

SHARING MENTORING EXPERIENCES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS:  
MOVING TOWARDS COLLABORATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by

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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative, illustrative study inquired into the mentoring experiences of six teachers in the Lower Mainland of Greater Vancouver. The purpose of this study was to examine factors that enhanced or hindered the mentoring relationships. Data consisted of transcripts from semi-structured interviews. The constant comparative method (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) was used to analyze data. Many teachers preferred hierarchical mentoring, where one person was more experienced than the other. Participants also preferred mentoring that was informal, friendly and reciprocal, and strongly favoured working with someone of similar background and educational platform, with diversity, conflict and negativity avoided. Participants also expressed a preference for mentoring that was non-evaluative, practical, safe and respectful. Teachers described characteristics that hindered mentoring relationships as being assigned to or experiencing a negative mentoring situation, workload and stress. Furthermore, the lack of time and financial support for mentoring and professional development was an issue. The participants' preference for more experienced teachers as mentors, which suggests a hierarchical relationship, contradicted findings that suggested participants also want mentoring relationships that are non-hierarchical and collaborative, based on treating each other as 'equals'. I suggest that collaborative mentoring can occur if more innovative, truly collaborative partnerships between universities and schools are encouraged, which may include teachers engaging in action research. I also suggest that collaborative mentoring coupled with action research may provide practical, timely, ongoing support for the professional development and the life-long inquiry into the practice of student, novice and experienced teachers. Finally, the study suggests the need for addressing and reducing teacher workload and stress, combined with a drastic change in the culture of educational organizations for collaborative mentoring to succeed.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine how teachers experience mentoring relationships, and discover what mentoring experiences enhance or hinder their personal growth and professional practice. This research will present real stories about teaching, learning about teaching and mentoring. Implications of the study relating to policy and practice will be discussed, and suggestions will be made as to how mentoring experiences may assist teachers in finding practical solutions to their day-to-day challenges of meeting their needs and those of their students. To reiterate, the key goal of this study is to make recommendations for meeting the personal growth and professional practice needs of teachers, as a means of helping teachers meet the needs of their students. The suggested recommendations may involve all or some of the educational stakeholders which may include the Ministry of Education, school boards, teachers, administrators, teacher educators, parents, students, professional organizations and associations, BC Teachers Federation and the local community.

### **Definition of Mentoring**

In current research, mentoring has been used to describe vastly different types of relationships and has many different definitions, which has been problematic. I will explore this issue in detail in the literature review. The following quote by Darwin (2000), in the context of learning



organizations, describes what I think mentoring relationships amongst teachers should strive towards:

Mentoring becomes a collaborative, dynamic, and creative partnership of coequals, founded on openness, vulnerability, and the ability of both parties to take risks with one another beyond their professional roles. (Radical humanist perspectives section, para. 3)

In addition, I agree with Mullen (1997) and Lick's (2000) definition of mentoring which adds to Darwin's. These authors define mentoring as an ongoing learning, helping and sharing relationship between two teachers that influences their personal growth and professional practice. Darwin's definition focuses on the nature of the mentoring relationship, whereas Mullen and Lick focus on describing the actions involved in mentoring. A combination of the above definitions of mentoring meets the most commonly accepted characterization of mentoring. In my literature review, I reviewed diverse and sometimes contradictory literature relating to both adult education and mentoring, in order to explore issues related to mentoring.

## **Background for the Study**

### *Overview of Current Teaching Conditions in Vancouver Lower Mainland*

Currently in the year 2004 and for the past two years, as a teacher I have personally experienced how K-12 teachers have faced an increased workload and increased stress due to cutbacks in educational funding initiated by the British Columbian Liberal Government. Teachers have been coping with larger class sizes (especially in grades 4-12), fewer teaching resources, lack of relevant professional development and a reduction in support staffing. Teacher workload and stress and its negative impact on teachers and educational systems have existed for years, not

only in British Columbia, but also around the world (Naylor, 2000). In addition, looking at the long-term, there will be a shortage of qualified teachers (BCTF Teacher Supply and Demand Workgroup, 2001). Beginning teachers currently graduating from teacher training programs face unemployment, and if they do obtain teaching positions face an even larger disparity between the theories they have learned about teaching in university and the practice of educating learners in the K -12 system. There is a need to support teachers dealing with the changes in the teaching environment and to better assist beginning teachers in making the transition from theory to practice by using methods of professional development and learning that address their unique needs as adult learners. In this study, mentoring has the potential to be an appropriate and useful method for addressing the above needs of teachers.

### *Two Hours in the Life of a Teacher Named Barb*

As I feel presenting real stories of teachers is important, the following passage illustrates a typical day in the life of a teacher in the Greater Vancouver Lower Mainland. This fictional story was co-created with an elementary school teacher who I interviewed as part of a pilot study on mentoring in December 2003. The content is based on actual experiences that she has encountered:

It is 7:45 as I enter the inner city school in Port Somewhere. This is where I work as a grade two and a learning assistance teacher three days a week. I am also the staff union representative. "Hey Barb, have you heard what our dear administrator Bill has done? He is not being fair... Let's go and find him right away!" After a 5-minute search he is found. "Bill, Barb and I need to talk to you about something. Is it okay?" "Sure let's go to my office," says Bill. After a 15-minute discussion we realize that we need to have a staff meeting after school to discuss the issue. I also hand my report cards to Bill as I think that I had better call the daycare and tell them that I'll be late again!

It's 8:05 by the time I finally open the door to my classroom. Finally, peace and quiet, I can think about my day. 8:10 the door to my grade two classroom opens and in comes one of my students, Vanessa, shaking and crying. "What's the matter?" I hug her and hold her as she shakes and sobs. After 5 minutes she is ready to talk about it. "Dad left us alone again with my older sisters. On Friday afternoon he said he was just going to the store to pick up some milk. He never came back. We were scared. We were soooooo alone until he came back Sunday night." Finally by 8:30 she has calmed down. She goes to read a book in the reading corner. The door opens, another child comes in without a jacket. The door opens again, "I didn't get my homework done. Can you help me?" The door opens and the parent of my autistic child wants to talk to me. Then a daycare staff complains about a child who hasn't taken his Ritalin. Another child comes in without a snack or lunch asking me for something to eat.

How will I meet all these needs? I call social workers for help and they don't call me back. What should I do? I don't have time to teach and feed and clothe them. If I don't take care of this no one will. I'm getting more and more kids. My class size has risen from 18 to 24 in just three years. I'm emotionally already exhausted and the day has barely begun. How will I survive the day? Will I actually teach something today? Where are the supplies? I have no time to reflect on my teaching. I want a district person to come in and implement a guided reading program while I sit back and watch. I need to have a moment of rest where I can reflect on my teaching. I better go and borrow those math books from the other grade 2 teacher. (Pachler, 2003, Unpublished)

This story illustrates how teachers have such a hectic working life where they are just doing and don't feel they have the time or freedom to reflect on the ethics of teaching and the deeper meaning of their work, as it relates to society as a whole.

### **Personal Statement and Assumptions**

The fundamental task of the mentor is a liberatory task. It is not to encourage the mentor's goals and aspirations and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees (or students), but to give rise to the possibility that the students become the owners of their own history. This is how I understand the need that teachers have to transcend their merely instructive task and to assume the ethical posture of a mentor who truly believes in the total autonomy, freedom, and development of those he or she mentors. (Freire, 1997)

Should we be free to choose our mentoring experiences, and negotiate our mentoring relationships? In my experience, as a primary teacher in British Columbia, I believe I learn best

when experiencing mentoring in a non-hierarchical, egalitarian, and collaborative learning community, but do all teachers want this or learn best this way? Many traditional mentoring practices do not support this type of collaborative, non-hierarchical learning and risk-taking, but instead focus on the transmission of skills, knowledge, and the culture of organizations, often ignoring the value of sharing and caring friendships that could develop amongst mentors (Darwin, 2000). Such collaborative, non-hierarchical mentoring relationships or friendships are generally not valued or encouraged.

I would argue that education equals freedom; however I have observed many teachers as learners and when these teachers are given the freedom to speak they are silent. Do they choose not to speak or act because they may be worried about what their peers may think of their actions, feelings or ideas? Are they worried about consequences from their administrators? Are they worried about how the other person may feel about their respectful criticism? I believe that mentoring can be a method for hearing the voices of those that are silent and empowering people to do what they feel needs to be done, which is consistent with my personal life philosophy.

Paulo Freire, a contemporary educator, has observed these silences amongst the people of Brazil. One of Freire's aims for education is to help people understand their own situation, needs and desires and find a voice to speak up about them and act on them. "Whether they live in cultures that are wholly silenced or in silent sectors of cultures that prescribe their voice, are struggling to have a voice of their own" (Mackie, 1980, p. 119).

Education through mentoring is an important process for learning, growing and changing both for individuals and organizations. Can mentoring also be a method for transforming teachers and their schools into respectful learning communities, where voices are no longer silent and diversity of ideas is embraced? Perhaps mentoring can also enable teachers, who are trying to provide the best education possible to their students, to direct their own course rather than merely react to the changes, cutbacks and increased workload in the current educational climate.

### **Research Questions**

Four research questions will be used to guide the study:

1. How do teachers experience mentoring relationships?
2. What factors enhance these mentoring experiences?
3. What factors hinder these mentoring experiences?
4. How do these mentoring experiences assist teachers in finding practical solutions to their day-to-day challenges?

In my interviews with six teachers, I want participants to come up with their own definitions of mentoring, so that I do not influence the teachers voice and descriptions of mentoring. Data will be analyzed according to a constant comparative method.

### **Significance of Study**

This study will present implications regarding the mentoring experiences of teachers and suggest solutions for some of the current issues and challenges teachers face with regard to teaching and learning in their changing teaching environment in the Vancouver Lower Mainland.

Furthermore, mentoring may have implications as a method for professional development that meets the specific needs of individual teachers for their day-to-day practice.

### **Organization and Overview of the Remaining Chapters**

In Chapter 2, I locate the research questions within the related literature and establish the significance of mentoring as an issue worthy of investigation. My review of the literature also critiques the various definitions of mentoring, thus moving towards a potential definition and a need for revising the definition of mentoring relationships or, at a minimum, the need for individuals who use the word mentoring to clearly state how they define it. Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative method of my research design and data analysis techniques, which includes aspects of the constant comparative method used in the study. In Chapter 4, I introduce the results and the framework used to analyze the data and to identify shared themes evidenced in the interviews of teachers in regards to their mentoring experiences. In Chapter 5, I discuss the main implications that emerge from this research study. These implications suggest areas for the further research as well as directions and suggestions for policy development and for practice as it relates to mentoring and personal and professional development. Furthermore, I discuss the limitations of the study and make suggestions for further research. Finally, in Chapter 6, I provide some concluding remarks highlighting some of the more prevalent and important issues.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

My focus for the literature review was not hierarchical mentoring. Instead, I was interested in finding out more about what is new in mentoring, in order to search for innovative ideas on mentoring. I also wanted to discover the voices of researchers who are not necessarily part of the mainstream mentoring discourse.

This chapter starts with a review of the literature related to adult education, leading to the more contemporary sharing and caring discourse of collaborative mentoring. I reviewed adult education first because mentoring involves the education of adults. I examined the different definitions and worldviews of adult educators, such as functionalism, radical functionalism, humanism and radical humanism, because the worldview of society or the institutions that teachers are involved in directly impacts how and for what purpose learning, professional development, or mentoring occurs.

### **Definitions of Adult Education**

Before you read them [definitions], keep this in mind: The value of a definition lies in its precision or ability to illuminate. These qualities often depend on how well we already know the concept the definition makes explicit. Definitions are rules for the correct use of terms; they are quasi-legalistic. At the same time, the workability of these definitions will depend on the extent to which the phenomena they describe are clearly bounded, standardized, or codified. That being the case, if the time is ever reached when it becomes easy to define adult education precisely, this may well be a case for worry rather than for rejoicing. (Merriam & Cunningham, 1989, p. 23)

Adult education is a process whereby adults undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values or skills (e.g.,

Boshier, 1996; Courtney, 1989; Darkenwald, & Merriam, 1982; Verner, 1964). The breadth of adult education worldviews is such that no universally acceptable definition of adult education is possible. Therefore, any definition must ultimately be based on certain assumptions and value judgments that will not be acceptable to everyone. More frequently, definitions of adult education involve:

- “Systemic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about knowledge, attitudes, values or skills” (Darkenwald, & Merriam, 1982, p. 9);
- supporting adults in gaining greater fulfillment in their personal, working or professional lives (Darkenwald, & Merriam, 1982); and
- assisting adults in learning about and meeting personal and societal needs (Verner & Booth, 1964).

Less frequently, adult education is described as life-long learning, which occurs in informal, spontaneous, non-institutional situations or settings (Darkenwald, & Merriam, 1982). However, most adult education does not occur in formal educational settings or workplaces (Boshier, 1996). It more commonly occurs within informal settings, where it is less likely to be recognized than in a more formal educational setting.

Here are some illustrative examples of adult education definitions relevant to this study.

#### *UNESCO's Definition of Adult Education and Life-Long Learning*

At the 1976 General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, members of UNESCO were “convinced that adult education as an integral part of



life-long education can contribute decisively to economic and cultural development, social progress and world peace as well as to the development of educational systems" (UNESCO, 1976, Introduction section, para. 10). The following definitions of adult education and lifelong learning were included in their recommendations:

The term 'adult education' denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development;

adult education, however, must not be considered as an entity in itself, it is a subdivision, and an integral part of, a global scheme for life-long education and learning;

the term 'life-long education and learning', for its part, denotes an overall scheme aimed both at restructuring the existing education system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the education system;

in such a scheme men and women are the agents of their own education, through continual interaction between their thoughts and actions;

education and learning, far from being limited to the period of attendance at school, should extend throughout life, include all skills and branches of knowledge, use all possible means, and give the opportunity to all people for full development of the personality;

the educational and learning processes in which children, young people and adults of all ages are involved in the course of their lives, in whatever form, should be considered as a whole.

## II. Objectives and Strategies

... (d) creating an understanding of and respect for the diversity of customs and cultures, on both the national and the international planes; (UNESCO, 1976)

While it appears implicit in the UNESCO definition that social development is a valid educational goal, some people voice concern with that viewpoint (Boshier, 1996). Boshier is

concerned that adult education as a method of social development should be distinguished from indoctrination, a distinction perhaps easier made in adult rather than in formal school education for children and youth.

The following quotes from researchers in the adult education field at Florida State University (2002) illustrate how adult education is viewed as a process of change (through personal and/or professional development), community development, cultural development (by respecting diversity), life-long learning (being engaged in the business of life) and personal accountability:

Lindeman (1926)

"Education is life--not a mere preparation for an unknown kind of future living...The whole of life is learning; therefore, education can have no ending. This new venture is called adult education--not because it is confined to adults but because adulthood, maturity defines its limits."

Lindeman, E. (1926). *The Meaning of Adult Education*. New York: New Republic, 6.

Merriam & Brockett (1997)

"...we define adult education as activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults."

Merriam, S. & Brockett, R. (1997). *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 7.

Verner (1962)

"Adult Education is the action of an external educational agent in purposefully ordering behavior into planned systematic experiences that can result in learning for those for whom such an activity is supplemental to their primary role in society, and which involves some continuity in an exchange relationship between the agent and the learner so that the educational process is under constant supervision and direction."

Verner, C. (1962). *Adult Education Theory and Method: A Conceptual Scheme for the Identification and Classification of Processes*. Washington, D.C.: Adult Education Association of the USA.

Bryson (1936)

Cited in *The Profession & Practice of Adult Education* (1997) p. 7: "...all the activities with an educational purpose that are carried on by people, engaged in the ordinary business of life."

Bryson, L.L. (1936). *Adult Education*. New York: American Book Company

Knowles (1980)

"One problem contributing to the confusion is that the term 'adult education' is used with at least three different meanings. In its broadest sense, the term describes a process--the process of adults learning...In its more technical meaning, 'adult education' describes a set of organized activities carried on by a wide variety of institutions for the accomplishment of specific educational objectives...A third meaning combines all of these processes and activities into the idea of a movement or field of social practice. In this sense, 'adult education brings together into a discrete social system all the individuals, institutions, and associations concerned with the education of adults and perceives them as working toward common goals of improving the methods and materials of adult learning, extending the opportunities for adults to learn, and advancing the general level of our culture."

Knowles, M. (1980). *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*. Chicago: Association Press, 25.

Courtney (1989)

"Adult Education is an intervention into the ordinary business of life--an intervention whose immediate goal is change, in knowledge or in competence. An adult educator is one, essentially, who is skilled at making such interventions."

Courtney, S. (1989). *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Houle (1996)

"Adult education is the process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge, or sensitiveness; or it is any process by which individuals, groups, or institutions try to help men and women improve in these ways. The fundamental system of practice of the field, if it has one, must be discerned by probing beneath many different surface realities to identify a basic unity of process."

Houle, C. (1996). *The Design of Education* (2nd Ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 41 (Definitions section, para.1).

## **Conceptions of Adult Education**

Teachers involved in mentoring are adult learners. Hence, in order to better understand mentoring, a review of the literature highlighting some of the main conceptions or worldviews that influence adult education is appropriate. According to Boshier (1996) there are four main worldviews that influence adult education: functionalism, radical functionalism, humanism and

radical humanism. I will suggest how these different worldviews influence the nature and purpose of adult education, educational organizations and the role of adult learners and teachers' of adults.

### *Functionalism in Adult Education*

The functionalism worldview of adult education is rooted in homeostasis with a behaviorist and scientific bent. It is focused on maintaining the status quo and social needs of society and its educational organizations. This emphasis on the needs of the society versus those of the individual is done with the belief that individuals do not really exist on their own, but are an integral part of groups or society. Functionalism caters to the needs of the institution rather than the needs of the individual learners; therefore it does not encourage the critical analysis of course methods, techniques or content. Furthermore, adult educators with a functionalist perspective believe that generic course materials and methods can be developed and used regardless of the students' specific cultural or societal background or needs. In summary, the purpose of adult education, from this functionalism perspective, is to transmit course content to the learners or "consumers of education" as efficiently and cheaply as possible, with the education provider's profit or agenda being the main agenda.

