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**POLISHING THE MOONBEAM: IDENTIFYING AND MEETING THE
NEEDS OF THE NOVICE TEACHER**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the lived, observed, and reported mentor/mentee experiences of a high school English teacher and the novice teachers within an English department of thirty-one teachers at a public high school of approximately three thousand students. The goal of mentoring, as stated by Brooks in Scherer (1999) is “to provide expertise and ongoing support and professional growth opportunities to enhance the skills and effectiveness of beginning teachers” (p. 54). The focus of the study is one teacher with whom, because of scheduling arrangements, the mentor was able to have the most regular contact, but also includes excerpts of professional interaction with an additional four teachers. The study documents the ordinary and extraordinary events that confront novice teachers and their mentor, ranging from preparing for the excitement of the first day in class to coping with the grief of the unexpected death of a colleague. The study suggests that camaraderie and incorporation of the novice into the school culture, and the resulting absence of a sense of isolation, are vital components to a novice’s initial success in the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I constantly remind my students that, when they are writing, they must not give me a list of sentences in paragraph form; I want some heart or passion to their message. I would need another thesis, however, to adequately explain my passion for those who have “ricshawed” me to this point, so let the list begin...

I will not save the best for last. My husband, Tom, has spent the last three years taking care of the total rhythm of our house and family so that I could spend my weeks responding to student and colleague needs and my weekends on explicating Dewey, Freire, Vygotsky, et al. I have probably thanked him every day during those years, but I will never adequately convey my gratefulness at his allowing the impossible to become possible. No child could ask for a stronger role model in showing what can occur when a marriage really is a partnership.

Speaking of children - and grandchildren – I would sometimes introduce myself to the six of them – Jarred, Blakely, Katherine, Brian, Jenna, and Garrett – as the mother and uma who loves you, and who will see you again in May of 2006.” I am looking forward to graduation, not just as a celebration of what they have helped me accomplish, but also of my ability to get in the car or onto a plane for regular weekend visits. I value my children’s overt pride in my academic journey that mirrors my pride in them as people.

The encouragement of Dr. Robert Mayer and Dr. Joseph Shosh has been

invaluable because they made me believe that I had the ability to tell a story that was full of heart and energy, not just data and observations, which made this experience so much more interesting. Simply learning to model my own classes after theirs was beneficial, but they also listened, read, and revised, and scooped me up after occasional meltdowns. Ironically, I will attend my retirement dinner the night before my MEDU graduation, but instead of seeing retirement as a closure, their encouragement has shown me it is a stepping stone.

When the hours grow short, but the minutes keep ticking and the frustrations mount, we survive because someone tells us the job we are doing is appreciated. Mr. William Rider, my principal, somehow provides that support on a regular basis for a staff of a few hundred, and he deserves recognition for the days he returned the bounce to my step. Ms. Margaret Grube, a former administrator, gave me the impetus to head in a direction that I never thought I would follow. Renee Boyer, one of my first mentees, taught me as much as I may have taught her and is now a valued colleague and a member of my MEDU committee. My friends and students cheered me on and often helped me find the light switch in the tunnel when I was sure the bulb was burned out.

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RESEARCHER STORY

Researcher Stance

Though I graduated from a well-respected, small private college and studied with professors who constantly challenged me, the gods did not align the stars when selecting my supervising teacher for my student teaching experience. I made the daily commute between my dorm and a nearby high school with two other English majors and longed to be part of their energized conversation that cracked and popped with ideas and aid provided by each of their co-ops. My supervising teacher, though an interesting character, preferred to work in absentia. He introduced me to the classes on my first day, and he thanked me for my efforts on the last day; the days in between were mine to muddle through alone.

I often look back on those months with a sense of horror and awe: horror at what my students did not receive because of the lack of guidance, and awe that I am in the classroom so many years later, ready to sign up for another thirty-five. On the other hand, the profession has been strengthened as potential teachers in their sophomore year of college now regularly receive more guidance than I did during my entire student teaching semester.

My first year of teaching was not much different. The English department at the small northern New York school had two teachers for each of three grades, only one of whom had more than five years experience. That honor belonged to the department chair, a distinguished looking gentleman in his mid-forties who

had mastered the art of aloofness. On the first Friday of every month I would hand him my lesson plans for the month, and the following Monday morning the plans would be lying on the desk of my locked classroom. No comments were jotted in the margin, no suggestions were penciled in red under an objective, and no quickly dashed plus sign reinforced the value of an activity.

The remaining five of us were a malleable mass of first, second, and third year teachers, waiting for experienced hands to mold us, but no one stepped forward. What saved us was each other and our schedules, which put four of us in the cafeteria at the same time. Those who think four teachers in the same room at the same time equals a gripe session have not listened to cafeteria conversation. I learned about *All Quiet on the Western Front*, introduced them to my English teacher's outside source vocabulary assignment, and we shared rough-around-the-edges poetry units. To play off H. E. Luccock's quote, as individuals, we could not have whistled a symphony, but as an orchestra, our sound made an impact.

As is often the case, these less than desirable situations provided the impetus I needed to take under my wing any new colleague who seemed willing to fly. I shared files, answered questions, and initiated multiple brainstorming sessions. I volunteered for student teachers and opened my door to whoever wanted to observe. When induction programs were formalized, I became a mentor. The satisfaction of seeing young teachers emerge from a cocoon has been every bit as fulfilling as watching adolescents do the same. And I have learned as

much from these nascent teachers as I have taught them. During interviews, my pen recorded unique lesson plans as frequently as it recorded my impressions of their answers, reinforcing the assertions that Moir and Gless (2001) make that the addition of new staff who are supported by a strong induction process not only strengthens the professional growth of the novice but also the veterans who participate as mentors.

After taking the job of department coordinator, I removed my name from the list of potential mentors because juggling the needs of a department of thirty-one high school English teachers and teaching a full schedule was an all-consuming task. On the other hand, I felt removed from the new teachers because our large department and our floating class schedule kept interaction to a minimum; if my new colleagues didn't teach next to me or share a planning period, I didn't see them. I knew that this arrangement did not support the level of interaction I wanted from or for my teachers.

Much of the joy of my career has come from the support of colleagues who have become family. If I needed to brainstorm a writing assignment, they met at my home and worked out a plan. If I needed to talk out a frustrating incident with a student, they had suggestions. If I had a disagreement with one of my children, they were available for "hall talk". Ultimately, much of my success as a human came from the people with whom I work. Berliner and Casanova (1996) reinforce the value of this awareness with their suggestion that "we need to

break down walls of isolation between teachers” for “collegiality contributes to feelings of efficacy” (50). I knew that I needed to provide a similar environment for new teachers, and sending them off in different directions was not going to allow that to happen.

Two years ago a rare opportunity presented itself when the combination of an early retirement incentive and a burgeoning student population necessitated the hiring of eight teachers in my department. Though I felt real excitement at the enthusiasm, energy, and cutting-edge knowledge that new teachers would bring to the department, I was also apprehensive about finding replacements for the five retiring, quality teachers who had over one hundred and fifty years of combined experience, in addition to filling three new positions.

The first challenge in front of me was to find eight fresh faces who impressed me during interviews and whom I believed could start the year running in order to minimize the phenomenal loss of so many excellent teachers. The second challenge was to analyze what I needed to do to facilitate the growth and development of these teachers so they could fill big shoes as competently and efficiently as possible.

In addition, our building is a large one and making sure that our new teachers did not get lost in the shuffle was another priority. It was at this point that I considered the possibility of combining these concerns into a process that would facilitate their growth as teachers. What if I could combine my role as department

coordinator with that of mentor in order to create a program that would allow me to interact with them as individuals, but also provide the dialogue opportunities of a group by having them meet together on a regular basis? In an effort to create the necessary sense of community, I asked to mentor all eight of the new hires. I wanted them to form a bond, share ideas, and address questions and concerns before the year even started. In addition to my individual work with these teachers, we met as a group, and other members of the department also participated to offer additional perspectives. I asked that these teachers remain in certain phases of the induction process for another year, and the English teachers who were hired for the 2005-2006 year are now an integral part of an immediate family. This continuation of a mentoring process for the first three years of a teacher's career is valuable to even the most prepared of novice teachers (Mutchler, 2000).

The rare opportunity to be incorporated into such a varied and welcoming community has been invaluable. I watch the interaction of this group of professionals and observe their classes with a great deal of satisfaction. Our department is a strong one, and when I eventually retire, I can do so with the certainty that these young people have the respect of their students, colleagues, administration, and parents.

Getting to this point, however, was largely the result of years of experience, a bit of reading, and gut reactions. I began last year with certain

“givens” about learning the culture of the building, discipline, grading, and lesson plans; where we went from there was often the result of questions posed, observations made, or fires that needed to be extinguished. With that experience behind me, I intended to approach the mentoring of this year’s new teachers with a program that was flexible but more systematic; my gut will always be important, but it needs to be balanced with a defined guideline. What seems most frustrating is the desire to cram thirty-five years of experience into ten months of forty-two minute observations and one-hour discussions – my own version of Don Quixote’s impossible dream.

On the other hand, I do not want the new teachers I mentor to feel as if they have to fear taking risks or carving a path that is unique to them. In *Teacher* magazine, Paul Watkins, a teacher at The Peddie School in New Jersey, indicated that a good educator is always in danger of becoming “indecently proficient” if he isn’t careful. Risks have to be taken, new avenues have to be explored, and wrong turns have to be made, before new peaks can be discovered and scaled. The quote resonated with the sounds of excellent teachers with whom I work who feel that what is good for their classroom has to be good for anyone else’s classroom. I need to make sure my new teachers feel informed and supported, but not stifled. They are entitled to the right to become the best version of themselves that they can be, not an imitation of someone else.

Those with whom I taught eighth grade for many years used to laugh that to teach junior high for an extended period of time requires that you are crazy when you start, and you become crazier in order to stay. A life in the classroom creates a similar expansion – you might enjoy the ride when you begin, but when you have spent a lifetime participating in a career this fulfilling, you want to get as many on the carousel with you as you possibly can – and you want them comfortable enough and successful enough to stay.

In a bit of irony, my emotional need to use my thesis to delve into the mentoring experience as I encourage new teachers to stay in the classroom is also intertwined with the realization that in the not too distant future I will be leaving; the siren song of retirement occasionally rears its ugly head. I am not, however, ready for the life of rocking chairs and mushy food. With apologies to Helen Reddy, “I am teacher, hear me roar” circulates ‘round my head, and I know that I will continue teaching in some capacity – perhaps formally or informally – perhaps to adolescents or adults – perhaps to students or to teachers. A native American proverb proclaims that “One who learns from one who is learning drinks from a running stream;” I need to make sure that my stream never runs dry, and that I have adequately prepared myself for any kayak ride I ultimately choose to take.

