career and continually putting themselves on the line with parents, students, and administrators, they need to know that someone is willing to support them. Providing that support is important, because it helps the new teacher understand that they are valued and that someone is there to listen and care. When emotional support is limited or is not being provided, the new teacher can be expected to feel insecure, frustrated and lack confidence (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Kilburg, 2002).

## COMMUNICATION AND COACHING

Just as good teachers adjust their teaching and communication to meet the needs of their students, mentors need to adjust the way they communicate and coach to meet the needs of the new teacher. According to Newton et al. (1994), mentors must be willing to communicate belief in the new teacher and be willing to provide them with direction, while at the same time allowing them to make decisions for themselves. Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts, 2000; Kinlaw, 1999 have argued that good communication and coaching help to strengthen collaboration and reflection-in-action, which in turn contributes to performance and the professional development of both new teacher and mentor.

When a mentor is not skilled in those areas previously identified, the result may be that the mentor directs, commands, or takes authority from the new teacher, reduces or eliminates input from him or her, or simply shuts down and makes a choice not to collaborate with the new teacher (Boreen et al., (2000); Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Kinlaw, 1999; Weeks, 1992). Unfortunately, when communication is minimized and is not a priority for one or both mentoring team members, then we can expect to see a relationship that is not functioning at its full potential. Communication is a skill and not every adult is as skillful in communicating with other adults as they might be with their students. That is why school district personnel need to be thoughtful and intentional in their selection of mentors as well as the training that is so important to the professional development of the mentoring team relationship (Kilburg, 2002).

## CHANGE AND CONFLICT

For many, the reality of the first teaching and mentoring assignment can be an eye opening experience. Managing a heavy workload while taking on an additional role without altering the roles and responsibilities that are already in existence can complicate a teacher's life. Add to this, the complexities of working with parents and students and trying to adjust to a new environment. All of these factors can have a dramatic effect on how the mentoring process is carried out (Corley, 1998; Veeman, 1984). Change can seriously complicate lives. Thus, a small problem or difference of opinion can escalate because of the anxiety and frustration one or both of the mentoring team members feels in his/her increasingly complex and changing life.

Although change is not necessarily viewed as a negative, it can, be an impediment to the mentoring process. Kilburg, (2002) suggests that knowing that some mentoring teams might encounter problems should assist those who are planning and coordinating mentoring programs develop strategies that will address the issues of change and provide more realistic expectations of potential problems. Unfortunately, it is important to remember that although change may be planned for, it is not always anticipated, nor appreciated. As Fullan and Stiegelbauer, (1991) remind us, "Change is everywhere, progress is not" (p. 345).

## THIS RESEARCH STUDY

When mentoring programs function in a way that nurture and support the new teacher and mentor, the programs are usually effective. Unfortunately, mentoring can become complicated even under the best circumstances; and what has seemed to have potential for both mentor and new teacher, may, in fact, be a recipe for disaster (Huling-Austin, 1990a; Villani, 2002) resulting in collateral damage.

In this study, we were interested in a systematic investigation of the collateral damage that occurred with mentoring team members in programs that we had designed. We wanted to determine if the mentoring programs were encountering any problems and if those problems were consistent with the literature. We also wanted to determine what challenges were being encountered on a regular basis. And finally, we wanted to evaluate our intervention procedures. Our goal has been to make the mentoring team relationships

as free as possible from problems that could negatively impact the mentoring relationship.

By gathering data along these lines, we further hoped to clarify and extend the literature base so that mentoring practices could have more widespread success.

## METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative study investigating the interactions and relationships between mentors and new teachers in four school districts. Multiple data collection techniques were used: (1) gathering data from fieldwork, that is, spending time in the setting where participants normally spend their time (Wilson, 1997; Yin, 1994,1998); (2) Providing first hand accounts that contribute to the depth of the study (Wilson, 1997; Yin, 1994,1998); and (3) using survey and interview data to establish a chain of evidence (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Wilson, 1997; Yin, 1994, 1998).