### *Radical Functionalism in Adult Education*

Out of a critique of functionalism, the radical functionalism worldview was born. Adult educators of the radical functionalism worldview challenged the purpose of functionalism as a

means to maintain the power structure of the status quo and supporting capitalism. In contrast to functionalism, radical functionalism was rooted in conflict and change. Adult educators from the radical functionalist worldview examined and criticized educational organizations and their methods of providing education by questioning the organization's biases.

Radical functionalist criticized the functionalist viewpoint of corporations and governments who had influenced adult education institutions to place greater value on producing compliant workers and citizens, rather than on critical life long learners, who embrace change, individualism and diversity. Radical functionalists attacked the functionalist's conservatism, idealism and willingness to accept structured inequality and human misery as the price of social efficiency and homeostasis.

### *Humanism in Adult Education*

Humanists are subjectivists in that 'reality' is what it is construed to be. Great effort is devoted to adopting the frame of reference of the participant. Social 'reality' is a network of assumptions and 'shared meanings'. (Boshier, 2004, para. 1)

According to Boshier (2004), without openness to differences, be it race, gender or culture for example, we overlook wonderful new learning experiences. Within humanist adult education, respect for diversity would be of great importance, in order to facilitate individual and group experiential learning that enhances personal growth and development.

The Florida State University (2002) used Lorraine Zin's description of the humanist worldview of adult education to create a table based on "Identifying Your Philosophical Orientation"

(Chapter 3), in *Adult Learning Methods: A Guide for Effective Instruction*, edited and expanded during a discussion in ADE 5080 Spring 1997 as follows:

- The purpose is “to develop people open to change and continued learning; to enhance personal growth and development; to facilitate self-actualization, to reform society.”
- The learner is “highly motivated and self-directed; assumes responsibility for learning and self-development.”
- The teacher is a “facilitator; helper; partner; promotes, but does not direct learning, sets mood for learning, acts as a flexible resource for learners.”
- The key concepts are “experiential learning; freedom; feelings, individuality; self-directedness; interactive; openness; co-operation; authenticity; ambiguity; related to existentialism.”
- The methods are “experiential; group tasks; group discussion; team teaching; self-directed learning; discovery method.” (Table 1)

### *Radical Humanism in Adult Education*

The radical humanism worldview of adult education is a critic of the constraints of the impact of the global economy on local people in their daily work. Lange's (2000) research on transformative learning appears to be rooted in the radical humanism worldview. She outlines the following constraints: “Public and corporate sector cutbacks, organizational restructuring, information and technological overload, job tenuousness, forced learning and self-development for marketability, and ethical conflicts at the work site” (Lange, 2000).

Lange's (2000) study also emphasizes critical transformative and restorative learning for revitalizing citizen action. She advocates new forms of working and living, which are based on an ecological, rather than an industrial model. She wants people to thoroughly change their

current working and living arrangements in order to transform their life from feeling exhausted, alienated, isolated, disconnected, pressured, depressed, stressed and angry, to a life where people can develop “their ethics of honesty, integrity, fairness, courage, respect, loyalty, community service and the common good” (Lange, 2000, The dialectics of transformative and restorative learning section, para. 1).

Radical humanist educators strive to emancipate adults from these self-perceived constraints. “They seek transformation, emancipation, and critical analysis of modes of domination. They want people to reconstruct their view of reality and take appropriate action. Thus education involves praxis (reflection followed by action)” (Boshier, 2004, para. 1).

### **Formal Versus Informal / Less Formal Adult Education**

In more formal adult education settings there tends to be a hierarchical environment with a focus on the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student. Whereas in less formal adult educational settings, the term ‘teacher’ is often not used, and the word ‘leader’, ‘mentor’ or ‘facilitator’ is preferred. This is due to an expectation that adults will learn from each other, through problem solving or self-direction. Hence, the tendency is for ‘facilitators’ to arrange less hierarchical conditions that facilitate the evocation, rather than the transmission of knowledge, skills and personal and professional growth.

My review of the literature on adult education leads to a review of mentoring, which is a form of adult education that promotes personal growth and professional development.

## Conceptions of Teacher Education

Teacher education has been widely examined, resulting in a number of conceptions of what the substance of teacher education and the teaching profession should be. These different conceptions clearly influence what are considered appropriate methods or goals for the personal and professional development of pre-service, novice and experienced teachers. According to Doyle (1990) the substance of teacher education is influenced by the following five major themes:

1. The *good employee* theme of teacher education prepares teaching professionals for the “prevailing norms and practices of classrooms and schools” (p. 5) by emphasizing the training and socialization of teachers to cope with ‘the real world’ of schooling. This commonly held view of teacher education is technical and experiential, heavily emphasizing learning from field experiences and an apprenticeship with a master teacher.
2. The *junior professor* theme of teacher education which locates the foundation of effective teaching in a university education based in the liberal arts or sciences. Teachers improve their teaching, not through pedagogical training, but through rigorous and academic education.
3. The *fully functioning person* theme which “facilitates the personal development of teachers by emphasizing the discovery of one’s own personal meaning and style in teaching” (p. 5). This type of teacher education would not be limited to seeking self-knowledge, but would include developing “knowledge of human development and of processes for creating supportive learning environments” (p. 5).
4. The “*innovator*” theme in which teacher education is seen as “a source of renewal and innovation for schools.” (p. 5) This type of education does not focus on “accommodating to the so-called realities of schooling, teacher education should be proactive.” (p. 6) Teacher education would focus on clinical training in laboratory settings where one could master innovative teaching practices. Learning to teach in field experiences would be of a detriment because molds teachers into learning how to survive with conventional modes teaching which creates a resistance to new ways of teaching.
5. The “*reflective professional*” theme in which teacher education is seen as:



Fostering reflective capacities of observation, analysis, interpretation and decision making (Duckworth, 1987; Richardson, 1989; Schon, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Zumwalt, 1982). Professionally trained teachers, in other words, should first and foremost be able to inquire into teaching and think critically about their work. The knowledge base for the preparation of reflective professionals includes professional knowledge, the craft knowledge, of skilled practitioners, and propositional knowledge from classroom research and from the social and behavioral sciences. (p. 6)

Doyle (1990) continues on to identify the core theme and pre-occupation with quality control as it relates to teacher education. Teacher educators “search for ways to assure or guarantee the quality of programs and the effectiveness of graduates” (p. 7). Therefore, the research has focused on effective teaching practices and not teaching as an inquiry. This pre-occupation with teacher effectiveness and quality control has had an impact on the status and control of schooling. The effectiveness question and the creation and measurement of “effectiveness indicators had, in other words, important symbolic value in establishing the technical qualifications of administrators to control the workforce and school systems and thus manage the affairs of education for society” (p. 9). So even though the “effectiveness question was originally designed primarily to generate context-free and scientifically grounded indicators for evaluating teachers” (p. 10). This emphasis on quality control and the “good employee” in teacher education has been known to prevail. In other words teachers must be evaluated, and judged by their administrators and are not capable of making their own decisions in relation to their teacher education. In this way, teacher education potentially could be used to manipulate and rule schooling.

Doyle (1990) presents another more current point of view that has arisen over the past decade in response to power and control issues in the efficiency and technical outlook of the education of teachers. Doyle recognizes two central themes that underlie the reaction against the quality

control perspective: knowledge and empowerment. From the knowledge and empowerment theme perspective, teachers and not administrators “are being seen as the primary users, if not the owners, of research and knowledge about teachers. This movement signals a fundamental shift in conceptions of the relation of research to the education of teachers.” (p. 13) The literature that Doyle reviewed presented a highly subjective, intuitive, artistic and praxis oriented perspective of teacher education based on personal reflection which may include learning from action research that relates to the current teaching situation and all the variables the teacher maybe currently facing. In situations like this, it would be impossible for an administrator to evaluate a teacher only on the basis of technical teaching skills.

Furthermore, Doyle cites Beyer (1987) who “argues, for example, that teacher education should foster practical reason that can help reconstruct a world dominated by inequality and the alienation and thus produce teachers who can contribute to the development of more responsive, socially just institutions and involvements” (p. 13).

In summary, Doyle concluded that the quality control approach of prescribing uniform teaching practices which emphasize the technical aspects of teaching, is a limited view of what really happens or needs to happen in the classroom and is often used to evaluate and control teaching and teachers. New emerging conceptions of teacher education pedagogy are becoming less focused on teacher efficiency and teaching skills and more focused on teacher empowerment and reflection as a method to improve teaching to a specific teaching situation. Doyle advocates teacher education that examines both how teachers discover how to teach and how this understanding is used to solve practical problems in specific situations in the classroom.

*Beginning Teacher Education (Student or Novice)*

'Beginning teachers' is used here to refer to those teachers who may be students on practicum or novice teachers who have little teaching experience. Much has been written about the importance of how beginning teachers are introduced to teaching. I believe that supporting beginning teachers is not just an economic, but also a significant humane responsibility. Gold (1996) states, with regards to beginning teachers that, "the initial experiences are imprinted, imbedding perceptions and behaviors regarding teaching, students, the school environment, and their role as teacher" (p. 548). Knowing the importance of the lasting impact initial teaching experiences have, it is important to find ways to include beginning teachers into collaborative learning communities.

The issue of respect and treating novice teachers like capable colleagues is a new way of viewing the education of beginning teachers. Part of the reason for this change in attitude is the looming and in some cases, already existing teacher shortage. There is a fairly universal perception that good beginning teacher support improves the professional well-being, performance and retention of teachers (Gold, 1996). High rates of attrition amongst beginning teachers in the United States of America "have been well documented in the literature (Harris and associates, 1992, 1993; Schlechty and Vance, 1981, 1983)". (Gold, 1996, p. 549)

It is also important to bridge the gap between the theories taught in teacher education programs and the practice of teaching by supporting problem-solving and reflection amongst beginning

teachers with the help of their colleagues. This, in turn, may help theories put into practice and avoid, according to Gold, who cites (Lieb, 1992):

Colleges of teacher education can train people to do anything. However, when teachers enter the schools they do not do those things...Even in the most powerful programs, the slippage, the fadeout is pretty high. When teachers enter their classrooms, much of what they have learned dissipates. (Gold, 1996, p. 560)

In summary, there seems to be a divide between theories taught in universities about teaching and what actually needs to occur in practice for successful teaching to occur. As in the previously mentioned ideas of Doyle (1990) the question of 'What is good teaching?' and attempts to standardize the form and function of good teaching because of the influence of "effective" teaching research with its "focus on efficiency and outcome, rather than process" has had a detrimental effect on how beginning and experienced teachers implement and inquire into their practice.

#### *Experienced Teacher Education (Professional Development)*

There is growing evidence that one-off professional development workshops are very ineffective in changing teacher practice. Gottesman and Jennings (1994) have examined the history of professional development in South Carolina and ask themselves, why some professional development efforts succeed, and others fail. They found an essential step was missing. This step was one where teachers help each other implement and refine their practice on an ongoing basis, in other words, a form of mentoring.

## **Conceptions of Mentoring**

### *Formal versus Informal Mentoring*

In order to clarify what is meant by formal and informal mentoring I will refer to Szumlas (1999), who reviewed literature on mentoring. Szumlas (1999) describes formal mentoring as a mentoring relationship that has been initiated by someone other than the mentor and protégé (e.g., the organization). Typically organizations that formalize mentoring set program goals, select mentors and provide extensive training for participants. On the other hand, informal mentoring can be described as a relationship that develops quite naturally between individuals, without organizational interventions, in order to meet each other's needs.

Hansman (2001) critically examined the literature on formal mentoring programs from a socialist feminist perspective. She discovered inequality in formal mentoring programs due to issues with respect to power as it related to “gender, race, class and sexual orientations.” In her review she differentiated between informal mentoring and formal mentoring situations. She found informal mentoring situations described as mentors and protégés coming together through mutual interests and attraction. These informal mentoring associations may last for many years and were dependent on the relationship developed between the mentor and protégé. In contrast, Hansman found that in the literature formal mentoring programs were described as frequently being created due to affirmative action laws and workplace initiatives designed to help provide women with opportunities for faster career advancement and higher wages. These may include situations

where the institution purposely encourages mentoring relationships with people of different social or ethnic backgrounds.

Hansman (2001) stated that it should be an ethical concern for those in the position to plan formal mentoring programs within organizations need to address the following key questions:

- “Can mentoring programs challenge unequal power relationships and institutional structures or simply reinforce them?
- Whose interests are primarily being served through mentoring programs, the organization, the mentors' or the protégés'?
- How do those who were historically excluded from positions of power within an organization because of gender, race, class, or sexual orientation contribute to and re-create organizational cultures and mentoring programs that do not replicate hegemonic cultures of the past?” (Conclusion section, para. 2)

In summary, Hansman's critical examination of the literature on formal mentoring, within the workplace and adult education, from a socialist feminist presents the idea that, in general, formal mentoring programs are presented from a functional perspective, where mentoring programs are deliberately designed and described with measurable objectives and productivity and profitability underlying every move. The author challenges this functionalist perspective of mentoring by advocating mentoring as a process that places social justice in the foreground, where power relations and ways of teaching can be challenged.

Apple (1990, in Hansman, 2001) claims that within society there are unequal power structures and that mentoring programs may reflect and promote oppression. Hence, these mentoring programs may focus primarily on serving the needs of the organization by managing adult learners, rather than empowering learners to challenge the traditional culture and structures (e.g., ways of knowing and doing). Apple and Bierma (2000, in Hansman, 2001) point out that “the

reality of bottom lines and corporate profits may make it difficult to achieve the ideal world of shared power and interests in formal mentoring programs, particularly if performance-driven [human resource development] aligns with corporate rather than human interests". (Conclusion section, para. 3) In such environments, the mentoring programs emphasize and reproduce these power structures by controlling learning within the mentoring program. Hansman (2001) suggested that formal mentoring programs should strive to not replicate existing power structures, and should ultimately be a tool for righting social inequities.

Next I will explore hierarchical mentoring and non-hierarchical mentoring. In the literature, non-hierarchical is also called 'co-mentoring' or 'collaborative co-mentoring'. In doing so, I will discuss the purposes of mentoring, the roles of mentoring within the organization and within these mentoring relationships.

### *Hierarchical Mentoring*

The traditional conception of mentoring can be traced back to Homer's *Odyssey* in Ancient Greece when Odysseus entrusted his house and his son, Telemachus, to a counselor named Mentor. The two developed a hierarchical, father/son mentoring relationship. Traditionally, the mentor was defined as an older, trusted and more experienced teacher or counselor (Barrett, 2000). The protégé was defined as a younger and less experienced student or learner. Kochan and Trimble (2000) reviewed literature on mentoring and found similar definitions of hierarchical mentoring in more recent times:

The term mentor is usually defined as a guide (Bey & Holmes, 1992), role model (Crow & Mathews, 1998), counselor, coach, or sponsor (Jacobi, 1991). These definitions view mentoring as a one-way relationship in which the mentee is in a subservient role, molded by someone of greater age, wisdom, or position, who appears capable and complete (Allerman et al, 1984; Bowen, 1986). In this traditional perspective, when the mentee is 'filled', he or she becomes a mentor to another, and the cycle continues. (para. 5)

Szumlas (1999) framed mentoring as a beneficial hierarchical relationship, where the purpose of mentoring is to maintain and transmit the history and the culture of the organization. Szumlas also describes mentoring as providing security and structure for a novice teacher wanting to follow rather than lead. For example, Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999), who normally can be located in the literature on non-hierarchical mentoring, describe what could be perceived as hierarchical mentoring situations on the basis of experienced teachers being asked to mentor novice teachers by modeling those aspects of the teachers' profession that cannot be taught by theory alone.

Teaching is a wise action in the midst of uncertain and changing situations. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 266)

Experienced teachers are often found leading and teaching by example, those things that cannot be taught by theory alone. By this I mean providing 'knowledge-in-practice', that is, knowledge through a reflection on teaching experiences and 'knowledge-of-practice', that is, "making their classrooms and schools sites for inquiry, connecting their work in schools to larger issues, and taking a critical perspective on the theory and research of others" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 273).

Other theorists, such as Hansman (2001), argue against a hierarchical form of mentoring because they believe it can marginalize individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, or sexual



orientation when one or more of these aspects reduce the likelihood of a mentor being allocated. The author also states that the mentors may be chosen according to their fit with the dominant cultural and corporate values. In doing so, the mentors may force the culture of the organization on the other person, resulting in indoctrination and a resistance to organizational change. In this way, the mentor also discourages the other person involved in mentoring to take risks or desire to be innovative outside of the dominant culture of the organization. This is similar to Barrett's (2000) description of negative mentoring, which is described as the mentor acting as a judgmental expert diminishing the other person's sense of self-worth and undermining her/his confidence and desires to continue to learn and grow.

### *Non-hierarchical Mentoring*

#### Co-mentoring

'Co-mentoring' is a type of non-hierarchical mentoring and is an important experience by which teachers develop long-term trusting, non-hierarchical, and reciprocal relationships (Mullen, 1997). Mullen (2000) introduces the use of co-mentoring to enable the realization of the "creative capacity" (Mullen, 2000, Crosses bridge at a walk section, para. 2) of individuals and groups through a "guided but flexible process" (Mullen, 2000, Crosses bridge at a walk section, para. 2) to promote professional development and change in educational settings. Similarly, Lick (2000) states that the benefits of co-mentoring are the promotion of synergy and sustained growth in the individuals involved. Jipson & Paley (2000) also highlight the equality and the reciprocity of the co-mentoring relationship, equal in its totality, but maybe unequal from one

situation to another. In other words, at some points in the relationship, one person may have to put more into it than they receive, yet in the long run, the relationship will be reciprocal.