Ah, but how do I take all this emotion and enthusiasm and channel it into a productive program that produces results, not simply warm and fuzzy dialogue?

Perhaps my challenge was to determine if there is anything wrong with warm and fuzzy. In college, student teachers have both cooperating teachers and supervising professors to praise and criticize their performance. During the first few years of teaching, principals who observe fulfill a similar role. The role of mentor should be that of a trusted confidant who wants and helps teachers improve in all aspects of the job, and I believe that can happen only if teachers are willing to ask questions and to be vulnerable, which requires trust. Without a doubt one of the strongest of my new teachers last year was the one who asked the most questions. She was not afraid to be vulnerable; she was not afraid to show she wasn't accomplishing all that she wanted each and every day; she was not afraid to admit that she was not always the master of discipline, but she was also the one who showed the most growth.

I needed to be sure I could guide and encourage new teachers without stressing them, but at the same time, not be too accepting of less than their optimum performance. Many researchers encourage districts to see teacher support and teacher evaluation as two separate components; they are concerned that any other process does not protect the formative nature of new teacher development (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999). As I said earlier, beginning teachers have to be the best version of themselves they can be; they can't be me or the teacher across the hall, and they can't feel as if that act of mimicry is the only option open to them.

The reverse is also true; I needed to be open to their comments about when I was not meeting their needs. “Never-enough-time” is every English teacher’s reality and trying to juggle the demands of my students, my department, and very diverse new-teacher-personalities is all consuming. I had to allow their individual needs to emerge and not try to force my time frame and research agenda on them.

A related factor was my need to collect written reflections from them. Though interviews certainly played an important role as well, their English-teacher-eloquence with the written word was particularly useful, but I did not want to impose on their schedules to accommodate me. With some mutual brainstorming, we arrived at an efficient way to produce occasional written insights. Each novice had the opportunity to select a classroom dilemma or success of the month, though in some instances, they chose to respond more frequently, and they simply spewed their emotional and intellectual take on the circumstances surrounding the situation. I made it clear that their thoughts were for the purpose of reflection and future discussion; they were not to worry about the precision of their writing.

I began to delve into the research literature to learn how I could best handle the many challenges that we were all likely to face and to clarify just what my role would be. Hansman (2001) gives Caffarella’s definition of mentoring as “intense caring relationships in which persons with more experience work with less experienced persons to promote both professional and personal development”

and Daloz's definition of a mentor as an "interpreter of the environment" (p.1). Odell and Ferraro (1992) state the goals of mentoring as means of providing guidance and support, promotion of professional development and increased teacher retention.

The situation in my building is not a unique one. The last period of extensive national teacher hiring occurred in the late 1960's and early 1970's. That group of teachers is now approaching retirement and, for the first time in thirty years, the proportion of new teachers being hired is growing (Johnson & Kardos, 2005). How we educate these new teachers is acutely important since they will soon become the largest segment of our teaching population.

Complicating the situation is new teacher attrition rate. Research indicates that as many as thirty percent of new hires leave the profession within three years, and forty-five percent do not stay more than five years (Graziano, 2005). When this occurs, students and colleagues do not gain the benefit of a teacher who grows from experience, and taxpayers pay the price for a continual cycle of hiring and training (Dexter, Berube, Moore, & Klopfenstein, 2005).

What happens between the excitement of student teaching and the reality of the classroom that creates this attrition? "Some systems are expecting the novice teacher will function like a veteran, and there is an inevitable clash between the idealism and attitudes imbibed in teacher training and the reality in the field" (Eldar, Nabel, Schechter, Talmor & Mazin, 2003, p. 29). "The transition

is characterized by a tremendous gap between the protected and assured status of the ‘student teacher’ during teacher training and the independent teacher who undertakes full professional responsibility for his actions” (Eldar, et al 2003, p.29). This sense of feeling overwhelmed and isolated is a common frustration among first year teachers (Brock & Grady, 1998). New teachers are also surprised by the time and energy necessary to handle the workload and a classroom. Some have characterized the year as one of being in a “black hole” (Brock & Grady, 1998). Compounding this problem are those who enter the field through alternate certificate programs that do not provide them with positive, organized skills (Freiberg, 2002). The situation in the state of Georgia provides the perfect example of problems created by teacher shortages. The state’s “Teach for Georgia” plan, in an effort to recruit more teachers, will certify college graduates with a 2.5 or higher grade point average within thirty days (Georgia TAPP, 2001).

How do we prepare the way for the continuation of a competent and enthusiastic teaching population? Though it may seem obvious to start at the beginning, principals often overlook or are under constraints that do not allow them to focus on what should be a key element in putting together a highly qualified staff – the hiring process. Johnson and Kardos (2005) quote Liu’s statement that “Hiring new teachers as early as possible and building in-depth information about the school into the hiring process can both develop novices’

understanding of how the school works and increase veteran teachers' investment in the new recruits" (p.11). Budget concerns and time constraints often push the interview process into mid-summer when the strongest candidates have already been hired elsewhere. My district was quite cognizant of this reality, allowing us to replace most of our retirees by the end of the school year. The ability to hire in early spring became an important component to a successful first year for these teachers. Because I was involved in most of the interviews, I felt connected to these individuals long before the school year began. I also made it a point to meet individually with the candidates before or after the interview, so that I could give them a tour of the building and have the opportunity to ask and answer questions that may arise from that experience. This gave me the chance to interact with them on a more personal basis.

Johnson and Kardos (2002) indicate that this personal connectedness is a key component to the success of the first year teacher. A sense of isolation can be a particular problem for beginning teachers because "they have just left an environment where the university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and preservice colleagues provided frequent feedback" (Walsdorf & Lynn, 2002, p.191). It is often difficult for novices to make these connections because they enter an environment in which social groups are already formed and cultural norms of the school are unknown (Brock & Grady, 1995). The environment that seems most helpful is an integrated culture in which interaction across experience levels

occurs and support is sustained; a sense of teamwork is dominant. If we want to stem the tide of teacher attrition this element is also important because “an integrated professional culture is strongly and positively related to job satisfaction” (Johnson & Kardos, 2005, p. 12). Johnson and Kardos (2005) avow that “new teachers who found themselves in such schools seemed to be better served – and, thus, more able to serve their students” (p. 12).

The literature reinforces my reflections of my own maturity as a teacher. I have experienced the most growth when I have had the opportunity to brainstorm with and observe colleagues. With that in mind I decided that I would mentor the new teachers as a group as well as individuals. I wanted them to have the opportunity for personal attention, but I also knew they needed to dialogue with peers, an opportunity that would allow for important exchanges of ideas as well as for vocalizing areas of concern. Making them aware that their struggles were not unique to them was a priority for me. I also wanted the professional group to be expanded by including other experienced teachers. My department were always willing to give suggestions as the occasion arose, but the more formal inclusion of these experienced voices were an important part of our group discussions. Because of the varied schedules of teachers within one department this interaction is often impossible, so formalizing a structure for these meetings was imperative (Johnson & Kardos, 2005).

I was clear about the value of the teachers being able to function as a professional support group, but the literature presented a variety of ideas as to the specifics that teachers needed. Brock and Grady (1998) conducted a survey that addressed the concerns of principals. The responses gave the surveyed principals' expectations of the first year teachers, the problems they had experienced with new teachers, and the forms of assistance they had provided. The results indicated the six proficiencies that the principals expected of first year teachers: a professional attitude, adequate knowledge of subject area, good classroom management skills, excellent communication skills, a belief that every child can learn, and a desire to help students succeed. The problem with this list, which seems reasonable, is the frustration of teachers who feel stressed because of "the amount of info that people assume you should know even though you have never taught before (Gilbert, 2005, p. 36). Walsdorf and Lynn (2002) state that "education is one of the only fields where often the same expectations exist for a beginning professional as for a ten-year veteran" (p. 191).

Not surprisingly, first year teachers describe their needs from a different perspective; they are more concerned with specific, day-to-day survival factors. They want myriad classroom management techniques, suggestions for working with mainstreamed students, and cues for determining appropriate expectations for students. Additional issues are how to deal with stress, angry parents, mounting paperwork, student grading/evaluation, student conflicts, lesson length,

and handling a classroom full of students functioning at several levels (Brock & Grady, 1998; Eldar, et al., 2003).

The concern that both principals and new teachers do have in common is the “number-one-ranked problem...classroom management and discipline” (Brock & Grady, 1998, p. 179). There is awareness on both sides that mastery of subject matter or preparation of a superior lesson is of little import if the students are not sufficiently attentive to benefit from the experience. New teachers are especially concerned that incidents involving student discipline result in administrative support (Walsdorf & Lynn, p. 2002). What can make this piece difficult to address is that “good classroom management is nearly invisible” (Freiberg, 2002, p. 56).

Complicating the lives of new teachers are the schedules within which they must often work. The novice usually must deal with classes of students with chronic attendance and behavior issues as well as learning difficulties (Breeding & Whitworth, 1999). “Ideally, new teachers should have only a couple of manageable preparations, with a minimum of movement from classroom to classroom” (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005, p. 30). Patterson’s data analysis (2005) found that “far more beginning teachers than veteran teachers...were teaching extra challenging courses” (p. 22). Patterson (2005) suggests that new teachers be given no more than two preparations and a mix of freshmen and higher-level courses (p. 20). Evidently freshman may be perceived

as “the enemy.” Most of my high school colleagues started teaching at a time when the new teachers were given what was left over after experienced teachers had made their own scheduling choices. These experienced teachers often see the situation as one in which they have paid their dues and have earned the right to teach the classes that are likely to be more emotionally challenging; they expect new teachers to do the same.

Once we have identified the concerns of new teachers, the next issue is to determine how we want to address them. What insight and direction can build the confidence and knowledge base of those who will teach our children over the next thirty-five years? The results of Mahler’s study (2001) ranked four strategies in the top five a significant number of times: emotional support 80%, the opportunity to network with other first year teachers 69%, access to mentor 62%, and class observations by a mentor/advisor 58%. (MLRN/Mentors.net). This information reaffirmed that we were attempting to move in the right direction. Our new teachers were receiving ample support from every direction in our large and nurturing department and our monthly novice teacher meetings, our Friday gatherings, and a department planning room gave them the peer dialogue. I made sure that I was available before and after school, during lunch, and via evening phone calls and email. Walsdorf and Lynn (2002) have acknowledged the value of email, either individual or group exchanges, as an important element to minimize a sense of isolation. What was a concern, however, was my limited

ability to observe each of the new teachers with any regularity because of scheduling conflicts.