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Data were collected over a two-year period from 149 mentoring teams in four school districts. During the first year of the study, there were mentoring teams in two school districts that were participating in mentoring programs. One school district was from a large metropolitan area and the second was from a small rural community. During the second year of the study, data were collected from 105 mentoring teams in four school districts; two from a large metropolitan area and two from small rural communities. Two of the four school districts had participated in the study during the first year. The school districts ranged in size from over 1,000 teachers with over 17,000 students to 45 teachers with 720 students. There were a total of 257 mentoring teams in all four school districts.

## DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was coordinated by the principal researcher who designed the school districts mentoring programs and was also the trainer for the four school districts' programs. Each year of the study, the survey and interview processes were repeated; each district had new teachers entering the mentoring process each year. During both iterations of the study four stages were used to collect data. The data reduction for the second year occurred one year after the first. Thus, there was no conscious attempt by the researcher to replicate the commonly occurring problems.

The first step was to ask the participants to assess the mentoring program at the beginning of each of four workshops in October, February, April, and June—for mentors and new teachers. Surveys given to each participant included open-ended questions regarding problems that mentoring teams were encountering regularly. During the last half of each workshop participants discussed their comments on the survey and the researcher recorded responses. The same survey and discussion protocol were used the second year of the study with new mentors and new teachers. The assessment process was part of an ongoing evaluation of the mentoring program and mentoring team relationship. There was no intent by the researcher to prompt the participants to answer in any specific way.

In step two, surveys were read one at a time, and problems were recorded. Common problems were identified in the surveys. Another trainer was consulted regarding the problems identified. The discussions regarding the surveys were analyzed by reflecting on the data and reducing to a manageable form. This allowed the research team to compile a list of categories to identify problems mentoring teams were encountering.

The third step involved identifying reoccurring problems, from the list of problems identified in step two, that mentoring teams were encountering. Mentoring team members that had identified reoccurring problems in the surveys were interviewed in small groups and individual settings over the school year. The objective was to collect data through in depth interviews that would provide a clear picture of the negative impact of those reoccurring problems on the relationship. The interviewer took field notes that provided more detail to the survey data and then transcribed them immediately following each session. Typically, the interviews were conducted as a part of the four workshops that mentoring team members participated in during the school year. The time given for each group interview was typically 30 minutes on average. On the average, between 10 and 14 mentoring team members were interviewed in an individual setting in one of the school district buildings, each averaging 50 minutes in length. The interviews were conducted to discuss the problems mentoring teams were encountering on a regular basis and to help form a clearer picture of the collateral damage that was occurring for both team members. From the data gathered in the first three stages, the research team applied a standard of selection to determine which problems would be addressed through intervention procedures. The standard of selection included the following: the problem had to occur on a regular basis for at least four months and for at least 50% of mentoring teams that had reoccurring problems.

In step four, intervention strategies were selected after the senior researcher met with the mentoring coordinator in the school district's main office. The responsibility of the senior researcher was to provide data regarding the reoccurring problem/s and then assist the mentoring coordinator in deciding on an intervention strategy to implement. After the intervention strategy had been implemented, the mentoring team members were interviewed about the strategy, for the purpose of determining its success or failure.

## RESULTS

In responding to the first two research questions regarding the types of problems mentoring teams encountered and the types of problems that mentoring teams encountered on regular basis, the data indicated the following findings.

### THE FIRST YEAR

The first year of the study the average return rate for all four surveys was 94%. Of the 44 mentoring teams, 75% (33) said that they had no problems and were satisfied that the mentoring experience had been very helpful. The remaining 11 of the 44 mentoring teams identified a variety of problems in their mentoring relationships. After all problems were

identified, the 11 team members were interviewed to determine which of those problems were reoccurring.

An interesting finding regarding mentoring teams that were encountering reoccurring problems was that one problem manifested another. Time was typically the common factor in all problems. Table 1 identifies the types of common problems encountered by mentoring teams and a list of reoccurring problems that caused issues within the mentoring relationship.

