

University of Alberta

Perceptions of Mentorship Among Beginning Teachers and Educational Leaders: Aligned or
Divided? A Synthesis and Overview

by

Taryn B. Banach

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Abstract

A large body of literature suggests mentorship can play a significant role in the successful induction process of beginning teachers. With high attrition rates in the teaching profession, ensuring effective supports are in place to support new teachers is imperative to the continuity of education. There are several varieties of mentorship frameworks and Hellsten et al. (2009) describe three common pairings forming the basis of their conceptual framework: assigned vs. unassigned mentors, engaged vs. disengaged mentors, and single vs. multiple mentors. These pairings form the foundation for this qualitative study, with the goal to determine whether perceptions of mentorship among beginning teachers and educational leaders are aligned or divided. Drawing on phenomenological and grounded theory methods, a purposeful sample of beginning teachers and educational leaders was selected to share their perceptions of mentorship. Three beginning teachers, and two educational leaders were interviewed and the data was transcribed, analyzed, and coded to identify common themes found in the responses. Four key emerging themes were synthesized from the data: theory to practice gap, enhanced efficacy, building trust, and the challenge of time. Alignment was found, to varying degrees, among beginning teachers and educational leaders for each of these themes. Recommendations for practice are suggested, focusing primarily on enhancing relationships and consistency of mentoring frameworks. The paper concludes with a personal reflection looking at first-hand experiences highlighting the implications consistent and collaborative mentorship can have on beginning teachers and entire school cultures.

Keywords: mentorship, perceptions of mentorship, mentorship in education, teacher induction, mentorship frameworks, collaborative mentorship

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Perceptions of Mentorship Among Beginning Teachers and Educational Leaders: Aligned or Divided? A Synthesis and Overview

Forty percent of beginning teachers in Alberta leave the profession within five years (Shulyakovskaya, 2017). Although this statistic seems enormous it is not the only field where high levels of attrition can be found. What is concerning is that it doesn't just impact these young professionals, but it has serious ripple-effects on continuity in individual school settings and the educational community as a whole.

According to the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) study on supporting beginning teachers (2018), "while Alberta's beginning teachers are experiencing many supports, those related to face-to-face relationships with colleagues were the most valued by respondents" (p. 5). During my career, I have been on both the receiving and giving end of teacher mentorship. These experiences have allowed me to see the impacts of positive, negative, and non-existent mentorship in both my personal practice and in the greater school community. As Squires (2019) affirmed through her intensive literature review, "deeper investigations of induction and mentoring practices for early career teachers has become more urgent given the emergent recognition of alarming attrition rates for this group" (p. 255).

This is especially true given the increasing burnout experienced by teachers due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on teaching. In my experience, increased demands are placed on teachers as classrooms become more complex. Schools are no longer focused on providing only academic support, but are also engaged in meeting the emotional, social, and often physical needs of children, collaborating with many stakeholders in the process. Beginning teachers are expected to be able to adapt to changes quickly, all while keeping up with traditional requirements such as lesson planning, assessment, and extracurricular activities. Despite

comprehensive teacher preparation programs, beginning teachers can enter their first classrooms disillusioned by the theoretical aspects of education versus practical skills and knowledge. Mentorship can play a key factor in helping beginning teachers navigate the arduous waters the field of education sometimes creates. However, mentorship will only serve its intended purpose if it is aligned between those who implement it and those who experience it.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight into the perceptions of mentorship among beginning teachers and educational leaders to uncover if there is alignment or disconnect between what participants believe about the purpose of mentorship and the effectiveness of various types of mentorship. In this study, beginning teacher refers to individuals in their first three years of teaching. Educational leader refers to an individual with a formal leadership title who is involved in the implementation of mentorship programs; in this study, one school principal and one divisional mentorship coach. Each beginning teacher enters the profession with different levels of experience and presuppositions. One-size-fits-all induction programs will not create conditions allowing beginning teachers to receive the individualized support they need to thrive and become confident, effective educators. The goal for this study was to provide foundational information to support educational leaders in developing mentorship frameworks which will be efficient in supporting beginning teachers as they enter the profession from university programs. Drawing on courses from the M.Ed program, a synthesis and recommendations for practice were established.

The research question guiding this study was: Are perceptions of mentorship among beginning teachers and educational leaders aligned or divided? The research question was

supported by the exploration of two sub-questions helping to shape ideas surrounding these concepts: What is the purpose of mentorship? And, what does effective mentorship look like?

Educational Significance

The significance of this research is imperative to supporting the continuity of education as a whole. The beginning years of teaching set up the foundation which enables teachers to be life-long, reflective, productive, and successful educators (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018). To ensure there is consistency and accountability among induction and mentorship practices, Squires (2019) suggests the “need to engage in intentional and strategic planning to develop a framework focusing on supporting the personal and professional needs of all members of the teaching community, especially novice teachers who will become the future leaders of our schools.” (p. 263). This is only possible if perceptions of both the purpose of mentorship and successful mentorship frameworks are explored.

This qualitative research provides further understanding of how both beginning teachers (those who experience mentorship) and educational leaders (those who implement mentorship) perceive these ideas. There is an immense amount of research supporting the need for mentorship, but the gap in this work is the lack of research specific to how teachers and leaders may view mentorship in similar or different ways. This then became the purpose and focus area for this study. For mentorship to be effective it needs to meet the needs of the people going through the process. The findings will be of benefit to not only beginning teachers by better understanding their individual needs, but also leaders, experienced teachers, and school communities as they support these mentorship experiences.

Literature Review

Research is clear in confirming mentorship of novice teachers is a contributing factor in preventing attrition and positively impacting beginning teacher induction (Alberta Teachers Association, 2018). Long (2010) describes how “some of the current professional expectations and school immersion practices actively work towards compounding the stress faced by beginning teachers” (p. 266). This can leave new teachers vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy and lacking affirmation, support, or course-correction for professional development.

Squires (2019) found inconsistent implementation and resourcing of mentoring and induction programs is evident not only across provinces but also across districts. As a result of these inconsistencies, novice teacher experiences will see a variety of situations in regards to mentorship. This could contribute to varying perceptions about the value of mentorship. Hellsten et al. (2009) found the ideal model of mentorship was characterized by an organic formation of mentorship relationships through unassigned groupings, which allowed for significant engagement between the mentors and mentees while allowing mutual trust and relationships to be formed. Involvement of the whole school community centered on collaborative mentorship, leads to holistic success for the mentees and mentors.

Facilitation Styles

Yoke Tean Foong et al. (2018) present a continuum of facilitation styles centered around enhancing collaborative enterprise to support reflective practice for beginning teachers through building metacognitive awareness. At one end of the spectrum, the collaborative typology is one in which the facilitator can perform the role of a collaborator or a coach. Yoke Tean Foong et al. (2018) describes how a “collaborator works collaboratively with the student teachers, uses

active listening skills, and provides appropriate access and support within the context of the learning experience” (p. 232). The main focus for a collaborator is to work with the teacher to develop solutions to challenges, developing their confidence and capacity through the process. Coaches play a more hands-on role in the mentoring process. They are also involved in setting goals with teachers and follow up through guided conversations using affirmation, motivation, and encouragement as strategies (Yoke Tean Foong et al., 2018).

Planning and Release Time

Common planning time where beginning teachers are given dedicated time with their mentor has been recognized as beneficial to beginning teachers in building confidence and retention (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). This time allows beginning teachers to gain in-depth access into things such as planning daily lessons, creating assessments, and general tips on being an effective teacher. Clark and Byrnes (2012) found designated time built into the daily schedule ensures interaction between mentors and mentees is happening on a consistent basis and was a strong predictor of beginning teacher retention. Release time happens when teachers are given the opportunity to observe other teachers teaching in action. This practice is highly regarded by beginning teachers as one of the most valuable to a mentorship process (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Being able to see different instructional techniques, classroom management strategies, and other pedagogical practices in action provides a richer, more authentic experience for beginning teachers, rather than just discussion surrounding challenges they are facing. Release time is also contingent on support from the principal, as they navigate how to implement organizational structures to create the space for this model to work.