### Collaborative Co-mentoring

Mullen (1997) is also a major researcher in the area of collaborative co-mentoring, another form of non-hierarchical mentoring. She supports that co-mentoring helps combat feelings of isolation, competition and abandonment as mentors break through their 'circles of one'. Lick's (2000) research also supports collaborative co-mentors, described as "a sponsor, advocate, and guide...they teach, advise, critique, and support each other to express, pursue and finalize goals (Vanzant, 1980) and being competent, supportive, non-exploitive, positive, and involved (Cronan-Hillix et al, 1986)." (p. 46)

Therefore, common themes in the definitions of 'collaborative co-mentoring' are:

1. Collaborative co-mentoring exists and grows out of an ongoing, flexible and naturally evolving process.
2. Collaborative co-mentoring is based on equal, democratic partnerships where all individuals shared their unique and worthwhile experiences.
3. Collaborative co-mentoring occurs between partners or in groups where everyone is a learner and a teacher and encourages risk-taking by exploring beyond existing boundaries.

The collaborative nature of co-mentoring, where the mentor and the other person involved emphasize the negotiation of equal power and control in the relationship, does have some

potential pitfalls. Mullen (2000) writes about the difficulty to negotiate power and control in bureaucratic organizations because of the resistance of the status quo to relinquish power and control. The co-mentoring process is opposed to the institutional practices of separation leading to isolation and exploitation. Also, novice teachers may not want this level of independence, preferring more direction and less self-determination.

### *Feminist Mentoring*

In further contrast to hierarchical conceptions of mentoring, I will now present some ideas found in the feminist literature on mentoring. A feminist conception of mentoring according to Thompson (1999):

The conception is based on conversations and shared experiences, through which mentoring partners develop trust and reciprocity. Through reciprocity, mentoring participants move to the practice of thoughtful critique, in which they question taken-for-granted structures within schools. Central to feminist mentoring are issues of concerns to the teachers involved, including issues of gender, race, and culture as experienced in their own lives. (p. ii)

Thompson (1999) also "...challenges the traditional patriarchal conceptions of mentoring, in which mentors are cast as experts in the task for novices to assimilate their mentors' knowledge and proposes an alternate feminist conception in which mentors and novices are learner-teachers." (p. ii) She argues that mentoring relationships are 'pedagogical' but also 'collegial relationships' that require more democratic forms of pedagogy. Thompson cites the ideas of Shrewsbury (1993) who describes a feminist pedagogy which involves an evolving pedagogy that is democratic and participatory with the goal for participants to grow and empower themselves as they transform existing learning communities.

## **Mentoring in the Teaching Profession**

Literature relating to mentoring beginning teachers describes the mentor's role as not only about giving technical support, but also providing social and emotional support. According to Gold (1996) mentoring beginning teachers is attributed to reducing teacher attrition, increasing teacher well-being and teacher performance due to a larger engagement in his/her profession. Gold's "analysis of the literature reveals a shift away from the concept of a mentor teacher who is considered to be the expert training a novice, to that of a support provider who offers assistance to a respected new professional colleague" (Gold, 1996, p. 549).

Moving out of the university setting into the practice of student teaching or beginning teaching is a tremendous transition. According to Thompson (1999) "traditionally, beginning teachers have either survived in isolation or were lucky enough, to be naturally supported by caring colleagues" (p. 6). Understanding that there is a growing need for beginning teachers to have emotional, social and technical support, in order to survive and to continue to grow professionally, educational stakeholders have started to find value in mentoring.

Thompson (1999) supports that in many instances, mentoring teachers and beginning teachers are the individuals who must shape and direct the relationship. Thompson argues that the mentoring relationship must be reconstructed to enable less hierarchical modes of learning in order to foster a reflective enquiry approach to learning, which can include a respectful critique of ways of knowing and doing. Thompson writes about collaborative mentoring as

“epistemological relationships (Nelson, 1993), in which knowledge is constructed and standards of justification are shared” (p. 7).

Clarke (1997) describes more productive teacher educators as ‘advisors’ and ‘coaches’, which is similar to my description of mentors. His conception of a coach for a student teacher goes beyond earlier conceptions of school advisors, who used to leave the classroom and allow the student teacher to take on a great deal of teaching responsibility with little feedback. Clarke feels that the more common functions of a school advisor should not be limited to a ‘supervisor’ who observes and reports on how student teachers apply what they have learned about teaching at university on their practicum. The function of the supervisor should also include providing immediate support, not only helping the student teacher survive the practicum, but encouraging involvement in collaboration and collegiality at the school. Furthermore, it is the school advisors’ role to help the student teacher inquire into his/her learning about teaching. According to Clarke (1997), this requires a school advisor with a lot of teaching experience and knowledge about current teacher education research. Furthermore, school advisors need to understand how to support the creation of knowledge about how to teach is created during practica.

Rhodes, Nevill & Allan (2004) conducted an extensive study on teacher satisfaction, dissatisfaction, morale and retention in an English local education authority, and found satisfying facets that enhanced teachers’ professional experience, satisfaction and retention. These facets included:

- working with others to achieve shared goals (99% deeply satisfying)
- friendliness of other staff (97% deeply satisfying)
- sharing work experiences with one another (93% deeply satisfying)
- the school values contributions made by its members (91% deeply satisfying)
- managers provide effective support for teachers (73% deeply satisfying)

- and [in contrast] professional development is offered which is relevant to my [individual teachers] own needs (48% deeply satisfying and 52% deeply unsatisfying) (Rhodes, Nevill & Allan, 2004, p. 72)

Interestingly, professional development was much less likely than the other facets to increase job satisfaction, yet the other facets mentioned which I associate with informal mentoring and positive interpersonal relationships that enable empowerment and collaboration amongst peers were considered much more highly associated with job satisfaction and teacher retention. Hence, in my opinion, these satisfying facets discovered could also be a result of beneficial mentoring experiences amongst experienced teachers.

### **Gaps in the Literature on Mentoring**

The mentoring literature indicates that many school districts are using mentoring programs to support teachers; however a review of the literature on mentoring by Awaya et al. (2003) draws attention to a vagueness or lack of purpose in many recently developed mentoring programs (Feiman-Nemser, 1996) and a lack of research focus on the details of mentoring interactions in practical settings (Hawkey, 1998).

Although mentoring is generally described as positive, there is a growing sub-literature on failed or negative mentoring experiences. Barrett (2000) describes negative mentoring when the mentor acts as a judgmental expert diminishing the protégé's sense of self-worth and undermining her or his confidence and desire to continue to learn and grow. Teachers involved in mentoring need to be aware of the negative aspects of mentoring and how they can be prevented or counteracted.

Finally, most of the research in the area of co-mentoring is not empirical in nature. For example, Barrett (2000) writes about the “thoughts, feelings” and “notions” of mentoring and co-mentoring and how it “might” be improved. The non-quantitative research methodologies commonly used when exploring co-mentoring do not easily provide quantifiable results, but are reciprocal and reflective, thus giving the researchers and the participants new insights and frequently meeting the immediate needs of the participants for security, empathy and support.

### **Summary**

From the literature review, it was clear that no universally accepted definition of adult education exists, because adult education occurs in and is influenced by a diversity of worldviews and societal contexts. In today’s multicultural, face-paced, and changing environment it is important to examine adult education in terms of its function. A strong theme is that adult education needs to be integral to life long learning and to societal progress, and as a key method of building stronger communities, and new and better ways of working. In terms of teacher education, a past focus on quality control was evident and a newer trend towards teacher education as a method of empowering teachers and encouraging them to become intuitive and reflective practitioners was revealed. The importance of the first teaching experience for beginning teachers was also apparent, as research shows that this strongly influences the shape of subsequent teaching practice. Research has also shown that professional development workshops for teachers are ineffective without follow up and ongoing support, which can be provided through mentoring. Conceptions of mentoring were presented from traditional, hierarchical mentoring to more collaborative and feminist mentoring, where mentoring relationships are grounded in equality

and the conversations and stories shared about teaching promote growth and learning. Mentoring as social and psychological support was also a significant area of research in terms of the role of mentors. Questions arose regarding whose interests are being served by mentoring programs, the needs of the institution being to maintain the status quo and school culture, often associated with hierarchical mentoring, and the needs of individuals being to feel empowered to question ways of knowing and teaching, which is more likely to be associated with non-hierarchical, collaborative mentoring.



## **CHAPTER 3: METHOD**

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine how teachers experience mentoring relationships, and discover what mentoring experiences enhance or hinder their personal growth and professional practice. By examining and sharing the stories of teachers, this study will be significant in affecting policies and practices, as they relate to mentoring and enhancing teachers' personal growth and professional practice.

Hence, implications of the study relating to policy and practice will be discussed, and suggestions will be made as to how mentoring experiences may assist teachers in finding practical solutions to their day-to-day challenges. In summary, the four research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do teachers experience mentoring relationships?
2. What factors enhance these mentoring experiences?
3. What factors hinder these mentoring experiences?
4. How do these mentoring experiences assist teachers in finding practical solutions to their day-to-day challenges?

### **Participants & Criteria for Inclusion**

Participants were teachers who currently teach or, within the last two school years, have taught at any level from kindergarten to grade 7, English as Second Language (ESL), Learning Assistance or within the Library of any Lower Mainland School District. I selected teachers interested or involved in mentoring because they were more likely to have had recent, rich experiences with

mentoring which will result in a more purposeful sample. Purposeful sampling (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) is useful in gaining a deep understanding of mentoring in specific instances through teachers who are likely to be extremely knowledgeable and informed about mentoring and where the need to generalize to all cases or contexts of mentoring is not of immediate importance.

Participants were recruited by letters to schools or district personnel. The participants had at least one week to decide whether or not to participate. Participants were presented with a consent form at least one week prior to the interview.

Participants were asked to dedicate a total of five hours over a period of six months. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through pseudonyms. They also had the option of refusing to answer questions or withdrawing from the study in part or in whole, at which point their contributions will only be used with further consent.

### **Data Collection**

A semi-structured interview was conducted (one hour in duration) with six teachers interested in sharing their experience of mentoring. There were five categories of questions, with flexibility in allowing for additional probing questions. The interviews were located in schools, or others locations if preferred by the interviewee.

Each interview was tape-recorded and stored on cd-roms and tapes, which were stored in a locked filing cabinet. Each recording was transcribed verbatim. Any observations or thoughts were recorded directly after each interview. I will personally destroy all data in 2010. The raw data was made available to people involved in transcribing the interviews and to my supervisors. People who have access to the data were informed in writing to keep the data private, confidential and locked up while in their possession.

See Appendix 1 for the interview questions that were used.

### **Data Analysis**

This study involved qualitative methods to generate rich data that is embedded in the day-to-day life of teachers. The research methods and tools used were non-coercive and egalitarian in nature. More specifically, the methodology used is grounded theory, often referred to as the “constant comparative method” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 273).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) cited in Denzin & Lincoln (1994), developed grounded theory methodology, as an inductive approach to data gathering and analysis, where ideas emerge through the reading and re-reading of the data and by constantly comparing new data to existing codes or themes that have been intuitively established. Strauss and Corbin (1994) described grounded theory as a “general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273).

Grounded theory is suitable to the purposes of this research as it allows teachers stories to be heard because “interpretations [made from the data] must include the perspectives and voices of the people whom we study” (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p. 274).

In my data analysis, I tell the stories of teachers mentoring through rich description. I then interpret what I observed and heard from the participants by looking for common themes, placing equal emphasis on the exceptions or negative cases (i.e., those aspects of the data that do not fit patterns and themes).

The stages of analysis are:

1. Coding - reading and re-reading transcripts, highlighting words or sentences of interest
2. Memoing - noting any questions or thoughts that emerge through reading the data
3. Summarizing – trying to use fewer words to describe the emerging codes
4. Categorizing – combining similar phrases and words into categories, sorting notes and relevant quotes into categories, creating themes
5. Comparing - look for cases that don't fit into the categories and why this is (describe context or circumstance)
6. Give the transcript or summary back to participant for comment (to add, highlight or delete) if they are willing
7. Begin writing the report and returning to the analysis as the document develops (i.e., refining the analysis and the document in parallel)
8. Ask participants to read and comment on the accuracy of the analysis (to clarify ambiguous comments or address any questions that arise)

## **Trustworthiness of the Study**

Both validity and reliability contribute to the trustworthiness of the data and the analysis. The following paragraphs describe these aspects in relation to the study.

### *Internal Validity & Reliability*

Internal validity looks at whether the findings capture what is really there, that is, whether the findings match reality, which is understood according to Merriam (1988, in Thompson, 1999) as being “holistic, multidimensional and fluid” (p. 100). Within this study internal validity and reliability of the data is enhanced through the use of triangulation of the data, where participants were asked to comment and evaluate the data and findings (i.e., member checks). Furthermore, the data were collected over as long a period as possible (approximately one year), which allows enough time to reflect on the data gathered on my own and with the participants, and to make any changes or answer any questions or interpretations arising from the data.

As a researcher, it was necessary for me to address the fact that I was also a teacher, or ‘insider’, examining a familiar educational setting. Although being familiar with the overall picture and context of teaching was a benefit, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, I forced myself during interviews, to be as objective as possible and to try not to influence the participants with what I thought was true about mentoring or my own ways of knowing and doing. A more detrimental factor to being an insider was that I faced the dilemma of wanting to dig deeper and extract richer illustrations and stories of mentoring experiences, but not to the point where it may negatively impact my relationship with the participants or cause any undue

stress. However, a benefit of being an insider was that I gained access to more subjects who were willing to participate. I also feel that, since I will be suggesting actions that can be taken, this study is going to be reciprocal by benefiting my colleagues and myself.

### *External Validity*

External validity refers to the generalizability of the data to a wider population. However, as Winter (2000) states “external validity is often of no importance to qualitative research...qualitative findings are best generalizable to the development of theories and not wider populations.” (Winter, A Summary of the Differences and Similarities Concerning the Notion of Validity within Qualitative and Quantitative Research section, para. 9) In qualitative research and especially the constant comparative method, the participant, the reader, and the researcher evaluate and consider what applies to their situation, and attempt to create theories grounded in the data. In order for new theories to develop there needs to be thick descriptions of the narratives, interviews or other sources of information reviewed for research. In addition, Creswell and Miller (2000) state the need “for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases... where individuals reflect on the social, cultural, and historical forces that shape their interpretation” (p. 127).

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

The following section begins with demographic information for the six teachers involved in the study. The results are then presented for each of my four research questions.

### **Demographical Information**

#### *Introducing Barb*

Barb is a teacher in her forties and of European ancestry who has been teaching in a variety of small and large communities in British Columbia for the past 11 years. She has taught children with diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, including a teaching assignment in a First Nations Community. She currently teaches in Port Coquitlam. She has taught Kindergarten, Grades 2, 3, 4 and 5. In addition to her teaching assignments, she has also volunteered as a union staff representative. In this role she helps teachers with problems related to their teaching assignment, often helping teachers address concerns. She has had rich experiences in working with others teachers in mentoring and professional development situations.

#### *Introducing Neil*

Neil has been teaching for a little over 4 years now. He is currently teaching Kindergarten - Grade 1. He has taught a different grade every year and has taught all primary grades. Neil is engaged with his profession as a primary teacher. He speaks about teaching in a very positive manner even though he has been through the challenge of teaching a large number of grades over

a short period of time. He has enjoyed numerous mentoring and professional development experiences where he has worked collaboratively on changing or enhancing his teaching practice.

### *Introducing Francis*

For over twelve years Francis has worked as a teacher/librarian at the same Lower Mainland elementary school. She has worked with all the teaching staff Kindergarten to Grade 7.

Sometimes Francis team-teaches in the library and at other times teaches students on her own, thereby providing her teaching colleagues with time to prepare lessons or to meet. Over the years she has collaboratively developed and taught a large number of teaching units and has experienced a wealth of professional development and mentoring experiences.

### *Introducing Werb*

Werb comes from a family of teachers and has a discernible passion for teaching. He was a teacher in various elementary schools throughout Vancouver for 34 years, part of which was spent as an administrator. He has been a sponsor teacher for a large number of student teachers entering the profession. Since his retirement 3 years ago he has been working as a faculty advisor and a sessional lecturer for University of British Columbia education students.

### *Introducing Lucy*



Lucy has been teaching for about 24 years. She taught in the Interior for her first few years and then in Vancouver. Lucy initially taught primary, from Kindergarten to Grade 3. In the last 8 years, she has taught intermediate grades up to Grade 6, which is her favorite grade. She believes teaching is her life, her personality, who she is. Lucy says she loves her job despite all the frustrations, e.g., getting annoyed with kids, getting tired, etc. She is excited about having an impact in children's lives. She enjoys being in a dynamic environment and believes that growing and learning are important. She has a passion for providing or being involved in professional development. She has worked for the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, offering workshops to teachers on teaching mathematics.

#### *Introducing Jennifer*

Jennifer has been teaching for approximately 5 and half years. She was a recreational therapist before getting into teaching. She always wanted to be a teacher. She attended university as a mature student. She loves children and feels that she has always had a special rapport with children. She loves her job as a teacher-librarian, learning assistance, and French teacher. This allows her to see every student in the school in some capacity or other. Jennifer dislikes the current political situation as it relates to teaching e.g., cutbacks, lack of resources, teacher layoffs, etc. In her role as a teacher/librarian she has been involved in working collaboratively with the staff at her school in developing and implementing a variety of teaching units.

### **Research Question 1: How do teachers' experience mentoring relationships?**

“Mentoring situations and needs are unique, and there is no formula or recipe for how it will look.” (Neil)

“Mentoring is a process.” (Werb).

“It’s more on a one-to-one basis.” (Neil)

Given that the participants perceived that no two mentoring relationships are alike, I sought to clarify the main types of mentoring interactions and supports that they described can occur during the mentoring process. They were consulting, coaching or collaborating along a flexible continuum. I will also describe participants’ perceptions of mentoring, as an informal, one to one friendship that may involve lifelong mentoring or lifelong personal growth and professional development.

#### *Types of Mentoring Relationships*

##### Consulting

“Mentoring, to me, has a connotation of teaching through leading, through guiding.”