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**Table 1. Common Problems Encountered by Mentoring Teams, Year 1**

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<u>All Problems Encountered</u>	<u>Reoccurring Problems</u>
(1) Not at the same grade level	(1) Lack of time for observing and meeting
(2) Lack of time	(2) Not in the same school
(3) Personality conflicts	(3) Not in the same subject
(4) Not in the same specialty	(4) Not in the same specialty
(5) Poor coaching by the mentor	(5) Not at the same grade level
(6) Not at the same school	(6) Poor match between new teacher and mentor. This typically included one or more problems identified from the list of common problems in year one of the study.
(7) Not in the same subject	(7) Poor communication and coaching skills
(8) Difficulty in working with one another	(8) Lack of emotional support
(9) Mentor was only a second year teacher	
(10) New teacher not willing to take advice	
(11) Poor problem-solving skills	
(12) Poor match between new teacher and mentor (a category mentors and new teachers identified that typically included a combination of problems identified)	
(13) Lack of emotional support	

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## THE SECOND YEAR

The average return rate for all four surveys in the second year of the study was 96%. Seventy-eight of the 105 teams surveyed were from two new school districts that had not been a part of the first year of the study. Of those 78, 17 teams indicated that they were having occasional problems in their relationships. From the two districts that had participated in the first year of the study, 7 of the 27 new mentoring teams indicated problems.

Of the 17 mentoring teams interviewed that were having some problems, 10 said they were encountering problems on a reoccurring basis. The two school districts that participated in the first and second year of the study found that 3 of the 7 mentoring teams were also encountering problems on a regular basis (Table 2).

It is noteworthy that the reoccurring problems were essentially the same the first and second year of the study. As we have considered whether or not this finding of

consistency could be an artifact of our scoring we could not identify a confounding or biasing factor.

## TEACHERS' RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION PROCEDURES

Once a mentoring team had been identified as having a problem/s that was negatively impacting its working relationship, intervention procedures were introduced by the mentoring program coordinator and/or the mentoring program trainer. (It is important to note at this point that each of the 35 mentoring teams typically encountered multiple problems during its partnership.)

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**Table 2. Common Problems Encountered by Mentoring Teams, Year 2**

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<u>All Problems Encountered</u>	<u>Reoccurring Problems</u>
(1) Lack of time	(1) Lack of time
(2) Over dependency on mentor	(2) Mentor and new teacher not in same building
(3) Not in the same building	(3) Mentor and new teacher not in same subject
(4) Not in the same subject	(4) Several new teachers sharing one mentor
(5) Not at the same grade level	(5) Poor match between mentor and new teacher
(6) Not in the same specialty	(6) Poor communication and coaching skills
(7) Unwilling to collaborate	(7) Lack of emotional support
(8) Personality conflicts	(8) Personality conflict
(9) Mentor was volunteered by principal	
(10) New teacher not willing to take advice	
(11) Mentor's lack of confidence	
(12) Mentor was too authoritarian	
(13) Poor communication and coaching	
(14) Poor match between mentor and new teacher	
(15) Lack of emotional support	

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After an intervention was introduced, each mentoring team provided regular updates on the effectiveness of each intervention strategy. The senior researcher and trainer for the mentoring programs supplemented the surveys with informal interviews and conversations with mentoring team members before and after workshops, as well as by email. Mentoring program coordinators also played an important role in providing information through regular meetings with the senior trainer regarding problems some of the teams were encountering. Confidentiality was maintained during these meetings. The senior researcher and trainer found teachers to be quite candid in their conversations giving both positive and negative feedback. For example, on a number of occasions several teachers shared that, "they felt the school district could have done a better job in selecting their mentors." When they were asked why they felt that way, their responses were that their mentors were not at the same school, or at the same grade level, or not in



the same subject or specialty. For purposes of confidentiality, the term *new teacher* has been substituted for the teacher's name in certain cases. The following are responses by teachers to the intervention procedures.

All 35 of the teachers encountering problems identified time as the factor that most negatively impacted them. The teachers said that having time to meet was especially difficult when each team member was in a different location. The use of email, the use of the telephone and meeting outside of the school were seen as positive suggestions by the mentoring coordinator, although a small number of mentoring teams were already using email. Unfortunately, the email service was not always dependable. Several of the veteran teachers suggested that the new teachers they were mentoring felt uncomfortable about asking the mentors to take time outside of the school day to meet with them, even though they had told them it was okay to do so. In at least three cases, the mentors said they could not respond in a timely way to the new teachers due to their busy schedules. The use of email and the telephone were not considered viable options according to these mentors.

For one new teacher, the interventions were simply ignored. He continually argued that "he just didn't have the time to meet with the mentor or plan his lessons." In the end, he was told by both the mentoring coordinator and his mentor that he had no choice in the matter.

