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Accessing the Knowledge Base of Retired Teachers: Experiences in Establishing a Formal Mentoring Program in a Rural School Division

J. Tim Goddard and Sharon Reimer Habermann
University of Calgary

This article is reports on the establishment of the formal mentoring program within a rural school division in Alberta, Canada. Through this program, the Chinook's Edge School Division established an innovative means to utilize the skills and knowledge of retired teachers and, at the same time, overcome the problems related to finding enough competent and qualified mentors to serve the needs of a widely scattered teaching force. A mixed methodological approach that is both layered and iterative was used to guide the processes of data collection and analysis.

Within the context of a culture that extols individualism through television shows such as "Survivor" and "The Weakest Link," the concept of people helping others to succeed in their work seems almost anachronistic. That those who have retired from the fields of battle should return to assist those who have taken their place verges on the altruistic. Such, however, is the situation across the ranches and farmland of central Alberta.

The Chinook's Edge School Division (CESD) serves a rural area south of Red Deer and north of Calgary, Alberta. Like many rural school districts, CESD experiences high staff turnover and is often in the position of recruiting new teachers. The situation is exacerbated by its location, equidistant from both Calgary and Edmonton. These two cities periodically express an insatiable desire for new teachers and tend to attract those who have spent the first few years of their career in the country. It was apparent to CESD that there needed to be some kind of support structure in place so that new teachers could be both recruited and retained.

Across Alberta, teacher recruitment is a competitive sport. School divisions advertise their wares in local, provincial, and national newspapers. Although a common perception exists that "local" candidates are given preference during the hiring process, this practice is changing. Declining rural populations are resulting in fewer graduates entering education programs at a university. Further, most teacher preparation programs in Alberta now require a 2-year postbaccalaureate degree, and many rural students simply cannot afford to support themselves through 6 years of college. The CESD is, therefore, in competition with larger urban boards for a diminishing pool of new teachers.

The situation is exacerbated as many neophyte teachers see a 2- or 3-year stint in a rural environment as a necessary training period prior to moving to the city. This "farm team" perception about teaching in rural schools has implications for teacher retention. The turnover of teachers in a rural setting such as CESD is thus constant and unabated.

The study reported here is important because it explores the mentoring of new teachers within a wholly rural environment. The special circumstances involved in working in such an environment bring particular stresses and influences on to the professional practices of a neophyte teacher.

That all new teachers are likely to benefit from a mentoring program has been well established (e.g., Alberta Teachers' Association, 1999; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Goddard & Foster, 2001; Martin & Trueax, 1997). These benefits are not restricted to teachers in a rural environment. However, it is important to understand that educators in rural schools experience a more intensively scrutinized professional life than their urban counterparts.

In a small rural community every action is noted, discussed, and analyzed. Rural teachers seldom have the urban anonymity of living in an area distant from the school in which they work. Further, they seldom have access to a wider social group of professional colleagues with whom concerns might be shared. The peer group is often limited to those who are experiencing similar problems, in the same setting, and with the same people. Such professional in-

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to J. Tim Goddard, Graduate Division of Educational Research, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive, N.W., Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4. (goddard@ucalgary.ca)

breeding tends to exacerbate and intensify the issue at hand and can sometimes prove more of a hindrance than a help to creative problem solving.

It is important that researchers do not "lump together" rural educators with their urban and suburban cousins. The experiences of neophyte teachers might be similar irrespective of environment. However, the context within which those experiences occur is quite different for rural teachers, and it may not be appropriate to generalize across settings.

Context

In the 1999-2000 school year, CESD established a series of support meetings for new teachers. Under the auspices of this program, known as the "Quantum Project," those teachers who were new to the division were given the opportunity to meet in a semistructured context. At intervals of approximately 6 weeks, meetings were held in a centrally located community and a structured discussion period was followed by an informal social evening. Attendance at these sessions was not compulsory, and the Quantum Project met with mixed success (Davidson, 2000). However, there was enough interest that the CESD decided to develop and implement a formal mentoring program. This was established for the 2000-2001 school year and, in June 2000, the first author was invited to be a member of the steering committee. The purpose of the project was to provide mentoring to new and new-to-Board teachers who started with CESD in the fall of 2000.