Unless schedules are created specifically with the needs of mentor and new teacher in mind, it is impossible for an ideal match to be created. With the myriad scheduling demands and permutations of a large high school, that reality seems unlikely. A way to partially address this would be the match of a mentor whose job is solely the observations of and dialogue with new teachers. This creates its own detractions. A single mentor is not familiar with all curriculum needs, and removal from the classroom setting removes the mentor from the reality of current demands that emerge from administrative and technological expectations. Each year a teacher is expected to do more and more, much of it not directly related to performance in the classroom or to lesson preparation, yet the length of preparation time and the twenty-four hour day remain the same. Consequently, performance in the classroom and lesson preparation is, ultimately, impacted. A mentor who is not directly experiencing this ever-increasing time crunch can become an added stressor, rather than a source of empathy and problem solving.

In the proverb we are told that absence may make the heart grow fonder, but it does little to foster casual but vital exchanges with colleagues. Shank (2005) acknowledges the value of the common space though, to her, this means sharing classrooms. Her perspective is that common office space “opens learning spaces

for common use and reduces teachers' inclination to view classrooms and offices as private space" (p. 16). Patterson (2005), however, feels that sharing rooms is a disadvantage, forcing "many to ...deal with the added stress that comes from switching rooms and moving" from place to place during the day and that it is imperative that new teachers be assigned to classrooms near those of helpful veteran members of their department (p. 22). Though these scheduling details may seem out of the purview of a mentor, it is imperative that someone, the mentor if necessary, be an advocate for these individuals and their needs. Anticipation of these needs is critical (Danielson, 2002).

Just as varying personalities make the world go 'round, varying mentoring styles make the school go 'round, but again, the anticipation factor of mentors seemed to be important to the new teachers. Danielson (2002) discusses Ross's request for first year teachers to indicate their mentors' style on a behavior continuum that ranged from directive to nondirective. Mentors with a directive style initiated interactions and support; the non-directive style mentor waited for the novice to request advice. Most important elements in life seem to require a balancing act--the mentoring style preference follows suit. Danielson (2002) reports that Ross's data indicates that the mentors who adapted their mentoring style to straddle both types produced the most satisfied teachers. The mentors who functioned in the middle seemed to have the ability to anticipate the needs of the new teachers, intervening when necessary, yet holding back if appropriate.

Saunders and Pettinger (1995) addressed Collison's term of mentoring styles as "guiders" and Monaghan and Lunt's terms of "professional" and "pastoral".

Danielson (2002) also indicate that Cameron-Jones agree with Ross in stating that both styles are important to assess and meet new teacher needs. What cannot be overlooked, however, is the concern that Meyer (2002) states that the novice must be able to explore his practice without fear of evaluation by the mentor. Mutual trust must be a vital aspect of the relationship between the mentor and the new teacher.

In order to successfully sense what these needs are and when they may occur, time "must be allotted for pre- and post-observation coaching, where the literature indicates the true learning is most likely to occur" (Meyer, 2002, p. 29). We have all likely taught the student who is proficient at spewing volumes of information yet is unable to express an understanding of and ability to apply the information. New teachers can fall into this same category; they may know the correct response or action, but that does not mean that they can implement it at the appropriate moment. Calling attention to moments in which a different or additional response or technique may have been useful can enable that response or technique to become a more ingrained part of the teaching repertoire. Meyer (2002) states that The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards makes explicit that "teachers must think systematically about their practice and learn from experience" (p. 30).

Choosing a particular action does not necessarily indicate that we can provide an explanation of why we chose that action. Mahler (2001) refers to this as cognitive coaching – a strategy intended to promote reflective thinking. The process involves department collaboration and requires pre-conferences, observations, and post-conferences. The end result of the ability to focus on specifics and to have clear and comfortable exchanges was improved student conduct and positive learning environments (Mahler, 2001)--exactly what is hoped for in an effective mentoring program.

This aspect of mentoring, the reflection of what and why, is as beneficial to the mentor as it is to the new teacher. Danielson (2002) reminds us that “the novice can reawaken the veteran’s questioning about practice, prompt reexamination of certain teaching behaviors, and affirm the veteran teacher’s own growth” (p. 183). Meyer (2002) quotes Shulman’s observation that “Learning from experience requires that a teacher be able to look back on his or her own teaching and consequences (p. 30). Though it is important for the new teacher to be familiar with the school’s traditions, culture, and policies, mentoring has to help a new teacher develop habits of inquiry and judgment. I became a much more effective teacher of the process of research when I once again became a student of the process of research through working on my thesis. A mentor can only become effective at facilitating the habits of inquiry and judgment of a new

teacher when the mentor has developed his own habits of inquiry and judgment-making (Sullivan, 2004).

The literature supports the idea that many factors other than retirement are largely responsible for teacher attrition. McCann, et al. (2005) report Fuller's studies in which novice teachers expressed concerns about classroom management, colleague and parent perceptions, evaluations, teaching techniques, grading, and workloads. Educators are now keenly aware that the student teaching experience cannot provide all things to all teachers. Managing the myriad tasks of a classroom and its peripheral factors requires juggling several glass balls, none of which can be dropped, so assistance must be in place as soon as a teacher is hired. In order to retain quality novice teachers to replace the thousands of American teachers who will be retiring over the next several years, districts must create and sustain a program of effective mentoring that will be proactive in dealing with new teacher issues. Retirements in my district have necessitated the hiring of over one hundred teachers in the last two years, so a keen understanding of the mentoring process is imperative in order to maintain the quality educational programs that currently thrive within the system.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The public high school in which I teach is more than just the building that provides me with a job; it is also a home, for it is the same high school from which I graduated forty years ago and in which I have taught for almost six years after teaching in our District's intermediate school for twenty-eight years. In many ways it *is* the same school that I attended--one that has continued to embrace the traditions that were part of my days as a student, much like a close family continues to appreciate the passage of its uniqueness from one generation to the next. As is to be expected, however, much has changed since I graduated as an eager-to-move-on eighteen year old in a school of eighteen hundred students serving grades 10-12. Six years ago we became a school for grades 9-12 as a result of a building project at the high school and reconfiguration of grade levels in other buildings. Because of surrounding farmland that is rapidly being devoured by developers and new houses, we now have a student population that is approaching the three thousand mark. During the first semester of the current school year, more than 300 new students enrolled in grades 9-12.

Our student body is a diverse one, a fact that is so important to our community that the District's mission statement starts with the belief that the District "respects the diversity of its student population." The diversity is not limited to ethnicity, but also includes students with a broad spectrum of academic and economic backgrounds, with nine percent of our student population

considered economically disadvantaged attending classes with hundreds of peers who come from middle and upper middle class families. Our identified gifted population is at 5%, which is higher than the national average of 2 to 3%, and we have over one hundred English language learners.

Our school day is divided into nine periods. Most teachers instruct for six periods, have one planning period, one duty, and lunch. Class size may range from fifteen to twenty-five students (infrequently more), depending on the level and the various permutations that result from scheduling so many students who have a range of course options. Considering the class sizes in some of our neighboring communities, we are very lucky to remain within the twenty-five student cap. A few years ago, in my position as department coordinator, I asked for a meeting with central administration to plead for limiting the English department to five classes and two duties. If students are to write essays, teachers must correct essays; the research paper assignment alone can take sixty hours to correct, and this must be accomplished while teaching full loads every day and having additional assignments to address. The administration agreed and has continued to support us, but I am afraid that a combination of an exploding population and our Board's vote to make us a referendum district will necessitate our return to a six class schedule.

My study in mentoring began formally in August when our District began its induction process for new teachers, though the seeds of many of my thoughts

and practices had begun the previous year when I mentored that year's group of novices. I received approval from my principal (see Appendix A) and from the college's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB), to help ensure the safety and confidentiality of my participants. I also received consent from this year's three new teachers and two teachers whom I had mentored the year before (see Appendix B). The latter two were included because their mentoring arrangement had been somewhat different than what the current first year teachers were experiencing, and because I was still very much a mentor to them; I expected the addition of bits and pieces from second year teachers would add another layer of insight to my study and to first year teachers' experiences.

Field Log

Once I started work on my data collection, I woke up every morning vowing that I would not be a bag lady that day. Before the end of the day, however, I would always lose my resolve, for the evolution of the field log to me necessitated additional backpacks in order to organize and cart around the various pieces of the data collection puzzle that started with my observations.

Observations

Though I was not a participant observer in the sense of actively instructing a class, I interacted with the new teachers in ways that made me not just an observer of their practice, but also an active observer of my own teaching practice as well. According to Spradley in Mills (2003), participant observations have two

purposes: “1) to observe activities, people, and physical aspects of a situation and 2) to engage in activities that are appropriate to a given situation that provide useful information” (p. 53). It was impossible to observe or dialogue with other teachers about their teaching practice without appreciating and evaluating, and often adjusting and altering not just what they were doing, but what I was doing as well. I recorded my observations of both their practice and mine at least twice a week. At other times, I was purely a passive observer, as Mills (2003) has said, “present only to observe what was going on” (p. 58). Areas of focus relevant to the classroom included lesson plans, assignments, seating arrangements, discipline, student interaction, classroom atmosphere/environment. Elements outside of the classroom such as developing relationships with classroom roommates, colleagues, staff and administration, carrying out extra duties, carving time for myriad tasks and for oneself, and participating in the life of the school were also noted and discussed.

Field Notes

I maintained a researcher log that contained all of my notes on the observations, my responses and thoughts about interviews, as well as my recollections of and reactions to informal conversations with the five teachers. It also contained each reflective piece of writing or interview response that I received from them. At the end of every week, I would revisit these notes and bracket my observer commentary, and I often added additional insight to my

original thoughts. According Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997) these brackets “ask[s] us not to ignore or put out of our minds our responses to experience but to articulate them and deliberately distance ourselves to look at them” (p. 351). This bracketing and articulation usually led me to create a list of questions about what I had observed or heard that would often be the basis for my next conversation with each of the teachers. There was no end to the curiosity I felt for every step of their thought process and journey as well as of my own.