The Role of Principals

Within the literature, the role of leadership in facilitating mentorship programs is integral to the success of these initiatives. Beginning teachers place importance in principals encouraging open communication, as well as consistency (Cherian & Daniel, 2008). Walker and Kutsyuruba (2019) echo this sentiment describing regular check-ins, an open door policy, and showing general care as being qualities beginning teachers appreciated about their relationship with their principal. With educational leaders busy, what is the most effective way for them to support mentorship programs without adding so much to their already full plates? Walker and Kutsyuruba (2019) describe how the principal's role in supporting beginning teachers becomes one of creating a structure supportive of the induction process. Principals directly influence these processes in their ability to alter structural supports, such as scheduling and providing allocated sub time. Processes such as common planning time and release time to observe other teachers is made possible through direct principal support. Other elements of indirect influence can happen through mentor-mentee selection, mentor training, and supervision and evaluation of the mentoring program (Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2019). Fostering a school culture which values collaboration, supportive relationships, and shared leadership will create conditions for mentorship programs to flourish.

District Coaches

Relationships are imperative to creating space for effective mentoring frameworks to take place. Those in positions of leadership are bound by the competencies of the *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS). Competency number one describes the importance of fostering effective relationships (Alberta Education, 2020). Characteristics such as displaying an approachable

personality and active listening skills work toward achieving this outcome. Hallam's et al. (2012) study looked at two mentoring models and their perceived effectiveness. They found a collaborative mentoring network team, composed of in-school mentors, principals, coaches, and others, that provided varied support and experiences for beginning teachers. In another model, composed primarily of district coaches as the main support system, results showed less perceived effectiveness. The distinction between coaching and mentoring is highlighted, based on the degree of interaction and therefore the relationship developed. District coaches are also not experts at every subject and grade level, something determined to be important to beginning teachers. Due to the lack of proximity and time invested, collaborative mentoring networks showed to be more effective than utilizing district coaches alone (Hallam et al., 2012).

The Dynamic School

Glickman et al. (2018) describe what they refer to as “the dynamic school” which is an environment where all teachers are supported and conditions for growth and student achievement are optimal. Three pillars support the development of the dynamic school: collegiality, “a cause beyond oneself”, and effective professional development. Collegiality refers to working together for improved instruction using strategies such as professional learning communities (PLCs), action research, or peer coaching. Developing “a cause beyond oneself” entails educators having common goals and a unified purpose regarding instructing students. At the epicenter, shared beliefs and values about education and students drive this concept to fruition. Professional development should be reflective of the school and division's mission. It supports collaboration and shared leadership. Opportunities to distribute leadership and develop what Glickman et al. (2018) refer to as teacher leaders will help to foster a collegial school culture. In this regard,

"teachers take collective responsibility for helping all of their colleagues to become better teachers and for the development and growth of all students" (Glickman et al., 2018, p. 41). Effective mentorship frameworks will overlap with each of these pillars. Many positive outcomes such as collective responsibility, connecting through collaboration, and developing capacity and being able to adapt to change are byproducts of the dynamic school (Glickman et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Hellsten's et al. (2009) study looked at the transition of Saskatchewan pre-service to in-service teachers through a lens of induction experiences. Three main themes emerged from their research supporting different frameworks for mentoring: assigned vs. unassigned mentors, engaged vs. disengaged mentors, and single vs. multiple mentors. A key finding was the relationship between the beginning teacher and the mentors, which could result in either positive or negative perceptions on the part of the beginning teacher. Those who felt their induction experience was positive felt higher job satisfaction, reduced feelings of isolation, and more confidence in their pedagogical practice. Developing a positive, trusting relationship between mentor and mentee was determined to be a critical factor in the perceived success of the induction experience. Individuals who felt disappointed by, or indifferent to, their mentorship experience often spoke of disconnect with their mentor. Ensuring personality traits and communication styles are considered when developing mentorship pairings is a critical management piece which must be considered, and followed up with if challenges present themselves. When beginning teachers are unable to identify consistent areas of support it can lead to feelings of overwhelm, isolation, and frustration (Hellsten et al., 2009). These conditions

can be detrimental when trying to develop the required skills of an effective teacher.

Assigned vs. Unassigned

Participants reported there were both advantages and disadvantages to having an assigned mentor. Most beginning teachers were able to develop good working relationships with their mentor. However, some individuals reported personality conflicts and they would have preferred being able to organically seek out a mentor who they had established a positive relationship with first (Hellsten et al., 2009). However, the lack of an assigned mentor could be detrimental to the development of a new teacher if they are unable or unwilling to seek out a mentor, possibly leading to feelings of overwhelm or not being supported.

Engaged vs. Disengaged

Engagement in mentorship refers to the ability of the cooperating teacher to be able to forge a relationship with the mentee extending beyond resource sharing (Hellsten et al, 2009). Ensuring adequate time is given is a key component in promoting an engaging mentoring experience. Time allows for trust to be built and for mentors to feel they are able to invest into the relationship by showing up for the mentee in meaningful ways.

Single vs. Multiple

Many traditional mentoring experiences involve beginning teachers being paired with one mentor teacher (Hellsten et al., 2009). Some beginning teachers will seek out other mentors on their own or some schools may take a collaborative approach. Being exposed to different mentors provides beginning teachers with the opportunity to observe different styles of teaching, planning, and organization. Engaging with different mentors allowed mentees a variety of learning experiences and to have numerous needs met from different individuals (Hellsten et al.,

2009).

Summary

Mentorship is a highly researched topic in the field of education, especially surrounding issues of different types of mentorship frameworks and roles various individuals play in these frameworks. Key ideas point to the importance of the relationship between mentor and mentee and show collaborative mentorship may have benefits over a single mentor (Clark & Byrnes, 2012; Fulmer & Brock, 2014; Long, 2010). Hellsten's et al. (2009) study conceptualizes some of the most common frameworks for mentorship found throughout various research literature. Applying these common frameworks from Hellsten's et al. (2009) study would mean "ideal" mentorship frameworks would include multiple mentors, both assigned and unassigned, who are engaged in the mentoring process.

The research problem investigated in this study was centered around whether beginning teachers and educational leaders believe the same things about the perceptions of mentorship and what effective mentorship looks like. Using Hellsten's et al. (2009) theoretical framework to anchor the study and develop the interview schedule (Appendix A), participant responses were able to be coded into general categories relating to different frameworks of mentorship (assigned vs. unassigned mentors, engaged vs. disengaged mentors, and single vs. multiple mentors). This helped to investigate emerging themes during the data analysis phase of the research, provided a road map for synthesizing conclusions, and helped develop recommendations for practice moving forward.

Methodology

This qualitative study explored participant's realities and made meaning of the

perceptions of their experiences surrounding the purpose and effectiveness of mentorship frameworks. Through semi-structured interviews and a carefully crafted interview schedule, participants were able to provide rich data supporting the research questions. The goal of the methodological strategy was to explore an everyday problem in which solutions can be developed to improve and practice in a particular discipline (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Various ontological assumptions were made during this study, which include reality as a constructed concept. Therefore, each individual's reality is shaped by their unique experiences. These ideologies oppose Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of naïve realism. Therefore, understanding three key notions are at the forefront of this study: (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The study itself drew on both grounded theory and phenomenological approaches. Characteristics of a grounded theory study are evident in the data collection and data analysis strategies employed (theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method of data analysis). Both of these will be described below. The researcher plays a critical role in grounded theory work as the investigator acts "...as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis..." (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 31). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe how "from the philosophy of phenomenology comes a focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness (pp. 25-26). At its core, phenomenology is concerned with experiences.

Participants

The sample size for this study was five and was purposeful as participants needed to meet

one of two criteria: be in the range of one to three years of teaching experience or hold a title in which they supervise mentorship experiences. Recruitment was done through educators within the Peace River School Division No 10. I sent an email to teachers on staff who were in their first three years of teaching outlining my intended research and asking for volunteers. Three teachers replied expressing they would be willing to participate in the research. I sent a similar email to educational leaders in the PRSD Master's cohort and had two individuals agree to participate, one school-based principal and one divisional mentorship coordinator. Incentives were not provided for participation, but the motivation was centered around contribution to the research and future improvements in educational mentorship programs.