(Neil)

Most of the participants clearly favored mentor teachers more knowledgeable than they were in the area of desired learning, in a type of consulting relationship. Barb mentioned:

If I was weak in an area and...a specialist came and I didn’t even understand this area it would be wonderful, I would just like to sit and take notes and have this person take over for me until I felt comfortable doing it myself. (Barb)

Francis said, "I do see mentoring as somebody with more experience guiding along somebody with less experience. Like a teacher and student type of situation as opposed to colleagues...that is how I see it". In addition Francis described mentoring as "consulting...like perhaps an expert from the district office is going to come in and give their expertise in a certain area." Neil described his choice of mentors usually as colleagues who, "seem to retire within a year or two" and as having "a wealth of knowledge".

The participants perceived the mentor as a specialist, a person who takes over, shows them what needs to be done and allows them the space to reflect. The intention of this type of hierarchical mentoring relationship is to share knowledge from a more experienced to a less experienced teacher rather than to engage in an egalitarian, reciprocal exchange of ideas.

Werb provides some examples of what this mentoring/consulting role would look like in practice, "I might be a consultant about how to develop a lesson plan; I might be a consultant on how to develop a unit plan made up of a variety of different lessons that lead to a common end result."

### Coaching

"Coaching implies a process where you help someone figure out the answers for themselves." (Werb)

To ground somebody, to stay focused, to say, 'this is all you can do, you can't accomplish miracles, you can't give a kid a hand out but you can give a kid a hand up'. Know what you are here for, know what you are capable of doing. You are sincere, you are genuine, you are trustworthy, you are fair and firm and flexible and you can do all those things. (Werb)

All participants described mentoring experiences with the features of coaching. These relationships were described as less hierarchical than consulting and centered on receiving support from the coach in the form of helping the other person involved to reflect, to focus and to feel empowered to find their own solution or path from within.

Of all the participants Werb made the above point over and over again. He said, "It's the old story: do you want to save a child or do you want to give the child the where-with-all to save themselves? ... to give themselves the ability to help themselves get on with their lives, get on with the world".

And,

But, if you have somebody that you are trying to give advice to, if you are trying to help along the line. First of all, you have to trust the fact that they have the where-with-all to do the job as you see it, the way it should be done. And you have to encourage it, you, your job is a coach. And a coach is both a cheerleader, a critic, what else does a coach do? A strategist, a time manager. (Werb)

Werb's view of coaching is consistent with his personal philosophy of teaching where he is helping individuals to help themselves.

Francis also described coaching as one of the features of a mentoring relationship. She described coaching as being different from collaborating, which I will describe in the next section. She said, "... coaching is one person who is going to help another person achieve something." She said, "Well, um, collaborating, I do see it as a situation of equals. They might come with different needs but they are going to resolve and work out something." So conceivably coaching could involve collaborating and vice versa, but the main distinction is that collaboration requires a greater sense of equality in the relationship than coaching.

### Collaborating

“Well, [in] collaborating, I think of two colleagues as equals” and, “Collaborating, I do see it as a situation of equals. They might come with different needs but they are going to resolve and work out something.” (Francis)

The participants also described collaboration as a type of mentoring. It was described as an equal, non-hierarchical, friendly relationship amongst two teachers that involved discussing, brainstorming, and giving and receiving support that could lead to personal growth and professional development.

Werb described mentoring as a form of collaborating where the focus was on learning to improve or change one’s teaching. In his description of setting up a cooperative learning unit with a colleague he described “it was mentoring in the sense that you were working together and you were assisting each other to put together a program for the kids”. Werb also mentioned, “certainly there is a lot of idea sharing and discussion going on there”.

Furthermore, Werb emphasized the importance of collaborative mentoring as a form of personal growth saying:

Definitely, definitely. You learned how other people think, you learned that your own ideas are not necessarily going to be accepted 100% or 100% of the time. So you learn to bend, you learn to be flexible, compromise at times.

Neil talked about collaboration as being a type of reciprocal mentoring:

I’ve always had a buddy class ever since I’ve been at this school, with an intermediate classroom and that teacher, in a way, mentors me, as I do

him. So, in a sense, I would call that collaborative teaching or just basic team work.

In summary, even though participants talk about these different types of mentoring, there can be an evolution or interchange. For example, Neil described his experience in his teaching practicum as a mentoring relationship that involves a slow integration into the profession through a sponsor teacher who acts as a coach. Later he talked about his current situation as collaboration, which implies that his mentoring situation has evolved from coaching to collaboration.

#### Informal Mentoring and Friendship

I think it [mentoring] gives you a sense of somebody who you can trust, somebody that you can rely on in confidence to give you sound advice... it is like having a professional friend, someone who you can say, "I respect and admire your judgment and here is the situation as I perceive it with what I am trying to do with my class, can you give me some suggestions of what I can try? (Werb)

"Very often too... people who you turn to as mentors become life long friends so it extends outside of the classroom" (Werb)

Participants made a distinction between being asked by their principal to mentor someone, where it is seen as formal mentoring, and being able to just approach someone on their own, without administrative intervention, where it is seen as informal mentoring. For example, Barb pointed out her role as a union staff representative is a type of formal mentoring that helps teachers with contractual or interpersonal issues.

All the participants described mentoring as usually having an informal, evolving aspect to the relationship. They usually preferred informality, describing the relationship as being relaxed,

comfortable, and casual. They also mentioned that frequently these informal mentoring relationships arose out of, or led into, a lifelong friendship. Frequently this friendship was described as being assisted by easy access and proximity to the people involved in mentoring.

Francis said, "It has just evolved. And most of them were informal...you know, where I initiated them or people approached me". On proximity Francis mentioned, "You want to be able to reach them by phone or ideally have them close at hand or to be able to pop over to their school readily. Or have them pop in on you." Werb also talked about having an informal process, "We would go for walks around the school, around the block, around the school. And it was very casual, it was very informal and his method was very Socratic."

Another description of this type of informal relationship was provided by Neil who said, "We don't meet on a regular basis, we don't meet, say, every Friday afternoon but we meet when the need arise. For example this could be just a lunch time discussion." Hence, Neil described his mentoring relationship as a series of timely but irregular, informal meetings that involve small discreet tasks to meet specific individual needs.

Francis talked about how mentoring was more than just a professional relationship and that in fact a friendship developed. She described one of her mentoring relationships as turning into a friendship that lasted for over 20 years and continuing on even though this person is now retired. She talked about knowing when the mentoring relationship was good, "because you could feel that it was just right. It was friendly and it felt safe." Neil described informal mentoring as feeling like "nothing at all" if it does not seem to take up too much time.

Another important piece about mentoring being informal is that it's more about a feeling of informality, rather than a lack of focus or seriousness in the goal of the relationship. For example, Francis described a situation where she was asked by the principal to mentor another teacher. She felt that because the principal asked her to mentor that it was a formal mentoring relationship. Even though this mentoring relationship was described as "formal but it felt relaxed and comfortable".

### Life-Long Mentoring

"I think it is a life-long process." (Neil)

"Even when I am at the point of retiring, you know, I think it is a life-long relationship."

(Neil)

Participants also described mentoring as being life-long. The following discussion with Werb is particularly interesting as he shares his perceptions of different models of teaching. He uses an industrial metaphor to describe the current model of teaching as being fairly automated. This is compared to a more Eastern concept of teaching, which involves being a life-long mentor or coach.

Werb: Let's take a look at a different model. Consider this one, consider the oriental model where a teacher is not a teacher in the sense of that, I will teach you this curriculum in math and that curriculum in arts, this curriculum in socials, this curriculum in personal development and I will have you in September and by the end of June I will have taught you this and then you will get on the conveyor belt and you will go down to the next teacher in line who will then pick you up and take you on to the next.

Researcher: So is that the model?



Werb: That is the model. Let's take the oriental concept of the Japanese term "asonsa" or the Chinese term "akifu" someone who is a true mentor of the learner. But not just admin/academic sense but also in terms of being a life long coach, a life long mentor.

Researcher: (talking over each other) so you are talking about the whole thing.

Werb: Yes you are, you are talking about more than just the academic. You are talking about the spiritual growth of a person, you are talking about their social growth, you are talking about everything.

## **Research Question 2: What factors enhance these mentoring experiences?**

"I think everyone benefits from mentorship. It is just basically an exchange of personal experiences and understandings, both within the school system and outside the school system." (Neil)

Analysis of data revealed two levels of focus: individual/interpersonal and organizational. These levels will be used as an overarching framework to present the findings which illustrate the factors that enhance or hinder teachers' experience of mentoring.

### *Individual / Interpersonal Characteristics that Enhance Mentoring*

"I think it is all in the wording. It's all in how you say it." (Neil)

"Education is a people profession. It's people helping people. It's people guiding people. It's people giving advice to people. It's people teaching people. And if you are not a people person, it's not the job for you." (Werb)

Participants provided detailed descriptions of their experiences of positive mentoring relationships. From the rich descriptions provided, the following list was developed, representing the main characteristics of mentors that enhance mentoring relationships:

- Respectful, understanding, delicate, non-accusatory (especially when evaluation is involved)
- Confidential, flexible

- Authentic, honest, open
- Non-hierarchical (not like a parent)
- Experienced
- Good listener
- Passionate
- Encouraging

With these characteristics, participants described how mentors can counteract stagnation, help break out of routines, and help to unify theory with practice. Mentors can also help teachers open up their minds and deal with frustrations that can cause them to shutdown. For example, Barb felt that if someone else shows you how to do something it can “unblock” you. Participants also stated that the attitude of the mentor is important. That is, the people involved in mentoring should want to change and that the other person should try what was suggested and give it a chance, while at the same time not feeling forced to change.

With regard to experience, Barb specifically mentioned she wants very experienced mentors in the area of requested professional development but also feels she can learn from beginning teachers. Barb also emphasized that similarity is important, which could be in assignments, background or in their professional development needs.

With regard to good listening, Werb emphasized, “You have to be. You have to be.” He goes on to explain why:

Well there are people who love to feel that their ideas are valued and that they are listened to. And it is more time consuming, definitely, but if you are going to be sincere to people you have to give them an opportunity to tell you what they think.

Neil mentioned that good teaching can be observed and learned from a mentoring situation where someone is passionate about what they are teaching. Watching people being passionate about what they are teaching influences him strongly. Neil commented:

I know that often people teach best what they are interested in. So, for example, that particular teacher that I was mentioning, she is passionate about a variety of topics and it shows because she brings them into her classroom and she teaches about those things.

Many of the participants described the mentor as a person who encourages and helps a colleague deal with or overcome problems or frustrations. For example, "part of mentorship too is to make the other person feel as though they are not going to get discouraged. Trying not to discourage them from continuing on with their profession". (Neil)

### Safety, Privacy and Trust

Many of the participants voiced their need for a trusting mentoring relationship where people can feel safe to share and that this sharing be private and respectful. Neil talked about mentoring which involved the observation of another teacher, "to respect that person as a professional as well and that in the presence of students, not to correct them or to put them in a position where it feels as if they are embarrassed in front of the students". He suggested that comments or suggestions could occur during a lunch meeting or in some other private setting. Werb said:

There has to be that mutual respect, there has to be that sense of trust involved. And, the only way I have ever seen trust evolve between a teacher and another teacher or teacher and a student is by mutual respect, reciprocal understanding. It's like, OK, I'm here to

teach you but hopefully in the process I will learn from you. You will teach me something...and give people reasons for your rationale I think they can buy into it rather than if you just impose an idea upon them.

In the section below I will describe how the participants expanded beyond reciprocal understanding to include other areas of reciprocity in the relationship.

### Reciprocity

The participants consistently and frequently expressed the importance of the reciprocal nature of mentoring and how it was beneficial to them and the teachers they work with. Werb mentioned that two teachers can be “equally skilled, but none-the-less, someone still can teach the other something”. Barb talked about her role of a staff representative also being a mentoring role.

People have “problems in the school, so of course I work in the school, I want to solve it as well.

It is reciprocal because you give each other advice.” Werb also said:

Well, I think it is reciprocal. If you come on as a mentor, strong with the idea that you have superior wisdom or understanding and try to impose it upon somebody, you are only going to get their back up and it is going to be counterproductive.

Francis mentioned that mentoring “meets many needs if reciprocal ...there is a benefit for both participants in the mentoring relationship” and like some of the other participants expressed the value of learning from each other’s diversity, “the mentor gains by getting the satisfaction of helping other people and learning from other people’s perspectives”.

Neil’s perception was that he felt there was not much to be gained as a mentor if the relationship was not reciprocal, “if you are both getting something out of it, that’s great. But if you are the only one giving then, no there isn’t a whole lot you can get out of it.” Hence, the satisfaction of

giving back or of continued learning provides a way of making mentoring valuable to both parties involved in mentoring process is being used.

### Learning from Each Other's Diversity

It's actually probably ideal if you have several mentors because different personalities will learn different things. Having to work with all these different kids with different personalities, I think it would be nice to have mentors with different personalities cause as a teacher you have to learn to work with everybody. (Barb)

Many of the participants voiced their opinion that mentoring relationships enhance learning because they help people break out of their own familiar way of thinking, learning and teaching when one reflects on one's practice with another teacher. Neil expressed that there is always "something that can be learned" and that "everyone has something to offer". Hence, a state of continuous learning and diversity of perspectives amongst mentors is considered as beneficial.

I think it [mentoring] gives an opportunity for the seasoned veteran to experience the vitality, the energy of someone that is new to the profession. At the same time, the youngster might be frustrated on certain days and this might be tempered by some of the wisdom passed on by people who have been there before and can give them advice that the sun will rise tomorrow and, yes, you have had a bad day but it doesn't mean you have to go out and change your career. (Werb)

Like Werb, many participants recognized the benefit of learning from diversity in length of teaching experience. As mentioned by Francis, experienced teachers can learn cutting edge ideas from a "a whiz-bang younger teacher who has been at the top of his or her field as a recent graduate but who has just learned a lot of new techniques and ideas and has absorbed them and is willing to share them". Werb used a sports team metaphor to sum up the benefits of diversity in creating a team:

I always compare the school staff to a professional athletic team, you need the grizzled veteran on the one hand who may be a little bit cynical but who has an understanding of what the whole situation is going to be like. And you need the exuberance and the

enthusiasm of youth working at the same time. And I think when you have a melding of the two in a productive way where one respects the role and the ability of the other in the whole operation of the school that things really take on a very good flavor.

### Choice

All participants felt there should be choice within a mentoring relationship. For example, Neil said:

I think we always have a choice, we can always go to someone that you respect in the school or someone who you feel has a lot of information and say, 'hey, you know, I would really like to have your input in something I am doing and I know that you have done this before, would you be willing to help me out or give me a few pointers?...I think ultimately you have control over how, what sort of professional development you receive from others in terms of control over mentoring other people, sure, you can say 'no' and you can also offer. Whether they take you up on your offer, that's up to them.

Barb also favored mentoring relationships where she was able to choose whom she wanted to work with and how and what she wanted to learn. Furthermore, Francis stated, "I think there should be choice. But sometimes they might be assigned and, if there is a comfort level there then I guess it is okay." Francis' last quote demonstrates that even where there didn't appear to be choice, for example when the principal asked a teacher to mentor another teacher, the person mentoring did not see this as a negative. Barb mentioned feeling valued when asked to be a mentor by her principal; however, this may be an interesting anomaly and an area in need of further questioning because from personal experience and through informal discussions with my peers, I have discovered that teachers often prefer choosing their mentor.

Werb also thought there was choice in the subjects in what was learned in a mentoring relationship, "Whenever I have a student teacher I always say, the first role, what do you want to start teaching first? What is the area you want to get involved in?"

Lastly, with regard to choice, participants mentioned that they did not want mentoring to feel like a burden to anyone, and that it is more like 'giving back':

I don't think it is a burden, if it was a burden then you wouldn't do it. It certainly takes effort. In any case you have to make that effort to help that person and if one didn't want to use that time, they certainly wouldn't offer. But I think that people do mentor out of the good will, because they feel like it is the right thing to do, because they perhaps get satisfaction from giving and in giving they get something back. I think that often mentoring can be reciprocal, you give an idea and sometimes you get an idea. And so I think it is beneficial to both parties. (Neil)

In summary, the issue of having choice in a mentoring relationship is important, and whether it is seen as being positive or negative depends on the situation. That is, if a teacher involved in mentoring feels valued and gains satisfaction from helping others and giving back, then choice in who the other mentor is does not have to be of great importance.

### Equality

If you can give people reasons for your rational I think they can buy into it rather than if you just impose an idea upon them. (Werb)

Equality in terms of making decisions and ownership of learning (as opposed to imposition of ideas and being told what to do) was also discussed as an important enhancement to a mentoring relationship, as demonstrated by the following dialogue with Neil:

Neil: I would say we make the decisions equally.

Researcher: And what would you want it to be?

Neil: Equal.

Researcher: Is there a reason why?

Neil: Well, I think that, that way, both parties have equal ownership over what they are doing as opposed to someone who feels like they are being told what to do. I think it is always in the benefit of both people to feel like they own part of this.

In this way, equal ownership implies a negotiated relationship where both people involved in mentoring mutually agreed on a mentoring process where decisions are made to what is and how it is learned, when and where mentors get together, how much time is spent together, and other details.

Barb perceived that mentoring has "...gotta be an equal relationship. You both want to be there." If it is imposed on people, Barb perceived this to not be mentoring at all, "...if somebody, let's say the principal...wants you doing this certain thing then it's not really a mentor – mentee relationship, it's kind of a parent-child relationship where somebody's trying to make you do something". Neil also felt that people learn more by not having ideas imposed upon them. He wants people to have the opportunity to think about and discuss what they will be implementing, "then they have the understanding to sort of work it out for themselves if they should pursue this course of action". Francis said, "Collaborating, I do see it as a situation of equals. They might come with different needs but they are going to resolve and work something out."

Finally, equality is of great significance in enhancing collaborative mentoring experiences.

Francis and the other participants underlined the importance of having mentoring situations that involve collaboration, between two colleagues who perceive each other as equals where what is learned is negotiated.



*Organizational Characteristics that Enhance Mentoring*Time/Ease of Access/Proximity

Many of the participants involved in mentoring experienced lack of time, a heavy workload and conflict between work and personal life. Francis underlined the importance of easy access and stated that the provision of "release time would be good." Furthermore Francis told the researcher proximity to the mentor "is very important".

