

Research on Mentoring

Over one million new teachers received mentoring between 1993–2003, but we know little about the magnitude of the benefits they have received or how the impact of mentoring varied across different types of programs.

Mentors who share similar educational backgrounds and subject matter experience as their mentees don't seem to have any impact, good or bad, on teacher retention or student performance—despite the fact that this type of matching is often stressed by state law and supporters of mentoring programs.

Jonah Rockoff. "Does Mentoring Reduce Turnover and Improve Skills of New Employees? Evidence from Teachers in New York City." NBER Working Paper, February 2008.

Despite the popularity of mentoring, little is known about its impact on employee turnover and skill acquisition. Nearly all published and unpublished evaluations of mentoring programs have used research methodologies that fall short of providing credible estimates of the causal impacts of mentoring: Serpell (2000), Ingersoll and Kralic (2004), Lopez et al. (2004), Strong (2005).

In addition to the general dearth of quality research on mentoring, even less is known about mentoring in special education: Gehrke and McCoy et al. (2006), (2002).

Wasburn-Moses, Leah. "Rethinking Mentoring: Comparing Policy and Practice in Special and General Education." Miami University, Ohio, 2010. Access at http://www.nctq.org/tr3/conference/docs/tr3_conf_washburn-moses.pdf

Sparks, Sarah. "Study Finds Special Educators Have Less Access to Mentors." *Education Week*, January 12, 2011. p. 16.

The mentor-mentee relationship does have its fallacies. A few of the problems that often hinder the consistent success of the mentor-mentee concept are mentors are not available to help first-year teachers, mentors are poorly matched with mentees, sufficient time is not allocated for mentors to aid mentees, and some mentors lack the sincere commitment to assist mentees: Bauer and Leblanc (2002); Cuddaph (2002).

Tammy Lorraine Staten-Daniels. "How First-Year Teachers Support Their Peers." Doctoral study at Walden University. October 2009.

Just having one year of clinical experience under a relatively effective mentor does not ensure that graduates of the program will enter at a level above other novices.

Papay, John P., West, Martin, Fullerton, Jon, and Thomas J. Kane. "Does Practice-Based Teacher Preparation Increase Student Achievement? Early Evidence from the Boston Teacher Residency." NBER Working Paper No. 17646. December 2011.

Mentoring has, at best, been a poorly designed and ineffectively implemented interaction between the mentor and the mentee. Far too many new teachers experience a disillusioning relationship that provides little support during this crucial stage of their career.

Boreen, J. and D. Niday. *Mentoring Across Boundaries*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2003.

Our work suggests that schools would do better to rely less on one-to-one mentoring and, instead, develop schoolwide structures that promote integrated professional cultures with frequent exchange of information and ideas across experience levels.

Johnson, Susan Moore and Sarah E. Birkeland. "Pursuing a Sense of Success: New Teachers Explain Their Career Decisions." *American Educational Research Journal* (Fall 2003). p. 608.

A review of 20 years of claims about mentoring reveal that few studies exist that show the context, content, and consequences of mentoring.

Feiman-Nemser, Sharon. "Teacher Mentoring: A Critical Review." *ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education*. ED 397 060, (1996).

Growing evidence shows that simply assigning mentors does not guarantee that new teachers will get the help they need.

Feiman-Nemser, Sharon. "Beyond Solo Teaching." *Educational Leadership*, May 2012. p. 13.

Current research does not yet provide definitive evidence of the value of mentoring programs in keeping new teachers from leaving the profession.

Ingersoll, R. and J. Kralik. "The Impact of Mentoring on Teacher Retention: What the Research Says." *Education Commission of the States*. February 2004. p. 15.

There is no consensus on what mentors should do, what they actually do, and what novices learn as a result of mentoring. Our results did not find a relationship between mentoring and teacher retention.

Wynn, Susan, Carboni, Lisa, and Erika Patall. "Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Mentoring, Climate, and Leadership: Promoting Retention through a Learning Communities Perspective." (2007). *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 6. pp. 209-229.

Most mentoring relationships lack any structure, are not monitored, and have no adequate follow-up procedure. The mentor may not have been trained, may not teach at the same grade level or academic subject, and the mentoring relationship at times has no coherence or collaboration to any state/district/school curriculum, plan, goals, or standards.

Wong, Harry K. and Rosemary T. Wong. (2010). "Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers and Principals."

Available at <http://www.effectiveteaching.com/pages.php?pageid=51>.

Negative outcomes have been reported and state that unstructured buddy mentoring can have harmful results and can actually be worse than no mentoring at all.

Head, F. et al. "The Reality of Mentoring: Complexity in Its Process and Function." *Mentoring: Contemporary Principles and ISSUES*, ed. M. Bey and C. T. Holmes. (Reston, Vir.: Association of Teacher Educators, 1992).

Well documented need for supporting beginning teachers has led to a great deal of focus in the past two decades on mentoring practice in schools, however, there is little empirical evidence to support specific mentoring practices.

Bennetts, C. "Lifelong Learners: In Their Own Words." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 20, no. 4 (2001). pp. 272-288.

