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To Thrive and Flourish:

Supporting Beginning Teachers Through an Induction-by-Mentoring Approach in Rural Saskatchewan

Lynn Lemisko, Laurie-ann M. Hellsten, and Carol Demchuk-Kosolofski



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Research Coordinator
Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation
2317 Arlington Avenue
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Telephone: 1-800-667-7762 or 306-373-1660

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Abstract

The overall objective of this research was to examine, in the context of rural Saskatchewan, the key components of an effective and sustainable mentorship approach that helps beginning teachers thrive and flourish. To address this objective we studied the implementation of a particular mentorship model where the beginning teachers' classrooms were the central focus, with regularly scheduled classroom visits by mentors who provided structure, continuity, relationship building, and professional development opportunities. Participants in this study included five mentor and mentee pairs who were matched based on proximity and, in most cases, on common grade or division levels taught. Mentors were provided with orientation training in a variety of mentorship skills and were provided with funds to cover release time from their own classrooms in order to visit their mentees' schools and classrooms for one full day or two half days per month. Findings provide important insights into the value and benefits of a mentorship program for both mentees and mentors and the data suggests some key ingredients necessary for an effective mentorship program.

This study demonstrates both the challenges and benefits of our induction-by-mentorship model. The recommendations we offer, based on this study, indicate ways in which induction-by-mentorship approaches might be strengthened, particularly in the Saskatchewan context. Overall, however, this study demonstrates that mentorship is a promising and effective approach that supports personal and professional development which helps beginning teachers and their mentors thrive and flourish.

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Introduction

This study was designed to build on our pilot investigation, funded by the McDowell Foundation, titled Bridging the Professional Learning Gap: Enhancing the Beginning Teacher Experience Through An Induction-By-Mentoring Model which examined the efficacy of an induction-by-mentoring model to support beginning teachers in one rural/suburban school division. Specifically, this study deepened understandings by expanding the investigation to include examination of the implementation of an induction-by-mentorship approach in a very large rural school division in Saskatchewan, where most schools are located at great distances from one another.

Our study arose out of concerns related to teacher retention because teaching has a turnover rate higher than that of most professions (Carroll & Fulton, 2004; Ferriter & Norton, 2004; Fuller, 2002). In particular, retention of beginning teachers is of special concern (Watts Hull, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001) as it is estimated that 20 to 50 percent of beginning teachers resign during their first three to five years (Villani, 2002; Voke, 2002). As teachers typically require five to eight years of experience to master the profession (Scherer, 2001), classrooms become recurrent training grounds as teachers leave before becoming experts only to be replaced by novices. This cyclical turnover has been demonstrated to have a significant negative impact on student achievement that stretches beyond individual teachers and classrooms (Ronfelddt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). However, our concerns went beyond simply retaining teachers. Our study was also shaped by our interest in providing supports that could help beginning teachers thrive and flourish.

In order to ensure that beginning teachers thrive, we claim that it is necessary to induct beginning teachers into a system, which from the very beginning supports mentorship, collaboration (Howe, 2008), and continued growth and learning (Carroll, 2005). Effective mentorship has the ability to “bridge the gap that occurs when interns leave their teacher preparation programs and move into classroom responsibility, providing ... access to best practices and resources beyond the classroom” (Carroll, 2005, p. 204). Hence, we are investigating approaches to the induction and support of beginning teachers in rural school divisions in Saskatchewan and in this study we focused on the overall question: In the context of rural Saskatchewan, what are the key components of an effective and sustainable mentorship approach that helps beginning teachers thrive and flourish?

Specifically, this study addressed three sub-questions:

- Can mentorship ameliorate the sense of professional and personal/social isolation experienced by beginning teachers working in rural schools?
- Does mentorship support the flourishing and thriving of beginning teachers in relation to the five stages or phases of first-year teachers' development (Moir, 1990)?
- What recommendations arise out of the data for development of an effective and sustainable mentorship approach in rural school divisions?

Objectives

Our research objectives were threefold. First, we aimed to more deeply understand the efficacy and the sustainability of a mentorship approach that focuses on rural beginning teachers' classrooms. We posited that this model could assist in retaining and sustaining beginning teachers by creating collaborative relationships between beginning teachers and experienced mentor teachers. Secondly, we also aimed to understand how this collaborative model might provide co-learning and supportive professional development for both the beginning teachers and their mentors. Thirdly, we aimed to identify key components of an induction-by-mentorship approach that helps beginning teachers thrive and flourish. We hypothesized that our project will make an important contribution to teaching and learning by providing feedback to the profession and all interested stakeholders about the benefits of developing similar induction-by-mentoring programs in other school divisions in our province.

Rationale, Literature, and Statement of Need

Most beginning teachers are optimistic, idealistic (Martin, Chiodo, & Chang, 2001), and feel prepared for their first year of teaching (McPherson, 2000), but the majority are shocked by their initiation into the profession (Simurda, 2004), finding their first three years as the most stressful in their careers (Martin, Chiodo, & Chang, 2001). These early experiences shape beginning teachers for the rest of their careers (Moir & Gless, 2001) and have implications for teacher effectiveness and career length (McCormack & Thomas, 2003). With these experiences in mind, approaches to beginning teacher induction have become an issue of special concern in rural school divisions in Saskatchewan where new teacher migration and teacher wellness are continuing challenges within public education.

Induction involves the ways in which the teaching community acculturates beginning teachers and usually refers to structured programs (Wong, 2004; Wong, Britton, & Ganser, 2005) or informal processes that may vary across schools (Bolman, & Deal, 1997). Most beginning teacher induction programs include some aspects of mentorship by experienced teachers but the composition of the programs and the training of the mentors varies widely (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of mentorship programs (Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, & Cowan-Hathcock, 2007; Serpell, 2000; Carter, & Francis, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2003) and their ability to improve teacher quality, which is one of the best predictors of student success (Davis & Higdon, 2008).

Studies into new teacher development point to ways in which induction approaches need to take into account the ebbs and flows in beginning teachers' experiences. Various studies (Berliner, 1988; Fuller, 2002; Goddard & Foster, 2001, Katz, 1972; Lortie, 1975; Moir, 1990) have highlighted stages of development experienced by beginning teachers. For example, Moir (1990) determined that first-year teachers experience five distinct phases over the course of a school year: the anticipation phase; the survival phase; the disillusionment phase; the rejuvenation phase; and the reflection phase. To ensure that beginning teachers flourish, it has been proposed that induction programs need to include mentorship and collaborative approaches to continued growth and learning (Howe, 2008; Carroll, 2005) that take the stages of development of beginning teachers into consideration.

The sense of isolation which might be experienced by all teachers can be exacerbated among beginning teachers and these feelings of aloneness need to be addressed. Similar to an Australian study of early career teachers (Buchanan et al., 2013), our study examined the challenges of physical, geographic, and professional isolation for beginning teachers. In our study, we were able to explore mentorship as a support for new teachers in its ability to ameliorate the sense of professional, personal, and social isolation experienced by beginning teachers working in rural schools.