As a result of that confrontation he had this to say:

I guess that I really screwed up. I just didn't think that I would have so much to do all of the time, and it just never seemed to end. The easiest thing I could do was just not deal with it, but it still didn't go away even when I did that. When I was confronted by the coordinator and the mentor, that's when I knew things better change or I wasn't going to make it . . . I was using time as an excuse to not do what I was supposed to do.

A majority of mentoring team members understood that time was going to be an issue. They also understood that it was too difficult for administrators to rearrange their schedules so that they would have time to meet. As a result, most of the team members were willing to work through the time management concern. As one mentoring team noted, "We understood that we probably wouldn't have the time needed to carry out all of the mentoring conversations that we needed to have. So we just did the best we could."

In one case, a veteran teacher was relieved of his position as a mentor because of negative comments made regarding the school district's board of directors and the principal. The mentor was extremely angry at being relieved and indicated that he believed "the administration and the school board were out to get me." The new teacher felt a great deal of relief because he didn't have to listen to the mentor constantly complain about the school board and the administration anymore. The new teacher felt that the mentoring coordinator was looking out for his best interests, especially when he was given a new mentor. He saw that as a positive step, not only for himself but also for the mentoring program. One of the comments the new teacher made captures his relief:

I've never run into a situation like this before where someone just wanted to complain about the administration and the school board all of the time, even

when he was mentoring me. It was awful . . . I was beginning to wonder if others were encountering the same thing. When the mentoring coordinator and superintendent talked to me about what was going on it was such a relief. I felt like this huge rock had been lifted from my shoulders.

Three new specialists to a school district experienced having only one educational specialist that they shared as their mentor. The mentoring program provided no other options for them. As a result, the new specialists felt they were not being given the appropriate help necessary to do their jobs. Although they understood the reasons the district did not provide more help, that didn't relieve the anxiety and frustration they felt almost everyday. For at least one new specialist, "it felt like I was being left out in the cold with very little support." Yet another specialist expressed her frustration in the following way:

It's hard for me to believe that the school district released some of the veteran specialists and then hired specialists with limited experience within the next 2 years. The unfortunate part about this is that we all have such heavy caseloads, including our mentor that we seldom get to talk with one another other than at our case meetings.

Seven teams experienced personality conflicts and were not able to resolve the conflicts without mediation by the mentoring coordinators. All but one of the conflicts was resolved, according to the coordinators. Both mentors and new teachers from the teams that were successful in resolving the conflicts seemed to agree that, "they very much appreciated the effort that their mentoring coordinator had made on their behalf." They also said that, "we appreciated the problem solving time we were given in the workshops to talk about problems we were having and how we might deal with them in a more effective way." In one mediation session, the mentor admitted that, "I had communicated information to the new teacher that was not accurate but I didn't know it until the mentoring coordinator brought it to my attention." However, that didn't happen until the new teacher had confided that the relationship was "just not working out and decided to talk to the mentoring coordinator first." Only one team felt that the mediation process did not work for them. Both mentor and new teacher felt that, "[they] just didn't feel as though [they] were a good match from the start, and it really didn't make any difference what the coordinator did, it just didn't seem to work." When asked why the relationship wasn't working out as well as it should, the mentors response was, "Our personalities are so different, and we both have pretty strong personalities that the give and take that we expected just wasn't there." In the end, both mentor and new teacher agreed to disagree.

Twelve mentors were not in the same schools as their new teachers. The intervention introduced in most cases was to provide a different mentor at the host school in which the new teacher was teaching. Unfortunately, this process took time. In several cases the mentors felt displaced because someone else had taken his/her place as mentor. Other mentors felt some sense of relief that they didn't have to bear the weight of helping the mentee all of the time. One mentor commented, "It wasn't that I didn't want to help. . . I

felt very responsible for creating opportunities to meet, which didn't always work because we were in different schools."

Several new teachers that had been assigned a new mentor teacher seemed to agree that, "the mentoring coordinator should have made that assignment in the beginning rather than wait until a problem developed." Nevertheless, those teachers said in individual conversations with the trainer that they did feel supported by the district's action. One new teacher's comment seemed to reflect how many of the other teachers felt, "I didn't quite understand why we were assigned a mentor in another building, but when they found out that it was becoming a problem, they acted pretty fast in accommodating us." In six cases, the new teachers had already sought out informal mentors at the schools where they were teaching. Consequently, each felt very comfortable with the new partnership and didn't want the school district to provide them with an "assigned" mentor. The mentoring coordinator agreed to their request.