Interviews

After observing the teachers’ classrooms, I always began our subsequent meetings by asking them what they thought of the forty-two minutes I had just observed, and the discussion became an interview rather than my report on what I had seen. Hubbard and Power (2003) acknowledge the value of the interview as a way “to bring out the information we couldn’t learn without getting inside our students’ minds” (p. 63). What I thought after observing their classroom was of little value to me or to them if I did not have insight as to the “why” of what I had just seen, and if they feared my observations were simply going to be an exercise in criticism. I also interviewed teachers individually in a conversation that sometimes became an exchange of ideas that looked nothing like a formal interview, using questions that came to mind as I listened to them talk or watched them interact with students and colleagues. From that starting point other questions emerged naturally as we talked and engaged in additional conversation.

Hubbard and Power (2003) aver that “interviewing in an improvisational tone allows the interviewer...to adjust the sequence of questions or build on a person’s answers” (p. 63). Those one-on-one exchanges were exceptionally useful in fortifying the relationship I had with these teachers, allowing me to make clear to them the respect and admiration I had for the job they were doing.

Teacher Surveys

I administered a fourteen question Likert survey, adapted from the John Lounsbury School of Education (Smoot 2002), that asked the novice teachers to rate themselves in a variety of categories that indicated their comfort level in areas that included content knowledge, lesson planning, assessment, classroom management, and leadership roles (see Appendix C). They responded to this survey both before and after the mentoring experience. Though Hubbard and Power (2003) feel that “surveys are a helpful, but truly limited, tool in getting a full sense of any environment” (p. 64), I felt it was important to create a baseline set of information. The information proved immediately useful in getting a sense of the confidence with which this group was starting the year, and eventually to see the growth that they felt they had experienced. At the end of the data collection period, I also asked the teachers to create a list of three things they were glad they had learned the first week, three things they wish they had known the first week, and three important pieces of information or insight they had acquired

over the last few months. In addition, I asked for general comments about the mentoring experience.

Though I cannot be certain that they responded with one hundred percent honesty, I can be certain that I can determine in what areas they felt they received the most help.

Teacher Reflection

I had hoped to get weekly reflections on a form modeled after one found in the *Handbook for Qualities of Effective Teachers* (Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004) (see Appendix D) from the teachers as a way to help them self-evaluate and to provide me with information, but I had little luck. Though they acknowledged the value of this assignment, their reality was an already heavy workload and an exceptional commitment to their job and students; as a result, the reflections consistently dropped to the bottom of their to-do list. My reality was I was working with adults who were entitled to say “No” and had been assured I would avoid adding to their workload. I was able to gather a few responses, but not to the degree I had hoped.

Trustworthiness

My mother was a firm believer in the power of the adage, and one of her favorites was “Wishing doesn’t make it so.” I know that I must distance myself from the core of me who wants new teachers to love their job as much as I have and to feel as “right” in the classroom as I do, so that I can observe and interpret

results that truly do exist rather than ones which I want to force into existence. In order to do this convincingly, I have had to develop a strong sense of what will make my study and me trustworthy.

Trustworthiness became an important part of my study from the moment I started working with the first year teachers. In order to get honest, productive responses from them, they had to be certain that my role was one of a mentor trying to guide them to become excellent teachers, and not that of someone who is going to give them a job evaluation. Huling-Austin (1992) takes the concern a step further and advocates the creation of an evaluation instrument that specifically recognizes their status as novices who are working toward proficiency. Perhaps this is something that could evolve from my study and be used by the district in the future. In addition, my design included a variety of interactions that included surveys, group and one-on-one interviews, formal and informal interviews, reflections, and observations.

I reviewed the literature and tried to create circumstances that addressed the areas that research literature suggests is most likely to be a concern of new teachers, mentors, and administrators. I also used my previous work with student teachers and first year teachers to guide my design. I hoped that the individual input of each teacher involved in the study would present a variety of perspectives and needs that would help me avoid directing the study in ways that may not be

the most beneficial for the teachers; I also expected that it would make me aware of unanticipated issues.

I informed new teachers and my principal of the research, and I emphatically conveyed the idea that no connection existed between participation and a satisfactory job evaluation. As I have said before, my role as mentor is one that is intended to make them the strongest teachers possible; no element of the study impacted employment. I also provided anonymity within the study by using pseudonyms for my colleagues to avoid unwanted attention or the concern that any information would be used against them (Flinders, 1992).

I shared my data with a support group of thesis candidates and colleagues to assure that I frequently evaluated my data and perceptions and was open to ideas and suggestions that I had not seen or thought of previously (Ely, et al., 2001). The schedule for data collection covered a period of four months, and I reviewed my data on a regular basis, so that I could adapt and adjust what was occurring to truly meet the needs of my new department members as well as of my study.

THIS YEAR'S STORY

The Cast of Characters

It's good if the director knows you and his cast very well because he then knows their potential. Max von Sydow

The relationship that exists among these five novice teachers is somewhat unusual in that they started the year with a pre-existing relationship with the school and each other. Four of the five student-taught in the building and were matched with our particularly strong teachers; in addition, the same four were also permanent substitutes in our building. Two of them were first year teachers when the other three were permanent substitutes, so all five of them knew each other before the current school year began. The significance of these factors can't be overstated. Three of the main areas of concern for new teachers – discipline, camaraderie, and the school culture (Brock & Grady, 1998; Walsdorf & Lynn, 2002)--are areas which our administration felt were already adequately established qualities of their teaching personae. I need to accurately convey this unusual professional history of the current group of teachers because their needs may be atypical of other novices.

Rachel

Sophomore on-level and college prep--2004-2005

In an unusual move facilitated by an early retirement incentive, my district ended preliminary budget discussions early and made the decision to allow

principals and department coordinators to interview new staff members long before the end of the school year. Because I was facing the prospect of hiring eight new teachers, I moved into proactive mode and sought excellent candidates to fill the openings rather than wait for the human resource department to forward applications and resumes to me. Even though my school is located in a township and draws from four suburban areas, we are often thought of as an inner-city school because we are the only high school for the city students and our school carries its name. With the label of “inner-city” comes the perception that danger and apathy lurk in every corridor. Determined not to lose quality teachers to “the word on the street,” I asked to speak to the English student teachers at a nearby college, hoping to convince some of these solidly prepared potential teachers that a job within my district could be both emotionally and academically fulfilling.

Rachel responded to that call. My principal and I interviewed her, and even though we still had several candidates to meet, we had several positions to fill, making us fairly certain that she would be one of the candidates to whom he would offer a position. She had been highly recommended by her supervisor at the college and her cooperating teacher at a local high school. In addition, the young woman’s poise, resume, and articulate, enthusiastic responses convinced us that she would be an asset to the English department and that our English department would be an appropriate fit for her. The comfort level and connection

were immediate; my principal and I agreed that we had seen a spark that we knew could catch on fire.

Maro

Freshman on-level and college prep--2004-2005

We never know when separate paths will converge. Several years ago a curly headed thirteen year old sat in the front row of my classroom and alternately awed me with her conscientious attitude, her innate intelligence, and her spontaneous wit. I never entertained the idea that this classroom favorite would eventually become a colleague, but she is now the one who greets me when I enter the planning room in the early morning and the one who appears at my classroom door late in the afternoon to tell me to go home.

She was hired shortly before Rachel, though not without some arm-twisting. She had stayed in the local area for college, completed her graduate work here, and had been assigned to do the first half of her student teaching at the high school from which she had graduated – ours. Our principal knew that a job as a permanent substitute was going to be available about the same time her second student teaching session was ending, and he offered her the position based on both his history with her and the strong recommendation of her cooperating teacher. She accepted the job with the understanding that she would finish the year but was ready to move to fresh territory--i.e. anywhere outside of the local community--when September rolled around. She then started her second student

teaching stint, and when she returned to be our permanent sub, she was ready to become one of the eight whom we were hiring for the following school year. Even though her more recent student teaching experience had been at a smaller and more affluent district, the staff had been unable to match the camaraderie and informal mentorship that several members of the department in our building had provided for her. Her work ethic impressed me, and her humor was a guaranteed de-stressor on the most chaotic of days.

Drew

Junior on-level and college prep--2005-2006

During certain periods of the year, much of my time is spent responding to calls and arranging observation time for prospective teachers who need to meet education class requirements. Drew was one of those students, though he was getting his certification through a graduate program, not as an undergrad. He arrived in his shirt and tie, looking as if he would be much more comfortable on the basketball court or baseball field, but he was outgoing, inquisitive, and instantly at ease.

When he needed to work with a teacher for a few hours a week, I was able to find a placement for him, and he quickly became a department favorite. He proved to be a quick study, a font of creativity, and a gentleman. At the end of the school year, his supervisor said he was interested in student teaching in our

building, but his program required him to student teach almost a full semester in one place, starting on the very first day of our school year.

I have long advocated potential teachers sitting in on classes during the first week of school because of the importance of knowing how to set the tone right from the beginning. Taking over a full schedule within the first few weeks of school, however, was a different story. Besides, it was unlikely that any of the teachers in my department would be willing to partner that arrangement. What I was able to negotiate was a schedule that allowed him to work with two teachers-- a half day with each - who taught the same courses and were willing to work closely with each other in order to simplify his planning. An additional advantage of this situation was that it placed him in two different parts of the building, thus creating contact with staff members whom he would not have met had he been centered in just one area of the building.

It was déjà vu all over again. The teachers with whom he worked suggested our principal hire him for another impending permanent substitute opening, which he accepted. Staff members throughout the building eagerly requested him to fill in for them when absent, so our administration knew we had another ready-to-step-in-and-take-charge member of the English department to fill the next opening. A retirement, a resignation, and the creation of a new position created that opening, and Drew accepted the job offer.

Sarah

Sophomore on-level and college prep--2005-2006

Sarah embodies the idea of “double the pleasure, double the quality.” She attended a university known for its theater and communication departments, intending to develop a career in front of or behind the camera. Even though she was impressive enough to earn an internship with ABC, she eventually decided that she was not nearly as content in her career as were her sister and brother-in-law who were teachers in our school. They shared with her their stories of satisfaction, fulfillment, autonomy, and the ability to create their own “stage;” they relayed anecdotes of the frustrations and difficulties, choosing not to sugar-coat that portion of the job, yet still encouraging her to consider this career change. She returned to school to earn her certification and, as luck would have it, she was assigned to student teach in our building, entering a ready-made family environment with doors initially opened by her sister, but firmly maintained in that position by her own effervescent personality and intelligence. Though I am beginning to sound like the proverbial broken record, once again, we had an opening for a permanent substitute at the end of her student teaching, as our previous substitutes accepted permanent teaching positions elsewhere. Her ability to discipline even the most difficult classes, her chutzpah, and her unique lesson plans during student teaching made her an obvious choice for one of the three openings in our department. She was eager to stay.