Hawk, P. "Beginning Teacher Programs: Benefits for the Experienced Educator." *Action in Teacher Education* 8, no. 4 (1986-1987). pp. 59-63.

Little, J. "The Mentor Phenomenon and the Social Organization of Teaching." *Review of Research in Education*, ed. C. B. Cazden. (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 1990). pp. 297–351.

Currently in more than thirty states, the universal practice seems remarkably narrow: Mentoring predominates and often there is little more. In many schools one-on-one mentoring is the dominant or sole strategy for supporting new teachers, often lacking real structure and relying on the willingness of the veteran and new teacher to seek each other out. Many mentors are assigned to respond to a new teacher's day-to-day crisis and provide survival teaching tips. Mentors are simply a safety net for the new teachers. Mentoring, in and of itself, has no purpose, goal, or agenda for student achievement. Thus, mentoring alone fails to provide evidence of the connection between well-executed professional learning communities and student learning.

Britton, E., Paine, L., Raizen, S., and D. Pimm. *Comprehensive Teacher Induction: Systems for Early Career Learning*. Amsterdam and San Francisco, Calif.: Kluwer Academic Publishers and WestEd, 2003. Available at www.WestEd.org.

Although there are occasional stories of how one person has been a successful mentor, the success of mentoring programs has been documented largely by opinion surveys. Long-term objectives, including the retention of new teachers and development of experienced ones, have had insufficient time to be realized.

Huffman, G. and S. Leak. "Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Mentors." *Journal of Teacher Education* 37, no. 1 (1986). pp. 22–25.

The Swiss philosophy explicitly rejects a "deficit" model of mentoring, which assumes that new teachers lack training and competence and thus need mentors. Instead, there is a carefully crafted array of induction experiences for new teachers.

Wong, Harry, Britton, Ted, and Tom Ganser. "What the World Can Teach Us About New Teacher Induction." *Phi Delta KAPPAN* (January 2005). p. 380.

The evidence of stand-alone 'mentoring as induction' programs has been called into question. Although all districts had a mentoring program, about a third (33 percent) of the teachers were not assigned a mentor during their first year of teaching. Many teachers (27 percent) reported that they did not regularly collaborate with other teachers, nor did they visit the classrooms of more experienced teachers to observe their instruction (36 percent); 46 percent said they did not have regular contact with their principals.

Public Education Network. *The Voice of the New Teacher*. Washington, DC: Public Education Network, 2004.

The mentoring component is essential to many induction programs, but is not helpful in and of itself.

Serpell, Z. and L. Bozeman. "Beginning Teacher Induction: A Report of Beginning Teacher Effectiveness and Retention." Washington, DC: National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999.

Despite the heavy emphasis on mentoring by many of the programs and by the literature on alternative certification, mentoring impacted fewer self-reported growth outcomes than either school context or coursework.

Humphrey, D., Wechsler, M., and H. Hough. "Characteristics of Effective Alternative Teacher Certification Programs." *Teachers College Record*, January 2008. pp. 1–63.

The mere presence of a guide does not improve teaching.

Alliance for Excellent Education. *Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High Quality New Teachers*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004, p.13. [Reporting on the work of Kyle, Moore, and Sanders. "The Role of the Mentor Teacher: Insights, Challenges, and Implications." *Peabody Journal of Education* 74 (1999). pp. 3–4. And Evertson and Smithey. "Mentoring Effects on Protégés' Classroom Practice: An Experimental Field Study." *Journal of Educational Research* 9 (2000). p. 5. Available at www.all4ed.org and www.NewTeacher.com.

New teachers' needs are so variable and immediate that the appropriate combination of expertise, experience, and cultural background is unlikely to reside in ONE mentor who is available when needed.

Schlager, Mark, Fusco, Judith, Koch, Melissa, Crawford, Valerie, and Michelle Phillips. "Designing Equity and Diversity into Online Strategies to Support New Teachers." Presented at the National Educational Computing Conference (NECC). July 1, 2003.

Mentoring is all the rage. There is some sort of deep hope on the part of everyone that if you get the right mentor, your life will be saved and you will be the teacher you remember. But the truth is that mentoring pairs seldom are anything but haphazard. They are driven by the schedule. They are often not pairs of people who really know the subjects that the individual is teaching.

Johnson, S. M. "Supporting and Retaining the Next Generation of Teachers." Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Graduate School of Education, March 2003.
Available at <http://www.simulconference.com/ASCD/2003/scs/>.

Professional development programs in the United States often are sporadic, incoherent in nature, lack alignment, and have no adequate follow-up procedure. We treat professional development as isolated events (such as mentoring), and not as a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained process.

Wang, A., Coleman, A., Coley, R., and R. Phelps. *Preparing Teachers Around the World*. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 2003.

We surveyed 110 new teachers in New Jersey. While 97 percent said they had a mentor, only 17 percent of the new teachers said that their mentors ever actually watched them teach in the classroom.

Kardos, S. "What Will It Take to Hold onto the Next Generation of Teachers?" *Harvard Graduate School of Education News*, (April 18, 2002).

While mentoring is the most widely practiced component of induction, mentoring by itself is not enough to retain and develop teachers. Mentoring programs vary widely and may do little more than ask mentors to check in with new teachers a few times per semester to chat.

