

Framework for Designing a Mentoring Program for Novice Teachers

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ABSTRACT *The literature is filled with the benefits of mentoring for novice teachers. One of the key benefits is that it can increase novice teacher retention in the teaching profession. However, little information exists in designing a mentoring program for novice teachers that addresses an organization's specific situational needs and resources. This article describes the 'Situational Mentoring Framework' for developing a successful mentoring program. This framework follows a systemic change approach in addressing four major components of a mentoring process: (1) mentor selection; (2) mentor and novice teacher preparation; (3) support team; and (4) accountability.*

Key Benefit of a Successful Mentoring Program for Novice Teachers: teacher retention

An effective mentoring program can increase retention of novice teachers in the teaching profession, addressing the problems of teacher attrition (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1995; Kajs *et al.*, 1998b; McCormick, 2001; Texas State Board for Educator Certification Panel, 1998). Through the guidance, support and understanding of competent mentors, novice teachers experience professional growth, personal satisfaction, and organizational productivity (Darwin, 2000; Spuhler & Zetler, 1994; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997). These successful results of a mentoring relationship lay the foundation for novice teachers to prosper in the teaching profession and to respond to the learning community's need by becoming the mentor-teachers of the future.

Teacher retention has become a critical issue with the current problem of teacher attrition and the projected shortage of teachers. For instance, in the USA 30% of teachers drop out during their first two years of teaching (Perez *et al.*, 1997). This dropout rate is especially troublesome considering the expected increase of student enrollment and the aging of the teaching force with 25% of the teacher population over 50 years of age, according to Dr. Darling-Hammond (Texas State Board for Educator Certification Panel, 1998).

Teacher retention can directly address three problems of teacher attrition. First,

teacher retention can reduce the stream of new, inexperienced teachers entering schools year after year that jeopardizes students' learning environments. The focus of the first-year teacher is more on surviving in the classroom environment rather than integrating content and adapting instruction to students' learning styles. These pedagogical abilities come with experience over time. Moreover, the high attrition rate of novice teachers and the inability to recruit new ones require school districts to hire part- or full-time substitute teachers who lack college degrees and pedagogical training. These deficiencies and the constant turnover of substitute teachers impede classroom students' academic preparation.

Secondly, teacher retention can reduce campuses' and districts' extensive time and expenditure in teacher recruitment and professional development. Personnel offices in school districts must devote much of their resources in finding teacher replacements that are either new, inexperienced licensed teachers, college graduates with a teaching permit, or substitute teachers with at least minimum academic credentials. Moreover, personnel offices must ensure these classroom instructors have received or will receive professional development in basic content and pedagogy. The teacher turnover cost that includes expenses attributed to employee hiring, training, and learning curve (i.e. the amount of time necessary to reach full productivity) can be staggering (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2000). The departure of a teacher from the profession can costs taxpayers in excess of \$50,000 (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2000). If novice teachers' retention levels increase, then recruiting expenses will decrease. Recruitment and retention are not separate activities, but two sides of the same coin.

Thirdly, teacher retention can lower faculty turnover that undermines long-term plans for academic improvement and achievement. The constant turnover of faculty disrupts the ability of campus and district administrators to develop cogent, long-term plans to address students' diverse needs, which also includes professional development for teachers. Instead, time is directed to filling classroom positions and training new teachers, which fragments and delays curricular improvement strategies. This is especially disruptive when state departments of education initiate stringent requirements of accountability for student improvement.

Situational Mentoring Framework (SMF)

While much is written about the value of mentoring, little information exists about designing a mentoring program for novice teachers that effectively addresses an organization's situational needs and resources. The Situational Mentoring Framework (SMF), based on research and practice, uses a systemic change approach in carrying out four major interrelated components of a mentoring process (Kajs *et al.*, 1998a; Odell & Huling, 2000). The four major components include: (1) mentor selection; (2) mentor and novice teacher preparation; (3) support team; and (4) accountability. The systemic change approach requires that an organization plan, implement, assess (monitor), and adapt strategies in a consistent, organized manner in carrying out the four major components, taking into consideration the organization's specific needs and resources. The nature of systemic change is to create an