At the same time, CESD saw the potential for this program to other jurisdictions. Accordingly, it was decided that the first year of the project would also be documented as a research project. The purpose of this article is to report on this establishment of a formal mentoring program for new teachers. Although the case reported here is specific to a rural school division in Alberta, Canada, the lessons learned may be of interest and utility to rural educators in other countries.

Review of Related Literature

In keeping with most accepted standards (e.g., Goddard & Foster, 2001; Kagan, 1992; Veenman, 1984), a beginning or neophyte teacher is defined as one with fewer than 5 years professional experience as a teacher. A review of the current literature reveals that there is a vast amount of research on beginning teachers and their socialization to the profession generally (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Kagan, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Olson & Osborne, 1991; Veenman, 1984). However, the experiences of the neophyte teacher within a rural environment has not been as comprehensively investigated. The study reported here begins to address this gap in the literature.

Beginning Teachers

Lortie's (1975) writing on the "apprenticeship of observation," and Korthagen and Kessels' (1999) recent work on the influence of preservice teachers' "preconceptions" upon their learning, suggest the importance of role models in the development of the neophyte teacher's professional identity. It is well documented that beliefs and images about what constitutes good teaching emerge in childhood and are seldom changed by preservice experiences (Hawkey, 1998; Kagan, 1992). Professional and social interaction patterns of teachers arguably have their genesis in a constructed conceptualization of what a teacher is, a conceptualization learned from professional and familial archetypes (Goddard & Foster, 2001).

In the majority of instances, this work is located in a discussion of the preservice preparation of teachers. The extent to which these influences contribute to the ongoing reconceptualization of teachers' professional lives once they are employed in schools, and to their subsequent career decisions, has been less well documented. What follows is a discussion of the effects of a mentoring program on the professional lives of beginning teachers in a rural environment.

Mentoring

Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, and Thurston (1999) hold that there are two dimensions to the professional lives of teachers. Echoing Lortie (1975), Sergiovanni et al. (1999) observed that "teaching is a lonely profession . . . and teachers are involved in a political struggle within their school for valuable resources" (p. 191). Goddard and Foster (2001) reported that not all beginning teachers are intellectually or physically prepared for either the loneliness or the struggle, with concomitant losses to the profession. The role of a mentor is conceptualized as one in which some of that initial professional loneliness might be allayed.

Mentoring is the process whereby one person provides advice to another, generally less experienced, colleague. Such advice may occur within either a formal or informal arrangement between mentor and protégé (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1999). Mentoring is a reciprocal process that is characterized by trust, openness, commitment, and friendship (Kerka, 1998). This process builds a foundation for professional and personal growth and is a transformative experience for both mentor and protégé (Martin & Trueax, 1997). Through the mentoring relationship, the protégé is provided with support and encouragement during both good and difficult times (Sheeler, 1996). Further, the protégé is helped to adjust to the realities of teaching, to relieve self-doubts, to avoid isolation, and to find value in teaching itself (Runyon, White, Hazel, & Hedges, 1998).

Below, we explore the extent to which these benefits accrued to neophyte teachers in a rural school division.

Method

The data reported here were collected between September and December 2000. During this time, participants completed a survey questionnaire, and selected participants engaged in an interview. This is the first phase of a full-year research project. The survey questionnaire will be administered again at the end of the school year, and at that time, participants will also be asked to provide a final reflection consisting of short-written responses to 10 questions.

In this exploratory study, we decided to first analyze the survey data in order to determine categories for further investigation. These categories then provided the impetus for questions included in the interview stage of the study. This process allowed us to identify issues of pressing concern to mentors and protégés, and then to probe more deeply into the context and effect of those issues.

We consider this a mixed methodological approach that is both layered and iterative. It is layered in that the quantitative data emanating from the survey were subjected to a factor analysis.[1] The factors that resulted then formed the structure on which the interview protocol was developed. The interview data were then subjected to text analysis using NUD*IST software, and emergent themes identified. The process is iterative in that these emergent themes will then (in)form the survey questionnaire to be administered at the end of the program, and a further round of qualitative analysis will determine recurring themes as well as newly emergent ones. Further, the process allowed us to conduct an informal examination of the congruence, if any, between the factor structure and the themes derived from the interview data.