All 35 of the new teachers said that emotional support was a critical aspect of the relationship with their mentor. Unfortunately, a few new teachers felt they were not receiving that support -- even after the mentors had received training in how to develop supportive relationships in workshops and in-service training. One new teacher said, "I don't think that the training my mentor received was real helpful. Although she provides some support it wasn't enough to make a difference." On the other hand, almost all of the mentors felt they were doing their jobs and providing the needed emotional support. It was interesting to note that in two cases, the mentors didn't agree on the type of emotional support needed by new teachers. They believed that the new teachers needed to "be dealing with things on their own." In other words as one new teacher suggested, "thrown into the lions' den."

The intervention procedures that were introduced included more problem solving time in workshops and/or meeting with the mentoring coordinators to begin a dialogue with the mentor and new teacher. For the most part these interventions were helpful. Although many of the mentors had felt they were doing what they were supposed to, what many found was, "[they] began to realize in the conversations that [we] were having with the coordinator that there are degrees of support and what may work for one new teacher may not work for another. That was helpful information."

Seven of the new teachers did not have mentors with teaching experience at the grade level they were assigned to teach. The intervention for three of the seven was to ask another veteran teacher who had taught at that grade level to mentor along with the original mentor. Most of the new teachers said that they appreciated having the new mentor, but they also indicated that this was something that should have occurred at the beginning of the school year when the mentors were first assigned to the new teachers. One comment made by a mentor was also supported by the three new teachers, "The school district should have known this wasn't going to be a good match for us, but after they realized there was a problem, they provided the help we needed." Two of the four new teachers that were not assigned a second mentor had already made connections with a teacher at their grade level at their school and didn't need an assigned mentor. Both new teachers expressed, "Both of us were disappointed that the school district didn't provided us with mentors that taught at the same grade level, but at this point, were very happy with the mentor we now have, mainly because we got to pick them."

One of the mentoring coordinators made the following comment, which was

helpful in understanding why some of the schools did not assign a veteran teacher in the same school: “We realize that placement at grade level is really the ideal situation for the mentor and new teacher, but when you don’t have a veteran teacher with at least 3 years of experience required by the mentoring program, then you have to do the next best thing.”

In one case, the mentor failed to provide the time or support needed by the new teacher. The intervention employed was to have the principal supplement the mentor’s efforts by serving as an additional resource person to the new teacher. The principal took on this role because there were no other veteran teachers available to do so. According to the new teacher, “This arrangement really didn’t work out too well. The principal was really nice about helping me out, but he just didn’t have the time that I needed and I hated to keep bothering him with questions when he was already so busy with his regular duties.” The new teacher also shared with the mentoring coordinator that

The mentoring program, for the most part, was not much help. Unfortunately, they didn’t have another veteran teacher in my area and the principal felt that excusing the mentor might cause some problems, so he said that he would be more than willing to help me. Unfortunately it didn’t work out as well as he planned.

Finally, there was one case, where a veteran teacher was directed by his principal to be a mentor. In a discussion with the program trainer the mentor shared, “I felt that the administrator was responding to an easy fix for the new teacher, and I certainly didn’t feel like I was valued in the selection process. It was a matter of ‘you’re going to do this and no questions asked.’”

The mentor also indicated at the beginning of the year, “I just don’t have the time to mentor someone new and because I was not given a choice in the matter I have to say I’m pretty uncomfortable with this arrangement, but I’ll do it anyway.” When the new teacher found out that the veteran teacher had not volunteered, she said, “I can’t believe that my mentor was told that he would have to mentor me. Talk about a forced issue I’m extremely uncomfortable with even doing this at this point.” After the mentoring coordinator listened to their concerns, they decided to continue the relationship and the coordinator would monitor its progress. The mentoring coordinator also met with the principal to talk with him about why he required the veteran teacher to a mentor.