Jessikah

Freshman and Alternative Education--2005-2006

Jessikah traveled an analogous route as the previous four in order to arrive at our front door, but she chose to walk the route backwards. A mother of four, she returned to school a few years ago on a part-time basis to earn her teaching certification. At the time, the District was hiring individuals to work as permanent substitutes if they were working toward their teaching degree, and Jess eagerly accepted the opportunity to earn a few dollars and gather experience as well. In many ways, her life preparation was as valuable to her as whatever she was learning in her education classroom, for she knew how to handle teenagers, having raised a few of her own. She could be understanding and nurturing with one hand, and just as quickly “lower the boom” with the other if a student crossed a line. When her official course work ended, history repeated itself, and she student taught in our department, fulfilling the promise we had seen in her as our permanent substitute. And for the fourth time, our principal offered a job in our department to an individual who had both student taught and been a permanent substitute in our building.

A Very Different Group – Unparalleled Preparation

I know that there is no such thing as a “typical” first year teacher, but I do believe it is unusual for so many novice teachers to have had such a strong association with a school prior to full-time employment. It does not take years of

experience or the pearls of wisdom from experts to reinforce the idea that, when something of quality is within your grasp, you do not let it go; when a system is working, you do not fiddle with it. We had talented people already working with us, so we hired them.

In their article for *Education Leadership*, Johnson and Kardos (2005) did, however, reaffirm choices we had made in the selection of this quintet. Among their suggestions were to “hire new teachers as early as possible,” to “assign new teachers to work alongside experienced teachers,” and to “provide more than one-to-one mentoring” (p.12). Each of our prospective teachers knew what their assignment would be long before the end of the previous school year, and the contacts within the building of the four who had worked there as permanent subs created invaluable personal and professional connections, both formally assigned and informally evolved. These connections allowed them to start the year with emotional and educational preparedness that exceeded what most novices experience. Maro even commented that, unlike the selfish attitude she had seen in another building in which she had worked, teachers in our building were likely to run each other over in our efforts to share whatever files, plans, and materials we had created or accumulated. In addition, our department organized a “Friday Food” gathering each week during which various members would take turns providing breakfast for other members of the department. We encouraged those filling in for English teachers to join us, thus further cementing connections.

Eldar et al. (2003) asserted that it was “reasonable to assume that the formula for the novice teachers’ success depends on a combination of their personality and talents along with support from the environment” (p. 43). We had witnessed the talent, and we enthusiastically provided the support.

And So It Begins...En Masse

Our similarities bring us to a common ground; our differences allow us to be fascinated by each other.

Tom Robbins

You remember the scene. Julie Andrews as Maria, the novice nun who will eventually become Maria von Trapp, is standing on the top of an open area, mountain peaks gloriously rising in the background. She spreads her arms wide and circles the lush greenness under her feet as the camera follows suit, her voice soaring musically and emotionally. We, the movie audience, though firmly seated in our plush fold-up seats, soar with her, experiencing if only briefly, her joy. Later in the movie, Mother Superior, uncertain about the unbounded enthusiasm of this young woman asks, “How do you solve a problem like Maria? How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?”

On many occasions I have viewed my teaching career as the chance to hold that moonbeam in my hand. Oh, a life in the classroom has certainly produced its share of Maria-like problems. But just as Mother Superior saw Maria’s energy as a problem that could shine, so did I see the up and down

rhythms of the classroom as a way to polish a moonbeam that I want to share with Maria-like novices. Perhaps a more realistic goal, however, is to direct them to its light and help them find the source--that moonbeam--on their own.

Because I feel so strongly about a mutual exchange of ideas, I gladly agreed when my District asked me if I would speak to the mentors and mentees at this year's Induction program, which was held over a two day period prior to the official opening of the current school year. The brief period of time that was given to me was going to come after lunch on the second day--the second day of lectures, facts, figures, and an accompanying and overwhelming stack of handouts. Whatever I had to say had to open with a bit of a grabber, be to the point--and be important to both the experienced teacher and the novice.

I had recently watched an interview with Tim Russert who was promoting his new book *Big Russ and Me*, which deals with the quality relationship he has had with his father. He mentioned one of his father's favorite lines, "If you want to recover the fumble, you have to get on the field." When you grow up in an area that builds social schedules around Friday and Saturday high school and college football games, you know that this sentence will hit home with the teaching staff, and that is the line I used to open my comments to the group. We have reached the era of baby boomer retirements, and the teaching population nationwide will soon experience an enormous turnover in staff. Every teacher is responsible for minimizing the impact of this "fumble," this not-so-gradual loss of experience,

and there is no better way to do so than by mentoring. If each teacher gets on the field and shares his physical and mental resources, this new generation will have a start far advanced of the one afforded us. A district's quality, however, cannot rise and fall on the talent of the experienced teacher. Just as necessary to the sustenance of a strong educational system is each of the new teachers who runs onto the field with those who have spent years honing their skills. The infectious energy and fresh ideas of the new wave of teachers are vital components to the academic and social rhythms of a school district. The sea of faces in front of me needed to be very clear about the qualities that each of them had to offer the other.

The second item on the agenda was a combination of a physical and emotional piece. From my experience with new teachers up to that point, I felt the most useful elements I had been able to give them was my time and my cheerleading talents. I let them know that, though I had often planned structured meeting times and topics, just as with our own children, crisis does not wait for its allotted time in a schedule. If new teachers can't talk with you when they need to, your best intentions are of little help. As for the cheerleading—a multitude of people will likely surround novices and will let the novices know when they have not met expectations – the parent who is critical when the teacher has missed a component of the IEP, the student who asks “Why did you get me suspended?” and the teachers' own little voices inside of them who question why they had so many “less than satisfactory” on the most recent progress reports. The mentor

needs to be the one who assures them that similar criticisms have befallen each of us, sometimes deserved, sometimes not, that every day will present us with lessons and opportunities for growth, and that, after several years in the classroom, no teacher is yet wearing a halo indicating a state of perfection. The mentor needs to assure them that rather than bemoan a weakness, they should reflect on what could have been done differently and incorporate that change into their repertoire.

I also encouraged mentors not to think that the mentor/mentee relationship was simply between the two of them. New teachers often need an advocate in a multitude of arenas that are out of their control but within the purview of the experienced teacher. Do they need a desk or a file cabinet or a teacher's edition of the text? Take a custodian aside and ask if there is a spare piece of equipment in a storage room. Talk to department coordinators about budget money that might allow a necessary purchase. The message to new teachers is "Ask." If the request is courteous and reasonable, it is likely to be fulfilled. Though a mentor should attempt to anticipate some of her mentee's needs, the mentor is not psychic. An effective teacher wants her students to inform her of holes in their understanding; a new teacher needs to do the same with her mentor.

The next set of suggestions for the mentor moved into tenuous territory – mentor observation of the first year teacher. The contractual concept preventing one peer from evaluating another is so deeply inculcated that the idea of sitting in

a peer's classroom --even an inexperienced one--for the purpose of making suggestions or tweaking a lesson, was often perceived as a line that we would not cross. Our local education association president assured those who asked that as long as the dialogue remained between the two consenting parties, the activity would not be in violation of the contract. I also assured them that they were welcome to sit in on my classroom to view both my warts as well as my beauty marks. This invitation to sit in on classes was not gratuitous, for if peer observations are to have any validity, trust has to be a cornerstone. This might mean that observations needed to be delayed until that comfort level emerges, but what is most important is that the mentor helps the new teacher – if there is no trust, the level of help is suspect. Ultimately, the purpose of observation is not to dialogue about what went wrong, but rather to simply have someone with whom to dialogue about all aspects of the lesson. What did the observer see with the additional set of eyes and ears? With what solid ideas did the mentor walk away?

Before closing, I had to remind the group that every successful adventure was sure to be accompanied by tedium. The District, understandably, has created a paper trail to track what the participating parties have accomplished. Last year, at the District's request, the teachers were asked to submit a list of topics of discussion--accompanied by a comment--and to also check off items that appeared on a master list. The infrequency with which this information needed to be turned in seemed to make the task more difficult to remember. This year, the

District has decreed that the same list of topics and the checklist must be turned in once a month. We expect that the regular rhythm of the monthly responses may make it easier to turn in the paperwork, and I had been asked to make sure that both the mentors and mentees realized that forwarding this information was a shared responsibility.

Of all the lessons that I wanted to convey that day, I left until last the lesson that is most likely overlooked. I gave everyone a copy of a poem that I cut from the pages of the *English Journal* several years ago. Taped to the side of my file cabinet, the lines of poetry are directly in front of me as I start my day checking email at my computer. The following is an excerpt:

You can teach/An old dog new tricks/Not to roll over/Or catch a ball

But to see things differently/Not just rearrange the furniture...

Actions speak words:/Possibilities, shifts and reversals

Trust inherent, truth built/Community empowered by being

Not the arbiter, but the example.

To teach as a learner/To learn as a teacher/Old dogs learn new tricks.

Dewey (1938) managed to say it more concisely – though lacking the effective imagery – when he indicated “the most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning” (p. 48). A mentor must see the mentoring experience as an opportunity for her own growth, not just the growth of the teacher under her guidance.

It Takes a Village...but Much of It Will Start in Your Hut

Though I wish my first official conversation with the three new teachers would have been early in the morning over a fresh cup of tea accompanied by some homemade muffins, that was not the schedule laid out by the District. After my words to the large group of secondary mentors and first year teachers, we ate the luncheon of pizza, soda, and dessert, and the four of us – the three first-year English teachers and I--moved to my classroom. I questioned how useful anything I had to say might be at this late stage of a two-day Induction, so I attempted to hit the basics that they would need to survive the all important first week and then give them an opportunity for questions and answers. Perhaps I should have first given them time to respond to what they had just seen and heard, but I began what was to be a pattern for me throughout the mentoring experience – feeling concern about balancing time that would be needed to cover all the topics that I wanted to address with my concern for balancing the time they would need to fully prepare for their own classroom lessons – and still have a life to call their own.