As noted above, while we are interested in the issue of teacher retention, we think new teacher induction programs and processes need to look beyond retention and toward support for flourishing. The notion of flourishing as it relates to teachers and teaching, is only recently under study (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014) and there are a variety of terms including happiness, well-being, and wellness that are connected to the concept of flourishing (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Teachers often struggle with finding a healthy balance in their lives (Naylor, 2001) and need support in enhancing their personal wellness to enhance energy levels, resiliency, and job satisfaction (Pelletier, 1994). We posited that mentorship could enhance beginning teachers' wellness or flourishing by helping to provide a positive, supportive community where teachers feel noticed, valued, challenged, and cherished (Cherkowski and Walker, 2014).

We think that our project has particular significance in Saskatchewan at present because, unlike other provinces in Canada, Saskatchewan does not have a government-supported beginning teacher mentorship program. This means that mentorship programs, when they do exist, vary widely between school divisions (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009; Prytula, Makahonuk, Syrota, & Pesenti, 2009). Recommendations stemming from a review of existing mentorship programs in Saskatchewan include making formal mentorship programs a priority in education, providing release time for regularly scheduled meetings, providing opportunities for classroom visits, and providing training to the personnel who will act as mentors (Olafson, Elaschuk, & Owns, 2002). Although different mentorship models have been proposed for use with beginning teachers (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hargreaves, 1998; Maynard, & Furlong, 1995; Spindler & Biott, 2000), including two models developed in Saskatchewan, (Ralph, 2002; Prytula, Makahonuk, Syrota, Pesenti, Archibald, Benson, Froelich, Gauthier, Goodman, Hellsten, Mihalicz, & Vangool, 2010), these do not focus on the beginning teachers' classrooms or address mentoring recommendations (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999).

Our mentorship model provided beginning teachers with the support of experienced master teacher mentors and we investigated how to implement recommendations in a sustainable way via a partnership between the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan and a rural school division. We think this investigation was necessary in order to demonstrate if the proposed mentorship program is effective and sustainable in a rural school division and, if so, our findings will provide the evidence that can be brought forward to the Government of Saskatchewan, Ministry of Education, in the hope they will contribute financially to a wider-spread Saskatchewan New Teacher Mentorship Program.

Description of Study Population

Altogether, there were five beginning-teacher and mentor-teacher pairings. Although the project budget included funding to support release time for workshops and retreats for all mentee and mentor pairs, the budget was only able to support release time for four mentors to visit the classrooms of their mentees. One mentee and mentor pair volunteered to participate in our study despite the lack of funding for release time for them because the pair was located in the same school and thought their work together as mentor and mentee could provide meaningful insights for our project. All participants were female and all the mentee and mentor pairs worked in elementary classrooms in a very large rural school division where most schools are located at great distances from one another and where divisional offices were located in a town over an hour away from a larger urban centre in Saskatchewan. In all but one of the pairs, mentees and mentors taught at the same grade or division level. For example, one pair taught kindergarten students, another pair taught Grade 1, division one students, a third taught division two, Grade 4 students and a fourth pair taught students in grades 1 to 4. In the remaining pairing, one person taught Grade 1 students, while the other taught students in Grade 5. In two of the pairings, both the mentee and mentor taught in the same school. The effort to take proximity into account when making the matches for mentees and mentors who worked in separate locations resulted in two pairings where the time to drive between locations was approximately 30 to 45 minutes, one way. Unfortunately, in one other case, the best match meant that the mentor and mentee were at a substantial distance from each other - at least a 90 minute drive, one way. Most mentors were mid-career teachers, while one mentor was retiring at the end of the project year. All of the mentees were in their first year or second year of their careers (those in their second year indicated that they were on their first full-year contract), so none of the mentees possessed multiple years of teaching experience.

Research Methodology: Data Gathering and Analysis

Mentorship training was offered in September for the master teachers who volunteered to become mentors. In addition, a retreat for both the mentors and mentees was organized in mid-October when the mentors and beginning teachers had an opportunity to meet and begin to build their collegial relationships. The retreat involved opportunities for co-planning and reflection.

Between October and December, each mentor spent four half-days or two full days in their mentee's classroom and each mentor spent six half-days or three full days in the beginning teacher's classroom between January and April. Classroom experiences took a variety of forms including observations, co-teaching, and coaching. All mentors and mentees, facilitated by a Research Assistant Moderator, were encouraged to share reflections and commentary about their experiences in a blog set up for use by participants in this project and all were encouraged to informally document their experiences through the use of other approaches to journaling and the collection of relevant artifacts and to consider an action-research inquiry into their mutual practice. In addition to these activities, beginning teachers and their mentors met again for full-day retreats with the research team in January and May. The full-day retreat in January provided an additional opportunity for reflection and planning for mentor and mentee pairs and for the pairs to obtain support and guidance in designing an action-research inquiry. The retreat also provided the opportunity for debriefing and data gathering by the research team. Short individual interviews (10 minutes) with all participants were conducted with the aid of a digital recording device during the January retreat. Lengthier individual interviews (30 minutes) were conducted with all participants in April. Focus group interviews (one hour and grouped by role) were conducted during the May retreat, and the retreat offered an opportunity for all participants to debrief their experiences together.

An adapted version of Cantril's Ladder (1965) combined with the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009) was used to obtain pre-, post-, and ongoing self-assessments by both mentors and beginning teachers to track their perceptions of personal wellbeing and flourishing with respect to social relationships, having a purposeful and meaningful life, being engaged and interested, having self-respect and optimism, and feeling competent and capable as beginning teachers through the five phases of early career teaching (Moir, 1990). All participants were asked to complete the Ladder in October, January, and May. Interviews

were scripted with questions co-constructed by members of the research team and the school division. Questions focused on professional and personal factors affecting teachers' beliefs about competence and confidence in their new roles in their school communities such as teacher identity, self-efficacy, and desired supports and resources as well as efficacy of the mentorship approach. Transcription of the interviews was conducted by a neutral third party and thematic analysis was used to identify repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We attempted to ensure that the coding of the transcripts and the interpretations made from the codes were constructed from the raw data contained in the transcribed responses to the interview questions (Boyatzis, 1998). Blog entries, which were few and far between, were examined using a document analysis approach (Bowen, 2009). The themes generated through analysis of the interview transcripts and the blog served to integrate the data gathered from these different sources and these results were combined with data gathered utilizing the Cantril's Ladder using mixed methods research strategies.

Findings and Interpretations

The analysis of the data collected from the blog, Cantril's Ladder, the Flourishing Scale, and most importantly from transcribed individual interviews and focus group discussions, revealed key ideas about the benefits and challenges of a mentorship model focused on beginning teachers' classrooms in a large Saskatchewan rural school division. These key ideas were expressed by the mentees and mentors who participated in this study. To honour their collective wisdom, we have divided our findings into three sections with key ideas supported by examples representing the voices of mentors and mentees who participated in the project. The first section outlines the benefits of a mentorship program (including the amelioration of isolation) as expressed by participating mentors and mentees. The second section offers examples proffered by participants regarding how mentorship supported the flourishing and thriving of beginning teachers in relation to Moir's five phases of first year teachers' development. The third section includes some specific recommendations and suggestions offered by the mentors and mentees that school divisions can consider when developing beginning teacher induction and mentorship programs.