Sharon started teaching in 2008 at her current school, with approximately 280 students in grades 7-12. For many of these years she was a classroom teacher, specializing in Social Studies classes. Sharon acted as a formal mentor to both university students completing practicum semesters, as well as beginning teachers at her school. Other teachers on staff look up to her as an instructional leader and she provided mentorship in many informal instances in this regard. In 2020, Sharon became principal at this school and transitioned to a different role in terms of mentorship. In her new role she acts more as a gatekeeper of mentorship at her school, creating formal mentorship pairings, overseeing these pairings, and fostering conditions for collaboration among her staff.

Jennifer started teaching in 2010 at a rural K-6 school with approximately 300 students. Her focus was in Div 1 grades, teaching Grade 1 for the majority of her time in the classroom. During her first year as a teacher, Jennifer's assigned mentor was dealing with health issues and ended up taking a leave of absence for much of the year. Another beginning teacher was hired to

fill this position. A new mentor was not assigned to Jennifer and she and her new teaching partner relied heavily on each other during this unique experience. In 2021, Jennifer left her school and moved to central office to take on the role of divisional literacy coordinator. Along with supporting teachers in the area of literacy part of this includes being a divisional mentorship coordinator. In this role, Jennifer works with beginning teachers in the division through monthly visits to observe them teaching and offer feedback and support.

Lena is a first year teacher at a school with approximately 280 students in Grades 7-12. The school is located in a town of 3000 residents and serves a large farming community. Lena graduated from the University of Alberta with a Bachelor of Secondary Education degree, specializing in Social Studies and Special Education. During both of her practicums she taught both in-person and online. She relocated from central Alberta at the beginning of the 2021 school year. Her current teaching assignment includes the following courses: Language Arts 7, Social Studies 7, and Social Studies 8. Lena was assigned a formal mentor who is a teacher with six years of experience. They meet weekly during one lunch hour and have been given release time from the principal to occasionally observe each other teach. A divisional mentorship coordinator also visits Lena once a month to watch her teach.

Robyn graduated from the University of Alberta with a Bachelor of Secondary Education in 2020 focusing on English and French as a Second Language. Her Advanced Field Experience (AFX) practicum was cancelled due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her current course load includes English 8, English 10-2, and French 7-10 in a school with approximately 280 students in Grades 7-12. Robyn grew up in the area approximately one hour from her current school. During her first year Robyn was assigned a formal mentor at her school, who had 10

years of experience teaching primarily Science courses. The pair did not meet on a regular basis and throughout the year did not observe each other teach. Robyn did not feel the pairing was an effective one and expressed that the different teaching areas played a challenge in her mentor providing assistance to her. A divisional mentorship coordinator was assigned to her but their teaching area was in Mathematics and monthly visits were inconsistent. In her second year, Robyn was not assigned a formal mentor but developed an informal mentoring relationship with an English teacher at her school with 6 years of experience.

Logan graduated from the school where he currently teaches in a small town of approximately 3000 residents. In 2021 he earned his Bachelor of Secondary Education from the University of Alberta, specializing in Mathematics and Biological Sciences. The school he teaches at serves 280 students in Grades 7-12. His teaching assignment includes PE 7, PE 8, Health 8, Health 9, and Math 10-3 and 20-3. Logan was assigned a formal mentor by his principal. In the first semester, Logan and his mentor had a 45-minute block of time each week where they were able to co-teach and collaborate. Due to scheduling challenges this time was not continued into the second semester. They did not meet on a regular basis for the duration of the school year. Logan also developed a close relationship with another PE teacher who became an informal mentor to him. Table 1 provides a general summary of the participants involved in the study.

Table 1. Description of Participants.

Pseudonym	Years in Education	Educational Background	Career Experience	Personal Children
Sharon	10+	B.Ed Secondary Education	Classroom teacher Principal	Yes Male (11) Female (9)
Jennifer	10+	B.Ed Elementary Education	Classroom teacher Divisional Literacy Coordinator Divisional Mentorship Coordinator	Yes Male (14) Male (11) Male (8)
Lena	1	B.Ed Secondary Education	Classroom teacher	No
Robyn	2	B.Ed Secondary Education	Classroom teacher	Pregnant with first child
Logan	1	B.Ed Secondary Education	Classroom teacher	No

Participant Consent

Qualitative studies are extremely personal in nature as they invite the researcher into the inner world of the participants. Ethical considerations are important in ensuring well-being of the participants and building trustworthiness in the results of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Introduction letters outlining the parameters of the study were given to participants (Appendix B). Informed consent was gained by all participants prior to the interviews taking place (Appendix C), and reviewed at the onset of the interview. Participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the research process at any time. Confidentiality was upheld by securing all

documents appropriately and destroying information at the conclusion of the study. The study also provided confidentiality for the respondents by using pseudonyms.

Researcher Presuppositions

Prior to interviewing participants the phenomenological process of *Epoche* was utilized to examine my own experiences, viewpoints, and assumptions about the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a researcher, I believed overall respondents would agree mentorship contributes positively to the beginning years of teaching. Having dedicated support in the form of a mentor teacher can allow beginning teachers to build trusting relationships allowing for opportunities to enhance growth, confidence, and efficacy. Based on a number of factors and experiences, the extent to which mentorship pairings are viewed as effective is a variable factor. Although I am a strong supporter and believer in teacher mentorship, I am understanding of the fact that all other educators may not feel the same given different experiences. Therefore, this is an area of bias for me as the researcher which will be addressed when discussing trustworthiness of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was completed through semi-structured interviews. This format was chosen as it allowed for structure to the interview but flexibility for the participant when responding to the questions. Given the research topic the interview allowed for an in-depth exploration of the topic and for participants to engage in a purposeful conversation. Data collection was guided by the grounded theory strategy of *theoretical sampling*. Here the researcher collects, codes, and analyzes the data then decides what data to collect next (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During each interview, I followed the order of the interview schedule but

established a natural ebb and flow of communication with each of the participants. I took brief jot notes and turned this into a one-page summary of highlights after the interview. This one-page interpretation of the interview was shared along with the transcript to each participant as a form of member checking (Appendix D).

The interviews were conducted through the Google Meet conferencing platform. This platform was chosen for two main reasons. First, it allowed participants to complete the interview from anywhere they had reliable internet. This meant some participants chose to complete the interview from their home, and others from their workplace. The second reason for choosing Google Meet was the ability to have a transcript generated automatically using the Chrome extension Scribbl. This proved to be a very efficient and effective tool and eliminated the need to manually type out pages of transcription. Each automatically generated transcript showed timestamps, as well as a detailed breakdown of each person talking.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once the interviews were transcribed, they were coded based on the key ideas emerging. The primary method of data analysis was done inductively and comparatively. Individual data points were analyzed using *the constant comparative method* of data analysis, an approach utilized in grounded theory studies. This method involves comparing pieces of data to one another to determine similarities and differences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Similarities which emerge become the basis of how data is grouped together in patterns and then labelled categories.

Deductively, data were also coded according to the theoretical framework informing the study on a smaller scale. This was in relation to Hellsten's work and the three categories of

mentorship (assigned vs. unassigned, engaged vs. disengaged, single vs. multiple). This strategy allowed me to take broad generalizations and apply them to the individual data points as well.

Trustworthiness

“All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). Steps were taken to build both validity and reliability, as these elements help to convince the reader that the researcher’s rationale and procedures of the qualitative study were trustworthy and accurately represented participants’ experiences. Two types of validity, internal and external, work in tandem to enhance the trustworthiness of a study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe how “internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality” (p. 242). In other words, do the findings of the study match what reality says to be true? Are the results credible? Due to the ambiguous nature of the concept of reality, validity is not a clear-cut concept, as people’s constructions of reality are shaped by their experience in relation to a particular phenomenon.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe how “prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest are temporarily put aside, or bracketed, so as not to interfere with seeing or intuiting the elements or structure of the phenomenon” (p. 26). In order to bracket my beliefs as the researcher, attempts were made to limit biases from impacting the research process, therefore keeping neutrality throughout the study, primarily during data collection and analysis. This included closely sticking to the interview schedule to avoid leading or prompting participants during the interview process. This was particularly challenging with the beginning teachers I had previously worked with and had presuppositions about what their views on mentorship may be based on prior experiences. I attempted to avoid jumping to conclusions during interviews and

ask only open ended questions allowing for exploration of the topic and the natural emergence of themes during the data analysis process. This also included giving voice to the participants in the discussion and findings portion of the study, highlighting participants thoughts and experiences and not my own beliefs as the researcher.