Participants

The participants in the study were educators engaged in the formal mentoring program established by the Chinook's Edge School Division. There were 22 mentors and 27 protégés involved in the project when it commenced in August 2000. All individuals involved in the mentoring program were invited to participate in the study.

Survey Questionnaires

There were two versions of the questionnaire, one for mentors (n = 22) and one for protégés (n = 27). The questionnaire was a 35-item, self-report measure developed by the researchers and CESD staff. Seven items provided demographic data, and 28 were Likert-type items. In their responses, participants were asked to rate the relative importance of topics such as "discussion of classroom management," "mentor encouragement/support," and "number of mentor visits to the protégé's classroom" (4 = very important, 3 = important, 2 = not very important, and 1 = not at all important). The same questions, with some minor modifications of wording in order to ensure appropriate context, were used in both surveys.

The researchers attended the first meeting of the mentors and protégés group, held in the board office in late August. Here they explained the research component of the mentoring program. In September, the surveys were distributed at the next scheduled meeting of the group. For those who were absent, surveys were mailed via the CESD internal mail system. Each participant received a package consisting of an introductory letter, the survey, an addressed return envelope, and a letter requesting an indication from those who would be willing to be part of an interview pool for the next phase of the project. The researchers and CESD senior administrative staff left the room while surveys were completed. Those who did not wish to complete the survey had the opportunity to simply return the materials in the envelope. As each mentor and protégé returned envelopes, confidentiality as to who had actually completed the survey was maintained.

Completed surveys were returned by 24 protégés (89%) and 21 mentors (95%), for an overall response rate of 92%. Further, 90% (n = 44) of the participants indicated that they were willing to be subsequently interviewed.

Mentors. Of the 21 mentors who responded, 10 were retired teachers, 5 were current teachers with over 20 years of experience, and 6 were current teachers with 10 to 20 years of experience. Their ages ranged from 27 to over 50 (17 were over 50 years old, 1 was between 41 and 50, and 3 were between 30 and 40). The majority of mentors were female (15 of the 21). In regard to prior involvement, 18 indicated they had never been participants in a formal mentoring program before.

Protégés. Of the 24 protégés who responded, 12 were 1st-year teachers, 9 were 2nd-year teachers, and 3 were 3rd-year teachers. Their ages ranged from under 23 to over 30 years of age (1 was under 23 years, 7 were between 23 and 26, 10 were between 27 and 30, and 5 were over 30). The majority of protégés were also female (20 of the 24). In regard to prior involvement, 22 indicated they had never been participants in a formal mentoring program before.

Interviews

The letters indicating a willingness to be interviewed were reviewed and sorted by three strata—role, gender, and

[1]While recognizing the limitations of using factor analysis techniques with such a small sample, we, nonetheless, believe that the process was consistent with the exploratory nature of the study.

geography. From each of these categories, a selection of letters were drawn. The goal was to have a sample of five protégés and five mentors, distributed in a manner representative of Board staffing. This was achieved. Of the five mentors, three were female and two were male. Similarly, of the five protégés, three were female and two were male. The interviewees were drawn from across the three main geographical regions (north, centre, south) of CESD.

The list of interviewees was then submitted to the district office, so that interview schedules could be established. It was discovered that one each of the selected protégés and mentors had withdrawn from the project. The mentor had withdrawn due to ill health. The protégé had withdrawn because although she was a new full-time teacher with CESD, she had been a substitute teacher with the board for 4 years and believed that the program was not particularly useful to her situation. The researchers selected two other participants from the list of those available, matching as before for role, gender, and geography.

The interviews took place on 2 separate days during the fall term, 2000. The researchers drove from school to school and interviewed participants in a conference room, office, or classroom as appropriate or available. A substitute teacher was hired to cover the class when a protégé or teaching mentor was being interviewed. The individual interviews were from 30 to 60 minutes; the average interview lasted 45 minutes. In three instances, both researchers were present at the interview; for the majority of cases, however, only one researcher was the interviewer.

All interviews were audio taped, and the tapes were subsequently transcribed. Printed copies of the transcripts were sent to each interviewee for member check to confirm accuracy and to provide participants with the opportunity to withdraw their remarks, or indeed themselves, from the study should they so desire. None chose to withdraw from the study, and only one request for edits or alterations to the transcripts was received.