Section I: Benefits of the Mentorship Program

Benefits for Beginning Teacher Mentees

Learning Routines and Logistics

Given that beginning teachers are recent graduates of teacher education programs, they are generally familiar with the processes and big ideas related to teaching and learning (e.g., subject area curriculum and lesson and unit planning), but they may not be familiar with particular little things like daily routines, classroom management, and expectations in their schools. Mentees in our study commented on ways in which they learned about daily routines and logistics of school life through their relationships with their mentors. For example, one mentee commented on how her mentor helped her with "classroom management ideas, just how to organize that crazy cupboard [and] some ideas on how to keep it simple."

Another mentee indicated that she had knowledge about a particular instructional strategy, but that her mentor assisted her in understanding how to actually implement the approach. This beginning teacher stated: "... it really wasn't about the ability level or the skill level, it was more about the structure of the activity and how to keep it flowing in that classroom management side."

Another mentee alluded more generally to ways in which she learned about routines and logistic when she commented:

... we're having an assembly tomorrow. That means we wait to get called down or you line up and you sit here; [its] all those little things that you don't really think about until you've hopped into the teaching profession and are on your own, you can really go to your mentor and just ask them, "How do you do this? And what kind of ideas do you have?" And it's nice to be able to bounce those ideas off each other. It's been great just to have someone with so much more experience to chat with, and I can see for my first year teaching, okay this is normal, this is what happens and I don't have to stress so much about that, but with planning she's helped me make my classroom a little bit more efficient and organized."

Develop Perspective by Heeding the Advice of Experienced Mentors

Beginning teachers often engage so intensely in their work that they experience negative effects on their wellbeing. Mentees who participated in our study noted how the advice offered by their mentors helped set realistic expectations, which in turn reduced stress and enhanced wellness. To illustrate, one beginning teacher commented on how she followed the advice of her mentor who had suggested:

" ... basically set your work hours and don't work beyond them ... never at the school past five; focus on what's important. If it's not going to make or break your day then don't worry about it; make sure you're home by five o'clock so that you have that time to yourself."

"I've started doing that I found after Christmas and I have been so much better at getting things accomplished and I have felt a lot better compared to the beginning of the school year, way less stress."

Mentees participating in our project also noted that they derived benefit from mentors who advised them that "it's okay to fail and try again," that teaching does not require "perfection" (nor can we expect everything to go perfectly), and that there is no need to feel guilty when things don't turn out as planned. For example, one beginning teacher ruminated on her reaction to the support she received through conversation with her mentor:

... to be able to reflect and just say, you know what I just am not there yet and I just need to calmly work my way in. I think just that whole calmness and ability to just say, like [she] said – it's okay if I didn't get that done, or it's okay if that lesson bombed. ... I just have to calmly figure out how I'm going to do it.

Receive Emotional Support From Mentors That Enhances Mental Health

Participants in our study highlighted the idea that their mentoring relationships proved to be as important in offering personal support as it was for offering professional assistance. Mentors were clear in their understandings of this, explicitly noting:

Mental health is just as important as the academics. And you cannot deliver those academics properly if you're not mentally healthy.

[As a mentor] I feel for the success of a beginning teacher is the emotional as opposed to the actual content. Because so many of them, they're perfectly competent to plan a lesson, to plan units. But it's the emotional, they can't handle the stressors, they can't handle the frustrations, the disappointments that can come.

It's all about being able to look in their eyes and know they've just had a run in with a parent and they need that venting time. I think where new teachers struggle a little bit is in more of the social ... more of the hearing it's okay.

The beginning teacher mentees clearly benefited from the fact that their mentors understood their need for personal support. Based on their comments, it is obvious that the mentees received needed emotional support from their mentors. For example, mentees noted:

Having that, I guess, extra personal support with somebody who does have a lot of experience. It's been comforting to know that other teachers are feeling the same way.

" ... it's good to know too that sometimes you feel like oh crap that was bad or I could have done that better. But it's good - for me anyways it's been comforting to know that other teachers are feeling the same way and that's been a big piece of it is just, you know, this happened this time we'll make it better for next time and that's kind of what this profession is ... "

" ... it was nice, I was able to talk to her about it when I was going through problems, we were able to talk more about professional things but it was nice having that. I guess I felt comfortable going to her about those issues and she would follow up you know - 'I hope you're having a better day today, don't worry things will get better.'"

She [mentor] always is caring about me and always is asking if I want to go out for supper after, like she always just really genuinely cares what I want to do and really cares about how I'm feeling throughout the day, and she knows when I'm feeling stressed or anything, because she usually brings me back and gets me to calm down.

As a component of the provision of personal support, mentoring can ameliorate feelings of isolation experienced by beginning teachers. One mentor highlighted the importance of the mentoring relationship in combating feelings of isolation when she reflected on a conversation she had with her mentee:

... getting to know her, she's like, "yeah nobody has asked anything about me, nobody knows anything about me. I just felt so lonely."

It is evident that the mentoring relationship can enhance mental health of beginning teachers by providing personal, emotional supports and ameliorating feelings of isolation.

Protected From Demands Put on by Self, Other Teachers, and the Community

Mentors can stand between the beginning teacher mentee and the pressures for performance applied by self, other teachers, and the community. Beginning teachers often face unrealistic expectations regarding extracurricular commitments and take on more than their fair share in their effort to demonstrate professional commitment. These pressures may be particularly intense in rural communities where new teachers, without the experience of small town life, can feel vulnerable and exposed to intense and persistent scrutiny. For example, a participating mentee observed:

... when you are moving from maybe the city to the small town, you've never lived in a small town, you never had 800 sets of eyes looking at everything you're doing all the time. That's where I think so much of the uncertainty comes from, and therefore the feeling of burning out or the feeling of unsureness comes.

Mentors who participated in our study were quick to point out that they believed they should protect mentees from the pressure of such expectations, noting:

... some staff members make you feel ridiculous - there's just always those people on a staff so you need somebody to protect new people from that.

Help as much as you can, but oh boy staffs are terrible for going, "oh let's let the new one without kids do it." The problem is, too, is that it's the coaching, it's the out-in-the-community ones that are the most noteworthy.

... as a mentor, to give that strength and confidence to the mentees to say no, don't overwhelm yourself ... You have to be a community member in your school, but first and foremost these first couple years you need to figure out your classroom, who you are as a teacher."

It is apparent that mentees can benefit from the mentoring relationship because mentors can stand as a protective barrier between mentees and the pressures to perform exerted by the beginning teachers themselves as well as by teacher colleagues and the wider community.

Benefits for Experienced Teacher Mentors

Learn Skills From Mentees

Although beginning teacher mentorship programs are often designed to offer learning experiences for mentees, it is clear that mentors who participated in our study also benefited as they learned new skills through their relationship with beginning teacher mentees. For example, mentors observed that their mentees had developed skills through their teacher education programs and/or skills with technology that the experienced teachers appreciated and learned:

... actually I found that my mentee, there's some things that she's got way stronger skillset ... especially with these initiatives and technology I think sometimes they can have skills that we don't have.