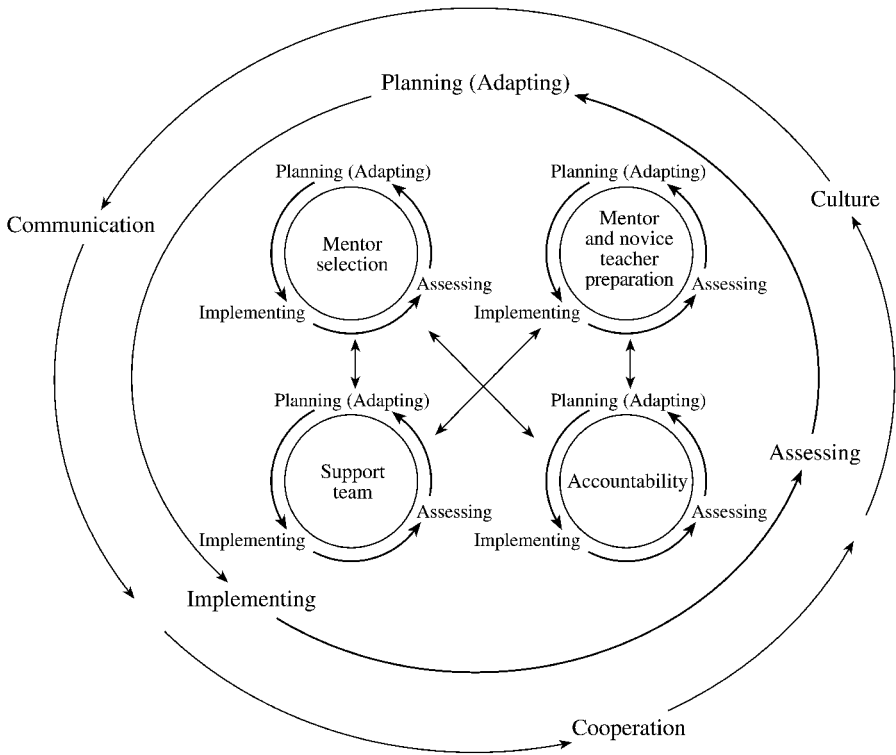


FIG. 1. Situational mentoring framework.

adjustable process among the four interconnected components as well as within each of the four components, allowing for situational variability. During this process, participants across all levels of the organization communicate and cooperate with one another so to create a culture responsive to the needs of individuals as well as to the organization (Clarke, 1999; National Education Association, 1997). Consequently, the SMF exercises a dynamic approach, not a static one, addressing ways to produce an effective and efficient sustainable mentoring program. Figure 1 displays the Situational Mentoring Framework that provides a systemic change approach in implementing the four interrelated components of a mentoring process.

Four Major Interrelated Components of the Situational Mentoring Framework

The four interrelated components of the Situational Mentoring Framework form the basis for designing an effective mentoring program. The description of these four components is an expansion of an earlier work on mentoring (see Kajs *et al.*, 1998a). In describing each of the four components a compare/contrast approach will be used. First, the *prevailing practice* of each component in the mentoring process will be briefly explained. Then, secondly, a *response* will describe the Situational Mentor-

ing Framework's approach to addressing each element. Both the prevailing practice and response are supported by the literature and field research (Cline & Necochea, 1997; Ganser, 1995; Hawkey, 1997; Kajs *et al.*, 1998).

Mentor Selection

The *prevailing practice* is that campus principals, on their own, select teachers to serve as mentors for novice teachers. Selection is usually based on teaching competency, not necessarily on mentor-teachers' personality, management style, and mentoring approach in relation to the novice teachers' dispositions. This 'boss-management' style of leadership is inconsistent with shared decision-making practices that serve to empower members of the school community (Cline & Necochea, 1997). Justifications for this approach include the lack of sufficient veteran teachers and doubts that experienced teachers have about their abilities to serve in the mentoring role (Ganser, 1995). Moreover, this decision-making approach provides expediency, considering the many time constraints of a campus organization (Zimpher & Rieger, 2001).

In *response*, the Situational Mentoring Framework follows a 'lead-management' style of leadership in which educators collaborate to ensure a viable process for mentor selection (Cline & Necochea, 1997). A systematic selection process for prospective mentors is formed to establish a basis for compatibility between mentors and novice teachers so a greater likelihood of caring and understanding takes place, building a relationship of trust. It is a process that matches mentors and novice teachers who demonstrate a similar thinking style or who are 'on the same wavelength' (Parkay, 2001, p. 197). Matching up participants is one of the most difficult but most crucial aspects of the mentoring process (Southworth, 1995; Whitaker, 2000). The quality of the professional and personal match between mentors and novice teachers will greatly impact the success of the mentoring experience, since the level of exchange between mentors and protégés is affected by the quality of the relationship (Covey, 1997; Hawkey, 1997).