To build internal validity, member checking was utilized by providing participants with a written copy of their interview transcript, as well as a summary of my key interpretations from the interview. In completing member checks, participants are given the opportunity to ensure their experience was accurately captured and interpreted. All participants validated these documents and no additions, clarifications or deletions were requested by any of the five participants. Participants were also provided with the interview questions in advance so they had time to prepare thoughtful talking points to the questions.

External validity deals with transferability or the ability to apply the results of a study to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Providing rich, thick descriptions is one strategy to build external validity. Detailed descriptions allow readers to find context in the study in relation to their own lives, therefore identifying connections between their situations and the results of the study. Thick description of all participants was provided above to provide context for each of the beginning teachers and educational leaders. *Maximum variation* was utilized on a smaller scale. The premise of this strategy lies in seeking variation and diversity in the sample to allow a greater range of readers to make connections to the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants varied in terms of educational role, gender identification, and teaching area.

Limitations

Although upholding trustworthiness was a priority in this study, there were limitations

which must be considered. Being a mentor at my school meant I had previously, or was currently, working alongside some of the participants in mentor-mentee relationships. Although I am not a formal evaluator of them, this relationship cannot be ignored even though all participants volunteered for the study. Another limitation is the short duration of the study, meaning only one interview could take place with each of the participants. It would be beneficial to be able to interview participants multiple times, particularly beginning teachers, to determine if there are shifts in their perspectives of mentorship over the course of their early years of teaching. These considerations could be addressed in future studies by interviewing participants unknown to me and lengthening the timeframe of the study to be able to conduct multiple interviews with participants to enhance the breadth of responses.

Findings and Discussion

During the interview process, participants were asked questions from the appropriate interview schedule: beginning teacher or educational leader (Appendix A). The following four themes emerged from the data analysis and literature review process: (a) theory to practice gap, (b) building trust, (c) enhanced efficacy, and (d) the challenge of time.

Theory to Practice Gap

All participants expressed concern about the disconnect between teacher preparation programs and entering the classroom as a first-year teacher. Both beginning teachers and educational leaders felt university preparation programs are heavily focused on the theoretical portions and do not incorporate enough practical learning for students.

Beginning teacher Lena discussed how she found once she entered the classroom she was unprepared for the demands of teaching, particularly in the area of classroom management. She

described how her university professors focused heavily on the need to build relationships with students as a key factor to being a successful new teacher. She then expressed confusion and frustration, that along with discussions about relationships, boundaries were not also taught, saying “I didn’t know until I became a teacher what a boundary was. I didn’t know how to set a boundary. No one ever told me” (Lines 154-155).

Robyn shared how valuable she found her practicum time in the school as it helped to build practical familiarity and confidence with the theoretical portions which had been heavily focused on in the early years of her program. She also echoed many of Lena’s comments, saying she felt her university program was very optimistic, causing her to enter the classroom with “rose coloured glasses” and unaware of the harsh realities sometimes found in the dynamics of a school (Line 116).

It is not just beginning teachers feeling the effects of the gap between universities and the classroom. Sharon, a school principal, discussed her experience of supervising first year teachers and noticing lacking skills coming out of practicum semesters.

You do get practicums, but those practicums vary depending on who you have as a facilitator. They're very artificial, right? They're not necessarily created in a practical sense. Do you get some experience teaching? Absolutely. Do you get some experience planning, 100%? But is it like the be-all end-all of preparing you? No. And so, I think teachers come out of university not prepared for the demands. Teaching is a career where, you know, it's not like a lawyer where you spend months, articling and years articling and then you become a lawyer. Like as a teacher, you graduate, you're put into the same classroom as someone who's taught for 25 years. You're going to complete

IPPs. It is the expectation. You're gonna complete BSPs, you're gonna complete report cards, communication to parents. Permission forms. Understanding the administrative procedures. Once your feet hit the ground running there's no time to look back. (Lines 85-96)

What is apparent from talking with both beginning teachers and educational leaders is universities can only do so much. They provide the practicum experience which allows students to gain insight into the teaching profession from a practical perspective, but it does not give the same experience as being the sole teacher in the classroom. Therefore, mentorship as a process can help close the gap for new teachers as they cross the metaphorical bridge from university to the classroom.

Building Trust

First year teacher, Logan, shared a positive mentorship experience where he had the opportunity to co-teach with another PE teacher during a flex period earlier in the semester. Watching this teacher start their class, and how smoothly it ran, made Logan reflect on his own PE classes. He realized he wanted to try some of the strategies he witnessed the experienced teacher using. Over the next few weeks he incorporated some of these management strategies into his classes and was impressed with how well his students responded. He summed up the experience saying

It turned into a really great experience. I have no problem with others correcting me during the lesson. Having them [mentor teachers] able to help you out making lessons better than what you imagine is always good because you always want to grow as a teacher. Now I feel comfortable going to other teachers if I have things I want to run by

someone or get a second opinion on. (Lines 204-208)

Robyn shared how mentorship has helped her induction to the profession.

I'll email her [mentor teacher] and be like, I'm really struggling with this student. What do you suggest? And she can kind of give me a little boost of confidence. Right?

Because oftentimes people don't always see good things you do or, you know, if ever something goes wrong, those seem to be the things focused on. (Lines 164-168).

Divisional Mentorship Coordinator, Jennifer, described how having mentorship outside of the evaluative process allows beginning teachers to continue to acquire and develop skills in a non-threatening environment, saying "It's feeling a trust with someone and a connection with someone who you can conquer those challenges with and look on the other side" (Lines 205-206). Working with a more experienced individual allows beginning teachers to see they are not alone in situations, and there are people to help guide and support them.

Through their experiences all participants shared mentorship is about growth and not criticism. The building of positive and trusting relationships was viewed as a key indicator of successful mentorship pairings and helped beginning teachers to not feel alone as they navigate the classroom for the first time.

Enhanced Efficacy

Logan discussed how mentorship helped increase his sense of efficacy as a beginning teacher and feeling like he wasn't "walking into the profession blind" (Line 441). Two of the biggest factors to come out of this was reassurance and confidence. He noticed many times feedback from his mentor would help transform a good lesson into a great one, further increasing his confidence in his teaching abilities.

“I would be so screwed if I didn’t have mentorship! I would have quit by now, or still be doing the same stuff I was doing in September” exclaimed Lena (Line 555-556) . Mentorship has altered her efficacy and manifested as a reflective process. She explained how she has noticed growth in the way she approaches situations or reflects on them afterwards and attributes this to interactions with her mentor. Increasing her own confidence in dealing with students and setting expectations has positioned her into a “comfy spot” which she doesn’t believe she would be in had she not received mentorship during her first year (Line 601).

Jennifer described how in her experience working with beginning teachers, mentorship appears to be a successful framework in supporting struggling teachers. Sharon matched many of Jennifer’s sentiments discussing mentorship as a more global issue. “I think, you know, teachers can survive, they can survive without mentorship. But will they thrive without mentorship? Not typically” (Lines 341-342). A critical feature of mentorship is promoting ongoing, reflective learning which is a key tenant of the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) (Alberta Education, 2018). Not only does mentorship create consistency in schools and divisions but it helps to establish best practices in the world of education as a whole.

The Challenge of Time

When discussing challenges or negative experiences related to mentorship a theme of time, or lack thereof, emerged in all participant responses. Robyn and her mentor struggle to meet on a regular basis as they do not have any common prep times and lunches are typically busy with students and supervision. Both her and Lena did have one period a week of allocated time with their mentor but due to scheduling constraints it did not continue into the second semester. As a principal, Sharon spoke about how ideally scheduling embedded time for mentors

and mentees to meet during the day “would be great, but it isn’t always feasible” (Lines 239-240).