I learned skills that she would've taken in University or her learning experience, I learned some things.

Another mentor commented on how she learned about implementation of an instructional approach from her mentee, noting:

She [mentee] did that a really cool way that I would never have thought about. I'm like ugh. She can do this, so can . Okay I'll do this.

Recognizing What They do Know and Invigorating Risk Taking

Experienced teacher mentors derive benefit because mentoring helps make their teacher knowledge explicit. In other words, mentors benefit from the mentoring relationship because it helps them learn what they actually know. For example, mentors remarked:

There's just so many little things that you just do automatically that you don't actually think of you're actually doing. Like as a classroom management activity or organization thing or whatever. And then your mentee will go, "wow that worked great, I'm going to try that."

You know, just little things like that. I would say probably the biggest one is just the reflection of my own practice.

In addition, mentors benefit because engagement with mentees can offer experienced teachers the stimulus to try new, and perhaps risky, things. For instance, a mentor participating in our study noted:

I got a kick in the behind on some of the things I'm doing this year. I was kind of woken up going, I have been stuck in the dark ages doing the same way for a long time, I could try it this way. It's a refresher, a rejuvenation.

Other mentors also observed:

... because they're so energetic, enthusiastic coming in and it boosts your energy and enthusiasm because you're going, oh wow, is she good at that ... So it really gave me the kick that I needed to try some new things.

You know, that's really hard thing to kind of let go of and having someone younger watch me has kind of forced me to step out of my comfort zone a little bit.

Having someone new watching you and asking questions has kind of encouraged me to try new things and to refine some of the things I was doing.

Builds/Reaffirms Confidence

Because teachers so often work in isolation from their colleagues, they do not often receive appreciative feedback from their peers. Mentors benefit from mentorship relationships because engagement with beginning teachers can foster mentor confidence as they receive messages which demonstrate that their work as teacher is honoured and respected. For example, a mentor who participated in our study noted:

... it was really nice to have somebody who values what I'm doing and appreciated it and confirmed that what I'm doing she was interested in and excited about and wanted to try new things. And it was a bit of a confidence builder for me too.

It is also evident that teachers who are close to retirement benefit by engaging as mentors because mentoring can offer pathways by which they can receive recognition and respect for their work as they wind down their careers:

I really, really would recommend to somebody who is near the end of their career to do it. Because it just gives you that little boost that, you know, don't coast into the end. Makes you feel like you're maybe leaving something when you're going, you've left something behind.

Benefits for both Mentees and Mentors

Collaboration and Co-learning

Mentees and mentors who participated in our study were clear that they were able to learn and grow together within their collaborative relationship. This was highlighted by both the beginning teachers and their mentors in their comments about how they worked together to implement a new divisional initiative. For instance, mentors observed:

We started working on blended math because we're in the same grade ... it was more collaborative.

We were able to actually just create it [blended math] together because she wasn't sure of what it was too. So we kind of learned together.

... it's still good to have those conversations and see what struggles she's ran into, what struggles I have ran into and then just have conversations about how we can improve it.

Beginning teacher mentees made similar comments regarding the benefits of collaborative co-learning as they worked toward implementation of the divisional initiative:

... it's been nice to work with [mentor's name] to create a course or to start creating a course that's specifically grade blended ...

It's nice that they're also learning it with us so it's not like we're just new to the thing. ... To have those conversations really about what's working, what isn't.

It is evident that both beginning teachers and mentors benefited from the opportunities for co-learning that arose through engagement in the mentorship program.

Ameliorates Feelings Isolation

Both experienced and beginning teachers can experience feelings of personal and professional isolation. Participants in our study were clear about how their involvement in the mentorship program meant they had opportunities to build a relationship that resulted in a sense of connectedness that helped to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation. Even though the experienced teachers were well established in their communities, mentors observed how their relationship with mentees enhanced their sense of connectedness which enriched their personal and professional lives:

I think for us, like our relationship building was the greatest thing for ourselves.

Even just to recognize the importance of talking to people about experiences that you're going through, honing your collaborative skills through this program. So having that time to work with other people I think develops your ability to do that, and to plan together, and to try something new.

I can still bounce things off her and get the reassurance that yeah, my kids aren't the only ones struggling with a concept or even just having to chat. We are very similar, like we have similar interests too. Just even having those conversations and being able to work with somebody on a brand new initiative that she probably knows more about than I do. You know it's always easier to do things when you can bounce ideas and feelings and emotions off each other. Oh and I definitely feel like I've benefited probably more than she has. She's given me a breath of fresh air, you know.

The beginning teacher mentees who participated in our study were unambiguous about how their relationships with their mentors ameliorated feelings of isolation. They observed:

... it was nice to be part of the program because it connected me to somebody who I could talk to other than, you know, if I was in a bigger school where there was other [grade alike] teachers then it wouldn't be as hard. But I didn't have that person to turn to within my school. But I found it to be beneficial in the fact that I was able to connect with people that had knowledge in my grade level because I think that's really important.

... like she helps me so much in so many different ways. It's crazy to think how I would have gotten through this first year without her. Just having that face-to-face contact and really building that relationship and being able to go out after school with [mentor], both professionally and personally. ... I just think that this program was really beneficial to me and I gained a really great colleague and a great friend outside of school.

I think it's nice when we are together we can kind of talk about the experience about being a new teacher and just a person almost, to vent with, and just problem-solve together. That person you can go to with any questions that you have, has been quite helpful. Just a sounding board almost, which is nice to have because there's a lot of different things that you're going through as a new teacher, and it's nice to have somebody to talk to about it.

I think it's been great just to have someone with so much more experience to chat with, and I can see for my first year teaching, okay this is normal, this is what happens and I don't have to stress so much about that, ... Just based from what I've seen in her classes, and extra support if I'm stressed or anything, she's always there for chatting.

[Mentor's name] helped in the fact that, you know, we could just talk about it. Sometimes it helps to just have another person to say, man I'm tired and overwhelmed and sometimes it's good to know that you're not the only one who feels like that. Even in her however many years of teaching, she's had twenty years or what not, that she still feels like that sometimes. So it's comforting to know that you're not alone when you're feeling overwhelmed.

It seems safe to say that both beginning teachers and their mentors benefited from engagement in the mentorship program. Both groups experienced enhanced professional growth through collaborative co-learning and both mentors and mentees experienced enhanced feelings of connectedness, which reduced feelings of isolation.

Section Two: Mentorship Supports Flourishing in Relation to Beginning Teachers' Stages of Development

Examination of the self-assessments completed by both mentors and beginning teachers using Cantril's Ladder and the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009) demonstrates that participants' perceptions of personal well-being throughout the year were positive overall. For example, positive rankings on Cantril's Ladder where the top rung (with a ranking of 10) represents the best possible situation in one's life and the bottom rung (with a ranking of one) represents the worst possible situation demonstrates these positive assessments. While there were some fluctuations over time, no participant ever placed herself on a rung with a ranking less than seven.