Alliance for Excellent Education. *Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality New Teachers*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004. p. 12.
Available at www.all4ed.org and www.NewTeacher.com.

Many mentoring programs lack key pedagogical content and the structural characteristics of effective professional development that are needed to produce effective teachers. There is little coordination or communication between the various mentors creating gaps and redundancies that prevent new teachers from having the ability to assess their professional needs or development.

Gordon, S. and S. Maxey. *How to Help Beginning Teachers Succeed*, 2nd edition. Arlington, Vir.: ASCD, 2000.

As mentoring programs have matured, it has become apparent that caring and insightful classroom teachers do not necessarily know how to mentor new teachers. Training people for the role of mentors serving teachers is a critical aspect of any effective program. It is simply not effective to identify people as mentors and then throw them into service in that capacity.

Daresh, J. C. *Teachers Mentoring Teachers: A Practical Approach to Helping New and Experienced Staff*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin, 2003. p. 28.

Although mentor training can increase mentor effectiveness, many who are setting up teacher induction programs are afraid to suggest that any training might be necessary for mentors. These fears often stem from the prospect of “turning off” mentors. However, without training and support for the mentors, an induction program may be little more than a haphazard effort at pairing new teachers with veteran teachers and hoping some good will come from the match.

Black, S. “A Lifeboat for New Teachers.” *American School Board Journal*, 188(9), 2001. p. 47.

The most critical weak links in ineffective mentoring programs are mentor training and support. These two elements are often missing because people assume that an excellent employee will naturally make an excellent mentor. In fact that is often not the case. Mentoring is a professional practice with its own knowledge and research base, strategies, and best practices. Without access to these “tools” of effective mentoring, the quality of mentoring is frequently inadequate to produce the kind of impact that the program was designed to produce.

Sweeny, B. *Developing, Evaluating and Improving Peer Mentoring and Induction Programs and Practices to Deliver a Higher Impact*. Wheaton, Ill.: Best Practice Resources, 2001. p. 21.

A search of the literature revealed that in most programs, mentor training consists of an introduction to mentoring at the beginning of the school year, perhaps followed by some kind of ongoing training. One of the shortcomings of many staff development programs is that they are ‘front-end loaded’ with little opportunity for systematic application, practice, and follow-up. One mentor related, “In my first year of mentoring, I felt like a new teacher. The information was given to us quickly, and I felt lost. You are fumbling around trying to look like a mentor, but what you really need is someone to mentor the mentor.”

Ganser, T. (2001). “Building the Capacity of School Districts to Design, Implement, and Evaluate New Teacher Mentor Programs.” *ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 452 168*, Springfield, Vir.: 2001.

This view of teaching requires an approach to new teacher induction that is different in scope and design from much of what currently passes for induction in this country: one-to-one mentoring of a novice teacher by a more experienced colleague whose primary goal is to help the novice survive the first year.

Unless we move beyond the traditional one-to-one mentoring model, we will continue to reinforce the Industrial-era practice of stand-alone teaching in isolated classrooms.

Fulton, Kathleen, Yoon, Irene, and Christine Lee. "Induction into Learning Communities." *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future*. August 2005. p. 1. Available at www.nctaf.org and www.NewTeacher.com.

Mentoring is a useful component of induction, but only one element of a comprehensive induction system.

Fulton, Kathleen, Yoon, Irene, and Christine Lee. "Induction into Learning Communities." *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future*. August 2005. p. 1. Available at www.nctaf.org and www.NewTeacher.com.

Mentoring alone will do little to aid in the retention of highly qualified new teachers. However, as an integral component of a structured induction program, it can be valuable. Understand that induction is ongoing and systematic, whereas a mentor may be someone who is assigned two weeks after the school year begins and may not be trained, compensated, or provided release time to help, much less be in the same building and teach at the same grade level or subject area.

Wong, Harry K. "Producing Educational Leaders Through Induction Programs." *Kappa Delta Pi Record*. Spring 2004. p. 107. Available at www.NewTeacher.com.

Many programs provide brief mentor training and/or orientation for mentors and mentees and then send them on their way with little or no ongoing support.

Lewis, A. "School Reform and Professional Development." *Phi Delta Kappan* 83, no. 7 (2002).

Only 6 percent of new teachers received in-class mentoring or coaching at least monthly. In addition, new teachers were likely to receive superficial support (e. g. their mentor prepared or sent materials) than support that might help improve their skills and knowledge of instructional techniques and classroom management, such as observing their mentor or having their mentor demonstrate a lesson.

Shields, P. et al. "The Status of the Teaching Profession 2003." *Teaching and California's Future* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2003).

So called 'mentors' are everywhere these days, but they aren't often given release time or a clear, compelling charge. Research has not been found that supports the systematic formation of effective teachers solely through the use of mentors, especially mentors who show up after school begins and may not have been trained, compensated, or given direction or goals to attain.

Schmoker, M. quoted in Breaux, A. and H. Wong. *New Teacher Induction: How to Train, Support, and Retain New Teachers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Harry K. Wong Publications, 2003). p. 55.