These time constraints can lead to mentorship experiences not living up to their full potential. Logan shared evidence of feeling overwhelmed with balancing the demands of being a first year teacher with extracurricular expectations and trying to meet with his mentor on a regular basis. Often mentorship felt like “one more thing added to the plate” (Lines 253-245). Without dedicated time he felt like he had to be the one to initiate or seek out the interactions many times. He expressed seeing value in the process but wished more emphasis would have been placed on ensuring adequate time for him and his mentor to meet.

The biggest surprise to come from this research was the need for a more structured approach to mentorship from both beginning teachers and leaders. I anticipated educational leaders would call for more structure and stronger frameworks, but did not anticipate hearing this from beginning teachers. However, all three were very vocal in discussing their desire for enhanced structure to mentorship programs. Robyn shared how dedicated time to meet with her mentor would have made them both more accountable to the process, along with frequent check-ins from her principal. She also felt the opportunity to provide feedback on the mentorship experience was missing. Logan described how having allocated time to work with his mentor more frequently to co-teach, acquire resources, and ask questions would allow him to “absorb as much information as possible” (Line 297).

Educational leaders, Sharon and Jennifer, both spoke about the need to have stronger parameters surrounding the mentorship experience through a “mini curriculum” (Line 304). Inconsistencies among schools is a concern for Jennifer as she visits many schools in her

coordinator position. To mitigate this, they suggest there needs to be divisional processes and expectations, along with resources for mentor teachers to utilize with their mentees.

Summary of Findings

There were four emerging themes to come from this research. First, participants felt there is a disconnect between university programs and the realities faced by new teachers. This appears to be something accepted by educational leaders and they anticipate having to support beginning teachers with, in areas such as classroom management and assessment. Beginning teachers feel mentorship structures help to ease them into the teaching profession and bridge the gap between theory learned in university and practice once they enter the classroom.

Participants expressed having people in their corner to support this transition, whether it was a mentor, other colleagues, administration, or the office manager, helped to make them feel comfortable and ease fears they had as beginning teachers, highlighting the importance of fostering positive relationships.

Second, mentorship programs have the potential to build confidence in beginning teachers and increase their overall efficacy. Through enhanced contact with a veteran teacher, questions and queries are able to be discussed and worked through. Mentors are able to share their own experiences with beginning teachers and help to eliminate feelings of isolation. Utilizing techniques such as co-teaching, modelling, and checking for understanding all provide beginning teachers with enhanced confidence and skills. Participants expressed the necessity to have assigned mentors to ensure everyone has someone. Beginning teachers saw value in having a mentor who taught in the same subject area, where educational leaders felt common personality traits were more important when selecting mentor-mentee pairings.

Third, through engaging in these deep relationships, trust and care are fostered. Given the mentorship experience is separate from the evaluation process, beginning teachers expressed a sense of ease and trust which can be built with their mentors. The process is growth focused and meant to genuinely help improve pedagogical practice, rather than centered on criticism. Taking risks, and trying new approaches is encouraged. Beginning teachers felt their mentors would be there to support them if something didn't go as planned. They spoke about the importance of having a mentor who was engaged and willing to put the time and effort into the process. Those who had a disengaged mentor felt they were imposing on their mentor when setting up meetings or asking questions. This often caused them to retreat from the experience all together.

Finally, time remains one of the largest barriers surrounding mentorship and the ability to implement efficient mentorship programs, from the perspective of both beginning teachers and educational leaders. Beginning teachers who did not have time embedded in their schedule to meet with their mentor felt the experience wasn't as fruitful as it could have been, as they tried to balance the demands of being a first-year teacher. Educational leaders also felt this pressure as they discussed seeing the value in providing assigned time for co-teaching, meetings, and discussion between mentors and beginning teachers, but felt it difficult to create these spaces of time due to complicated scheduling and lack of resources, both human and financial. For principals, creating a culture of collaboration and mentorship in their schools can help to mitigate this issue. A multiple-mentor framework presents itself in which everyone has the opportunity to be a mentor or mentee. Rigid boundaries soften and collaborative enterprise becomes the focus in supporting all educators.

Table 2. Summary of Emerging Themes

Emerging Theme	Perceptions Aligned or Divided	Summary
Theory to Practice Gap	Aligned	All participants agreed there is a gap existing between university and the classroom. Mentorship helps to make this transition smoother for beginning teachers.
Enhanced Efficacy	Aligned	All participants agreed to an extent beginning teacher efficacy was enhanced through mentorship interactions, specifically in the area of confidence.
Building Trust	Aligned	All participants agreed mentorship allowed for the forging of positive, trusting relationships.
Challenge of Time	Aligned	All participants discussed one of the greatest challenges surrounding mentorship to be the lack of available time.

Research Conclusions

This study addressed the question, “Are perceptions of mentorship among beginning teachers and educational leaders aligned or divided?” Collecting qualitative data, I uncovered further insight into the perceptions of the purpose of mentorship and what effective mentoring looks like between beginning teachers and educational leaders. Throughout each interview, it was extensively discussed how mentorship is a positive driving force in the induction of beginning teachers. Several examples were given by all participants displaying the various ways mentorship can be experienced which tied back to the theoretical framework proposed by Hellsten et al. and the different mentorship pairings (assigned vs. unassigned mentors, engaged

vs. disengaged mentors, and single vs. multiple mentors). Relationships were at the forefront of many interviews and participants described how building trusting relationships is necessary for mentorship pairings to be successful. All participants acknowledged to some extent mentorship has positively impacted their teaching efficacy and expressed the desire to continue to invest in collegial mentorship relationships with colleagues moving forward, inadvertently describing frameworks such as peer coaching or collaborative mentorship. Through participants' experience I learned there is a clear call for enhancing the structure surrounding mentorship experiences from both beginning teachers and educational leaders. Beginning teachers felt more consistency would enhance their induction experience and educational leaders believed increased accountability is needed for leaders overseeing mentorship pairings.

Overall, there is alignment among beginning teachers and educational leaders about the purpose of mentorship and what effective mentoring frameworks may look like. My findings lead me to believe an investment of additional time and resources, as well as an enhanced consistency at both school and divisional levels, will lead to many positive implications extending well beyond creating a smooth induction process for beginning teachers. Effective mentorship frameworks have the potential to transform school cultures to value collaborative, collegial, trusting relationships among many educational stakeholders.

Recommendations

The conclusions in this study lead to several recommendations to transform mentoring experiences including enhancing relationships, adopting a peer coaching model, and increasing structure and consistency. School-based and divisional leaders can utilize these recommendations to further their understanding and knowledge of effective mentorship frameworks.

Recommendation: Enhance Relationships Between Mentors and Mentees

Beginning teachers believe their mentorship experience is more meaningful if they know their mentor is invested in them as a person and genuinely wants the best for them. “A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community” (Alberta Education, 2020, p. 3). Before a leader is able to make effective change they must foster effective relationships by learning about the people they are serving and leading. Small things like going for coffee or having lunch together can expand the relationship and give time to talk about common interests outside of teaching. The induction process is very much a socialization of new teachers and mentors are positioned in a place to be able to support this process. Taking time to listen, understand, and communicate will enhance trust and rapport in mentoring situations. Rather than a dissemination of information, a cyclical process of learning through asking questions, sharing experiences, and modelling drives the mentoring process.

Recommendation: Adopt a Peer Coaching Model of Mentorship

Collegial relationships beyond the mentor-mentee relationship contribute to a deepened mentorship experience. In the PRSD all schools work under the collaborative response model. In this model, all educators on staff work together to support student needs. This model lends well to fostering a peer coaching model of mentorship. A key attribute of a successful peer coach is the ability to practice inquiry and active listening. Fulmer (2014) describes active listening as “seeking to understand what is being said and restating or paraphrasing what was heard in order to check understanding” (p. 3). Being an expert is not necessary for an effective peer coaching situation as the joint generation of ideas, dialogue, and possible solutions is the primary focus. Individuals who are not teachers, such as educational assistants, office managers, and other

support staff play an integral role in the peer coaching process. Principals and other leaders can support the peer coaching model of mentorship by providing release time for individuals to meet and using creative scheduling for co-teaching opportunities.