Perhaps even more telling than numbers are the statements made by participants during individual interviews in April regarding their perceptions of personal flourishing. A beginning teacher who ranked herself at a seven stated:

I just feel like in regards to profession I feel like I'm putting, I'm doing my all in my job. So I feel like I'm on the right track, there's still a lot I need to learn but I feel like I'm kind of feeling a little bit more successful with where I'm going in the direction and I feel like I've been making a difference in the school and with the kids.

Ranking herself at the level of an eight or nine, another beginning teacher mentee noted:

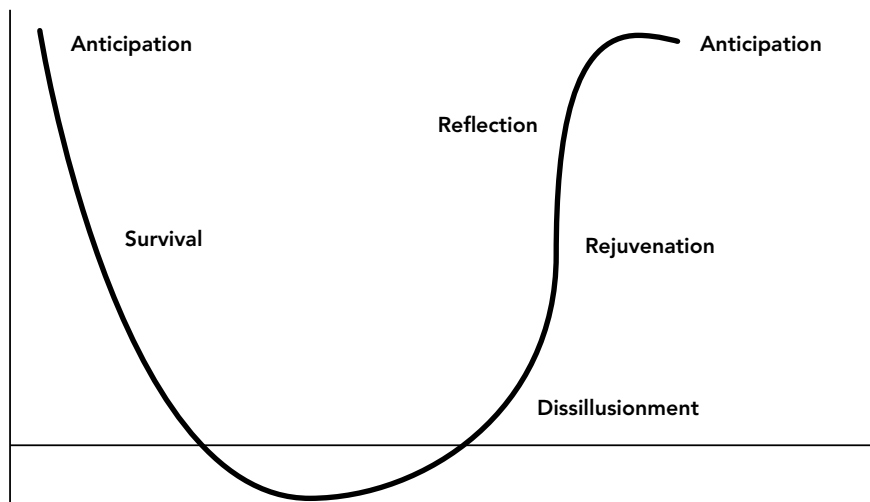
I think at the beginning of the year I was probably lower, just because I was kind of not sure what I was getting myself into, maybe. Yeah I don't know, just - I have more knowledge now, just from [mentor's name] even, like she helps me so much in so many different ways.

Mentors also reported positive self-assessments:

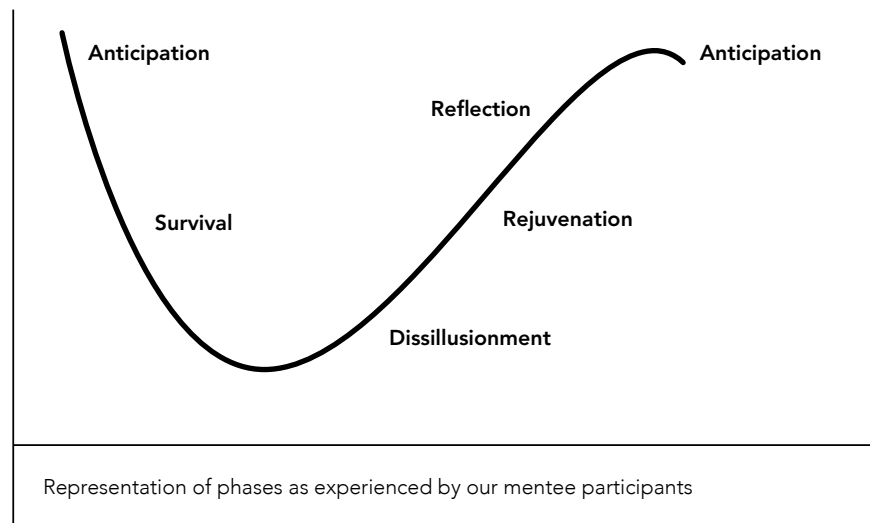
Right now I would probably put myself as and eight to nine. Teaching is really different than it was even twenty years ago. A lot more all-encompassing than it has ever been, I find. There's always going to be the change in paradigm, the change in Education and bringing on stressors that we can't control because it's like get on the train or it's going to mow you over type thing. But now I'm up at the eight and I'm feeling good and enjoying my life ... [working with mentee] has given me a breath of fresh air, you know. Working with the young is really ... invigorating!

I would probably say an eight or a nine. For me, I feel like things as far as my classroom, things are going well there with my students. For myself personally, like mental health-wise I don't really have anything that's causing a lot of stress or anything like that right now. And my relationships with my colleagues and my own personal relationships, everything is going well. [And] Just the idea of knowing you're helping [mentee] someone else out in any way that you can, obviously gives some self-satisfaction as well.

In relation to these positive self-assessments, data analysis indicates that while beginning teachers in our study did experience the ebbs and flows highlighted by Moir (1990) in her description of phases experienced by first-year teachers over the course of a school year¹, the time spent in the disillusionment phase was reduced. The following visual representations of Moir's phases express our interpretation of how the experience curve was flattened out or abridged for new teacher participants in our study, which we posit was due to the support they received from their mentors.



Moir's phases as represented by Wisconsin Education Association Council
<http://weac.org/articles/new-teacher-handbook/phases/>



Our representation of the disillusionment phase (less deep or prolonged) as it was experienced by beginning teachers in our study is based on data that reveals that all mentees ranked themselves no lower than seven on Cantril's Ladder and on the statements made by mentees when they commented on their experiences of disillusionment. All mentees proclaimed that they did have times when they felt overwhelmed and frustrated, but they also indicated that these feelings dissipated quite quickly as they received support from their mentors. For example, mentees observed:

It was right around the March break, before the March break where I was having quite a hard time at work and I just wasn't getting really anywhere. I didn't feel like I was getting anywhere with my students and they weren't responding well and so that was a really difficult time for me because it kind of made me question, am I supposed to be doing this? ... I had some questionings and I had some doubts of myself and it was kind of a really rocky road for a couple weeks. And that was right around the time when [mentor's name] came out to visit and it was nice to have her support because she kind of brought it back to reality that this is a hard group. ... that was nice having that person that has that experience and could tell me that - she kind of helped me feel better about the situation.

So that was a very busy time for me, just trying to get settled and get my head wrapped around everything. ... And yeah, [mentor's name] helped in the fact that, you know, we could just talk about it. ... it's comforting to know that you're not alone when you're feeling overwhelmed. Probably right now too, I'm feeling a little overwhelmed just with all the sudden the end of the school year is here and we've still got lots of work to do and there's May and June packed full of all sorts of other things that need to get done as well. So it's just all the sudden crunch time. But again, I just met with [mentor] on Thursday and it's the same thing for her and so like I said it's just sometimes comforting to know that other people are feeling the same way.

Certainly there's been several times where it's been overwhelming. And there's a lot of expectation placed on teachers, whether you're trying to get all of your Developmental Reading Assessment results in or your report cards done or you're trying out new initiatives of the school division. And there's just a lot on your plate ... So yes there's been quite a few times over the year. [But mentor provided support] we, for example, she came up before the first set of interviews and before report cards were due and it was kind of nice to talk about that and kind of discuss what interviews might look like and how you can set it up, so just somebody to talk to about those first times is really helpful for sure.