As well as Francis, Barb also expressed that mentors should be easily accessible during school hours or by e-mail. Proximity and scheduling one's availability were also important. She felt that the school could support teachers by giving them some release time from instruction and agreed that mentoring could also occur before or after instructional time, during recess and lunch or in the evening at home over the phone.

Neil mentioned that mentoring worked much better if it did not consume too much of his time, and was "just a lunch time discussion". He went on to say:

I guess it depends on, to what extent do you start mentoring. If you are spending huge amounts of time going through units and breaking down lesson plans, of course it is going to take a lot of time. But if you simply say, 'here is something that I have tried and, or here are some resources that you might borrow, here is something I have done before, here is a field trip that you might want to try.

Neil was happy to engage in mentoring after instructional time but blamed a similar work life and personal life conflict for mentoring not occurring. Neil said:

I am happy to engage with staff outside of school. It just doesn't happen very often. I know that at this school, and I don't know what it is like at many other schools but at this school everyone kind of works independently and everyone is quite busy, they have families to go to.

Hence, mentoring works best when organizations support people in finding mentors with easy access or close proximity or alternatively provide paid release time for mentors being able to observe each other teaching or to provide other support. From my personal experience and through informal discussions with my peers, this organizational support should focus on supporting mentoring by reducing the workload of teachers and not causing too much extra paperwork.

### **Research Question 3: What factors hinder these mentoring experiences?**

Again, two levels of focus: individual/interpersonal and organizational will be used as an overarching framework to present the findings illustrating the factors that hinder teachers' experience of mentoring.

#### *Individual / Interpersonal Characteristics that Hinder Mentoring*

##### Assigned or Negative Mentoring Situations

Although participants mentioned that they had not had any negative experiences of mentoring, perceptions were given of what a negative mentor would be like. For example, Barb perceived a negative mentor to be someone who does not want to work with you but is assigned to you. Barb said, "I guess the negative mentor would be somebody who's not really wanting to work with you. They've been assigned to you and so they're not putting their full effort into the job."

Barb also described a negative mentoring situation as working with someone who is bossy and treats you like a child. Barb said:

Well, I guess kind of going in with a bossy kind of attitude, you have to do this, you're going to do it and they're not very flexible and so forth, kind of understanding that mentoring is something you're gonna take what you want out of it, you can't be forced into it.

Werb described negative mentors as people who would come across as having superior wisdom or understanding and try to impose it upon somebody. Werb stated this approach was only going to get their back up, and be counterproductive.

#### Resistance to Changing One's Way of Teaching

"pure coaching never took off because there was a large number of teachers who were set in their ways and felt that they couldn't, they didn't need improving." (Werb)

"you have two types of teacher. You have those who have 30 years of experience, you have those who have one year of experience repeated 30 times." (Werb)

Werb raises an important point regarding his peers' lack of willingness to change and learn new approaches to teaching. He feels this happens because teachers need to feel a sense of control over their teaching. He cites a personal experience of his less and more experienced teaching colleagues not being receptive to taking on ideas and materials from him, as follows:

Well, it's interesting, because I've found that the average teacher tends to be very possessive of what they have created. You know, it is interesting because when I retired I went and I had filing cabinets full of math material, you know, I put them out on tables in the front hallway and said, 'come and help yourself'. I ended up putting 80% of it in the garbage bin. People didn't take advantage of the opportunity. Things I had spent a

lifetime creating. It didn't matter to me, I had given most of it to my student teacher who was quite happy to take it away (laughs). He wanted it. He took all my tables from the last 10 years, he took just about everything going. But other people who I felt were in a position to tremendously benefit from a lot of things, it wasn't their creation so they didn't want it. That's fine, fair enough...it's about control...and it's about being in charge and materials and possessions. (Verb)

Finally, Barb perceived that if a person does not want to change or try new things that it would make mentoring a negative experience for the individuals involved.

In summary, some of the participants expressed their resistance to changing one's way of teaching because teachers want to have the right to control how they teach in their classroom. Therefore, mentors that were evaluative in nature or insisted on changes were viewed as undesirable. Barb related this type of forced change where a teacher would be assigned a mentor by an administrator's decision. Barb said, "you're kind of forced to, you have this time with this person and they're gonna change something in your class that you don't want being changed around."

### *Organizational Characteristics that Hinder Mentoring*

#### Lack of Time

One of the main constraints to mentoring according to the perceptions of most of the participants was the lack of time available for preparing for and engaging in teaching, never mind finding time for mentoring or professional development. Lucy felt very strongly that there was little time for mentoring. Lucy said:

More and more resources are being taken from us, people being taken from us, teachers are more stressed than they used to be and they do not have as much time to focus on maybe professional development as they want to.

Jennifer talked about how her time for collaborating and team-teaching in her role as a librarian had almost been eliminated because of cutbacks.

Then the first year or two the cutbacks came, the collaboration time got smaller ... [Collaboration time] basically has gotten eliminated over the past 4 years. So now I just have little blocks of time where I can fit that in.

In addition, Werb described the problem of finding time for teachers to observe each other as partly due to the structure of the teaching day:

I think one of the constraints, of course, is the nature of the organizational structure of education. One teacher, one class. And to have somebody come in and observe me or for me to be released from my class to go and observe a colleague simply requires somebody else covering my class. And, in the absence of administrators wanting to do it, in the absence of the budget that allows for substitute teachers to be brought in, TOCs to be brought in, I think just the logistics are a very difficult thing to accommodate.

Francis mentioned that mentoring sometimes could be stressful if it involved too much time. To overcome this restriction of time during the teaching day, most of her mentoring experiences take place after school, usually around 3:30pm. Francis seemed fine with this arrangement. When asked about approaching administration to get release time for mentoring, Francis said that she would "first kind of think about if the administrator would actually allow her to have that release time". If she felt that the administrator would find it acceptable she would approach him or her and, if not, she would not. Francis said that if the administrator turned her request for release time down, that would have been fine with her.

### Workload and Stress

Teachers are generally willing to help because that's just the nature of teachers. But I know it's also very difficult because we have so much work to do that if we have to help somebody else it's just another load on our shoulders that we have less time to do what we need to do at the time. You know what I mean, like, we've got so many tasks to complete that if you're helping another teacher then you have to do that after school as well generally cause you don't get any release time to do it. (Barb)

The issue of teacher workload appeared to be a common theme amongst the participants. For example, Barb perceived her and her peers' heavy workload and lack of time as hindering her from what she considers the important task of mentoring others. Too much mentoring was perceived as increasing stress by taking away from after school planning time which she felt would impact the quality of her teaching negatively, rather than positively. Barb, as did a number of participants, felt that teachers can not get together for mentoring because they are exhausted due to increased workloads, government cutbacks, and many students with social, emotional or health related needs. Also there is the issue of job sharing where two teachers work with the same students but on different days. She finds it difficult to meet with her partners in the evenings or on Saturdays, because her partner needs to be with her family. She felt that, generally speaking, beginning teachers are more motivated to stay late because they have more enthusiasm.

In summary, Barb felt that workload makes it difficult to help others. In this way, helping others was not always perceived to reduce teacher workload by being reciprocal. As a matter of fact, too much mentoring, as related to being a staff representative, which she described as a form of mentoring (even though this researcher feels that being a staff representative is not a commonly associated view of mentoring within the literature) is perceived as increasing stress by taking

away from after school planning time. Too much mentoring is perceived as impacting the quality of her teaching because it is just too much, and teaching on its own is perceived as exhausting.

Neil also described mentoring as increasing the workload both in the short and long-term for the person giving the majority of the support, and only reducing the workload for the person who was being mentored:

If you are the one mentoring, I would say that, no, it doesn't reduce your workload, you are having to do one extra thing when you wouldn't have to necessarily....if you are the one being mentored....you work more efficiently and you get more ideas and you are not struggling with how to do things.

Neil also stated that "teachers are very busy with what they do. There are a lot of demands placed on our jobs" and that mentoring is "just one more thing that is added on the pile."

However, he also mentioned:

I don't think it's [mentoring] a huge chore, but given that you have got to collect these notices, you have to collect the money, fill out reports, you have to, and I don't mean report cards, that's aside from that, you've got your extra-curricular, perhaps it's band, perhaps it's art, perhaps it's some sort of team, and on top of that you are trying to help out someone else. I mean it's just one added thing that you have to think about.

And:

More often than not, teachers are very independent people and it is probably much easier to just work within the confines of your classroom rather than going around and volunteering and helping everyone else. So, yes I would say that it does require extra work. (Neil)

### Evaluation or Observation Within the Mentoring Context

I think that whenever you are being evaluated there is a little bit of trepidation on the part of the person that is being evaluated. Of course it adds more stress that makes it a little bit more unnatural for that teacher. As it is, most teachers don't like being observed and if someone else is in the room, perhaps their styles change a little bit, but certainly if you are being evaluated then things certainly change a lot more than they would in the regular situation. (Neil)

Participants perceived evaluation as a negative experience. As Werb stated that, "people, I think feel challenged if they feel that they are going to be evaluated. It's [mentoring] not an evaluation process, it is a growth process". Also, in relation to mentoring as a form of remediation, where a previous evaluation has revealed areas for development, Barb considers it negative when an administrator asks someone to mentor another teacher in order to "force her/him to change something in their classroom that they really do not want to change".

The issue of observation, as a form of evaluation, was raised numerous times during interviews with participants. For example, Neil perceives observation as not always welcome:

I know that many teachers don't often like to have people observe their classroom. Often we feel like it's like being in a fish bowl and having everybody looking in...I think that you need to be very careful when you are observing not to overstep your boundaries and not to interrupt or usurp the person whose classroom you are in.

On numerous occasions Barb confirmed that she didn't mind being observed by another teacher, but did however indicate that there was a difference between a teacher and a principal observing her. I re-queried and re-confirmed that she perceived being observed by a peer as non-evaluative and non-threatening in nature. On the other hand, she felt that if a principal was mentoring her



she might feel uncomfortable because of the potentially evaluative situation. Francis also said, “I wouldn’t feel safe in a mentoring situation that involved evaluation.”

#### When Mentoring is Misused as Indoctrination into the School Culture

Some of the participants mentioned that mentoring could have a negative impact by stifling teachers’ creativity. This could occur if the intention of mentoring is to impose the existing school culture with its own philosophy and ways of doing things on the teachers involved in the mentoring relationship. Mentoring in this sense could be seen as a form of indoctrination.

Werb outlined some of the dangers of imposing organizational culture. There is, “the possibility that somebody feels they are going to impose ideas or impose values or impose methodologies on somebody. This is the way we do things here. This is the way we have always done things here.”

This type of mentoring may also have a negative impact on the school and its organizational culture. It may create a culture of fear, mistrust, and an avoidance of risk-taking, which is a necessary part of learning and innovation.

#### Lack of Financial Support for Mentoring as Professional Development

Many of the participants felt that the lack of support for release time for mentoring or professional development was strongly linked to a lack of the ability of schools being able to pay for it. They felt that paying for professional development could be a shared responsibility between teachers and schools. Francis felt that sometimes administrators have to make these

types of decisions because “due to government cutbacks, there is very little money for release time or for teachers to visit other teachers to learn from each other” and that when she started teaching years ago that there was much more support, money and release time. Francis said, “Well, I really feel that the school should be paying for it, but they haven’t.” Neil said,

I don’t know, I think in these times, a big part of it, certainly I am held within some confines. I can only visit Monday to Friday. Because even though I would love to visit with him [potential mentor] on Saturday and Sunday, firstly, his kids aren’t going to be there, neither is he. So, at this point, I don’t know what my school would pay for ... there is only so much money that is available and I personally don’t feel like I could sacrifice a day off to, of my own pay, and go visit this person. So, I think that would be primarily it, I would say financial restrictions both within personal and within the school board.

**Research Question 4: How do these mentoring experiences assist teachers in finding practical solutions to their day-to-day challenges?**

Mentoring helps teachers handle practical issues with their peers, students and teaching. For example Francis found mentoring beneficial because it teaches her those things that she can’t necessarily learn from a book, the little insights, the little tricks that help her do things in a real practical type of setting. Participants also talked about how mentoring can support what is learned from workshops, and described various mentoring actions that were beneficial in providing practical solutions.

*Mentoring as Professional Development*

Participants described ways that mentoring allows the sharing of new teaching activities, theories, ideas, giving advice or observing each other. In other words, mentoring provides a useful source of professional development opportunities.

Barb found that mentoring helps her grow as a professional by introducing her to new teaching strategies, new resources and new perspectives and viewpoints from those people she was involved in a mentoring experience with.

Neil talked about his mentor providing him with specific advice and leading him to specific resources. "Often I am going there for a specific answer and they are often able to provide me with a lot of advice and a lot of resources." and "She has been teaching for a very long time in the system and she is constantly offering me all sorts of advice or giving me resources, as was the one before that."

Jennifer talked about how her mentor would help her pull things together, "she would help me focus on...the more practical stuff." Jennifer also provided the following example of how mentoring could provide specific and immediate advice especially if the people involved in mentoring are in close proximity to each other and may actually have a direct insight and experience with the same students or families. Jennifer commented that if mentoring:

was within the same school it would have even been greater. Because you are dealing with the same groups of parents, you are dealing with a lot of the kids that other teachers have either had or had people in that family. Because, you know, a lot of times, you know, say you have got a classroom discipline problem, a lot of times it is not just that child but it is the rest of the family, right? So if you talk to a teacher who says, "you know what, I've had this problem and this is what I did with it. Or, you know, why don't you encourage her to do this because that is what worked for me last year." I think that works. Apart from that, just a lot of teacher ideas come from sharing. You know, if you are doing literacy circles and you want, you know, what did you do in literacy circles, how did you do this? And they have done it and you can try it the very next day because you are seeing that person daily. And then you can come back at recess and say, "oh I did it, it didn't work. I did it wrong." And then the next day you try it again, right? So that is just so close at hand.

Werb confirmed what the other participants said about the practicality of mentoring. He said, "The advice I got when I was a student teacher was more direct, it was more specific to the job."

Jennifer, like other participants talked about the importance of mentoring which involved team teaching and reflecting on ones' teaching practice.

I can see myself pairing up with somebody who is an expert maybe in a certain area that I want to focus on. ... Gleaning ideas from different people about what works for them that I don't know about. So, as far as having differences of opinion, um, maybe different ideas is OK, different approaches may lead to things that I can glean from that would work for me.

### *Mentoring Promotes Collaboration and Innovation*

Within my school...there is more of a push being made by the administration...for collaborative work and they are looking at ways to give time for teachers of similar grade levels to get together. And I think that is great. In reality it hasn't happened yet but some small things are that we meet as a primary staff and intermediates meet as an intermediate staff. And so I think that is the beginning of that plan. (Neil)

Neil said:

There is a teacher who sometimes I work with in a different grade level, she doesn't enjoy teaching PE and I am not that great at teaching art. I will often go up there and we will exchange ideas and that makes it a lot easier because now I am not struggling with having to think of new ways to do art and she is not thinking of new ways to teach PE.

Werb emphasized how useful the collaborative aspect of mentoring is to obtaining advice from your peers.

The greatest advice I got was from my peers. I certainly didn't get it from any professor of UBC, I didn't get that much from the administrators, but the colleagues that I worked with and, even if it was just observing how to set up your room or how they handled something that was significant. Um, I think was something that was probably the most beneficial to me. Do I believe in mentoring colleague to colleague? Very definitely so. (Werb)

The participants described mentoring as a tool for innovation and change. Teaching in itself requires a great deal of flexibility and the ability to adapt quickly to the changing needs of students, parents and society. Neil's thoughts on his experience of mentoring were:

I think it is a way that we can see beyond the 4 walls of our own classroom and to get fresh ideas, to get feedback on our teaching. Otherwise our own teaching and learning becomes stale." In addition, Neil describes the benefit of mentoring as better meeting the needs of the teachers to teach students by providing teachers with "different inventive ways of teaching a certain unit or subject". Similarly Werb talked about mentoring, "as a chance for shared creativity and the idea that, yes, this is the way that I might go about doing this particular unit or this particular lesson but you are little more right brain thinker than I am so let's see what we can come up with in terms of amalgamating some of your suggestions with mine.

#### *Mentoring for Beginning Teachers: Social Support & Theory into Practice*

Barb expressed that mentoring is important especially for beginning teachers because it helps provide emotional support for the difficult transition from university to professional practice. She indicated that she wished she had a mentor to support her when she first started to teach. She feels that one of the reasons why so many teachers leave the profession in their early years is because they are "thrown into classrooms". She feels that more beginning teachers could be retained if they could meet at least once a week with a mentor. It is interesting to note that I have not come across any British Columbian statistics that support Barb's opinion that providing extra supporting for beginning teachers is a major factor in reducing attrition.

Werb highlighted some of his perceptions of beginning teaches and how mentoring could be useful in providing greater focus, clarity and a more realistic sense of reality to enable them to translate their theory into practice. Werb said:

I think a lot of people who come into teaching, they have a very starry-eyed, unrealistic perception of exactly what teaching is all about. And exactly how much influence they have. And I think they also have an unrealistic perception of how much work is involved.

And,

The greatest misperceptions that student teachers have...is they don't define their role as a teacher. Exactly what is their central focus that they are supposed to accomplish. And a lot of them have a very idealistic, at the same time unrealistic understanding of what they can do.

Teaching requires adaptation to different situations, individual student needs and finding resources, which you cannot learn from theory alone. Barb saw the benefit of mentoring as helping one see what the theory looks like in practice. This she perceives will help deal with the real practical issues in the classroom, such as differences amongst the needs of students in their local learning situation. Barb's opinion is that teachers don't just want to hear about new teaching methods in workshops alone. Teachers learn better through continued discussion while they collaboratively learn and assist one another during the implementation of new teaching methods.