Systematic Process for Mentor Selection

The principal and/or selection committee first develops a pool of prospective mentors. The selection committee should be made up of educators, e.g. experienced mentors, campus and school district administrators, and university faculty, who have been involved in mentoring and are supportive of the mentoring process. It would also be helpful to have committee members who are familiar with the personalities and abilities of prospective mentors and novice teachers to assist with the matching of them. The pool of prospective mentors would consist of experienced teachers who meet selection criteria for becoming a mentor. At a minimum, selection criteria should include experienced teachers who: (1) are seen as experts by peers; (2) have demonstrated the ability to analyze their own teaching using a reflective process; and (3) are willing to handle the many responsibilities associated

with the mentoring role (Zimpher & Rieger, 2001). Since it would expand their professional duties, experienced teachers would need information about the expectations of the mentoring assignment to make a conscientious decision about serving as mentors. It would be appropriate to develop a job description that outlines the roles and responsibilities of a mentor as well as a list of the available organizational resources (e.g. continuing education, substitute teacher assistance) to better serve the mentoring role. For example, mentors may need to receive preparation in the use of the professional development assessment approach in working with novice teachers (Guskey, 1998). This evaluation process (discussed later) incorporates both self- and interactive assessment techniques to build communication and trust among mentors and novice teachers, as well as to focus on the common goals of a classroom teacher (Guskey, 1998).

Secondly, prospective mentors and novice teachers participate in a personal styles profile to provide initial information about their dispositions in working with others. The DISC (Director, Influencer, Steadfast, and Conscientious) Personal Profile System is an example of such a tool. This instrument is licensed by Carlson Learning Company in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, and is used internationally. This instrument provides participants greater self-awareness about their behavioral styles and strategies for interaction with others who have the same or different styles in work and social environments.

Thirdly, novice teachers and prospective mentors spend time discussing each others' roles and expectations in the mentoring relationship, checking for similar and differing viewpoints. This exchange of values and perspectives not only provides useful information in the matching process of novice teachers and prospective mentors, but also sets the stage for developing a significant mentorship based on personal styles and mutual interests (Hardcastle, 2001). A significant mentoring relationship is usually not confined to work-related issues, but can include the protégé's personal and spiritual life as well (Hardcastle, 2001). Hayes (1998) found that people who were able to choose mentors whom they knew and respected might derive more benefits from a mentor-protégé relationship than when a mentor was simply assigned.

Once the three-step process is complete, the matching of novice teachers and mentors takes place. If an insufficient number of qualified mentor-teacher applicants exists, it may be necessary for the principal and/or committee to request the participation of experienced teachers who are responsive in acquiring behaviors and assuming responsibilities of a mentor-teacher (Papalewis *et al.*, 1991).

It may be appropriate for the mentor-teacher and protégé to establish a timeline for the mentoring relationship. Usually, this period of time spans a semester, a year, or two years. Situations may exist that would call for the working agreement to be set for the first four months or semester of the school year to address novice teachers' immediate mentoring needs. Then, the novice teacher and mentor can decide to either continue the relationship or decide that the novice teachers' needs would be better served with another mentor-teacher. This short-term timeline for the mentoring relationship allows for the natural selection process to occur in developing a long-term mentorship (Kajs *et al.*, 1998a). This process happens when,

during the course of a semester or school year, a novice teacher and an experienced classroom teacher spontaneously begin to exchange ideas and work together on a regular basis, creating a natural mentoring relationship. 'Mentoring relationships with supervisors that develop naturally provide a nonthreatening way for protégés to challenge their mentors and to exceed performance expectations' (Nelson & Quick, 1997, p. 521). It is anticipated that the same mentor and novice teacher would continue during the second year, with mentoring focusing more on instructional refinement (Texas State Board for Educator Certification Panel, 1998). The mentoring relationship can also be directly affected by whether or not a support team is used in the mentoring process (the support team is addressed later in this article).