The transcripts were then subjected to text analysis using NUD*IST software. From this analysis, seven themes emerged. These themes are described in the findings and interpretations section of this paper.

Findings and Interpretations

The themes that emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative components of this study are described here. These components are then integrated in the final part of this section.

Quantitative

The means for both mentors and protégés were relatively high on the 28 Likert items.

Multivariate tests. A MANOVA was conducted to determine if there were significant differences between mentor and protégé responses. Items 8 through 35 were treated as dependent variables, and item 2 (indicating mentor or protégé) was the independent variable. Although significant differences ($p < .05$) were found on 8 items, a post-hoc test to account for Type 1 errors indicated a significance level of 0.164 . As such, it was concluded there was no significant difference between mentors and protégés. Separate factor analyses, therefore, were deemed unnecessary.

Factor analyses. A principal components factor analysis was conducted with orthogonal rotation. A seven-factor solution obtained accounting for 68.7% of the item variance. The seven factors are described as follows.

Factor 1 (14.0% of the variance) was labelled Special Situations and included such items as discussion of cognitive special needs, discussion of parent-teacher conferences, report writing discussion, discussion of ethnic students, and physical special needs discussion. Factor 2 (12.4% of the variance) tapped Professional Policies and Procedures, represented items such as shared planning time, information regarding school culture, and information regarding school policies. Factor 3 (11.7% of the variance), Support and Encouragement, tapped items such as mentor emotional support, classroom management discussion, and help with classroom management.

Factor 4 (8.3% of the variance), Teaching Skills, included such items as advice on teaching skills and lesson planning discussion. Factor 5 (8.2% of the variance), Mentor Compatibility, included same-grade experience, same-subject experience, and partnering decisions. Factor 6 (7.8% of the variance), Mentor's Proximity, represented items such as the optimum number of meetings and same school placement. Factor 7 (6.3% of the variance), Interactions, involved the regularity and location of meetings between the mentor and the protégé. The factors and items that loaded on each factor are presented in tabular form in Table 1.

Qualitative

The seven themes that emerged from the qualitative aspects of the research are described here. First, respondents discussed their personal history and its impact on their professional lives. They presented subthemes that described their love of children and of the subjects they taught. They recounted previous positive school experiences from their childhood. And they referred to what Goddard and Foster (2001) described as professional archetypes: those teachers who had a significant impact on their decision to become teachers themselves.

A second theme was concerned with issues of moral, parental, administrative, and curriculum support. The men-

tors were able to provide this support in a nonjudgemental way. As Drey[2] reported, "I say, 'hey, this doesn't get to anybody, this is you and I. You have a problem with [the administration], talk to me. I can't help you necessarily, but at least you can lay it on me.'" The protégés appeared to welcome this opportunity to share their concerns and frustrations.

The third theme that emerged was the opportunity to clarify roles. The mentors provided the protégés with information on the roles of teachers, administrators, and other constituent groups within the school. They also helped to clarify the role of the mentor as a supportive, nonjudgemental associate. This was elaborated upon in the fourth theme, that of immediacy. The protégés welcomed the immediacy of the relationship that existed when mentors were drawn from the same school and, in some instances, the same grade level. The serendipitous nature of chance meetings in hallways or staff rooms added to the strength of the mentor-protégé relationship, which was the fifth theme.

Regarding this fifth theme, it was apparent that protégés welcomed the opportunity to have someone to talk to and, once the initial nervousness had worn off, someone with whom to share the most intimate thoughts concerning professional practice. The difficulties experienced by the beginning teachers constituted the sixth theme. These were reminiscent of difficulties reported by Veenman (1984), Goddard (2000b), and others. The protégés were concerned about the organizational specifics of their school, about student behaviour and classroom management, and about what constituted an appropriate level of extra-curricula "volunteering" by a new teacher.

The seventh and final theme that emerged concerned mentor and protégé responses to the program itself. Overall, this was considered to be a successful program and respondents were adamant that it be continued. Hank observed that his mentor is "actually at the same school, so we can meet whenever we have some spare time. . . . I think the mentorship program is a great thing, a very valuable thing." Others expressed similar sentiments. The themes that emerged from the interview data, and a brief description of each, are presented in tabular form in Table 2.