Jennifer talks about how in a perfect world even student teachers would learn by team teaching with experienced mentors. She feels that the student teacher would learn by "feeding off each other..." But to better learn they should "have equal responsibility... the same way that open area classrooms used to work". Jennifer feels that team-teaching, to develop student teachers with mentors who consider each other equals, would be beneficial because:

You are in the same room, the same things are happening and you are interpreting them differently and then you can talk about it. Well, why did this work this way but it didn't work this way this time? What were the dynamics for that? And that other person, you don't have to explain the situation because they were there.

Finally, in relation to wanting beginning teachers to have mentors to team teach with, Jennifer said:

You know, I always have thought, I've actually thought about this a lot, you know in the perfect world you very first year of teaching would be team teaching, always. And that would be your mentor. And so, you know when you are first doing your practicum and you are in a classroom and you get some teaching time and the other teacher is there. But instead of having it like that, have equal responsibility, so that you are observing doing volume and then you feed off each other. Do you remember the same way that open area classrooms used to work? And, there were two teachers or three teachers working with a group of kids. And I think for, to develop teachers, that would be a really great thing because you are in the same room, the same things are happening and you are interpreting them differently and then you can talk about it. "Well, why did this work this way but it didn't work this way this time? What were the dynamics for that?" And that other person, you don't have to explain the situation because they were there and they might have seen it in a certain way and said, "don't you realize you were doing this?" and you might say, "oh I didn't realize." ... It's the same way with the teaching practice, you always teach the same way until someone says, "why don't you try doing it from this angle?" and you are going, "oh yeah, I guess I could." Right? But if you did that in your first year you wouldn't maybe pick up bad habits in your teaching, maybe. There would be someone to always bounce ideas off of, you would be way more confident, it would give you, both teachers time to develop new strategies.

### *Mentoring as Ongoing Support & Follow-Up for Workshops*

I think what really has to take place is that you need to find something that is going to have enduring value. When I think of all the workshops I have attended, when I think of all the new ideas that have come down the pipe. How many of them have survived longer than two or three years? You get a little cynical after a while when you realize that, you know an awful lot of people are out there putting on workshops only to enhance their visibility.  
(Werb)

Workshops are good for firing people up, but one critique is that there is no ongoing support or feedback to keep the change or implementation going.

Teachers who have observed the many changes that have been driven by the Ministry of Education and fall apart because of a lack of ongoing support and have as a result a certain cynicism and resistance to change. This lack of ongoing support can be addressed through mentoring:

[Workshops] are not as intimate so it is more vague, it is more general. They have certain time constraints. Mostly the workshops that I attend are after school and they only last for an hour, perhaps an hour and a half and there is no follow-up afterwards...it is very limiting...where as in a mentorship role it is continuing, often, and it's not as, it's more, not necessarily indefinite but it's more flexible. (Neil)

Jennifer found that she had noticed a trend that:

New teachers like to go to workshops and things that are already composed for them and that teachers who are more experienced like to do individual things. So a teacher that is more experienced might like to go and sit in on a classroom and watch something new instead of attending a workshop where it is not hands on. Whereas the new and inexperienced teachers want to go to workshops, gather information and then take it back.

Another critique of workshops was that they are too vague and short lived to make any real big impact on how you teach. Hence, again, workshops alone are not sufficient in meeting teachers' ongoing professional development needs.

Workshops, in conjunction with mentoring, are perceived as being more flexible and therefore more suited to meeting teachers' specific and practical professional development needs through continuous learning with ongoing support and follow-up.



## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

The research questions will now be examined further in light of the results by demonstrating whether results confirm, contradict or add to current research on mentoring, teacher education and professional development. Based on these findings, recommendations will be made for policy and practice, which could involve all stakeholders in education, such as the Ministry of Education, school boards, teachers, administrators, teacher educators, parents, students, professional organizations and associations, BC Teachers Federation and the local community. The discussion will close by highlighting the limitations of the study and making suggestions for further research.

### **Mentoring Experiences**

Descriptions of the participants' experiences of mentoring relationships confirmed what I found in the literature on mentoring. For example, many of the participants described mentoring as a one-on-one relationship involving, to a greater or lesser degree, consulting, coaching, and collaborating. This was similar to Kochan and Trimble's (2000) findings in their review of the literature on mentoring, where they found definitions of mentoring as a counselor, coach or sponsor with a more experienced person. Results were very similar to the framework used by Lipton et al. (2001) who found that mentoring involved consulting, coaching and collaborating. In addition, my results confirmed that mentoring was experienced as a unique, evolving process or relationship, also found by Lipton et al. (2001) and Kochan and Trimble (2000).

My interviews of the participants revealed that mentoring was mostly informal in nature and at times thought of as a life-long relationship, as previously found by Hansman (2001). For example, as in Werb and Neil's experience, friendships lasted beyond the retirement of their mentor. Interestingly, even though the relationships were informal, meaning they were experienced as friendly, safe and confidential, there was still significant focus on meeting specific needs and goals.

### **Experiences that Enhance Mentoring Relationships**

#### *Learning from Each Other's Diversity*

You have to be open with the ideas you suggest. You have to give them some latitude to consider different ideas. You can improve your teaching by working with a teacher that way. (Werb)

Just like Werb I value the diversity of my teaching colleagues, diversity in ethnicity, gender, status, age, ability, learning style, subject matter, discipline and others. I have learned a lot from collaborating and sharing with my mentors our different ways of knowing, learning and teaching. Being exposed to this diversity has helped me grow as a person and as a teacher. Applying what I have learned from the diversity of my peers has given me greater insights into facilitating learning and meeting the varied needs of an extremely diverse group of students. I believe teachers can benefit from this synergy, by inviting a variety of mentors into their lives who will help them examine and create diverse ways of knowing through a multiplicity of insights due to sharing dissimilar backgrounds, beliefs and experiences.

Results of this study suggest that these teachers would rather work with and learn better with mentors who are similar in their background and educational platform. This is inconsistent with Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999), who found that teaching colleagues, who have diverse ideas and experiences, learn more from each other. These results suggest that teachers avoid diversity due to fear of potential disagreement or conflict at the cost of potentially rich learning experiences. Interestingly, most of the participants had difficulties coming up with, and when they did, talking about negative mentoring experiences. One participant felt so strongly about this that I was asked to delete from the transcripts any comments about a negative mentoring experience. Teachers seem to value a mentoring relationship, that is friendly and conflict-free, with a teacher who has similar views, over the potential of learning through diversity. Perhaps if teachers felt they had the ability to deal with potential conflict or disagreement and could recognize the value of learning from colleagues with diverse views, they would be more comfortable mentoring with a greater diversity of colleagues.

Participants also expressed a preference for a mentor who is more experienced. This relates to research findings as in Lawson (1992), cited in Wright (2002) who found that novice teachers expect to engage in traditional mentoring, and may encounter a process of 'enculturation' (Feiman-Nemser, 2002) into the language, values and teaching techniques of the educational organization they teach at. This raises an interesting question. Could it be that teachers' conceptions are stuck in traditional top-down modes of learning? Of course it is important to note that working with a more experienced teacher need not dictate enculturation. They feel that they can only learn something from a 'master teacher', mentioned by participants on numerous occasions, who is perceived as having all the answers to give them. In contrast, Feiman-Nemser

promotes mentoring that involves 'quality induction', not enculturation, as previously mentioned. Quality induction involves mentoring as a process of more than just social and instructional support, as it needs to also involve a joint enquiry, which could be modeled by an experienced teacher, for the purpose of gaining deeper insights into one's teaching practice.

Lick (2000) also talks about the importance of diversity as a catalyst for synergetic learning:

Synergy commonly refers to how the whole is more than the sum of its parts. In synergistic relationships, people work together to generate a total result that is greater than the outcome of their separate efforts. Members of a synergistic co-mentoring group inspire and energize each other, and the openness and diversity of perspectives create new ideas, knowledge, and problem-solving potential. (p. 46)

As teachers of multicultural classrooms, we need to learn even more from these different perspectives in order to ensure that students of all cultures and backgrounds are empowered to reach their potential. As a further example of learning from diversity, Gilfus (1999) in her research on violence against women, suggests, collaborative mentoring among researchers, advocates, practitioners, and policy makers from diverse backgrounds can lead to a complex process of deeper learning and effective collaboration. Gilfus feels that diversity causes stress but also great strength which leads to valuable collaboration.

### Recommendation 1

All educational stakeholders recognize the value of collaborative co-mentoring to maintain and encourage diversity within schools, as this allows organizations to grow and adapt to the changing needs of all the stakeholders, thus fostering a culture of professional development through synergetic relationships.

Mentoring be collaborative and include all teachers regardless of their unique differences and that mentoring not be used to selectively advance or support only those teachers who most easily support the existing organizational culture.

### *Training for Individuals involved in Mentoring*

As stated above, participants avoided choosing mentors that they considered having a different educational platform and background as theirs. In addition, the literature states that people with a diversity of educational platforms and backgrounds have much richer learning experiences. Therefore, people involved in mentoring could be encouraged by their peers to mentor a greater range of colleagues if they can learn how to value diversity and how to deal with potentially different views and uncomfortable feelings.

Often it is assumed that experienced teachers are automatically competent mentors. Kajs (2002) states that “novice teachers are rarely provided interpersonal skills training to prepare them for their role in the novice mentor-teacher relationship” (p. 62). Boshier (1996) mentions that teachers of adults employed by educational institutions are usually selected for their specialized knowledge or expertise, not for their teacher training. However, specialized knowledge and technical skills do not always imply good adult education teaching abilities. The great majority of full-time adult educators are employed in an administrative or semi-administrative role and are involved with program development and management functions. Boshier believes as a general rule, the higher one’s rank in an adult education agency, the less involvement one has in routine program development activities. Hence, their base may be theoretical and their distance

from the daily practice of teaching may make it difficult to know and support the real day-to-day need of adult learners.

### Recommendation 2

Mentors would benefit from courses in adult education, and interpersonal skills. More specifically, supporting mentors by providing education for mentoring is important because they face the difficult task of building friendly, deep, meaningful, and influential relationships, which may involve conflict and uncomfortable feelings. Hence, mentors need to learn about respectful, authentic communication and how to safely deal with potential conflicts or disagreement. This may include learning about creating an empathetic and open climate of discussion with respectful criticism and without negative judgments, where learning from diversity is valued. Within these relationships, as equals, they create, contribute, scrutinize and build diverse knowledge about teaching and gain significantly from the professional and personal development involved in mentoring and collaborating with their peers.

Mentors for beginning and experienced teachers must be educated in providing assistance with personal and professional high-stress situations. This education should consist of: problem solving, conflict-resolution strategies, and understanding and supporting the needs of novice and experienced teachers. Mentors also need to have access to and be aware of up-to-date information on current teaching practices and learning methods, in order to support other teachers in a mentoring capacity.

*Mentoring Promotes Life-long Mentoring*

"I think it is a life-long process." (Neil)

Many of the participants confirmed that being involved in mentoring promoted life-long mentoring. Some participants experienced or observed that teachers involved in mentoring stayed involved in mentoring throughout their professional life, and sometimes even into their retirement. Those involved in mentoring in turn involved teachers who have not previously experienced mentoring. This could be attributed to their desire to give back or receive support, through the reciprocity of mentoring over a lifetime.

In relation to mentoring pre-service teachers, Hughey (1997) makes the main point that one-to-one mentoring has "expanded to include a great number of participants...mentorship may now take the form of teaching and counseling not only from one-to one, but also from one to many, from many to one or from many to many" (p. 103). That is, individual mentoring circles create bigger circles and soon everyone is learning. Like Hughey (1997), I believe that mentoring involves many. I would even like to make her definition of mentoring an even broader one. Mentoring occurs whenever a colleague makes an impression on you and causes you to reaffirm beliefs, discard old beliefs, or develop new ones.

In summary mentoring, as support for teachers, is a self-perpetuating, life-long process that continues to grow and benefit more and more teachers by providing support for the teaching profession, which otherwise could experienced as more stressful and isolating.

### Recommendation 3

Novice teachers should be introduced in their teacher education and by their peers to collaborative mentoring early on in their profession as a means of continued professional development and support. This in turn will provide the momentum for synergetic relationships, which will provide support for the changing needs of teachers throughout their teaching career.

### *Mentoring as Social Support*

Results of this study have shown that mentoring is valued as social support for beginning teachers in that it can provide social support during transition from university to professional practice, the theory to practice gap. This type of support was similar to other types previously discussed but has an emphasis on the interpersonal dimension. According to Gold (1996) there are two types of social support that mentors provide to teachers: instructional and psychological. The purpose of instructional-related support is to assist the novice teacher with the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to be successful in the classroom and school. This includes support such as sharing teaching resources, observations within the classroom and collaborative team teaching, which have previously been raised by participants as an important source of support for beginning teaching. Gold (1992) cites a definition of psychological support as:

emotional support, positive regard, accurate empathy, empathic listening, and meeting psychological needs. Educators also have stated that psychological support includes an array of skills and strategies including confidence building, reinforcing a positive self-esteem, guidance in developing a sense of effectiveness, instilling a sense of self-reliance, learning how to handle stress, and psychological assistance. (p. 562)



The participants also valued mentoring as a form of social support which they attributed to reduced stress and increased engagement in their profession, as long as the relationship was informal, friendly and reciprocal.

Gold cited research by Billingsley & Grossk ( 1991), Darling-Hammond (1984) and Lawrenson & McKinnon (1982) who like others have reported “that limited opportunities for professional exchange and lack of professional support are two of the most frequently cited reasons for teachers leaving the profession” (p. 561). It is important to note, however, that I have not come across any British Columbian research that substantiates that the lack of opportunities for professional exchange and support are major factors for local teacher attrition. Gold believes in assisting novice teachers in devising personalized professional development plans with supportive colleagues. These plans should focus on the novice teacher’s personal needs and emphasize stress management, problem-solving, and communication skills. Gold feels that attrition can be reduced by supporting teachers in their personal development and their ability to prevent burnout. Similarly, I have recently observed a trend of encouraging teachers to devise personal and professional development plans in the Vancouver and Surrey School Districts.

#### Recommendation 4

Teachers, professional associations and school administrators need to value positive, respectful and collaborative mentoring as a form of trustworthy support that is relevant and practical to the individual needs of teachers.

Teachers, professional associations and school administrators need to value collaborative mentoring, as a form of social support for dealing with work stress and isolation, and for encouraging increased teacher engagement and retention.

### **Experiences that Hinder Mentoring Relationships**

#### *Lack of Clarity in Defining Mentoring*

There is a lack in clarity in the use of the word mentoring which has been described in the mentoring literature. As mentioned earlier, Lipton et al. (2001) frequently use the terms coaching, collaborating, and consulting interchangeably to describe mentoring or facets of mentoring. Furthermore, like the participants in this study, Doyle (1990) confirms that the purpose of mentoring is often described with only a technical focus on providing assistance with teaching strategies, skills and methods. The purpose and focus of this technical approach is on efficiency and quality control.

On the other hand, Doyle feels that a description of mentoring with a focus on the relationship and not quality control is important. Doyle, like the participants, found that mentoring should focus on providing social support: instructional and psychological support. Different from Doyle, was that the participants avoided critiquing mentors at the cost of potential change or learning and to avoid any conflict or negativity. In contrast, Doyle (1990) and Grumet & Pinar (1996) value examining and critiquing the ways of knowing and doing and how knowledge and meaning is created between critical and reflective teachers and students that informs teachers' practice.

As stated earlier in the literature, the participants in this study had similar difficulties when describing mentoring. For example, Francis said, “coaching and mentoring could be quite similar. Collaborating, I don’t see collaborating and mentoring as being as related as coaching and mentoring”.

From my readings I have come to define teacher evaluation as a summative process to determine the retention, hiring or promotion of a teacher. On the other hand, I define teacher supervision as a formative process used to examine strengths and weaknesses in practice, and to support teacher professional development by encouraging teacher growth and improvement in a non-evaluative way, which may include collaborative, non-hierarchical mentoring.

Like the participants in this study, the literature sometimes describes mentoring as an evaluative relationship between an administrator and a teacher or a teacher and a teacher. Scarpa (2004) describes a current peer review program in Rochester, New York involving teacher mentors. It is part of the mentor’s role to evaluate the teacher and assist in making decisions on his or her employment, including the provision of a report or a continuing teaching contract. Scarpa describes these reviews as resulting in firing more first year teachers and only 70-80 percent of veteran teachers ‘saving’ their jobs. People who are positioned to make such decisions over offering or refusing a teaching contract (*i.e.*, teacher tenure) are often called mentors. Being in a situation of being fearful of losing one’s job is not a safe, encouraging situation for risk-taking, growth and learning. The participants opposed evaluation for the above-mentioned reasons. Many teachers and administrators would agree that teacher evaluation and supervision are important to ensure that students receive the best possible education under the guidance of

competent educators. They also agree that teacher evaluation and supervision, if done incorrectly, can be stressful for all participants, and can negatively impact employee morale, and may provide little useful information on teacher competency or goals for improvement.

In order to reduce the anxiety of the teacher being evaluated and increase the likelihood of the teacher being him or herself, and possibly trying out some new teaching strategies without the fear of being disciplined if a new strategy does not succeed, it is important that teachers have choice. For example, Article 4.E. of the Vancouver School Board Local Collective Agreement (VSB, 2002) states “that an employee may request an evaluation and may choose to ask an administrator she or he trusts and feels comfortable with for an evaluation” (p. 53).

Evaluation, according to the Agreement, is purely summative in nature. The purpose of this type of evaluation is to monitor teachers for retention, remediation or dismissal purposes. This type of summative evaluation is used to decide if a teacher meets the minimum requirements for teaching. It excludes the benefits of formative evaluation for teachers who meet or exceed minimum requirements and would appreciate suggestions for continual teacher self-assessment and improvement. Hence, the Agreement does not encourage teachers to reflect on their strengths, instead focuses on a deficit model. In any evaluation all things that influence student achievement need to be considered. The agreement should take into consideration the school culture, community support, students’ level of understanding, special needs within the classroom, the curriculum and the availability of resources (people and materials).