Professional Development for Mentors and Novice Teachers

The *prevailing practice* is that mentors are not required to attend a comprehensive professional development program. If they do attend program sessions, they tend to be more informational (e.g. program logistics) rather than educational (e.g. training in coaching techniques) in nature. A presumption is that teachers' competence as classroom instructors is sufficient for the mentoring role. However, even the most experienced teachers may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to serve as both a colleague and a supervisor of a novice teacher. Moreover, novice teachers are rarely provided interpersonal skills training to prepare them for their role in the novice teacher-mentor relationship.

In *response*, the Situational Mentoring Framework emphasizes the need for mentor-teachers to participate in a comprehensive professional development program to prepare for their mentoring role and for novice teachers to take part in interpersonal skills training (Zimpher & Rieger, 2001). Along with this preparation, mentors and novice teachers receive continuing education and support during the mentoring relationship to address needs that arise.

Mentor-teachers' Professional Development Needs

Mentor-teachers need to possess specific knowledge and skills to carry out their roles as reflective guide, supportive coach, and understanding caregiver to novice teachers. In addressing these professional development needs, they would participate in mentoring preparation based on the following key topics: (1) stages of teacher development; (2) adult learning principles; (3) professional development assessments; (4) interpersonal skills to assist in formative assessment and coaching; and (5) relevant knowledge and skills of teachers to assist classroom students to succeed (Coppenhaver & Schaper, 1999; Guskey, 1998; Hawkey, 1997; Kajs *et al.*, 1998a; Roden & Cardina, 1996). Novice teachers and mentors should view the development of this knowledge and skills as opportunities to strengthen professional practice as lifelong learners (Kajs *et al.*, 1998b).

Stages of Teacher Development

First, mentor-teachers need to be familiar with the stages of teacher development from beginner to seasoned classroom instructor. Various models that outline stages of teacher development exist. For instance, Berliner proposes that teachers who remain in the profession can advance through five developmental stages, starting at the novice level and ending up at the expert stage, with three progressive levels in between: beginning teachers viewed as being advanced, teachers qualified as being competent, and those seen as being proficient in their instruction (Hawkey, 1997). Knowledge of these levels will shape mentors' expectations of novice teachers' performance and will guide mentoring approaches to address protégés' concerns. For instance, during the novice teacher stage, mentors will probably exercise more of a counseling role to deal with protégés' personal issues than at the advanced beginner level, where mentoring is more geared to instructional refinement.

Adult Learning Principles

Secondly, mentors need to be familiar with adult education principles to appropriately guide novice teachers' in a learning process. While they may have sufficient understanding of pedagogical principles appropriate for classroom youth, they may lack techniques in working with adults. Weise (1992) indicates that adults require educational opportunities 'that are self-directed, problem-centered, experiential, and role-related. Guiding students to engage in problem finding, not just problem solving' (p. 22), using a reflective approach in their professional work (Schon, 1987). Mentors may need to guide and model self-reflection to protégés since in teaching there is a tendency to concentrate on doing things rather than creatively thinking about how to improve instruction (Hawkey, 1997). By encouraging novice teachers to reflect upon their teaching experiences, mentors help them to develop their 'active curiosity' as they progress in their professional careers (Zimpher & Rieger, 2001).

Professional Development Assessment

Thirdly, this mentoring process provides scheduled opportunities for assessment between novice teachers and mentors to determine progress using five types of professional development assessment (Guskey, 1998, pp. 39–41): (a) participants' reactions; (b) participants' learning; (c) organizational support and change; (d) participants' use of new knowledge and skills; and (e) classroom student learning outcomes. The plan would include the use of electronic and/or hard copy professional portfolios to display novice teachers' growth and development (Driskell, 1999). The professional development assessment method, which includes formative and summative evaluation, exercises an interactive approach between novice teachers and mentors. Protégés and mentors first self-assess their performances, and then share and exchange their insights, noting strengths and ways to improve their professional relationship and their ability to accomplish

established objectives, e.g. classroom students' learning. This is in stark contrast to the practice of having only novice teachers assessed by mentor-teachers. The peer coaching model in which the novice teacher requests an observation by the mentor to provide feedback can serve to nurture a mentoring relationship because of the model's nonthreatening approach (Gottesman & Jennings, 1994).