I've definitely felt overwhelmed, and it wasn't just schoolwork that needs to be done, piling up more and more and more. Or dealing with parents or something like that ... One day for instance, I had a very bad phone call. So I was quite upset after the school day and she [mentor] actually came in, gave me a hug, gave me a chat, said, "we all have those days." And it was very nice. So that was really good to have her right at the school to confide in and stuff.

Yeah, [felt overwhelmed at] report card time. Definitely. But [mentor's name] a was a huge help to me, like she took me through the whole process of doing our report cards and doing our different summaries to send home to parents, and all the little things like that, that you really don't get to do in University. So it was really nice having her through those stressful times, and yeah she really helped me a lot through that.

It seems evident that engagement in mentoring was an important ingredient in the feelings of well-being experienced by both mentors and mentees as they participated in our study. We also suggest that the evidence indicates that mentoring helped beginning teachers pass more smoothly through the phases experienced by new teachers during their early career and this reduced time in the disillusionment phase indicates that mentorship helped these new teachers thrive and flourish.

Section Three: Recommendations and Suggestions

Key Ingredients of an Effective Mentorship Program

The mentors and mentees who participated in our study offered important ideas regarding what needs to be included in a valuable and effective mentorship program. Their recommendations match suggestions detailed in the literature review of existing mentorship programs and our participants offered interesting insights into why they considered particular ingredients to be key.

The key ingredients, as suggested by the experienced teacher mentors and beginning teacher mentees who participated in our study, are detailed below.

Provision of Time

According to participants the most important ingredient in an effective mentorship program is the provision of time, including release time, preparation time, and conversation time. Mentors and mentees highlighted the importance of the release time that was provided as part of the projects:

... the time to actually go into the classroom with the mentee was a huge advantage.

... when I specifically had the time set aside for this, whether it was the day to visit [name of town] or it was the day that [mentee] came to see me, then I was able to foster that relationship and I was able to do things. I was just even thinking, you know in a perfect world a beginning teacher would not have a full course-load. They would have that [preparation] period at the same time as you [mentor] that's scheduled.

I would like more days where we get to go work with our mentors. Like not just that once a month. Two or three times would be awesome.

However, mentors and mentees were clear that even with release time funded by the research project, time for working together was often limited and this affected the efficacy of the mentoring process. For instance, if the beginning teacher had no preparation time built into her schedule, when the mentor visited her school there was no time in the day for mentor and mentee to talk, plan and reflect together. Participants observed:

I've been teaching all day and I've had supervision ... prevents us from building those personal relationships too because it's great to have her here but if we're just working with kids all day, we don't really have time to talk much.

So making sure that yes, you spend a day in each other's classrooms, but also take time outside of that I think is really key. ... Even if you're grade-alike and in the same building, I think it's still important to give time to work together because otherwise things get too hectic and you don't really have that time to collaborate.

In emphasizing the provision of time as a key ingredient for positive mentoring experiences, participants offered some suggestions about how more time together could be arranged:

... maybe half a day release time every once in a while ... where we just meet just to plan and talk.

... even a period a week so that the principal could go in and take the class ... Give [us] a chance to meet ... right off the bat to establish that relationship to give [us] time to do that because beginning teachers don't have any time.

Mentors Need Particular Skills and Characteristics

Participants in our study, particularly the experienced teachers, were very clear in their recommendation that mentors be carefully selected based on their capacity to display particular skills and characteristics that go beyond being good teachers of children and youth. For example, mentors suggested:

mentors needs to know that role [be] a person who really thinks about other people, how they're feeling

... organized, keeps things together, keep yourself balanced. ... somebody who is willing to stretch themselves even a little thinner.

Yeah, that empathy. Not looking for drama, not looking to stir the pot. ... be outgoing, and really open to new things. I think if I had a mentor who wasn't open to new things, it would be a total different experience.

Mentors and Mentees Need to Volunteer to Participate

Another key ingredient for success emphasized by participants focuses on their perceptions of the voluntary nature of mentorship. Both the beginning teachers and experienced teachers were convinced that an effective mentorship program should invite individuals to volunteer to participate rather than requiring them to do so.

I don't think you could say to someone, you have to be a mentor this year. They have to want to be a mentor.

We tried to do that a few years ago where they tried to assign mentors. And it didn't work because there wasn't a natural relationship; there wasn't a connection between those two people because one of them was being forced in.

... if somebody was willing to be a mentor and work with you and you were willing to have a mentor, then as long as you have the time to really get to make those relationships I feel like you would build that ... I guess if it was forced then you might not have the same commitment.

I also really think it's great that we signed up because I think it takes the right personality to be a solid mentor, and if we were to force teachers to do it, I don't think it would be as effective.

Mentors and Mentees Need Orientation

Both mentors and mentees were enthusiastic in suggesting that orientation or training sessions are an important ingredient in an effective mentorship program because such sessions help participants understand their roles and provide opportunities to begin building relationships.

I also think the training process, you know just even that first meeting here and just these conversations of what does it look like and what is your role ...

I think that it's really important that those who are being selected as mentors, you go through that process of applying to be a mentor and that you give parameters of what it looks like to be a mentor or mentee as well.

I was in a situation where I was told early on in the school year that I had a mentor in the building. But without them defining what is meant for that person to be a mentor and just that you could go to them for questions. ... I think those guidelines are key to a successful mentorship program.

"I think it would be beneficial if you were looking at a mentorship program to have a meeting like we did ... if you had met with your mentors before school started. Do that in that first initial week where you're all gathering and have time to co-plan and talk about fears, talk about things that you're excited about. 'Cause that collaboration piece I think is what gets a lot of us excited. And to start that program at the very beginning of the year, maybe even before that first week where you meet with all of the staff and start going to those PD days I think would be quite beneficial."

Mentorship Processes Should not be Evaluated

Participants in our study were clear that an effective mentorship program does not require evaluative oversight. In fact, they indicated their belief that if there had been a requirement for submission of products to demonstrate work they did together, this would have interfered with mentoring processes and undermined the efficacy of the mentorship

program. Mentors, in particular, emphasized the need for participants to feel free of judgement in all aspects of mentoring processes, noting for example:

The only thing that I would have a fear of is if the school division did really buy into this, that then they would turn it into something where you had to produce something. And that would be my fear, is that it would turn into something that you have to prove that we gave you that time for a reason.

And I think just the nature of this too, that she [mentee] felt no judgement or pressure by me being there ... I'm just showing up, and don't plan anything special, plan everything that you need an extra set of hands for. You know don't plan something that I'm going to judge you on and critique you on. Plan something that's going to be hard and we can work on it together.

... it's safe to make mistakes or safe to fall because I'm here, that's my role. So it's really important that they [mentees] know that you don't have that evaluative component to your role.

... nothing's being graded. We're not reporting to anybody. If there had to be something set out about it, it would be pressure.