From my personal experience, after listening to the participants and reviewing literature on teacher education and collaborative mentoring, Lick (2000) and Mullen (2000), there was a consistent voice that teachers are, or should be encouraged to be reflective professionals who know how to discover where they need to improve. They are capable of, and should be supported in designing their own professional development based on their individual needs. As a matter of fact, I believe that good teachers are good researchers and problem-solvers by nature.

#### Recommendation 5

Mentoring should be non-evaluative, non-hierarchical, formative and collaborative. For example, I see how our school promotes collaboration by offering teachers release time to collaborate with peers or outside agencies. This type of informal mentoring addresses individual needs for teacher professional development in a low stress, but practical and valuable way.

Evaluators should not be referred to as mentors. In an atmosphere free of evaluation, mentoring feels safer and it can better support teachers in identifying and making independent, professional judgments regarding their professional development needs.

#### **Lack of Time and Funding for Mentoring and Professional Development**

Results have shown that lack of time and funds for mentoring and other professional development activities are major constraints within the teaching environment. Werb suggested that “[mentoring] is a way, if you can arrange release time, where someone can actually observe you in your teaching and make suggestions that might lead to improvement within your teaching.” Hence, it is suggested that providing release time from instruction for mentoring will

help both novice and experienced educators to identify and meet their needs for instructional support.

Francis said, "I think release time would be good during class time because they would observe what is actually happening in the classroom". Barb suggested that non-enrolling staff, such as the principal, learning assistance teacher or English as a second language teacher, could provide release time for mentoring.

"More money...more options to go out and have visits with select master teachers and observe what they are doing. Or to have outside of the in-school professional development, to have money to go to certain workshops that are offered in our district and other districts that might be tailor made for the need of a particular teacher."  
(Francis)

In my personal experience I have also noticed a growing lack of money for professional development and have observed the cancellation of a mentoring program, the elimination of district professional development consultant positions, and ever decreasing funds for teacher release time over the years. It appears that in times of cutbacks teacher professional development is often cut as well.

#### Recommendation 6

The Ministry of Education provide funds for release time, materials or other support necessary for mentoring and implementing what has been learned into the classroom.

As a participant suggested, non-enrolling staff, such as administrators, learning assistance teachers or English as a Second Language teachers, could provide release time for mentoring.

### **Teacher Workload, Burnout and Attrition**

New teachers usually demonstrate an idealism and excitement about teaching. When confronted with public criticism, low morale, and little administrator support, many of these new teachers become disillusioned and begin to withdraw from others, which can result in leaving the profession. (Gold, 1996, p. 550)

Gold (1996) found that teachers entering the profession often do so with unrealistic expectations in regards to their goals, workload, institutional constraints, and the public's view of the nature of their work. Teachers in turn may burnout trying to meet these unachievable and unfulfilled expectations because of the negative impact it has on their self-esteem.

Odell & Ferraro (1992) found the quality of the first teaching experience to be the most heavily weighted factor influencing teacher retention. In this regard, an administrator may be able to shape the tone and quality of a new teachers' first teaching experience, which may increase the desire to stay in the profession Gold (1996). Gold's research also attributes teacher burnout as a factor that influences the attrition of beginning teacher's. Burnout is due to the overwhelming feelings of disillusionment in believing that they are unable to deal with the "rapid changes in the conditions that describe a teacher's workplace" (p. 550). The participants mentioned that they are frequently faced with an increased workload due to continuous and comprehensive changes to their curriculum, mandated by the Ministry of Education. These changes are often implemented without adequate support, in terms of professional development and materials.

From personal experience I have seen some teachers become cynical to suggested changes and choose to ignore them. They go with their own ways of teaching, as they feel that these changes are not sufficiently supported and may even be abandoned in the future by the introduction of new initiatives. In my experience, I have heard teachers talk about government mandates negatively as they feel they are created by individuals who are far removed from teaching. Furthermore, I have also heard my colleagues express that many government initiatives are an intrusion into the classroom and work life of teachers, and are often associated with unnecessary paperwork for the sake of accountability.

The issue of teacher workload appeared to be a common theme amongst the participants. All teachers felt they were overworked due to cutbacks in learning resources and support. Many of the participants mentioned that they felt dissatisfied with teaching because they felt that they did not have the necessary resources to meet the needs of all students. This creates tension as teachers find it difficult to achieve the unobtainable goal of providing the best education possible for each and every student.

The participants and the literature confirm that the theory to practice gap that novice teachers face is considered another significant reason for teachers leaving the profession. (Gold, 1996) However, it is important to note that results of the survey of recent graduates of British Columbia Teacher Education Programs indicate that British Columbian universities have made significant progress in closing this theory to practice gap. (BC College of Teachers, 2004) Novice teachers are faced with the same multitude of tasks that are challenging even for the experienced teacher. From my personal experience as a former novice teacher, they are faced with implementing



curricula and classroom management, individualizing programs for students with special needs, developing methods of student assessment, dealing with a great amount of paperwork, and nurturing sometimes difficult interpersonal relationships with students, peers and parents. Gold (1996) says novice teachers frequently get the most difficult assignments and receive the least amount of support, because teachers with more seniority can choose assignments more suitable to their abilities. Experienced teachers have also already built a suitable support network or know where and how to get additional support for their teaching.

Gold felt that supporting teachers through mentoring reduces teacher stress and burnout by providing ongoing support that leads to greater teacher engagement and empowerment. Gold has found that:

In most cases, teachers tend to support and empower one another and are strongly committed to education in schools. By encouraging this unity and sense of pride in self and the profession, [teachers] can realize their own potential to influence the teaching profession and thus society (p. 559).

It is important to note that collaborative mentoring and stress reduction cannot be the only solutions to teacher attrition and career satisfaction as there are other factors at play, which Gold (1996) lists as follows:

- (1) meeting teachers and unmet psychological needs
- (2) amount of education
- (3) initial commitment to teaching
- (4) adequacy of teacher preparation programs and student teaching
- (5) professional and social integration into teaching
- (6) the role of the administrator (p. 550)

Interestingly, in opposition to what the literature said, some of the participants felt that mentoring can also be a source of stress, especially if the relationship involves conflict, little reciprocity and takes too much time and effort.

### Recommendation 7

Teachers can be empowered by supportive administrators and colleagues to reach their potential through mentoring.

Increase the collaboration and mentoring time available to teacher/librarians or teachers interested in being a mentor.

Encourage teachers to assess their work life balance and make necessary adjustments to address burnout.

### **Working in Isolation**

Cox (1997) uses the metaphor of walking a tightrope to describe the stressful and sometimes isolating situation developing educators experience as they develop their practice. Like the participants in my research, she too found that teachers often feel a lot of isolation and exhaustion as they engage in their practice.

Many of the participants and the literature confirmed that teaching is a demanding and tiring vocation. After a day's teaching not many teachers have the energy to meet and discuss lesson plans, educational philosophies or how to reach specific students. Perhaps this is the reason why many teachers frequently do not team teach or meet to discuss ideas. However, Cox (1997)

believes that “it is delightful to be part of a long-lasting relationship that brings you the challenges as well as affirmation that you have grown.” (p. 81)

I too have felt the exhaustion and the isolation. However, it has been my experience that even though it might be more work to establish the mentoring relationship and develop teaching plans, that in the long run team teaching and collaborative mentoring are much less tiring and much more rewarding than teaching and learning about my practice in isolation. I feel particularly thankful that in my beginning years I had an experienced teacher, a mentor, who reached out to me and helped me out of my isolation by providing me with social, emotional and instructional support.

My mentor gave me a sense of belonging by assisting me with, but not limited to:

“...instructional strategies, procedures and policies, understanding students and their needs, resources, bulletin boards, or planning for instruction.” (Cox, 1997, p. 71) I don’t know what I would have done without her. I believe it was her positive mentoring that has influenced me to become committed to being a life-long mentor who has enjoyed and will continue to enjoy and benefit from mentoring numerous teachers and high school students interested in becoming teachers. Mullen (1997) also supports the idea that co-mentoring helps combat feelings of isolation, competition and abandonment as mentors break through their ‘circles of one’.

In my personal experience, and that of some of the participants, many teachers are quite territorial and tend to want to work on their own. Hence, there seems to be a disconnect in that isolation is almost preferred rather than imposed possibly by institutional constraints.

Furthermore, this disconnect may be an area of future research which would involve examining if teaching attracts people who like to work in isolation. The hesitancy toward mentoring could be due to the perceived stigma attached to asking to be involved in mentoring as it may be seen as a weakness, rather than a strength. Gross & McMullen (1983, as cited in Gold, 1996) note that “many needy people do not seek help even when it is readily accessible. In fact, individuals often refuse help even when the alternatives of tolerating problems or putting forth additional efforts are costly” (p. 563).

Wiseman (1997) also makes an argument for the benefits of teachers working and learning collaboratively, as opposed to working alone. Wiseman illustrates and presents what she discovered as part of a group of mainly female graduate students who got together to write about teacher education. Wiseman uses the metaphor of weaving to describe what the members of the writing group discovered “...that our conversational weavings created a circle of collegial friends stronger and wiser than a circle of one.” (Wiseman, 1997, p. 190). Wiseman writes about the importance of reflecting on the past and present experiences, stories and beliefs of peers. Clandinin & Connelly (1992) say “... it is not so much that images and metaphors are needed; rather ... teachers are, in an important sense, living our images and metaphors.” (p. 369). Like Wiseman, Clandinin makes an excellent point that teaching is about life and living together. I agree, metaphors allow teachers to break out of linear, hierarchical paradigms and allows them to experience life the way I believe it should be, more organically, non-hierarchical, and holistically.

I too believe that mentoring as a form of social support for teachers, which includes the development of mutual trust, understanding, appreciation of one's uniqueness and abilities, and encouragement to work through problems and weaknesses, will in any case lead to better working environments for all the educational stakeholders.

Lange (2000) advocates that people need to thoroughly change their current working and living arrangements in order to transform their life from feeling exhausted and isolated to a life where people can develop ethics of honesty, integrity, fairness, courage and respect. Collaborative mentoring provides a tool for making this type of transformation.

#### Recommendation 8

Mentoring is private between the people involved and needs to stay that way for trust and safety to develop, which will promote teacher learning and help overcome professional isolation and loneliness.

#### **Lack of Choice and Control in Mentoring and Professional Development**

“Not everyone wants to participate in mentorship so I think that it would be an error to force people to do it” (Neil).

A key element of making mentoring or professional development a success is that it needs to be voluntary, practical and specific, which implies a great amount of choice. Thompson (1999) found that mentoring relationships were more successful when there was a choice of mentor and where conversations were planned and casual, centering around work-related and personal

issues. Furthermore, Thompson found that the most successful mentoring relationships created shared experiences, which provided opportunities for the partners to learn reciprocally. It could be said that choice in professional development leads to greater reciprocity, which then leads to more successful and supportive collaborative learning and mentoring relationships. There is a danger however in having choice. Even though,

Zey's (1985) research suggests that mentoring programs are most effective when partners are allowed to choose each other freely. But allowing free choice may also mean exclusion of those who are "other" as protégés (Stalker, 1994) by those in charge of these programs, thus reflecting the power of hegemonic culture within organizations. (Hansman, 2001, Literature of mentoring section, para. 5)

Barb, like many of the participants, indicated that there is pressure from the Ministry of Education to influence the professional development of teachers and that this limits the teachers' choice of professional development. She felt that teachers are professionals and should be able to choose the professional development they want.

Neil said that "there are some restrictions often when there are school professional days...we are doing something as a school and I don't get to choose what those things are." Neil also took issue with the idea that when school staff get to choose professional development 'the majority rules', which in turn impedes on the rights of the individual teachers who may be in a minority. Perhaps their needs to be a balance between meeting the professional development needs of individuals and the school-wide professional development needs of all staff. In some of these situations teachers may have to be involved in professional development activities that they have already taken or which are not necessarily a high priority. The following dialogue with Neil illustrates this point:

Researcher: Has there ever been a situation...there has been a conflict between your professional development needs and those of the school?

Neil: Yes

Researcher: And, what happened?

Neil, Uh, the majority wins or whatever the school dictates goes.

In one situation Neil described where a professional development day was used for an activity that did not meet the professional development goals of many staff:

We do decide things as a staff and they are not always what everyone wants and, certainly I would prefer often to do things that are different from that and it's not even that sometimes. Sometimes it is the staff doesn't have a choice because it is mandated by the provincial government so, recently, we have had to come up with school growth plans and certainly, it is not very popular amongst lots of people but we are restricted in what we are allowed to do. So, yes, that would not be my first choice. (Neil)

Neil also talked about the need for more control over how professional development days were utilized. He felt there is a need to ensure that professional development days are used for professional development and not used solely to comply with government-imposed mandates or policies, such as school growth plans. In regards to this, Neil suggested:

The ideal mix [for professional development time] would be not having to participate in the school growth plans because I personally don't get a lot of personal benefit out of it...if these are professional development days then I would like to see myself grow professionally out of it and coming up with a school growth plan doesn't really do it for myself. Apparently the word is that there is a plan for teachers to come up with their own, for teachers to be able to control their own development in more ways than we currently enjoy and that would be ideal I think. If we wrote a little plan and were to submit it and say 'hey here is what I would really like to do and these are the days that I would like to do it'. (Neil)

My experience coincides with Neil's. I have observed that schools often decide that it is not convenient to work on government-imposed initiatives before and after non-instructional time. Instead, the utilization of professional development days is justified by adding a small component of practitioner-directed professional development to their day, when actually the real focus is complying with government-mandated initiatives.

I feel that it is important to keep in mind that a lack of control over one's work environment and professional development may diminish the attempts of teachers to practice as autonomous but interdependent professionals, especially if teachers feel powerless to implement what they perceive as meaningful change in their classrooms. This could be very discouraging in regards to teachers' engagement in their practice. The literature confirms this:

Mentors in formal mentoring programs, and the adult educators who help plan these programs, can plan responsibly and act ethically while enhancing the personal, workplace, and professional development of all involved. As Cervero & Wilson (2000) maintain, the question of "who should benefit" (p. 13) is central to planning, managing, and participating in formal mentoring programs. (Hansman, 2001, Conclusion section, para. 4)

### Recommendation 9

Providing a variety of professional development or mentoring supports is a way of creating fairness and greater balance between the needs of individual teachers and those of larger groups of teachers at the school. As one participant suggested, mentoring need only be "probably 25%" and that rest of professional development time could be "25% workshops, 25% observation, 25% collaborative teaching" (Neil).



Schools should use as many non-instructional days as possible for professional development and not for the implementation of non-professional development related government-mandated initiatives.

Move towards a continuous growth plan and away from a deficit plan. This shift in attitude needs to be communicated to all the stakeholders.

### **Silence: Barrier to Change and Innovation**

Silence here refers to reluctance to critique or question a decision. For example, when discussing the use of professional development days, participants indicated that even though there appears to be inappropriate use of professional development days, they felt uncomfortable about speaking out about it. There is a fear of criticizing school administrators or their teaching peers. When Neil talked about the use of a professional development for the school growth plan, he said, "it is mandated by the province so I can't really speak up."

Werb provided some interesting insight into why there is a reluctance in newer teachers to speak up and try more innovative approaches. He stated that newer teachers:

very often ... think they have to do everything exactly the way you do [more experienced teacher]. And one of the things you have to do is sit down with people and say, 'look, you are a professional in your own right and you don't have to be my clone'. This is what I developed over the course of many, many years. And it didn't come naturally from day one, so, you know, learn as you go. (Werb)

Teachers need to feel comfortable critiquing each other in a thoughtful and respectful way, in order for learning to occur. Thompson (1999) suggests thoughtful critique as a more deliberate

mode of learning in which the mentor and the beginning teachers intentionally address issues of common concern. Thompson states that critique needs to be expressed tentatively and cautiously, yet she is of the opinion that current conditions in schools discourage critique. One of the factors the author attributes this to is the possibility that individual involved in mentoring relationships may need to work together for more than one year to develop a sufficient level of trust to move to a more critical feminist reconception of mentoring that supports and challenges both people involved.

Lick's (2000) research supports the notion of collaborative co-mentors, described as "a sponsor, advocate, and guide" who "teach, advise, critique, and support each other to express, pursue and finalize goals (Vanzant, 1980) and being competent, supportive, non-exploitive, positive, and involved (Cronan-Hillix et al, 1986)" (p. 46).

### **School Culture/Climate**

The issues previously described, such as workload, burnout, isolation, lack of choice and silence, could also be considered as characteristics of the school culture that the participants worked within. School culture (or climate) refers to the way individuals work together in schools (i.e., the relationships), and also the values, cultures, diversity, teaching practices and organizational structures present within a school that cause it to function and react in particular ways (ASCD, 2004).

Werb, one of the participants, described the school culture as being a “factory model” where you are “bringing kids in, in September and you are saying by the end of June this is what you are expected to learn. Not, how much you are expected to grow, but how much you are expected to learn”. When asked how this could change, Werb went on to say that “a lot of the ability to change is based on the climate of the times” and that:

A lot of it is tied to economics. When times are good, when money is in abundance... then they are pretty receptive to change and they are pretty receptive to trying out new ideas. Right now we are very much in a conservative economic mode...when times are tougher and when money is scarcer, then determining what should be taught i.e. the goals and objectives of education and how should you assess and evaluate tend to come to the fore and take priority... maybe a lot of the ability to change is based on the climate of the times as much as anything else [and the fact that] a person will not change unless they feel the need to change (Werb).

In my experience, school cultures are mainly hierarchical in nature based more on what is in the teaching contract and living to the letter of the union contract (i.e., more legalistic). Gold (1996) describes how teachers are the key to good teaching, yet we won't see good teachers emerge in an environment that is authoritarian and does little to liberate the talents of individual teachers. There is also a “bombardment with multiple reforms and lack of capacity to integrate them into coherent effort that improves student learning” (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004, para. 1). Coupled with cutbacks and lack of ongoing resources and support for teachers, this results in increased workload, high stress and non-implementation of reform initiatives. One example specific to mentoring, with regard to lack of support and cutbacks, is the reduction in the number of mentoring consultants available.