Integration

A review of the seven themes shows that five have a close affinity with the seven factors identified earlier. This congruence was made manifest in a number of ways.

Theme 2 (the provision of nonjudgemental support) was reflected in Factor 2 (Identification of Professional Practices and Procedures) and Factor 3 (Mentor Support and Encouragement for the Protégé). Issues from theme 3 (role clarification) were evident in Factor 4 (Teaching Skills), and the immediacy reported in theme 4 was similar to the proximity mentioned in Factor 6 and the interactions described in Factor 7. Factor 1 (Special Situations) was closely allied to theme 6 (the difficulties experienced by protégés in their work), and theme 5 (the mentor-protégé relationship) was echoed in Factor 5 (Mentor Compatibility).

This degree of congruence between factors and themes was not unexpected. After all, the factors identified from the quantitative data were influential in the construction of the interview protocols. However, it had been assumed that the elapsed time between the administration of the questionnaire (early September) and the conducting of the interviews (late November) would be enough for some "pre-practice" concerns to lose their saliency. This did not appear to occur. Indeed, references to all seven factors were found in the themes emanating from the interview data.

Two new themes emerged that were not reflected in the factor analysis. These were theme 1, personal history, and theme 7, responses to the program. Questions that focus on these themes will be developed and included in the follow-up study.

Discussion

The findings and emergent themes resulting from this study suggest that the establishment of a formal mentoring program within CESD was successful. They also suggest that this success was only possible due to the support of the board. It is apparent that others who seek to establish similar programs must invest resources in the process. These resources do not have to be significant, from a cost perspective, but they must be targeted. If such a program is to be successful, it is imperative that appropriate resources be identified and made available.

Required Resources

It is apparent that the recruitment of experienced mentors, the provision of money, the establishment of a sense of community, and the provision of time for reflection, have all contributed to the success of this program.

Recruitment of experienced mentors. The use of retired teachers, who are provided with 4 days of substitute teacher salary, has helped overcome the problems of finding suitable mentors for new teachers employed within a small school. These teachers were actively recruited by the central office staff, who wanted to ensure that teachers with a reputation for success were involved in the project.

Provision of money. The payment of a mileage allowance has helped address issues related to rural isolation, as some mentors were required to travel over 100 kilometres (60 miles) in order to visit adjacent communities. There

[2]All names are pseudonyms, selected by the participants to provide what we have termed "recognisable anonymity."

Table 1
Summary of the Factors

Item #	Item	Loading
Factor 1: Special Situations (14% of variance)		
25	How important is it that effective methods for teaching students with cognitive special needs be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.86
30	How important is it that effective methods for teaching students with physical special needs be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.77
29	How important is it that effective methods for teaching ethnically and culturally diverse students be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.65
24	How important is it that preparation for parent-teacher conferences be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.43
Factor 2: Professional Practices and Procedures (12.4% of variance)		
10	How important is it that mentors inform their protégé about the school culture?	.78
11	How important is it that mentors provide protégés with information about school policies?	.74
27	How important is it that the school's policies and procedures be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.69
28	How important is it that the socioeconomic make-up of the community be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.69
Factor 3: Mentor Support and Encouragement (11.7% of variance)		
33	How important is it that classroom management be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.87
12	How important is it that mentors provide protégés with help about classroom management?	.79
19	How important is it that mentors provide protégés with a "shoulder to cry on"?	.63
17	How important is it that mentors display professional competence?	.60
8	How important is it that mentors provide protégés with support and encouragement?	.52
Factor 4: Teaching Skills (8.3% of variance)		
34	How important is it that writing student reports be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.71
13	How important is it that mentors provide protégés with advice on teaching skills?	.70
31	How important is it that teacher professional growth plans be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.66
32	How important is it that lesson planning be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.51
Factor 5: Mentor Compatibility (8.2% of variance)		
23	How important is it that mentors have experience teaching in the same subject area(s) as their protégé?	.78
15	How important is it that mentors and protégés are involved in deciding who they will be partnered with?	.77
22	How important is it that mentors have experience at the same grade level(s) as their protégé?	.76