As the four of us moved our chairs into a small circle, their conversation did not buzz with the excitement I had seen in them on previous occasions. Instead, they talked about feeling overwhelmed by two days of official-speak. Crisis Training. IST's. IEP's. 504's. PSSA's. Adopting Anchors. Confidentiality. Powerschool. Emergency procedures. Benefits package. Beneficiaries. Differentiated Instruction. And the list went on. Any one of these topics could be

the subject for a full semester graduate course, yet these eager professionals were supposed to effectively absorb the two-day crash course version. Unfortunately, the opening of school was not going to be delayed while they cleared their heads, so I made sure no one needed fresh water, and we dove in.

I had recently read Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point (How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference)* and was reminded of criminologists James Wilson and George Kelling's Broken Windows theory. They contend that if a window is broken and left unrepaired, the assumption will be made that no one cares or is in charge. This will then lead to similar apathy in neighboring buildings, creating a downward slide. To generalize the idea Gladwell (2000) states that "an epidemic can be reversed, can be tipped, by tinkering with the smallest detail of the immediate environment" (p. 146).

When talking to others about classroom discipline, I have often said that if we take care of the small issues, the large ones will fall into place. The broken windows theory provided me with a concrete example of why I suggested that my new teachers be very clear about their discipline policy--and the first question of valuable and endless questions to arise over the next few months emerged. One of them asked about posting a list and creating a handout of their classroom "do's and don't's" This provided my first opportunity to reinforce my firmly held belief that my role as mentor covered two broad categories. I would 1) be available to them as often as possible for questions, brainstorming, or

conversation, and I would 2) tell them what I do and explain why I do it. Unless they unexpectedly crossed some kind of questionable line, I would not tell them what to do or that their way was “wrong”--which brings me back to the question about posting rules and the broken windows theory. The first week of school, my students learn that I expect them to be in class on time, bring necessary materials, have their student ID, and respect each other and me. With each of these rules I provide examples of past circumstances and anecdotes that assure them that I am serious about these rules, and assure them that I expect the same behavior from myself that I do from them. I do not need a long list of rules, nor do I have to create a complicated cause/effect system of crime and punishment. I have taken care of the small concerns and, inevitably, the large ones fall into place; students do not doubt that someone cares and that someone is in charge.

A teacher had asked a question, and I responded with an explanation; the route she chooses to take is now for her to decide.

Addressing the issue of discipline was simplified because of the prior knowledge I had of each of these individuals; their work as both student teachers and permanent substitutes in our building had proven their ability to be exceptionally capable of maintaining a positive energy in a classroom.

The day was drawing to quick conclusion, but I had two key issues that I wanted to talk with them about before we broke for the day –1) how they were going to fill the first three days of classes and 2) what they were going to do about

classroom seating arrangements. Once again, their prior experience gave them a clear starting point regarding seating arrangements. Because each of them had been a permanent substitute, each was adamant about the seating assignments not being totally at the discretion of the students and that each would create and adhere to a seating chart. One of them was willing to let the students seat themselves initially, but would give them the clear caveat that she would be the final arbiter of who sat where.

Their insistence on implementing this bit of organization indicated that, perhaps without yet realizing it, they too believed in the Broken Windows theory. Their students would see that their teacher was “in charge and cared,” and the same message would be clear to their teaching colleagues who might, at some point, be asked to cover their classrooms.

What they were not so certain about was what the first week of classes should look like. I still remember the panic of my first week of teaching so many years ago, wondering how I was ever going to keep my students occupied for forty-five minutes every day, especially since our new textbooks had not yet arrived, so I asked what their classroom activities would be for the first few days. Teens are quick to run with a ball that has been bounced to them. The teacher’s job is to make sure they run to the basket, not off the court, and I have seen my fair share of teachers who have lost the ball, the game, and the student the first

week of class. The discipline has to be clear and the activities well planned and attention getting.

The questions from the three of them ran the gamut. “Should I assign homework the first night?” “What do I tell them about me?” And simply, “How do you think I should start?” In an effort to avoid the “Do as I do” syndrome, I asked them to brainstorm among themselves as to what they might want to do, reminding them that over-planning was preferable to under-planning. As I listened to their ideas about specific readings, homework, and note taking, I realized that they had not taken into account the craziness of the schedule for the first week. Each grade level would have a day in which they would not follow the regular schedule because of grade level assemblies with the grade level principals and counselors, which meant that some classes would meet for a full period, others might have a shortened period, and still others might not even meet at all on a particular day. Whatever plans they might create for the first few days had to be adaptable to these combinations. This nosedive into the disruption of anything resembling a regular schedule during the first few days provides a valuable lesson to teachers – he who does not bend during jackknife dive, belly flops.

This situation also highlighted the fact that, though we had hired extremely qualified first year teachers who were familiar with our staff, students, and school culture, they were teachers who had never made this dive alone. Several months of solid experience with discipline, presenting a lesson, and

school procedures, had always occurred with the safety net of a cooperating teacher or the lesson plans left by the absentee teacher for whom they were filling in.

Though their brainstorming about the first week produced some valuable concepts such as opening with the unit with which they were most familiar and giving the students an overview of the first semester, I decided to insert myself more than I had intended. Dewey (1938) has provided me with a bit of justification with his idea that “the mature person...has no right to withhold from the young on given occasions whatever capacity for sympathetic understanding his own experience has given him” (p. 38). I handed out my proverbial two cents. I am a mentor as a result of my years of experience. I have opened the school year in ways that I felt were successful, and I have opened it in ways that I knew would not see the light of day again. The one way, however, that has always been successful is the one that introduces my classroom and me to my students, my students to me, and my students to each other. Paley (1997) captured the value of this interaction with her comment that “although we begin school as strangers, some children never learn to feel at home, to feel they really belong. They are not made welcome enough” (p. 38).

I wanted them to internalize the value of making their students feel as if they belong, to feel welcome, so I posed a question to which I thought I sensed the answer:

“Why did you accept the job at the high school?”

The students are good kids

Department colleagues care about me

Students talk of pride and tradition

Principals are visible

Colleagues talk about pride and tradition

The veterans have been more than generous

Principals talk about pride and tradition

I am comfortable and all is familiar – why start over

I've never experienced such pride and tradition

It feels like a home

If the key reasons for accepting employment are related to familiarity, comfort, and tradition – and what is tradition without familiarity and comfort – then why not make an overt attempt to recreate that same atmosphere for students during the first week?

How?

Teachers need to talk to their students about who the teachers are, where they have been, why they are here. Instructors do not have to be an open book, but “connection” is not a four letter word in a teacher’s lexicon. They should explain their classroom philosophy. Are students able to voice their opinions as long as

their delivery is respectful? Are peers expected to listen respectfully? Will your classroom be a safe zone?

Search the Web, dig into your scouting or college freshman memory bank, or ask me, and come up with some team building exercises. Introduce students to each other, create seating arrangements that allow them to face each other, have them work together in brief exchanges. Pass out the textbooks, but don't stop there. Walk them through its use. Skim the table of contents, turn to the back and make them aware of the handbook for writing, the handbook for grammar and revision, the handbook for literary terms, the glossary, and the index of fine art. Mothers don't hand children knives and expect them to learn to cut that steak without instruction. The textbook is your tool; show your students how to use it. You will be surprised at how many of your charges will acknowledge this walk is canvassing uncharted territory.

Find a quote that inspires you or says something about what you believe, and share this snippet of encouragement with your students. Talk to them about adages that may swirl around their homes that they may never have thought about. What point are their parents trying to make with the phrase? Provide them with a few quote books or a list of quotes you have downloaded from the Internet. Ask them to select one that characterizes them and share the rationale with the class. They may never see school as a home, but they will see your classroom as a place

in which they matter. Time that is spent setting the stage of the classroom will reap endless rewards in succeeding acts.

I also wanted to make sure we talked about discipline, and that each teacher had the opportunity to share “tricks of the trade.” As the District’s mentoring supervisor often told them, good teaching is made up of “effective habits and a bag of tricks.” These individuals received much approbation from staff members during both their student teaching and permanent sub stints because they had successfully handled different groups of students in subject area classes that were out of their area of expertise. Neither magic nor good luck had made this happen; their personality and skills had, but I wanted them to verbalize – to reflect on – what they had done that supported this success.

Drew’s Voice

Bell to bell we’ve been told

Keep them involved bell to bell

They were right – engagement is key

It’s *The How* that is not always easy

Oh,

and knowing what and when to let go

But it is me, too

I have benefited from patience and maturity

I would not have been as successful three years ago

On the other side, my youth is valuable

I have street cred'

Sarah's Voice

I love the kids – and being on the stage

I use the force of my personality if I have to

They become receptive

I keep hearing the voices of my colleagues

"You are the adult," they remind me

But there is nothing like time and experience

Being a permanent sub acclimated me

Every day I spend in the classroom I gain more control of them

And more respect from them

Jessikah's Voice

Life in the trenches

Has taught me

To nip things in the bud

My Thought--"Do I see a broken window about to be repaired?"

Mentor's Voice

I have heard about

and seen your

Consistency Consistency Consistency

My Request

Trust one who has gone through it.

Virgil

My priority for the afternoon had been to prepare them as much as I possibly could for that memorable “my first day with my own classes.” As we talked about the events of the first week, I saw the shoulders straighten up a bit, the enthusiasm and energy lift, and the importance and excitement of the profession that was now theirs to own, sink in. I also saw the length of the “must discuss” items on my agenda and the ticking clock. Again, their previous experience in this building allowed me to move a bit more quickly through some of the issues than I would have moved with true novices. They knew the secretaries, our custodial staff, our extra duty routines, and they were familiar with our department’s substitute kits, and the enormous resources available in our planning room and library.

What would be new to them would be formatting lesson plans without a college supervisor dotting their “i’s” and crossing their “t’s,” and also the development of their own grading system. During one of the District’s Induction Days sessions, an administrator shared with them a form (see Appendix E), mnemonic included, to direct their lesson plans. “OATH” was an easy reminder to include their **O**bjective (with the PA standard attached), the **A**ctivity and **A**ssessment, the **T**ext info (including other materials such as transparencies and

overheads), and **H**omework. I supplied them with copies of the PA standards, encouraging the teachers to see these as extensions to their planbook. If a teacher is focused when developing a lesson plan for an English classroom, the teacher is addressing the standards. English teachers were teaching these points long before state standards appeared, but it is certainly imperative to become familiar with them, keep records of what lesson addresses what standard, and generally be able to talk knowingly about them.