[Needs to be] Understanding what a mentorship is, from the higher-ups. There has to be trust that you're not wasting the day. ... they would have to buy into what a mentorship program looks like. How it's not coaching and [that] spending a half day talking to someone to keep them from quitting their job might be really valuable. That is a valuable use of time.

Build a Mentoring Culture Across the Division

Both experienced and beginning teachers in our study suggested that building a mentoring culture across the school division would contribute to mentorship success. They recommended involving an entire team, from principals, to learning coaches, to superintendents:

I think that the principal really needs to be involved to help, to also support because not that my principal isn't supportive but I think they need to know how things are going. I think the principal, even if they're not that kind of person, has to come out a little bit and just know what's going on ...

I do think that that's an important part because in order for them to allow us to get together and share and oh ... cover my class so I can work with [my mentor] And you know, that kind of thing. The principals need to be on board to be able to support any way that [they] can.

... when the division is setting up a mentorship that the principals need to be on board with this. If that very beginning [orientation session] included a team - mentor, mentee, principal and the learning coaches ... And they would have been at this meeting so everybody would have been on the same understanding ...

I would really like to see the division go to the administrators and explain the importance of fostering the mentor-mentee relationship. Because I have seen it come into our school about ten years ago, and everybody was kind of teamed up with a younger teacher or an older teacher or whatever. But nothing was ever done with it. I would really like to see that fostered a little bit more. And those administrators, I'd really like to see them make that a priority.

Challenges and Suggestions

Participants in our study highlighted some challenges that arise in the effort to implement a sustainable mentorship program. At the same time, the mentors and mentees offered some interesting suggestions that are worthwhile when pondering ways in which to meet these challenges.

How to Match Mentee and Mentor Pairs

While the challenge of finding the right kind of personality matches when pairing mentees and mentors was mentioned, participants focused on the challenge of making matching decisions based on whether grade-or subject-alike pairings or pairings based on proximity is most important. In this case, there is no clear direction offered by participants on this issue as the statements below illustrate:

I think the surprise for me was that it didn't have to be grade-alike, because when we first saw the list I went, ugh grade [?], how am I going to help somebody in grade [?]. But then you meet this real person who's just a real person and has similar needs.

I personally feel it needs to be grade-alike or at least sort of division and alike."

There's the mentor relationship which I don't think has to be grade-alike at all, it has to be location."

I would say grade-alike for sure. Helpful with resources and things. Then I think I would say distance because if the distance was chopped, then it's easier to make time right?

As these comments illustrate, the data does not support one direction for match-making over the other. While some commented on the difficulty in building and maintaining a relationship supportive of emotional and mental well-being when the distance between mentor and mentee was too great, others commented on the way in which grade-alike pairings were helpful in supporting planning and sharing of resources. However, given that both mentors and mentees in this group offered commentary that suggests that mentorship is most important in offering opportunities to understand school routines and logistics and to build relationships that support personal well-being, this group appears to lean more toward suggesting that pairing based on proximity (same school or within a 30-minute drive) is most important. However, this group of mentors and mentees are all teachers of students in elementary schools, so we caution that subject-alike pairing might be emphasized by teachers of high school students. In the end, matching mentors with mentees depends on several variables, including: which experienced teachers volunteer to become mentors, which beginning teachers volunteer to become a mentee, the locations where the potential mentors and mentees work [and reside], the size of the schools in which the mentors and mentees work, and so on. Hence, the most promising practice when it comes to match-making is to simply be as practical and realistic as possible when trying to balance these variables. We also suggest that it is also good practice to provide explicit explanations for mentors and mentees as to why they are paired.

The participants in our study also offered some insightful suggestions regarding how to overcome mentor and mentee matching problems. For example, if the matched and assigned grade-or subject-alike mentor is at too great a distance to help the mentee acculturate to living in a new community, a teacher (or teachers) in the mentee's school could be invited to serve as the on-site mentor to support the new teacher's integration into school and community culture. Both mentees and mentors commented on situations that revealed how mentoring into school and community culture did unfold during the project on an informal basis, and they suggest that school divisions consider formalizing the process. For example, mentees noted:

I would say that in terms of like building relationships in the community it's been the teachers in the building that have [helped]. ... So in terms of me being involved in the community, that came from watching the kids' ballgames and coaching volleyball and talking to other staff members and having events at the school. And it came from staff members in the school and that's just because, you know, [mentor] lives [name of town].

I have help in the school- help to figure out the community and make connections and, you know, kind of just talk about what's going on. So I would say that piece has been huge for me as well in terms of like a sense of belonging.

Mentors were quite direct in offering suggestions. For example:

Like I think those two are important so that if you don't have a grade-alike, like some small schools wouldn't have grade-alike, then [mentees] need to have somebody within that school that can guide that person in how life goes. Because there's lots of little things that people in your school expect, but they're unwritten rules.

To handle some of the problems that arise when matching mentee and mentors, participants suggest that when mentor and mentee pairings are problematic due to distance or lack of grade-or subject-alike options, consideration should be given to use of a team approach or use of multiple mentors who could fulfill various roles.

Professional Development Challenges

Participants in our study highlighted the need to offer alternative approaches to professional development that might better match a mentorship culture. They suggested alternative ways of offering beginning teacher orientations along with alternative ways of offering professional development opportunities for all teachers in a division. For example, mentors and mentees proposed that school divisions that offer beginning teacher workshops and orientations could consider inviting mentors to join mentees during the beginning teachers' orientation session. For instance:

... if they have beginning teacher workshops. ... if that time was maybe – even if they were allowed to bring along somebody who is their mentor, then you could help explain some of this stuff. ... meet for half the day on the policies of [the school division] but in the afternoon - here is your time with your mentor. Let them ask questions, or that's our learning coach, let me bring them over here, we're going to introduce you, that kind of thing.

Mentors and mentees also proposed that school divisions interested in mentorship could redeploy the dollars usually spent on various divisional professional development opportunities to provide time and opportunities for teachers to collaborate across the division, supporting the development of a mentorship culture. Participants suggested, for example, that inviting mentors to join mentees in professional development sessions could be worthwhile for both:

[Mentor] had said to me before that, do you want to go to some of the Professional Development sessions together and I said sure. So I went to one, ... and we sat together and she was able to ask questions about [workshop topic] and we looked at data and talked about what the data meant and stuff. That was good that we kind of had that extra time together.

Yeah, even if it was one session for a mentor and mentee that they went to a certain area and worked on what they needed to work on.

Additionally, rather than bringing in experts to offer PD regarding divisional initiatives and priorities, study participants suggested that more opportunities could be provided for teachers to engage with each other - to engage in mentor and mentee collaborating and planning and/or peer coaching, planning, and collaborating. For example:

Grade-alike PLTs or something. And then you could plan together and talk about it and meet a couple times throughout the year.