Continued

Table 1 Continued

Item #	Item	Loading
Factor 6: Mentor Proximity (7.8% of variance)		
21	How important is it that mentors work in the same school as their protégé?	.79
35	How often should formal meetings between mentors and protégés take place?	.74
26	How important is it that effective methods for teaching students with behavioral problems be discussed as part of a formal mentoring program?	.53
Factor 7: Interactions (6.3% of variance)		
18	How important is it that mentors show a commitment to visit the protégé's classroom?	.84
16	How important is it that mentors establish a two-way interchange to discuss goals and procedures?	.60
9	How important is it that mentors meet regularly with their protégés?	.43
Items not loading		
14	How important is it that mentors and protégés meet together before school starts?	
20	How important is it that mentors and protégés are given shared planning time?	

was some concern that such a requirement would cause financial distress to the mentors and would result in a high rate of withdrawal from the group. This did not occur. Mentors explained that their willingness to travel such distances was predicated on their belief that a mentor-protégé support program was essential to new teachers, particularly those in a relatively isolated school. At the same time, they appreciated that the mileage allowance ensured they were not "out of pocket" for their expenses. Mentors saw this payment as a manifestation of the school division's willingness to support the mentoring program in the fullest possible way, and they were appreciative of this support.

An understanding of the symbolic value of a mileage allowance on mentor perceptions is especially important when trying to establish mentoring relationships among rural high school teachers. In many cases, the nearest neighbouring school serves a geographically distant part of the school division, and travel along country roads is both time consuming and expensive.

Establishing a sense of community. The role of the central office staff in the organization of regular dinner seminars provided mentors and protégés alike with the opportunity to mingle in a social setting. As Drey recounted, "after supper, [my protégé] and I sat for an hour and discussed some of the issues she was experiencing. It was a wonderful, relaxing, and yet professional conversation." The dinner seminars were held every 6 weeks and usually followed an afternoon inservice session. As a result, participants were able to travel to a professional activity and then complete the day with social interaction.

Providing time for reflection. Another initiative is that protégés have been encouraged to take 2 half-day leaves of absence from their classrooms, to provide them with an opportunity to pause and reflect on their practice. These leaves are offered on a "no questions asked" basis. The teachers might use this time to visit the professional libraries maintained by the Alberta Teachers' Association or one of the local universities, to observe another teacher in the same or an accessible school, to meet with their mentor, or simply to withdraw from the classroom and contemplate their practice. Engagement in all these activities was reported by the various protégés. It is only through the provision of such resources—experienced mentors, money, community, time for reflection—that the mentoring program reported on here has been successfully established.

Caveats

Notwithstanding the success of the program, there are some caveats that must be addressed. These involve issues of professional culture, ego, ethics, and contemporary professional knowledge.

Professional culture. Although provision was made for all the protégés to take 2 half-day leaves of absence, few accepted this opportunity. Those who did subsequently reported that the time was of immense value in that it permitted them to "step back" from the classroom, albeit for a short time, and consider their practice. Such respite allowed them to relax a little and address perceived problems in a thoughtful manner. Those who did not take the leaves re-

Table 2
Summary of the Emergent Themes

Theme	Subthemes
1. Personal history	Familial and professional archetypes
2. Nonjudgemental support	Advice and support provided in a nonjudgemental way
3. Role clarification	Information on teacher, administrator and other constituent group roles, specific to the school
4. Immediacy	Mentors at same school provided for serendipitous *ad hoc* discussions
5. Mentor-protégé relationship	A close bonding between protégé and mentor
6. Difficulties experienced	Organizational specifics, classroom management, appropriate 'volunteer' time
7. Responses to the mentoring program	Positive experiences and a sense that the mentoring program should be continued

ported a variety of reasons for ignoring the opportunity. Some felt that the effort involved in planning for a substitute teacher outweighed the benefit of the half day itself. Others believed that their school administrators were only paying lip-service to the idea and that there might be a negative impact on their evaluation reports. Many thought that their colleagues would see the taking of a half day as a sign of weakness and insecurity. The authors have advised CESD to consider making the half-day leaves mandatory for all new teachers, thus reducing the stigma that appears to exist within the professional culture of the division.