Recommendation: Increase Structure and Consistency

Enhanced structure and consistency surrounding mentorship frameworks can be achieved through several avenues. First, a mini curriculum should be developed by the divisional mentorship coordinators for use by mentor teachers. The extent of this curriculum does not necessarily need to be in-depth lesson plans but rather a map or guidebook which can be utilized. Discussion prompts, graphic organizers, or checklists could be useful resources to be developed. All educators, no matter their role, have extensive amounts of items on their daily to-do list and this guidebook can allow mentors and mentees to have something to keep their conversations and meetings organized and productive.

Second, providing adequate time and training for mentorship is necessary. Many teachers acting as mentors do not know how to effectively act as a mentor. They may be a fantastic teacher but this does not automatically mean they will be a fantastic mentor. Providing training for those interested in acting as formal mentors could happen through professional development sessions offered throughout the school year, hosted by the divisional mentorship coordinators. Allowing mentor teachers the opportunity to consult, collaborate, and share experiences will create space for growth to take place. Investing time and resources into developing good mentors will lead to better mentorship experiences and more effective beginning teachers.

Personal Reflection

Mentorship has always been an area near and dear to my heart since I was a beginning

teacher in 2016. I truly believe the support I received in my first year was invaluable and shaped me into the educator I am today. I was hired for a position I had no formal training in. I would be teaching junior high humanities in a triple-split class half time, as well as acting as the schools Inclusive Education Coach half time. My principal took me under her wing and ensured I was well situated to excel at this complex role. She acted as an unassigned mentor to me but one of the most influential I had. We developed a strong, trusting bond and I felt I could go to her with challenges big or small. She worked from a growth model of supervision and we developed what Glickman et al. (2018) would describe as a collegial relationship. Feedback was given in a suggestive manner and never presented as a checklist of "things to do or not to do". During our discussions there were equal amounts of ideas generated from both parties when looking at alternative approaches to a situation. I knew if she witnessed me in an off-moment or if a lesson didn't go as planned, those mishaps wouldn't be at the very top of her list when we debriefed. She saw my passion and my heart for teaching by having conversations with me and my students. Because of how much I felt she valued me, I valued myself and strived to be the best teacher I could for my students, knowing I had her support.

Not only did my principal act as an unassigned mentor, she also ensured I had a collaborative team of people who were invested in my growth and development as a beginning teacher. At the school level I was assigned a mentor who taught in my subject area and we were provided occasional release time to work alongside each other or observe each other's teaching. At the divisional level, a beginning teacher mentor coach oversaw all of the first year teachers. He would do monthly visits and was a great third-party resource to have outside of the school setting. For my I-Coach duties, an Inclusive Education Coordinator was assigned to my school

profile and we were also provided with monthly professional development sessions.

Since my time as a first-year teacher I have had the opportunity to be on the mentor side of mentorship. Through this time, I have been able to learn about and employ various mentorship techniques and have seen the implications on the confidence and efficacy of beginning teachers. I have experienced beginning teachers with various levels of buy-in towards mentorship and had to approach different teachers with different mentoring styles. I have always believed in the power of collaborative mentorship and creating a culture of mentoring and this is something I have tried to work with other colleagues to do. Together we are stronger and can support all beginning teachers in different ways which will meet their individual needs.

During the 2021-2022 school year in particular, I have witnessed how collaborative mentorship can result in positive implications for not only beginning teachers, but whole school cultures. At our school we had a couple of first year teachers. They were assigned formal mentors but also received other mentoring support. Things such as divisional mentor coaches, release time to observe other teachers, and collaborative teaching time during flex blocks were utilized. Along with these strategies, a culture of collaboration and helping each other emerged over time. Communication among teachers was enhanced through the collaborative response structure and opportunities to focus on student learning and achievement through a lens of teamwork. This allowed for beginning teachers to work alongside several different teachers, I-coaches, and leadership to tackle challenging student needs. Based on the responses given during the semi-structured interviews it is clear beginning teachers enjoyed and found benefit from experiencing collaborative mentorship. Ensuring I was upholding trustworthiness by bracketing my own biases toward the positive implications of mentorship, completing member

checks, and providing thick description of the participants helps to confirm these findings are authentic to the participants of the study and not just a reiteration of my personal beliefs.

Going through this Master's program has transformed the way I think about leadership and mentorship. This process has allowed me to enhance my theoretical knowledge of several different leadership facets and challenged my thinking about many others. I have learned how to use a critical lens when looking at research and considering different perspectives of an issue. Things which once seemed black and white are now shaded grey. Moving into a new role this fall as a divisional inclusive education coordinator I will be placed into a leadership role working primarily with school-based inclusive education coaches and school-based leaders. This program has prepared me immensely for the challenges which lie ahead and given me the skills and confidence to lead others on a path of inclusion as a divisional mentor. Mentorship has the potential to not only positively impact beginning teachers but also veteran teachers and overall school cultures. More effective teachers and collaborative school cultures are going to create the conditions for enhanced overall student learning and success.

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Appendix A:

Interview Schedule

Interview Questions (Beginning Teacher):

1. Tell me about your mentorship experience as a beginning teacher.
2. Do you feel your university program effectively prepared you for the demands faced as a beginning teacher? Give examples.
3. Describe a positive mentoring experience you have had. Give examples.
4. Have there been challenges or negative experiences related to your mentorship experience?
5. If you had the opportunity to change or design your first year mentorship program what would it look like? Would you change things? Is there anything you didn't get which you would want?
6. Overall, do you feel mentorship is a critical part of your induction experience? Why or why not? How has it shaped your teaching practice and efficacy?

Interview Questions (Educational Leader):

1. Tell me how you have experienced mentorship as an educator?
2. Do you feel university programs effectively prepare beginning teachers for the demands they face? How does this impact the way you set up mentorship programs for beginning teachers?
3. What do you see or view as positive aspects of mentorship for beginning teachers? Give examples.
4. What do you see or view as challenges or negative experiences related to mentorship for beginning teachers? Give examples.
5. What do you believe an ideal mentorship program for beginning teachers would look like? Describe in detail.
6. Overall, do you feel mentorship is a critical part of the induction process for a beginning teacher? Why or why not.

Appendix B:

Letter of Introduction - Individual Interview - Adult Participant

Taryn Banach
EDPS 509 student
780-835-6095
banach@ualberta.ca
Feb 14th, 2022

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student in the Master of Education in Educational Policy Studies program at the University of Alberta. The purpose of this letter is to you to take part in a research assignment for my EDPS 509 Research Design and Data Analysis course. My assignment is intended to uncover perceptions of mentorship between beginning teachers and educational leaders. Your participation would involve a 1-hour semi-structured interview with myself. Your participation is voluntary; there will be no consequence to you should you decline to participate or decide to withdraw from participating.

In order to gather data for my research assignment, I will be conducting a 1-hour semi-structured interview taking place over Google Meet. This would happen sometime in the month of February during a time scheduled by both of us. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Please note:

- You may choose not to answer any question.
- You may opt out of this research assignment once responses have been submitted. To do so, please submit your request by email by March 10th, 2022 and I will destroy all data.
- I will send you a transcription of the interview as well as a summary of the main points I understood you to make by email; you will have the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcription and my interpretation of it. Should any concerns, complaints, or questions arise from your participation, you may contact me or my instructor, Dr. José da Costa (jdacosta@ualberta.ca).
- All data will be handled in compliance with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants:
- Participant names will not be revealed. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms or numerical coding will be used in all written representations of the data.
- Hard copy data will be locked in a filing cabinet and will be destroyed on my completion of my graduate program.
- Digital data will be stored on my computer under a secure password-protected system and will be destroyed on my completion of my graduate program.
- Data will be used to complete my EDPS 509 course, my graduate program, and may be used in future presentations and publications in educational contexts.

Thank you for considering this invitation to participate in my research. If you wish to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me by February 10th, 2022. I have included two copies of the consent form: one is to be signed by you and the other is for your own records.

The plan for this research has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, you can contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Should you wish a copy of my research findings, I would be pleased to provide one on your request.

Sincerely,

Taryn Banach
Graduate student in the Master of Education in Educational Policy Studies program
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
780-835-6095
banach@ualbert.ca

University of Alberta Ethics ID# Pro00096710

Educational Policy Studies

7-104 Education North • University of Alberta • Edmonton • Canada • T6G 2G5

Telephone: (780) 492-7625 • Fax: (780) 492-2024

Appendix C:

Adult Participant Consent Form

EDPS 509 Research Assignment: Perceptions of Mentorship Among Beginning Teachers and Educational Leaders.