Interpersonal Skills

Fourthly, novice teachers and mentors need to have good skills in interpersonal communications to develop a meaningful mentoring relationship. These skills assist them to actively listen, clarify, and problem-solve in their communications with one another. 'Significant mentorships are not brief, formal, one-way exchanges. They take time to develop and evolve through mutual interaction' (Hardcastle, 2001, p. 202). Mentors ranked interpersonal skills as the most important feature, even over individual attributes, and levels of experience and subject knowledge (Hawkey, 1997). The ability to exchange information in an effective and respectful manner is especially critical in carrying out the professional development assessment process that includes classroom observation and feedback. Strong lines of communication between and among colleagues in a school community can create an organizational environment that addresses the needs of individuals (Clarke, 1999; National Education Association, 1997).

Relevant Knowledge and Skills

Lastly, mentor-teachers need to focus on the knowledge and skill requirements of today's classroom teachers to properly guide novice teachers. Research indicates that classroom teachers need competence in six major areas for directing student learning (Gettys & Holt, 1993; Grove, 1992; Kajs *et al.*, 1998a; Roden & Cardina, 1996; Zimpher & Rieger, 2001). These six areas include: (a) developing students' ability to think critically about issues; (b) promoting students' interpersonal skills for effective social interaction; (c) providing conflict resolution techniques so conflicts are handled appropriately and respectfully in a timely fashion; (d) incorporating technology effectively in instruction so students develop proficiency in using technology tools in lifelong learning; (e) using a variety of assessment methods to address student learning styles demonstrating appreciation for specialty and diversity in the learning process; and (f) exercising inquiry and research in the analysis of instructional methodologies to strengthen student performance.

To provide ongoing lifelong learning opportunities for mentors and novice teachers an Internet library containing a wide-range of information and services on mentoring, including journals, conferences, and presentations should be developed. This Internet library can provide a central location that will enable participants to find topics on mentoring, such as (www.iloveteaching.com/mentor/index.htm), instead of participants using a piecemeal approach to search for mentoring information. The library would be continuously updated, as information/sites become available.

Novice Teachers' Professional Development Needs

Often novice teachers' professional development needs are overlooked in developing skills to strengthen the mentoring relationship. As with mentors, first-year teachers should possess interpersonal communication skills, including clarifying expectations, focusing on relevant issues, and formulating constructive responses. This ability can help reduce the effects of discouragement and disillusionment that can occur during the first year of teaching (Moir, 1999). Consequently, first-year teachers should participate in workshops covering interpersonal skills development to strengthen their abilities to participate in the professional exchange process with their mentors.

Support Team

The *prevailing practice* is that the assigned mentor is solely responsible for mentoring responsibilities. These chores are usually in addition to the mentors' existing classroom responsibilities; thus, the mentoring process can be negatively impacted by mentor-teachers' time constraints (Hanson, 1996). Exceptions do exist. Some districts, usually large ones, can assign experienced teachers as full-time mentors (Ganser, 1995). Still, mentor-teachers may experience limitations in some areas of knowledge and skills, such as technology, thus creating frustration for them and novice teachers.

In *response*, the Situational Mentoring Framework incorporates the support team approach that includes as participants the assigned mentor-teacher, and campus, school district, and university educators who demonstrate knowledge and skills pertinent to novice teachers' professional development. For instance, in one school setting, an experienced teacher who was a member of the mentoring team and known for her classroom management ability, provided to the protégés a demonstration workshop in handling classroom disruptions to ensure quality time-on-task for academic assignments. School principals believe that the support team approach in a mentoring process is not only a viable method, but a preferred one as well (Kajs *et al.*, 2001).

Along with their knowledge and experience, team members must also demonstrate strong interpersonal skills to work effectively with novice teachers and one another (Schmuck & Runkel, 1994). Communications between and among all participants (i.e. mentor-teachers, novice teachers, and support team members) can occur in face-to-face meetings and through 'telementoring' (e.g. e-mails and chat rooms via the Internet). Because of the support team's number of participants and their job assignments, coordination of services is a critical factor in handling the demands of mentoring. Using scheduling software like Microsoft Project 2000 can assist the support team coordinator to organize team members' responsibilities following a prescribed timeline, especially since schedules can be made readily accessible via the Internet.