I added one more packet to their overloaded briefcases and minds by giving them copies of curriculum maps that members of our department have been pushing and pulling into shape over the last few years. The information was not really new to them because other teachers and I had shared curriculum materials and ideas with them before the summer break, but they now had the official pieces of paper. They asked no additional questions, but I was certain that once the school year actually rolled out, questions from both sides would be a daily part of our interaction.

The gradebook discussion was equally brief. I was aware that sensory overload was flicking switches, and I knew that the next week would be soon enough to conduct that dialogue. My only suggestion at that point was that when they talked to their classes about grades, they should do some modeling on the board. I asked them to create a sample student's grades to show the students first hand the grade advantages of doing all assignments as opposed to the sabotaging

they can do of their own grade if they decide not to do particular assignments. I had more to add, but it was time to bring the day to a close, and I still needed to discuss one more item with them--my request to have them be an integral part of my action research, *Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Novice Teachers*.

Without their approval, this particular topic was not going to be viable, but I in no way indicated this as I spoke to them. Their consent had to be forthcoming because they trusted me as a mentor, not because they felt intimidated or concerned about employment. I don't know that I would have been so willing to ask them to participate if I had not had a prior relationship with them. I think that by this time, they knew me well enough to trust my sincerity and integrity; my primary goal was to give them whatever insight and technique I could share in order to have them grow as educators and to sustain the quality of education at our school.

I gave them a brief personal history that ultimately explained why this particular focus was so important to me. I wanted them to understand my strong belief in the value of the study. I also handed them copies of the letter of consent as well as a copy of the proposed design that I had written for MEDU 700. This design included explanations of what I was trying to accomplish, what methods I would try, and my plan for assuring trustworthiness and credibility. I emphasized that they not give or withhold consent until they had had time to carefully read both the letter and the design. When possible, important decisions need the

advantage of time, and I wanted to be sure they had ample opportunity to read, ask questions, and mull over what I was asking of them. They did not hesitate; they were ready to sign, seal, and deliver their consent, and dive in with me.

What I also asked was that they annotate the proposed design. If a question arose, put it in the margin. If a comment hit a chord, react to it. If they strongly agreed or disagreed with an idea, tell me about it. In *Educational Leadership*, Marge Scherer (2005) stated “newcomers learn best...when they are actively participating in their own learning” (p. 7). Having them turn the pages with me as we began this chapter of their career would be the first step in their participation.

I glanced at the clock and told them that we were in the midst of what was going to be a theme that would run throughout their days in education – never enough time. We had stayed longer than the time allotted us at the end of the day and had addressed only a fraction of what I had hoped to discuss with them. The rest of the agenda was going to have to wait for our next opportunity to meet, which was not going to be until the end of the first week of classes. They still had not had any reasonable amount of time to organize their classrooms. Because of scheduling complications, exactly which room--or rooms--two of them would be working out of had been in question up to the last minute and preparing those rooms became a priority for the first few days of school. Complicating the schedule were the meetings I needed to attend and the tasks I needed to fulfill as

coordinator, compounded by Sarah's hour commute until she found an apartment closer to work, and Jessikah's class schedule which had her teaching the last two periods of our day and then starting at 2:55 with the after-school alternative education program.

Last year, when mentoring the group that included Maro and Rachel, the eight new teachers and I met on a regular basis, creating a lively exchange of ideas. As Friere (2005) indicated, the more educators and the people investigate the people's thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate" (p. 109). Even though these eight were not necessarily best friends, they did share a respect for each other and often expressed appreciation for the "we are all in the same boat" mentality. The opportunity to have group discussions was productive for me as well as for them. One drawback was that the group was a bit too big for me to give the one-on-one attention that was sometimes needed.

As I prepared to begin the study, I now sensed that this year's situation was going to be very different – the small size was going to allow for one-on-one, but individual schedules and a new District requirement of mandatory after-school professional development hours would complicate the possibility of getting together as a group, which would deny them the range of input that comes from being part of a larger group. Not surprisingly, the meeting issue is one that was also found in the literature. Gilbert (2005), in *Educational Leadership*, relates a

novice teacher's concern that "what I need to do to be a better teacher, I can't do because I have to go to meetings" (p. 37). What did I say about never enough time?

A Year in the Classroom Begins

What is well begun is half done. Horace

I started the week with a dilemma. I wanted to sit in on their classes during that first day or two so I could see for myself what factors made a new teacher's classes sing--or screech--but decided against it. My professional curiosity and my study would have to be put on the back burner for the sake of these teachers. All their planning and classroom preparation up to this point had had to be done on personal time; I was not content with the amount of time I had had with them; and they were somewhat anxious about what lay in front of them. I chose not to exacerbate the anxiety by scheduling a visit in their classrooms. They were adults; they were professionals. They had the right to start their careers without a chaperone.

When the three of us did meet at the end of the week--before Jessikah had to dash to her alternative education after-school program--I started the discussion the way I always began dialogue after sitting in on novice teachers' classrooms. "You are the expert in your own classroom. What good things happened this week?"

Sarah responded first, repeating what was to become a mantra for most of them: “I was surprised that I was not nervous. I was more so when student teaching, but the experience of working as a permanent sub made a huge difference.” She continued with “I knew most of my students, my roommate helps keep me organized, my class sizes are reasonable, and having my own room with only two preps is hugely helpful.” In that one commentary she validated what the literature has said and what I worked very hard to arrange when I was juggling the many permutations of creating a schedule for thirty-one English teachers (Weasmer & Woods, 2000; Walsdorf & Lynn, 2002). These authors iterated the value of peer and veteran support and expressed concern that novice teachers were often assigned the most unreasonable schedules within a department or building. Unless they requested otherwise, I was able to give each teacher a schedule of no more than two preps and had pleaded, with building administration support, for an additional position that would maintain class size at a reasonable number.

She also felt very much at ease about what specific lessons she would present after the opening warm-ups and connections among classmates were made. Though I had given her the curriculum maps of others who taught the course, she had also been given entire units by other teachers. Ok, so I will admit to a little nepotism in that her sister had previously taught the same course, but she was not the only one who, as she said, had “hooked her up” with materials.

Time and time again in our building, colleagues exhibit a key lesson of childhood – learn to share. What impressed me about Sarah, however, is that, though it would have been easy and understandable for her to deliver those plans to her students exactly as they had been given to her, but she didn't. She used them as a template to add, subtract, multiply and divide what was given to her to make them her own.

Drew had already initiated daily journal writing on a topic given by him-- only two to three sentences at first--and he intended to read and respond every day. He was encouraged by the insight to each of his students that he had acquired, and the students had indicated their pleasure with his responses. Because his cooperating teachers had made several journal assignments, he assured me he had given all of the usual caveats about students not using these as personal diaries – they were not to reveal deep, dark secrets, and if they did, he had reminded them that he was ethically bound to report any information that concerned him. I questioned how long he was going to be able to stay on top of reading and responding to over a hundred journals a night. He did not have a doubt in his mind that this was a viable task. I am the last person to discourage youthful ambition and energy, so I said nothing, but I was just as confident that by the end of the first marking period – if not sooner – this assignment would no longer be a daily requirement.

Jessikah, before dashing to her afternoon assignment, had decided that one class was exciting, one was trying hard to “to push her buttons,” and she was still trying to get a feel for the students in the afternoon program. What had been particularly useful were the conversations she had had with the other three teachers in the alternative education program. Two of them had taught in the program the year before, and one of these had grown up in the same neighborhood and attended the same church as many of the families whose children were in this program. He provided the “street smarts” that helped his colleagues steer clear of certain confrontations. One eye-opening example was that our District had provided a particular color ID lanyard for students who did not have one, and he told administration and colleagues that insisting students wear that lanyard was an invitation to trouble. The problem? The lanyards were the color of one of the gangs, and the opposing gang members were certainly not going to wear that color. Our administration had to purchase new lanyards to expand the color choices. We old dogs learned a new trick that week. And the moral? Multiple mentors, both formal and informal, are undeniably necessary to each of us.

Jessikah had pushed the limits of how long she could stay, so she placed the letter of consent and a few annotated notes onto my desk, apologized for and expressed regret at having to leave, and headed to what was still unfamiliar territory – for both of us. Because she was unable to participate in any extended

dialogue after school, we had to make other arrangements. On a positive note, we did have the same lunch period, so working lunches became the primary answer to our problem.

Sarah and Drew also presented me with their signed letters of consent and their written thoughts in response to reading my research design. I thought that our months of contact during their previous work in our building and our infrequent conversations and emails over the summer had created a palpable level of comfort, and I asked them to please vocalize any concerns they had in being part of my study. Sarah was succinct, saying that she was “a bit nervous,” but acknowledged that any feedback would be useful. Drew responded more enthusiastically, but I had had more contact with him the previous year than I had had with Sarah. He repeated what I had told them earlier--the pieces of my study that involved them were pieces that I would be completing as a mentor, study or no study. I was simply going to be more precise about the documentation of what I did and how they responded. His response was what I had hoped for. “I don’t have any concerns at all because of my comfort level with you and the department. I know it will not be a “looking over my shoulder/someone looking over my back” type of deal, but that you are truly here to help us and get information from us at the same time. Besides, everything is cured with M&M’s.”

And as the semester progressed, I found my fair share of them--with peanuts, of course--tucked into the bottom left drawer of my desk. All that a roommate could ask for ...

Their conversation was animated and easy, and they clearly expressed the energy they felt after a day in which connections had already been made. The students had been cooperative and attentive, and each of the classes had seemed to enjoy the icebreakers that the new teachers used to nudge the creation of a sense of community within the classes. One of the warm-ups required a student to take a bit of a risk and politely call attention to himself, but that had not deterred anyone; someone had risen to the challenge in each class, the students and teacher had laughed together, and she felt the students were ready to come back the next day for the “class that was going to be a little bit different” as a student had told her.

Our discussion then comfortably moved into areas that were new and uncertain territory for them. Sarah raised a concern about an ELL student whom she had been told understands and reads English, but does not speak in class. As the parent of an ELL student whom my husband and I adopted when he was seven, I am acutely aware of how often these children are sometimes lost in the educational shuffle because teachers are hesitant. I encouraged her to be as much of an advocate for this child as she would be for any other. The rule for determining the needs of any child has to be to do what would you want done for your own children. Our ELL point person was one of the many from whom our

inductees had heard on the first two days, but both Sarah and Drew admitted that she had been one of a long list of names and faces and information with which they had been inundated and by which they had been overwhelmed. In the best of all possible worlds, I would have taken them to our ELL supervisor and the instructor for a personal introduction and a brief exchange about their ELL students, but in a building as large as ours with staff schedules as varied as ours are, some of the personal contact that used to be a matter of course, no longer occurs, at least not “on demand.” I suggested that they start with email contact, and schedule time to have a personal conversation as soon as they could.