... next year the division is planning on using our Professional Development days to do some grade-alike planning and what not, and I really think that is the best kind of Professional Development day they could give us on those days. Give us some time with people who teach the same grade as us - to do some planning and thinking together because again being away from my room and having to plan for your sub just kind of adds to the work load. So if we could do some sort of mentorship experience or do some sort of grade-alike planning on days that are already set aside for us to have that Professional Development, I think would be the most beneficial.

... if I knew the grade four teacher in [name of town], you know maybe we could set things up like that at the beginning of the year, so that we were reading our novels at the same time or there was that opportunity to make some connections for my kids too, across the division. Because that's engagement, you know, real life learning - connecting with other people like that. So the opportunity to meet with other people early on I think would be beneficial.

Finally, both mentor and mentee participants noted how visiting the classrooms of other teachers offers excellent professional development opportunities and they suggest, implicitly and explicitly, that school divisions consider offering time for such visits:

it's just always good to see other classrooms and other teachers in action. Like there's a thousand little things a day you can pick up.

I found it really helpful when I went into her classroom just to see some of things she was doing. Again, so as soon as you see another teacher in action it's just- yeah, you pick up on all these little things. So how she runs her day was completely different from mine and I could pull some of her just routines into my classroom;

[Mentor] and I used one of our PD days to go and visit a school. ... we went and observed the two [grade level] classes there, which I thought was more beneficial than any other PD that I've actually gone to. Just being able to sit and watch and observe the other classroom, it was nice to see how other people do it and then after being able to collaborate with them and share our ideas. I thought that was really beneficial and we were able to do it together.

Using Technologies to Connect

Participants were clear that the use of particular technologies were not especially effective in helping mentors and mentees connect. They indicated that our experiment with the use of a blog and Moodle were not helpful because these proved to be awkward and time consuming. Participants indicated that email was a useful tool and recommended that group texting or a group email approach might prove effective:

If it [blog] was set up a little bit easier to connect or even if we were all set up on a group text so it would've been on a group thing but then somebody responds and somebody responds to the response and I don't know, I'm just thinking that something like that might have been easier.

... even if it were to be a group email. From that email we just kept commenting on the email, then everybody would as long as everybody forwards it to all.

Overall, while mentees and mentors acknowledged the importance of communication technology in maintaining their relationships, participants were clear about the importance of maintaining opportunities for face-to-face collaboration.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our study investigated the overarching question: In the context of rural Saskatchewan, what are the key components of an effective and sustainable mentorship approach that helps beginning teachers thrive and flourish?

We also addressed specific sub-questions including the following:

Can mentorship ameliorate the sense of professional and personal/social isolation experienced by beginning teachers working in rural schools?

Does mentorship support the flourishing/thriving of beginning teachers in relation to the five stages or phases of first-year teachers' development (Moir, 1990)?

What recommendations arise out of the data for development of an effective and sustainable mentorship approach in rural school divisions?

In summary, our study found that mentors embedded in mentee classrooms does appear to ameliorate the sense of professional and personal isolation often expressed by beginning teachers and rural teachers. Our study also found support for the notion of mentorship helping to enhance the flourishing of beginning teachers as they progress through the five phases of development described by Moir (1990). Our study identified six key recommendations or ingredients for successful and effective mentorship: provision of time (release time, preparation time, conversation time); mentors need to possess particular skills and characteristics that go beyond being a good teacher of children and youth; mentors and mentees need to volunteer to participate; mentors and mentees need orientation sessions; mentoring should not be evaluated; and building a mentoring culture across the school division contributes to mentorship success. In addition, our study identified three key challenges for the development of sustainable beginning teacher mentorship programs, especially as related to the rural context. These included the importance of the match between the mentors and mentees, offering alternative methods of professional development, and using technology to connect mentors and mentees.

However, despite these findings, there were limitations to our study. First and foremost, our study findings were limited to five mentor and mentee female elementary pairings from one rural school division. It is possible that the findings and recommendations we identified may not be generalizable to other school divisions or to male mentors and

mentees or to secondary teachers. In addition, our study was limited to one school year in length and longer follow-up of the same mentor and mentee pairings would be helpful in determining the efficacy of the beginning teacher mentorship long-term. Lastly, our study focused on one particular method of beginning teacher mentorship: that of the mentor being embedded in the beginning teachers' classroom. It is possible that other methods of mentorship may be as efficacious or even more efficacious for particular mentor-mentee pairings.

To address these limitations, we have planned ongoing research which will expand the study of beginning teacher mentorship in Saskatchewan to multiple and diverse First Nations schools and provincial school divisions, methods of mentoring, and a diverse range of teachers.

This research has arisen out of our partnership work with the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, Saskatoon Tribal Council, Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit and personnel, including superintendents, in-school administrators and beginning teachers from the following school divisions: Good Spirit, Greater Saskatoon Catholic, Horizon, Light of Christ, Northern Lights, Prairie South, Prairie Spirit, Prairie Valley, Saskatoon Public, and Sun West.

With these partners, we arranged the Saskatchewan New Teacher Mentorship Forum which has been meeting since April 2015. During these meetings we have engaged in collaborative discussions among partners aimed at creating common understandings about beginning teacher mentorship, drafted a set of principle-driven beliefs with respect to beginning teacher induction workshops and mentorship, and created a beginning teacher induction-by-mentorship conceptual framework based on these beliefs. We have also launched a research project that will address the limitations of this study and which will provide extensive data for evidence-based decision-making and capacity-building in support of beginning teachers throughout the province. Together, with a network of supports from multiple stakeholders, we can develop and advance a province wide teacher mentoring program in Saskatchewan, with the goal of discussing our findings with the Government of Saskatchewan Ministry of Education in hopes that in the future they will consider, as the British Columbia Ministry of Education has recently done (BC Newsroom, 2012), partnering with school divisions, First Nations, and universities in a larger New Teacher Mentorship Program.

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Endnotes

¹During the first Anticipation phase, beginning teachers who have typically just completed a teacher training program are eager and excited about their initial teaching assignment. In the *Survival phase*, beginning teachers face the realities of teaching, encountering aspects of the job that they didn't anticipate. During this phase they maintain their enthusiasm but are getting tired. As time goes by, new teachers experience the *Disillusionment phase* – a time when they are working hard, but feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. They may question if they are actually helping students learn and can begin to wonder if teaching is the right profession for them. The *Rejuvenation phase* is a time when new teachers begin to employ some coping strategies to manage the problems they encounter, which assists them in developing more positive perspectives regarding their capabilities. This phase can emerge following some time off - during winter break, for example – and, according to the observations of beginning teachers participating in our project, Rejuvenation resulted from encouragement and support offered by their mentors. During the *Reflection phase*, which unfolds towards the end of the school year, new teachers begin to contemplate changes that they want to make for the following year. They begin to critically analyze the past year, taking into account things that 'worked' and things that did not. During the second *Anticipation phase*, new teachers look forward to the coming school year with an eagerness that is tempered by their reality-based experiences.

2317 Arlington Avenue
Saskatoon SK Canada S7J 2H8
Phone: 306-373-1660
Toll Free: 1-800-667-7762
Fax: 306-374-1122
Email: mcdowell@stf.sk.ca

www.mcdowellfoundation.ca