After a month, both mentor and new teacher felt more comfortable with the relationship. Although they still struggled on occasion, their comfort level with one another became more pronounced and positive. By the end of the school year, both agreed that the “mentoring experience was worthwhile, but not the selection process.”

## CONCLUSION

This study has sought to illuminate some of the problems that mentoring teams encountered on a reoccurring basis and their responses to intervention procedures that were introduced. By introducing the different intervention procedures, mentoring team members and mentoring program coordinators were provided with opportunities to articulate the challenges they faced. By reflecting on and verbalizing their practices, all of the mentoring program coordinators and most of the mentors and new teachers were

better able to understand the problems encountered and deal with them more effectively. The potential value of this practice is that it provides school districts and university personnel with another lens through which to view the challenges encountered by mentoring team members and mentoring program coordinators.

The researchers believe that the real value of this study rests upon documenting a more complete account of problems mentoring program coordinators and mentoring teams encounter as they work through the transitional process of developing and sustaining new mentoring programs and mentoring relationships. Planning and carrying out regular conversations with mentoring teams regarding their practices helps to build confidence and a professional culture that values relationships, reflection and collaborative practices. Some of those conversations, which are included in the recommendations, need to explore self-assessment as a part of the reflective process. Part of managing the health of any mentoring program and is developing an assessment process that is in the best interests of all participants. Roskos and Boehlen (2001) believe that when teachers are able to assess their own performance, they see more clearly the foundation and instructive role of the self-assessment.

Finally, our data show that school district personnel and education faculty need to share the results of their investigations to build on the limited research base that currently exists in the professional education literature. As educators learn more about the problems that mentoring teams encounter beyond those typically found in the literature they will be in a better position to more fully explore the intervention techniques. We must monitor the progress of our efforts through well-designed research for the dual purpose of informing practice and policy as well as discovering those questions that have yet to be asked.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON FUTURE RESEARCH

The significance of this study does not rest on these results and conclusions, although they are helpful. Our data suggests that a more formal approach is necessary in a study of this nature. The study's real significance lies in creating a research agenda that examines intervention procedures, problem solving time in workshops, and choices that mentors and new teachers make regarding their relationships. Based on this study, the following is recommended for future research.

First, mentoring teams that were encountering problems on a recurring basis should have been examined more closely--that is, there should have been a more thorough assessment process throughout the life of the mentoring team relationship. For those teams who continue to encounter problems, the mentoring program coordinator needs to involve both team members in two forms of assessment. The first assessment would require each mentor and new teacher on a regular basis, to self-assess their relationship professionally and personally and to analyze why they believe the relationship is faltering. The second assessment is based on the first assessment and will involve the mentor, new teacher and the mentoring coordinator in a discussion regarding why the problems have not been resolved and the possible solution or solutions to their problems. The purpose of continually assessing team members is threefold: to ensure that the mentoring team is getting the assistance it needs; to help the team members understand

they are valued; and to provide more detailed evidence that will clarify the type of intervention procedure to be used.

Second, there should be a closer examination of the workshops new teachers and mentors are required to attend during the school year and on their impact in helping to resolve problems that mentoring teams encounter on a recurring basis.

Third, there is a need for more clarity in understanding the degree of emotional support needed by new teachers and what that support should look like. This has specific implications for training and the selection and matching process for mentoring program

Fourth, research is also needed in highlighting the choices mentors and new teachers make as it relates to the team relationship. Providing opportunities to dialogue may help clarify what is at stake, but raising these issues may also lead to dysfunctional stalemates and may deepen differences rather than prompting more thoughtful discussion. That is why a more thoughtful analysis is so important. An analysis that requires those who develop and participate in mentoring programs and those who study their impact be cognizant of and responsive to these important distinctions and their implications.

Finally, the research design recommended involves the use of a quasi-experimental time series design that is appropriate for the four recommendations. The time series design would examine intact mentoring groups that were encountering problem/s on a reoccurring basis at each school district over a period of 1 to 3 years, depending on the length of the mentoring program. Intact groups would pretested repeatedly to determine what reoccurring problems needed to be addressed. Once a problem was identified as part of the mentoring team's routine, the group would be exposed to an intervention treatment created by the mentoring program coordinator. After the intervention had been completed, the intact groups would be repeatedly post tested to determine the effectiveness of the intervention procedures.

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