Researcher: Taryn Banach

Date Range of Research: January 30th, 2022 - April 16, 2022

I, _____ (name of participant), hereby consent to participate in the research, Perceptions of Mentorship Among Beginning Teachers and Educational Leaders.

I understand my participation includes:

- 1 hour semi-structured interview with Taryn Banach over Google Meet.
- Audio recording of the interview.

As per the Letter of Information, I understand:

- My participation in this research is voluntary.
- I may withdraw from the research without penalty until March 10th, 2022.
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially.
- No identifying information will appear on written representations of the data: pseudonyms or numerical coding will be used to convey the data.
- The data will be used for the purposes of completion of the Master of Education in Educational Studies (MES) program and may be used in future presentations and publications in the educational context.
- The plan for this research has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, I can contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix D:

Participant Validation Summaries

**Pseudonyms have been used for each of the research participants.

Research Participant Pseudonym: Jennifer

Role: Divisional Literacy Coordinator/Mentor Coach

Questions	Responses
<p>Tell me how you have experienced mentorship as an educator?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assigned a divisional mentor who came in a few times over the course of the year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Would meet up a few times a year with the other beginning teachers and divisional mentor ● Assigned a school-based mentor as well but she was going through family issues and she was out for a lot of the year. ● Grade level partner was also a new teacher who worked together to plan etc.
<p>Do you feel university programs effectively prepare beginning teachers for the demands they face?</p> <p>How does this impact the way you set up mentorship programs for beginning teachers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “No, I don’t”. Can tell from experience, teachers come out of university having “absolutely no idea how to teach kids to read”. ● Focus is on theory and learning material. ● When they get into the classroom it is a very different scenario from the “picture painted in university”. ● Need more time in the classroom (practicum) to learn from experience rather than learning from a book. ● Literacy and classroom management are a focus when working with beginning teachers. Foundational skills are going to set them up for success.
<p>What do you see or view as positive aspects of mentorship for beginning teachers? Give examples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having an “expert” and someone with experience who can act as a guide. ● Observing other teachers, co-teaching. It is easier to implement an idea if you can “see it”, rather than just talking about it. ● Working together with others to ease the demands of planning, organizing, and prepping.

<p>What do you see or view as challenges or negative experiences related to mentorship for beginning teachers? Give examples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need to have structure and a plan when going in to observe beginning teachers. Not just going in to be critical. “What are you looking for?” ● In smaller, rural schools it can be difficult to pair up teachers who have similar subject backgrounds. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A Science teacher may have trouble being a mentor to an English teacher. ○ Lack of available teachers who can be mentors (personnel). ○ Video conferences can be an option to connect teachers from different schools, but is it going to have the same impact?
<p>What do you believe an ideal mentorship program for beginning teachers would look like? Describe in detail.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Divisional support to enhance areas of literacy and numeracy, specifically. ● School-based mentor. ● Team-teaching with mentor for ½ day for the first semester of the school year. ● Much more support at the school level to do observations, meetings which happen on a regular basis etc. ● Mentor teacher in the same subject area or grade-level as the beginning teacher. ● Resources available for mentors to use with beginning teachers. Right now, there is a lack. We don’t have any. ● Structure in the framework so mentors and mentees know what to expect. ● Levels of scaffolding and support depending on the individual teacher. Not everyone needs the same thing.
<p>Overall, do you feel mentorship is a critical part of the induction process for a beginning teacher? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It depends on the teacher. Some beginning teachers will be fine without any formal mentorship. ● If you are a struggling beginning teacher, mentorship can make a “huge difference”. ● It is going to depend on the individual and where they are at in their learning and abilities.

Research Participant Pseudonym: Sharon

Role: Principal

Questions	Responses
<p>Tell me how you have experienced mentorship as an educator?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mostly organic. Me seeking out mentorship from others. ● Formal, divisional program was in place but the self-directed experiences were more valuable. ● Not one assigned school-based mentor, but rather 4 or 5 teachers I was comfortable going to for advice and guidance. ● Peer-to-peer mentorship as I grew in my career. Seeking out teachers in other schools who taught the same subjects as me. Learning and sharing with each other. ● If you have a curious mindset early in your career it doesn't go away once you are through the first few years of teaching.
<p>Do you feel university programs effectively prepare beginning teachers for the demands they face?</p> <p>How does this impact the way you set up mentorship programs for beginning teachers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Absolutely not”. ● Theory based. In a secondary degree about half of the courses you take are not education related. ● Practicums are artificial in nature. They expose you to surface level aspects of teaching. Lesson planning, some assessment, some behaviour management. There is a whole other set of demands waiting for you once you have your own classroom. ● Without mentorship you are “shooting in the dark”. ● As a school leader, you try your best to pair people up who you think will be a successful pairing.
<p>What do you see or view as positive aspects of mentorship for beginning teachers? Give examples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allows for a bit of a “soft entry” for teachers in that they have a person on staff they know they can go to. ● Mentorship is a non-threatening, non-evaluative process. Where as a Principal you are their evaluator. ● Allows for the creation of a culture of learning at a school. It is not just beneficial to the new teachers but all teachers to engage in reflective practices. ● Builds trusting relationships and allows for beginning teachers to not feel alone in a situation. There are people there who will offer advice and guidance to make it to the other side of a problem. ● Builds efficacy and skills in new teachers they might not have acquired though

	<p>their university courses or practicum experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mentorship is a passion to help others grow and succeed.
<p>What do you see or view as challenges or negative experiences related to mentorship for beginning teachers? Give examples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Right now, I have confidence in the mentor teachers at my school. It would be worrisome if I didn't have people who want to be mentors. How do you set up an effective program with teachers who do not want to put in the work? ● Challenges or negative experiences can come if mentorship is not done correctly. ● Assigning mentors with mentees creates a type of manufactured relationship. It is not a guarantee they will get along. ● Time is a big challenge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Try to embed time but it doesn't always happen ○ Mentors need to want to make the time to meet (lunch, afterschool) ● Inconsistencies can be a negative. Some years mentorship is robust and other years almost non-existent.
<p>What do you believe an ideal mentorship program for beginning teachers would look like? Describe in detail.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A consistent divisional, top-down approach is necessary. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inconsistencies among schools within the division. One school could have a thriving mentorship program while at a school down the road it is non-existent. ● Ideally, organically allowing mentees and mentors to come together. ● More of an apprenticeship approach if budget allows. Not throwing teachers off the deep end and expecting them to be able to swim right away. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allows them to absorb information without the pressure a traditional first year entails. ● Training for mentors who choose to volunteer because they are passionate about mentorship. ● A program or curriculum mentors can use as a guide. ● Monthly sub time provided for mentor and mentee to meet together away from the daily demands. ● Communication between mentor, mentee, and administration.
<p>Overall, do you feel mentorship is a critical part of the induction process for a beginning teacher? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "Yeah, I think mentorship is integral for success". ● Teachers can survive without mentorship but many will not thrive without it. ● Mentorship creates consistent practice within a school and within a division and even in the world of education. ● Fosters ongoing, reflective learning which is a tenant of the TQS.