Darwin (2000) examines traditional viewpoints on workplace mentoring and claims that they are nested in a functionalist perspective, where the needs of the institution are paramount. She feels that a more radical humanist perspective is needed if mentoring is to help employees deal with the realities of today's changing workplace. In this way, collaborative co-mentoring would be most suitable in helping to bring about the transformations needed to achieve such large changes. However, participants were silent in that they did not make any suggestions of ways that things could change, perhaps because they have seen smaller changes fail and changes of this magnitude (i.e., moving to a collaborative learning community that includes co-mentoring) is unfathomable. Radical humanist educators strive to emancipate adults from these self-perceived constraints. "They seek transformation, emancipation, and critical analysis of modes of domination. They want people to reconstruct their view of reality and take appropriate action. Thus education involves praxis (reflection followed by action)." (Boshier, 2004)

In today's workplace we have shorter employment periods, rapid technological change and more worker diversity (women and other races). Darwin (2000) believes we now need a different mentoring ethos if we are to keep all employees abreast of change. In her view, mentoring should be a "collaborative, dynamic, and creative partnership of coequals, founded on openness, vulnerability, and the ability of both parties to take risks with one another beyond their professional roles." (Darwin, 2000, Radical humanist perspective section, para. 3) In other words, a type of workplace that is more like a community of learners would be required in order to create an environment which fosters, amongst other things, collaboration, openness, and authenticity.

Even though the participants did not mention action research, Auger and Wideman (2000) and Lick (2000) suggest using and reflecting on action research as a authentic method of learning and bringing about major changes in organizations that are rigid and well established. Changes, which in my opinion, are necessary in order to move towards collaborative mentoring and creating learning organizations. Auger and Wideman (2000) advocate professional growth by colleagues examining and discussing their teaching practices. Lick (2000) and Mullen (2000) advocate action research as being great as a change agent for modifying traditional practices, hierarchical systems, and stagnant homogenous cultures. They advocate participatory action research in order to address issues of power, control and change. They feels that action research is based on equality and democracy. Lick describes action research as a whole-faculty study group process, where teachers work together to create their own goals for learning and then use their results by sharing them with the school.

My results, however, confirm a major constraint in participatory action research as a method of professional development. From talking to the participants and from my personal experience, I sense that some teachers may feel uncomfortable with the fluid and evolving nature of action research. In addition, the participants in this study suggested that they preferred to avoid conflict amongst their colleagues, which is in opposition to action research that encourages challenging one's beliefs and perceptions. Altrichter (1993) also mentions that teachers may find it very difficult to challenge their perceptions and beliefs based on the observations of others.

#### Recommendation 10

Teacher utilize mentoring and action research as a tool for cultural change and innovation towards the creation of a community of learning within schools.

### **Collaborative Mentoring and Creating a Collaborative Learning Community**

The participants supported collaborative mentoring; however they also desired many of the characteristics of learning communities, some of which are listed below. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (2004) in Oregon outlines the emerging factors that lead to and exist in a learning community. These factors involve facilitating, guiding and coaching others, providing social support, supporting risk-taking and encouraging innovation, sharing information, solving problems collaboratively, accepting conflict as normal and using it as a stimulus for change, providing time and support for professional development, modeling life-long learning for others and creating an environment that is safe, supportive and conducive to learning, all which are considered characteristics of collaborative mentoring. This implies that researchers must not simply look at supporting collaborative mentoring but must understand that for collaborative mentoring to truly occur, be supported and grow, one must examine the greater context of the school culture that it occurs in. Collaborative mentoring, therefore, in my opinion can only exist in emerging or existing school cultures which support a collaborative learning community or culture.

Shields (2001) states that society reaps the benefit of an enhanced school culture through an increase in dialogue, teacher collaboration and cooperation, all traits of a collaborative learning community. In a democratic, collaborative learning community there must be a sense of equality

between the teachers involved in mentoring where both gain from the reciprocity of the relationship and both are encouraged to work creatively towards their and their students' self-actualization.

In a learning community based on trust and safety, teachers can feel comfortable in improving teaching skills, developing self-identity, a network of colleagues, more confidence, fresh ideas and enthusiasm. The mentor continues to become more self-actualized as she or he obtains leadership opportunities or reviews and improves curriculum and instruction. Pinar (1995) cites Eisner and Vallance's definition of self-actualization as it relates to schooling and curriculum:

Schooling is to provide a means of personal fulfillment, to provide context in which individuals discover and develop their unique identities. Curriculum in this view is a pervasive and enriching experience with implications for many dimensions of personal development. (p. 29)

I have recently experienced senior administrators asking teachers to create a collaborative learning community within a new school, where I will be teaching in the fall. Another example of an organization trying to create a collaborative, democratic learning community is the Vancouver School Board, who put forward a suggestion for a mentoring program, which was later disbanded due to cutbacks. Frequently in times of cutbacks adult education is the first to go. Nevertheless, their intentions were good and the program suggested provided a good description of what collaborative mentoring and democratic leadership could contribute to the creation of a collaborative learning community (Shields, 2001).

The Vancouver School Board's suggested mentoring program promotes democratic leadership, consistent with the leadership expected in a democratic learning community, that is, everyone in

the school community is a leader. Their mentoring program appears to be developmental, reflective and collaborative. Therefore, mentors are encouraged to team-teach and to observe each other, and other teachers. The democratic nature of the program suggests learning activities involving all stakeholders in setting goals and suggesting resources. Hence, the program encourages communication, collaboration and reflection all characteristics of collaborative mentoring and learning communities.

I have always been involved in mentoring at some level. All my successful mentoring experiences have a common thread. They take place in a spirit of collaboration where everyone is equal in terms of power and control in their relationships and where everyone can learn from each other's culture, experience and uniqueness. It can also be said that growth between the people involved in mentoring occurs through a dialogue of collaboration, modeling and reflection. A process of discussion and reflection provides the mentors with support and improved instruction through reflection as they develop their own path. A true learning community would accept that the path found might be quite different from other teachers in the school. During these discussions, stories emerge as they relate to our teaching and to our lives. The discussions take on a "mythopoetic meaning" as discussed by Kesson (1999), who defines the mythopoetic genre of curriculum as:

A broad range of intertwined perspectives: narrative and autobiography, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and spirituality. It speaks to what is perhaps most basic in human beings – the capacities to feel, to emphasize, to imagine, and to reflect on the larger purposes and meanings of our lives. (p. 84)

This type of relationship allows every participant to fulfill his or her human need to feel supported and acknowledged in a democratic setting. Furthermore, both the teacher and the



student learn and feel a sense of being part of the greater experience of moving towards self-actualization.

Mullen (2000) describes collaborative mentoring as promoting “a kind of counter-culture that is opposed to prevailing institutional practices of separation and exploitation ... a new form of participatory action research rooted in social equality” (p. 5). An article by Dubetz and Turley (2001) has had a profound impact on me because it proves that mentoring can occur in practice in a way that is not based on indoctrination, but addresses the needs of the mentee to develop self-efficacy. In my opinion, they view their research on mentoring through a humanistic lens.

They value the:

- sharing of knowledge about the institution
- establishing an identity within the academic community
- use of autobiographical reflection
- ability to appreciate the different lenses of their colleagues’ past and present experiences
- mentor as a sounding board and protector when requested
- guidance toward professional enhancement opportunities
- encouragement to be independent thinkers
- collaborative process

In fact, the humanist worldview of adult education, as described by Florida State University (2002), shares some key principles with both collaborative mentoring and a learning community. For example, a key goal is to facilitate growth in a way that helps individuals become more authentic and open to change and continuous learning through interactive activities, such as team teaching.

Democratic learning communities are constantly changing, building and rebuilding. Kincheloe (1999) supports the importance of “critical self-reflection concerning the construction of one’s

consciousness that results in self-direction and community building” (p. 81). Mentors need to examine the cultural and societal biases that influence them. Only then will truly democratic, collaborative relationships and learning communities develop. The building of an evolving, democratic relationship using principles of democratic, transformative processes is the ultimate reward.

Just like a democratic learning community changes over time, so do the activities and nature of the collaborative mentoring relationship. The activities must change over a number of years and adapt to the stages a beginning teacher goes through, as she or he becomes a master teacher. At the beginning of the teaching profession mentors must learn how to support the beginning teacher adapt to the shock of being thrust into a profession where she or he may face a difficult work assignment with inadequate resources. In addition, the beginning teacher may need help with teacher expectations and collegial support. Next, mentors must support each other through a period of discovery, experimentation and consolidation, as they grow together into master teachers, constantly engaging into a joint inquiry of their practice and ways of knowing about teaching and learning.

### *Potential Pitfalls on the Road to Collaborative Co-Mentoring*

The collaborative nature of co-mentoring, where the mentor and the other person involved emphasize the negotiation of equal power and control in the relationship, does have some potential pitfalls. Mullen (2000) writes about how difficult it is to negotiate power and control in bureaucratic organizations because of the resistance of the status quo to relinquish power and

control. The co-mentoring process is opposed to the institutional practices of separation that lead to isolation and exploitation. Also, novice teachers may not want this level of independence, preferring more direction and less self-determination.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As a graduate student one of the things that I find very difficult is when to push the research and reading further and when to stop. It has been my experience that the more I read the more questions I have. I am starting to believe that research is never finished. Stansell (1997) agrees stating that "no study is ever really finished... you just reach a point of having given it all you can give it, and you're the only one who can say where that point is" (p. 140). I am still learning to make decisions as to where that point is. I still rely on the input of my mentors to help me decide when I have added enough detail and thought to my research. I still however, realize that it is important to consult researchers in the field of mentoring for their opinions and feedback on my research.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Through this study various questions have arisen, which warrant further investigation. Firstly, does the tension between the official discourse of the school or school district on the practice of formal, hierarchical mentoring get in the way of the unofficial, informal non-hierarchical mentoring relationships of caring, sharing, and reciprocity mentoring discourse? There is an important point to be made in not treating or viewing mentoring from a solely positivistic stance where mentoring is limited to learning new teaching skills and not the caring and sharing

mentoring discourse I have discussed earlier. I think there is an interesting distinction between the official, organizational discourse and practice regarding mentoring (i.e. using a school district provided specialists or consultant and the caring and sharing mentoring discourse of reciprocity, mutuality, voice, silence, etc.). This seems to me a productive analytical area to probe a little deeper, and into this interesting area of 'tension' in the research on mentoring.

Secondly, I discovered issues relating to the needs of the institution conflicting with the needs of individuals. It would be interesting to look at this area a little further and to explore issues regarding indoctrination, marginalizing of individuals, and lack of individual control and choice.

Thirdly, as Thompson (1999) argues, the mentoring relationship must be reconstructed to enable less hierarchical and more collaborative ways of learning, which can include "thoughtful critique...a more deliberate way of learning in which...teachers intentionally address issues of common concern" (p. ii). Furthermore, I believe there also needs to be respectful critique, meaning the use of authentic and considerate communication. Further research into this issue would be helpful.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to explore how teachers experienced mentoring relationships and to examine what enhanced or hindered these relationships. Furthermore, I studied how mentoring can be positive and supportive of the personal growth and professional development needs of teachers. The final outcome of the study was to suggest practical recommendations based on the needs and choices of individual teachers that support their inquiries into their practice. As a consequence, this study could ultimately help meet the needs of all educational stakeholders.

When looking at experiences of mentoring, there were different types of relationships, mostly involving some type of coaching, collaborating and consulting. Mentoring relationships were mostly traditional or hierarchical in that they involved a teacher with more experience mentoring a teacher with less experience, a clear preference of the participants. Despite the difference in experience, reciprocity in the relationship was considered extremely important to participants, which is consistent with previous research. Practically-focused mentoring relationships were favoured as they were perceived to address specific, practical needs and goals in a 'timely' and 'efficient' manner. Often a deeper inquiry into ways of knowing or doing was not the focus. Surprisingly, mentoring relationships were also described as mostly informal, sometimes lasting into retirement and essentially becoming life-long friendships. Generally, if a teacher is involved in mentoring, they will stay involved and hence it becomes life-long mentoring. Therefore, involving teachers in mentoring early in their practice is more beneficial for encouraging life-long mentoring. This may include encouraging more innovative, truly collaborative partnerships

between universities and schools, which could include action research and teacher educators taking on a larger role in the classroom during practica.

In considering qualities that enhance mentoring relationships, teachers preferred a relationship that was informal, friendly and reciprocal. Also there was a clear preference for working with someone similar to oneself. However, this contradicts previous research evidence stating the benefits of diversity. In this respect, it appears that teachers prefer to favour similarity and the natural harmony that friendship brings, over a potentially conflicting situation whether there may be disagreement due to diversity in experience, approach and values.

In exploring aspects that hinder mentoring experiences, a lack of clarity in defining mentoring was evident. The main message was that mentoring should not be considered as evaluative, since this is seen as negative and makes it difficult to take risks that encourage growth and deeper inquiry. When considering the school culture and climate, there were issues of concern around workload, attrition, and the fact that teachers tend to work in isolation and experience exhaustion and burnout. This is of concern as research has shown that a friendly working environment, where psychological needs are met and teachers are acknowledged and valued, are critical to retention and increasing teacher engagement. The provision of social support, including psychological and instructional support, is a key benefit of mentoring. In addition, a prevalent focus on efficiency and quality control of teaching, based on a deficit model, was also of concern, as well as cutbacks in funding, initiative fatigue and a lack of time for mentoring and professional development. Hence, there is a need to find innovative ways of providing teachers

with release time, and work-life balance so they can engage in personal growth and professional development activities, such as collaborative mentoring.

Through exploring adult education research, it was clear that there is currently a need for deeper learning at a practical level, in terms of what good adult and teacher education looks like. In addition, there is also a need for consideration of more humanistic and democratic approaches to adult education, that include a deeper inquiry into ways of knowing and doing. Collaborative mentoring is one such approach. However, collaborative mentoring is unable to exist without radical, transformative change to a more collaborative learning community within schools. These learning communities are characterized by equality, democracy, and a safe environment where conflict is accepted as normal and there is a huge emphasis on respectful dialogue as a form of inquiry through the sharing of stories about teaching. It is important to remember that mentoring might not work for every teacher at any given point in time. Teachers need to have choice in order to be fully engaged in their chosen personal and professional development, which may involve seeking or using forms of support other than mentoring.

The question remaining is how can we reconstruct school culture to create more collaboration and deeper learning? It is suggested that action research combined with collaborative mentoring are potentially useful approaches that encourage teachers to be engaged in a process of continuous, life-long inquiry into their practice. However, leadership is required from the top and bottom and large bureaucracies are inherently difficult to change. What can be done to assist senior administrators to feel comfortable with, and value leading organizational cultural change of this magnitude? Furthermore, would this induce a dilemma for the administrators in that they

would want the mentoring program to be evaluated for accountability sake, proving that the program is actually beneficial? I suggest that if evidence such as this is required that it should be done in a way that involves unobtrusive self-evaluation, which could include questions such as, 'did you value your mentoring experiences?', 'did these experiences help you in your personal and professional development?' or 'have you experienced a positive impact with students or parents as a result of your mentoring experience?'.

Finally, since change is recognized as stressful, there needs to be a focus on learning and wellness for all stakeholders, in order to deal with the current exhaustion and isolation that teachers currently experience. This could involve a focus on workload and release time. The changes involves creating a safe work climate where innovation and creativity are encouraged and where there are non-hierarchical ways of working together, which could include collaborative mentoring.



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## **APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Definitions of mentoring**

- When you hear the word mentoring what do you think of?

### **Experiences of mentoring**

- Please tell me about your experiences with mentoring.
- What did you expect from mentoring? Did you get what you expected?
- Why did you choose to get involved with mentoring? How did you approach the person?

### **Time for mentoring**

- When did your mentoring experiences take place? Why did it occur when it did?
- How do you find the time for mentoring?

### **Place for mentoring**

- Where did your mentoring experiences take place? Why did it occur where it did?
- Benefits of mentoring
- What do you expect from mentoring?
- What are the qualities of a beneficial mentoring relationship?
- Please tell me how mentoring experiences have enhanced your personal growth and professional practice.
- Any positive impact on your workload or stress level?
- How do you ensure that the mentoring situation is safe?

### **Hindrances of mentoring**

- Please tell how mentoring experiences have hindered your personal growth and professional practice.
- What are the qualities of a non-beneficial mentoring relationship?
- Any negative experiences? Any not helpful or even harmful? How did you deal with the situation?
- Any negative impact on your workload or stress level?

### **Choice of mentoring**

- Did you have choice over who, when, where and what was involved in your mentoring experience?
- Did these choices work for you?

## **Support for mentoring (Training for mentors, organizational support)**

### **Organizational level**

- How do you think mentoring should be supported by your school or district? Why?
- What do you think is gained by the school or district by supporting mentoring?

### **Personal level**

- What kinds of support have you given or received as a teacher?
- What do you think was gained through the mentoring experience?

## **Relationships (Collaborating, Consulting or Coaching)**

- What was the relationship like? Did you find it informal or formal? Did it work for you or not?
- How would you describe your role in this specific mentoring relationship?
- Were you mainly giving or receiving support?
- Were any situations reciprocal?
- Were you mainly collaborating, coaching or consulting? Why?
- Was it an evaluative or non-evaluative relationship? (i.e. remedial mentoring, disciplinary)
- Did the relationship evolve or change in any way? Why?
- What type of support did you receive? Was it support with your personal growth or professional practice?
- Do you think you could work with more than one mentor at any one time?

## **Choice of personal growth and professional development activities**

- On your professional development days, who decides on the activities?
- Did you have choice over who, when, where and what was involved in your personal growth or professional development experience?
- Did these choices work for you?
- Did you feel obligated to participate in these activities? Why?
- If you had a choice, what do you think is the best way to meet your day-to-day needs for personal growth and professional development?

## **Summary Questions**

- Let's sum up what we talked about.
- Please sum up the benefits of mentoring?
- What conclusions can you draw from using mentoring as a method to promote the personal growth and professional development of teachers?
- Please sum up the disadvantages of mentoring?

**Closing**

- Is it okay for me to send you a transcript of the interview for additional comments?
- Is it okay if I send you a summary of my analysis of the interview for additional comments?