Having the advantage of a sister who had taught this course was standing her in good stead, for she had looked through these handed-down and detailed lesson plans that had been successfully used, and said she was ready to “hit the ground running.” When she relayed this information, what was particularly important to me was her comment that she had used the heart of the assignment, but had altered it to suit her own interests and personality following Connelly and Clandinin’s (1988) advocacy that “the more we understand ourselves...and are headed where we have chosen, the more meaningful our curriculum will be” (p.11). Though her sister had provided the raw plans, as I have previously stated, this situation is not an unusual one in our building. Our environment is a perfect one for any new teacher in that she does not have to reinvent the wheel, yet she has the freedom to adapt lesson plans to suit her individual needs.

Drew experienced a circumstance that highlighted the value of touching base with someone of experience; in this case, the “someone of experience” was Drew. One of his duties is to supervise the in-school suspension room one period a day, something which he had done last year when subbing for the teacher for whom that used to be a full-time teaching assignment. As his forty-two minutes drew to a close, he engaged one of the students in conversation and learned that they had not yet eaten, even though they were supposed to have lunch two periods earlier. The ISS students are to come to the cafeteria shortly before the general student body arrives, pick up their lunches, and return to the ISS room to eat. No one had informed the teacher who was in charge of that period. Drew recognized the error, and immediately called the appropriate office and to arrange for food for his charges. We also discussed the complications that were likely to emerge because of the lack of consistency from one teacher to the next unless each of the teachers assigned to that room had the opportunity to talk about common rules and expectations. The classroom may be a personal bailiwick, but this assignment underscored the fact that, in many situations, teamwork within a building is imperative. We discussed compiling a list of all those who were assigned to that duty to facilitate e-mail or mailbox contact so that some degree of common expectations and how-to’s could be created. By the end of the following week, the mission had been accomplished.

Drew wanted to discuss issues related to what he had experienced last year, and had heard other teachers talk about--students who do not complete assignments. This is where the mentor/cheerleader I had spoken about on the first day had to come in, but the cheering cannot be for just the mentees; it also has to be for the students. One idea that I frequently encourage teachers to focus on is that they not buy into the culture of low student expectation. Students cannot learn if they do not do. Students cannot do what has not been asked of them. I strongly hope that this is one area in which a crop of young teachers can make a difference by standing up to colleagues who see certain groups of students as “do-nothings” instead of seeing them as students who have the possibility of being “somethings.”

The remaining request I had for the day was for them to look over the Novice Teacher Reflection Survey (see APPENDIX E) that would provide me with baseline responses to their perception of their readiness for the classroom. The Likert survey asked questions that ranged from their readiness to begin teaching to their understanding of diverse learners, to their skill in leadership role in the school. Again, they had no questions, which I comfortably attribute to their lack of anxiety with what I was asking and not to any element of intimidation or uneasiness.

As they prepared to leave, I gave them copies of a few lines from Anne Lamott that I post on my bulletin board as inspiration for my students when they

begin my introduction to the research paper. Anne's brother was overwhelmed by the idea of completing a report on birds that he had been assigned several months earlier. To reassure him that the task was manageable, his father suggested that he simply work on the assignment "bird by bird." I assured the mentees that the profession they had just entered will create a diversity of rewards that they can't begin to imagine right now but, along the way, a person, place, or thing will test that fulfillment. When that happens, they must remember to take the events of their career "bird by bird."

Drew's Song

Sometimes new teachers get lucky. And sometimes mentors can help set that luck in motion.

Because Drew was a frequent substitute in our department, our paths crossed regularly, and during our conversations he eagerly vocalized his interest in teaching British literature. In our building, department members request the courses they would like to teach; some teachers prefer to remain in a particular program and others will decide it is time to teach something different. The department chair then begins the game of scheduling-chess, trying to move the various pieces of core courses, electives, specialty duties, and number of periods taught into a winning master schedule. Many hours (or days) and many phone calls later, the end result is usually satisfactory to most members of the department. Yes, the experienced teacher does receive some preferential

treatment; nothing is accomplished by moving an experienced, quality teacher out of a program so that a new teacher can take over. That does not mean, however, that I assign the most difficult schedule to a new teacher. Each member of my department teaches an equitable combination of college directed and basic English courses. An increase in the number of juniors, the year in which our students take British literature, allowed me to slide Drew into his first choice program, and he had now crossed the first novice teacher hurdle.

The second most important scheduling item in our building is classroom location. Any teacher who has had to float from room to room knows the difficulties faced by even the most organized of teachers if, every forty-two minutes, they have to pack their bags at the end of a period, scoot down the hall or across the building to a new location in which they are supposed to be ready to start when the bell rings four minutes later. Though our administrators are sympathetic to that plight, the complexities of the scheduling in a building our size often necessitates this planned chaos.

My particular schedule would allow another teacher to teach in my room full-time if I moved my restricted study hall out of my room. On the other hand, that study hall was the only time during the regular school day that I would have access to my room and my department files that were necessary to meet the needs of such a large department. My sanity depended on this. When I learned that Drew would likely be assigned to my room, I told him it made no sense for him to

float for one period. I would move my study hall to another location for that period if I could work in the room during a part of my planning period, or at least stay long enough to organize and gather the department files I would need. I promised him that whatever went on in that classroom was white noise to me, and I would mention nothing that transpired unless he brought it up or unless moral or ethical lines had been crossed. I had no reason to anticipate such a need, but like Drew with his journal assignment, I wanted the caveat out there. I assured him I was an excellent promise keeper, and he assured me he had no problems with the arrangement. Once again, because of the relationship we had had the opportunity to develop prior to the beginning of his official job, I really believe his willingness was as much a reflection of his trust in me as it was his desire to have “his own home base.” This room arrangement became more important than either of us could have anticipated. Affirmation of this came via his comments.

My roommate is

Helpful, caring, compassionate

But honest and truthful

The best feeling in the world is

Knowing you can come to work

And mess up

But not have a million people jump down your throat

The given is

Mistakes happen

And no one evinces this more than my mentor

She doesn't pretend to be perfect

Or put on airs because of my age and her experience

Proximity is

Crucial

I became appreciative of this proximity during the first week of classes as I was trying to organize the quagmire that was also known as my desk at the end of a period. Drew asked if I wanted to stay, and I asked if I was being invited to wear my mentor hat or my “roommate-about-to-leave” hat. He said he was interested in early feedback, so I gladly cooperated though I had a meeting that would keep me from staying more than the first several minutes. I could easily have stayed at my desk, but moved to the side of the room, so I could see his face and get glimpses of his students as they interacted. He was clearly in his element, with a voice and body language that indicated confidence in his ability to be successful at the task in front of him.

The bell rang and all students were in place except one who straggled in several seconds later. He repeated a standard reminder that this was the last week for students to determine the most efficient route for moving through congested stairways and seemingly impassable hallways; all were expected to be on time the

following week. He added an additional suggestion that if they were late, they would be wise to accept the consequences without compounding the problem with an argument. I was pleased with the firm but non-confrontational way in which he delivered his comments.

As he spoke about his classroom and expectations, he started with the concept of a classroom as a community. He would learn their names by the end of the week and would create circumstances that would have them do the same by the end of the second week. He would accomplish his task by constantly reviewing the seating charts he had made so that he could associate faces and names. He would have them complete their task by working in small groups to concentrate on learning only a few names a day. Eventually the success of each student's face/name association could be evaluated as questions on a quiz or extra credit points on a test. The students were still in "first week of school" mode--bright-eyed and receptive. Heads nodded appreciatively, and no student made sidebar comments.

Journals were the next item on his agenda. He was intent on the idea of daily writing as a way to facilitate dialogue with his students as well as a way to increase their writing frequency, and eventually, their fluency. The potential success of his topic choice--If you had only one song that you could put on your CD player or ipod, what would it be--was unclear as their faces remained neutral and their voices were silent. This acquiescence was somewhat unexpected, but he

did have a prior history with many of them. Perhaps they were not yet willing to push the envelope; perhaps they were just testing the lay of the land. I watched them write for a few minutes – and I watched a few of them think or pretend to think for a few minutes – and it was now time for me to leave for my meeting.

I had planned to arrange a specific time that Drew and I could talk about the survey that the novices had taken for me as well as to discuss whatever else might emerge from conversation, but I discovered that day just why sharing a room with one of the first-year teachers was going to be fortuitous. My last period is spent in another classroom, and I always return to my classroom to organize my materials and work for a few hours. Drew seemed to work in much the same way. He was in the room for the last period and stayed at his desk, so we had ample opportunity to talk. This arrangement was a far cry from the solitude in which I had usually ended my day; it also cut into the work that I would pump out during these hours. It did, however, allow for extended questioning on both our parts that always proved to be informative and beneficial.

We discussed the novice teacher reflection in which he had rated his current skills as a teacher; the ratings categories were excellent, good, average, and less than average. The areas in which he felt most comfortable, giving himself an “excellent” were using technology, understanding diverse learners and finding strengths in each, and evaluating and finding good teaching materials. His confidence in his technological ability seems to come with the territory for most

new teachers thanks to prior personal and academic technological exposure and expectations. I tapped into this know-how of my new teachers on many occasions last year when our computerized grade-keeping program kicked into high gear, and I was pleased to know that this year I wouldn't even have to leave my room for my personal instruction. When Drew patiently walked me through directions, he paused as I wrote every step, knowing that I would need to refer to my notes and that repetition was my only hope. This skill would be the first but not the last opportunity for the novices to teach the old dog new tricks.

He also indicated he felt particularly confident about his ability to evaluate and find good teaching materials, acknowledging that the wealth of experience and information that our teachers have stockpiled over the years made the task easier. Through careful budgeting, sharing of materials, and sample copies provided by sales representatives, we have accumulated cabinets full of texts, novels, and audio-visual equipment that meet the needs of everyone. Each teacher also freely opens personal files to help a peer jump-start a new teaching assignment. His familiarity with our planning room materials and staff had given him a head start, especially since he had had access to them over the summer, but his innate intelligence and clear sense of what he liked and didn't like were also assets.

A strength that I saw in Drew was the degree to which he genuinely enjoyed and cared about the kids. Many of my students had been in the classes he