Research Participant Pseudonym: Lena

Role: First Year Teacher

Questions	Responses
<p>Tell me about your mentorship experience as a beginning teacher.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informal meetings and check-ins. ● Assigned mentor but seek out other mentors as well. ● Visits from the divisional literacy coordinator every 6 weeks or so. ● A lot of people at my school are willing to help me and I feel comfortable going to them. ● I feel like the mentors at my school actually care about how I am doing and there is a trust built with them. ● Being in a smaller school there is a level of closeness and support from the admin I don't think I would find in a bigger school.
<p>Do you feel your university program effectively prepared you for the demands faced as a beginning teacher? Give examples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not at all. "Learned more in the first 5 weeks of the school year than 4 years of university". ● University is focused on the theoretical aspects, but that only gets you so far. ● "I found I had zero preparation for classroom management". They don't tell you how hard it's going to be. ● They focus on relationships but not the necessity of boundaries as well. ● Idealistic. They tell you all the good stuff like "teachers can save the world", but not how difficult the journey to get there is. ● University doesn't discuss how to build relationships with other co-workers and admin, focuses only on relationships with students.
<p>Describe a positive mentoring experience you have had. Give examples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You get to run things by people. You get a second opinion on things. ● When you don't know what to do it is nice to have someone who you can talk things through with and they won't necessarily tell you what to do but help you strategize and come up with potential solutions. ● Mentorship is about growth and not criticism. They are there to help and make you better. ● Mentors can share experiences and you feel like you can relate to what they have been through. Makes you not feel like you are the only one going through it. ● It's okay to feel bad or to make mistakes. You don't have to be perfect all the time.
<p>Have there been challenges or negative experiences related to your mentorship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of direction and mentorship surrounding literacy, specifically benchmarking, interventions, and divisional assessments. ● Lack of communication and feeling like we are just trying to figure it out as we go. ● Moving to a new town you make friends with your co-workers so it can be hard to know what role you are playing. Is it appropriate to ask a school

experience?	question outside of school hours etc.
<p>If you had the opportunity to change or design your first year mentorship program what would it look like?</p> <p>Would you change things? Is there anything you didn't get you would want?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Similar to the set up I have now. ● Having an assigned mentor is key because if you don't have one you might not know who to go to. Even if people say "come to me" you don't want to be a burden to them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is nice to have a consistent person, but also the ability to go to others if you want. ● Mentorship was discussed in the interview process. Part of the reason I chose this position. ● School-based support has been much more beneficial than divisional mentorship. ● Collaboration days between mentors and mentees would be beneficial to spend like a half day together uninterrupted to work on things.
<p>Overall, do you feel mentorship is a critical part of your induction experience? Why or why not?</p> <p>How has it shaped your teaching practice and efficacy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "I would be so screwed if I didn't have mentorship". "I would have quit by now". ● You can't grow if you don't have any feedback. If there's no one who is willing to go watch you teach or listen to your problems that won't be possible. ● Through mentorship you are able to build trusting relationships and so feedback is genuine and not evaluative. You know it is coming from a good place and not as criticism. ● Shaped efficacy as it has changed the dynamic of how I approach things. ● Helped me to establish expectations for students. I don't think I really thought about it before. ● Having a mentor is like someone who can almost "bring you back down to earth and help you with the practical stuff".

Research Participant Pseudonym: Robyn

Role: Second Year Teacher

Questions	Responses
Tell me about your mentorship experience as a beginning teacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assigned Mentorship. ● Mentor taught in a different subject area. ● Lack of parameters of expectations for both mentor and mentee. ● Seemed like more of a “hoop to jump through” ● Lack of time to ask questions. Didn’t want to “impose” on the mentor teacher.
Do you feel your university program effectively prepared you for the demands faced as a beginning teacher? Give examples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Not at all”. University is very “optimistic”. ● Rose glasses ● Focused on theory and curriculum. Doesn’t prepare you for the “dynamics of the school” or “building relationships with difficult students”. ● The picture they paint is not accurate. “Reality is much harsher”. ● APT practicum cut short by COVID. Skills which should have been developed in practicum had to be focused on in the first year of teaching.
Describe a positive mentoring experience you have had. Give examples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having a boost of confidence and not someone who is just focused on things which go wrong. ● Getting to share resources and ideas with other English teachers. ● Working with EA’s to gain insight into classroom management or dealing with challenging students. ● Reaching out to others because often as the teacher you are the only adult in the room. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Informal mentorship. Not something “expected” so it is “less daunting”. ○ When “obligated” to do something it feels not as “authentic”.
Have there been challenges or negative experiences related to your mentorship experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Process felt inauthentic. “Admin just checking a box”. ● Assigned mentor wasn’t a good fit. Lack of commonality in subject area. Time constraints. ● Lack of structure and expectations. ● Blocked time in the schedule didn’t always happen. Mentor would email and cancel. ● Assigned mentor didn’t appear invested.
If you had the opportunity to change or	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dedicated weekly time to meet between mentor and mentee. What happens at the meeting can be flexible but the time should be decided to keep everyone accountable.

<p>design your first year mentorship program what would it look like?</p> <p>Would you change things? Is there anything you didn't get you would want?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Mini curriculum” for mentorship meetings. In this month you have to meet these outcomes etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Basic things like how to call parents, create assessments, find appropriate films. ● Still assigned mentors but need a more thoughtful process pairing people up. ● Reflective form at the end of the year for teachers to submit to admin about how their mentorship process went to make changes for the following year.
<p>Overall, do you feel mentorship is a critical part of your induction experience? Why or why not?</p> <p>How has it shaped your teaching practice and efficacy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes, it is helpful. ● Helps you advance quicker and acquire skills. ● If you don't have mentorship it doesn't mean you can't be a wonderful teacher. It does help lessen the stress of first year teachers though. ● Teachers who have strong mentorship are probably more successful in their early years. Can catch and correct issues before the admin brings them up in an observation.

Research Participant Pseudonym: Logan**Role:** First Year Teacher

Questions	Responses
Tell me about your mentorship experience as a beginning teacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feels kind of like an “optional” thing. If it wasn’t sought out there wouldn’t be much there. ● Assigned school-based mentor ● First semester there was a PULSE scheduled with my mentor teacher which was nice to have time to chat and check in. No allocated time. ● Preps didn’t align so the mentor teacher could come observe classes. ● “Handful” of people have been good to go to about subject-specific questions or scenarios.
Do you feel your university program effectively prepared you for the demands faced as a beginning teacher? Give examples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Absolutely not”. ● Learned a lot about writing scientific papers and what not, but not a lot about classroom management. ● “Doesn’t really prepare you for the real world”. ● Once you are in the situation it often plays out differently than how you talk about it in university. ● Practicums were the most valuable because it really helped to build confidence and familiarity with the classroom. ● University does not prepare you for how different students actually are in a classroom.
Describe a positive mentoring experience you have had. Give examples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sitting with my mentor teacher and listening in on parent-teacher interviews. Got to experience different scenarios and talk through how you would approach them. Built confidence for having to do PTI on own. ● Co-teach with a PULSE teacher who was able to provide guidance and assistance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Modelling of strategies like explaining instructions, checking for understanding etc. ● Give feedback to help improve lessons and teaching practices. Become more comfortable with your own teaching and delivery of lessons.
Have there been challenges or negative experiences related to your mentorship experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unclear parameters around the framework of mentorship. What is expected? How do I use a mentor? ● As it is set up now you (beginning teacher) have to be willing to seek it out. If you don’t, it probably won’t be helpful. ● Will go unused if there is no designated plan or routine. ● Time constraints: balancing the demands of being a first year teacher with extra curriculars and personal things. Mentorship can sometimes feel like “one more

	<p>thing added to the plate”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Having designated time built into PULSE or lunch etc would help to mitigate this feeling.
<p>If you had the opportunity to change or design your first year mentorship program what would it look like?</p> <p>Would you change things? Is there anything you didn't get you would want?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A week of dedicated time where mentees can observe their mentor teacher and work one-on-one with them (Beginning of the year/start of the semester). ● Allocated time to support beginning teachers. Co-teaching, visiting other schools, acquiring resources, asking questions. “Absorbing as much as possible”. ● In person opportunities for connection. Online PD isn't engaging and listening or talking face-to-face with people is going to be more effective. ● Pairing beginning teachers with mentors who teach in their subject area is important to be able to provide advice and guidance on situations which are relevant to that particular course. ● Having support from the numeracy coordinator, rather than the literacy coordinator would be beneficial as it would be support which is more subject specific.
<p>Overall, do you feel mentorship is a critical part of your induction experience? Why or why not?</p> <p>How has it shaped your teaching practice and efficacy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “It is a critical part”. Mentors can help calm your nerves and provide insight into things you may not even initially consider. ● No one should come into the profession blind. ● Mentorship helps both the beginning teacher and the mentor as you can “feed off each other”. ● Having a mentor builds a high sense of efficacy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gives reassurance and reaffirm confidence ● Feedback and support from a mentor can transform a good lesson into a great lesson. ● PE: Looking at how the other teacher starts class and attendance. Classes have been running smoother and I feel more confident in the classroom.