Ego. In some cases, the protégés refused to acknowledge any need for a mentor. These neophyte teachers were self-confident to the point of arrogance, and explained that their involvement in the process was simply one of political expediency. In essence, they believed that failure to participate would have been noticed by senior staff and would have counted against them in their annual evaluations. It is questionable how much benefit these teachers gained from the experience. The CESD needs to discuss this issue with staff in a nonthreatening manner and determine if there are ways by which such fears might be allayed.

Ethics. The tendency of mentors to suggest that the protégés could "tell them anything" has potential negative implications. There are distinct parameters within which professionals may discuss the work of colleagues, and beyond which they ought not step. One can foresee the situation arise where a protégé is encouraged to describe, in detail, the actual or perceived peccadilloes of a colleague or administrator. This raises issues serious concerns vis-à-vis the code of ethics by which all Alberta teachers are required to abide.

For example, Section 23(3) of the Teaching Profession Act "requires members to report forthwith to the executive secretary on the unprofessional conduct of another member" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2000, p. 12). Further, the teacher is required to first inform the other member prior to discussing perceived misconduct with the executive secretary. There is no provision for teachers to discuss the practice of other professionals with a third party, even one who has retired but nonetheless remains within the profession as a superannuated member of the association. Therefore, in a situation where a retired teacher encourages a neophyte to share details about the performance of a school administrator, there is cause for concern that both may be guilty of unprofessional conduct.

Contemporary professional knowledge. A third caveat is related to the rapidly changing world of the school. It is apparent that the role and culture of schooling is undergoing a transformation. The introduction and integration of computer technology has altered the pedagogy of teaching. The influences of external cultural and socioeconomic factors on the classroom environment are beginning to be recognized (Foster & Goddard, 2001; Goddard, 2000b). The growing movement towards high stakes testing has resulted in changes to curricula foci and resource allocation. Advances in teaching techniques and in our knowledge of human learning have irrevocably changed the ways in which contemporary teachers structure their classroom spaces and interact with their students. It is questionable as to what

extent the retired teachers are aware of, or sensitive to, these pressures on the work of beginning teachers.

Conclusion

Formal mentoring programs involving veteran teachers have been shown to assuage many of the unique challenges faced by beginning teachers. For the protégés, such programs aid in the development of certain characteristics attributed to teacher-success, including child-centeredness, ability to motivate students, consistency, and empathy (Breeding & Whitworth, 1999). Recent work by Goddard (2000a) described five benefits for protégés. These benefits were found to also exist here.

Specifically, mentoring (a) offers protégés an opportunity to voice their experience, (b) gives protégés a sympathetic ear, (c) provides an "insider" view of professional contexts, (d) helps protégés navigate their first explorations of the "real world" of teaching, and (e) assists them with the establishment of routines.

The benefits for mentors include the development of a sense of renewal and revitalization, especially for those retired teachers who were "brought back into the fold," as it were. The process also leads to the development of new skills, to increased status, and to opportunities for personal empowerment and professional growth.

As with most formal mentoring programs, the one reported here involved the pairing of a veteran teacher (mentor) with a neophyte teacher (protégé). The desired outcome of these programs was that new teachers would gain support, knowledge, insight, and so forth, from mentors, in hopes they would be better equipped to successfully complete their first years of teaching. This, in turn, would lead to a higher retention rate of teachers within the employ of the board. Such long-term impacts of the program are impossible to assess at this stage but will be monitored over time.

The nonevaluative role of mentors, who had little if any evaluative power in the protégés' careers, was purposeful. It was intended that protégés would find it easier to approach mentors for advice and encouragement and feel comfortable raising concerns that would otherwise be difficult for them to express for fear of appearing incompetent (Breeding & Whitworth, 1999; Goddard, 2000a). This was found to be the case.

The small number of participants involved in this study is a limitation to the generalizability of the results and interpretations. We have reasonable confidence in the reliability and trustworthiness of the instrument, a confidence enhanced by the agreement between the quantitative and qualitative themes that emerged. At the same time, there were some themes that emerged in the interviews but had not surfaced in the survey responses. At the end of the year, we intend to address issues of personal history and responses to program to the second-phase questionnaire. In targeting specific questions to such emergent themes and in monitoring the changes in teacher retention rates, we should be able to develop a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of the affects of a formal mentoring program on the experiences of neophyte teachers within a rural environment.

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