The support team approach can provide many benefits to the mentoring process. First, it can reduce mentor-teachers' stress level in trying to address novice teachers' wide range of needs, which can include both professional and personal issues. Second, this team approach reduces the time commitment of a mentor-teacher

by sharing mentoring responsibilities with a group of dedicated educators. Third, if a personality conflict occurs between a novice teacher and mentor (or another support team member), then other team participants are available to assist the novice teacher, and possibly mediate the conflict. Fourth, since campus and district educators are members of the support team, novice teachers and mentor-teachers are reassured that mentoring is a high priority in the school district (Ganser, 1995; Guskey, 1998). Fifth, the support team approach can build a community atmosphere that provides opportunities for team participants to exchange research information and strategies to better perform their tasks, as well as discuss ways to strengthen the mentoring process. Lastly, the teaming of campus, school district, and university educators models to teachers and school administrators, alike, the importance of inter-institutional collaboration in nurturing novice teachers' professional careers (Rubin, 1998).

Accountability

The *prevailing practice* is that mentor-teachers practice a self-monitoring approach in carrying out their mentoring responsibilities. While mentor-teachers have good intentions to work with novice teachers; the lack of program structure, inexperience with professional development assessment techniques, and the competing priorities associated with being classroom teachers can be barriers to mentor-teachers successfully carrying out their responsibilities.

In *response*, the Situational Mentoring Framework develops a deliberate and systematic plan of accountability with program benchmarks. This plan addresses the need for scheduled observations and meetings between novice teachers and mentors so that: (a) appropriate pedagogy is modeled and practiced; (b) classroom instruction is evaluated and improved; and (c) interaction is constructive and ongoing. The professional development assessment components (Guskey, 1998) discussed earlier serve as a basis for these activities. The evaluation process provides opportunities for novice teachers and mentor-teachers to reflect and self-assess, and to assess one another in light of professional growth expectations as classroom educators. Reflective teaching demonstrates a constructivist learning approach in which teachers critically examine their instructional practices to facilitate and enhance student learning (Henderson, 1996). This process can serve as the basis for identifying areas of professional development as part of one's lifelong learning plans. The creation of either an electronic or a hard copy portfolio can chronicle the professional growth of novice teachers (Driskell, 1999). The use of scheduling software, e.g. Microsoft Project 2000, can facilitate the development and completion of mentoring activities by set timelines. The designation of a monitor (e.g. support team coordinator, campus administrator), agreed upon by participants, to oversee the progress and conclusion of program benchmarks can greatly assist the accountability process.

Conclusion

A successful mentoring program can strengthen novice teachers' competence and satisfaction, and in turn increase teacher retention in the profession, thus, reducing

the growing teacher shortage (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1995; Kajs *et al.*, 1998b; Texas State Board for Educator Certification Panel, 1998). The Situational Mentoring Framework, a systemic change approach, provides a structure that can strengthen current mentoring practices for novice teachers. The innovation of this framework is its design to plan, implement, assess (monitor), and adapt strategies in a consistent, organized manner to address four major interrelated components of a mentoring process. However, participants ultimately determine the quality of the mentoring process, creating a culture of responsiveness to individual and organizational needs (Clarke, 1999; National Education Association, 1997). Participants within the school community must take responsibility for creating this culture since school cultures exercise resistance to change (Barth, 2001). 'School cultures cannot be changed from without; they must be changed from within' (Barth, 2001, p. 11). The challenge is for the campus community to see the mentoring process as a mechanism to increase teacher retention in the profession, which promotes quality education for classroom students and provides lifelong learning opportunities for teachers, addressing their developmental needs.

This study provides a basis for further research and development in establishing an effective mentoring program to retain novice teachers in the profession. The next step would be to pilot a field study using the Situational Mentoring Framework, assessing the performance of the operations of the four major components in light of an organization's situational needs and resources. Moreover, this study could look at the impact of the mentoring program on novice teachers' self-efficacy, using Bandura's (1977) Teacher Efficacy Scale, since teacher self-efficacy can impact student achievement. In describing self-efficacy, Denham and Michael (1981, p. 39) state, 'The cognitive aspects has two parts: (1) a sense of the likelihood that the ideal or normative teacher can bring about positive changes in the student; and (2) an assessment of the teacher's own ability to bring about such changes'. Hayes's (1998) research on nurse practitioner students' levels of self-efficacy resulting from a mentoring experience provides a basis for study on this topic. This study on mentoring in nursing programs also accentuates the high value and relevancy of mentoring in assisting novice practitioners in a variety of professional careers.

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