

Spring 2006

## Mentoring Teacher's Stories: Caring Mentors Help Novice Teachers Stick with Teaching and Develop Expertise

Jarene Fluckiger

University of Nebraska at Omaha, [jfluckiger@unomaha.edu](mailto:jfluckiger@unomaha.edu)


Sheryl McGlamery

University of Nebraska at Omaha, [smcglamery@unomaha.edu](mailto:smcglamery@unomaha.edu)

Nancy Edick

University of Nebraska at Omaha, [nedick@unomaha.edu](mailto:nedick@unomaha.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/tedfacpub>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Other Education Commons](#)

Please take our feedback survey at: [https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fluckiger, Jarene; McGlamery, Sheryl; and Edick, Nancy, "Mentoring Teacher's Stories: Caring Mentors Help Novice Teachers Stick with Teaching and Develop Expertise" (2006). *Teacher Education Faculty Publications*. 7.

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/tedfacpub/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Teacher Education at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teacher Education Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).

*Jarene Fluckiger**Sheryl McGlamery**Nancy Edick*

## **Mentoring Teachers' Stories: Caring Mentors Help Novice Teachers Stick with Teaching and Develop Expertise**

**B**eginning teachers are faced with challenges that are changing and complex. Teachers' stories in this article show how quality mentoring during the first year of teaching is a key factor in why novice teachers stay in the profession (teacher retention), and develop expertise (teacher quality). As a profession, we educators need to do all we can to enable capable and experienced teachers to pass on a legacy of expertise to every novice teacher.

**T**he first year of teaching is exceptionally challenging. Educators have gathered evidence showing the need for mentors to help novice teachers stay in teaching and develop into master teachers.<sup>1,2</sup> Teachers support the idea of teacher-mentors and report that their best ideas regarding teaching come from their colleagues.<sup>3</sup> However, there is a lack of information on how mentors make a difference in novices' staying in teaching and becoming effective teachers.<sup>4</sup>

Our college coordinates a comprehensive teacher induction program that includes graduate coursework, peer cohort support and intensive mentoring during the teacher's

first year on the job. We have generated several quantitative and qualitative research studies that span a ten-year period, from 1995 to 2005. Longitudinal quantitative studies have indicated that novice teachers participating

Jarene Fluckiger, Ph.D., a member of Omega Chapter, Nebraska and a recipient of an international Delta Kappa Gamma scholarship, is associate professor of Elementary Education and Assessment Literacy at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Sheryl McGlamery, Ph.D., is president of Omega Chapter, Nebraska, and associate professor of Science Education at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Nancy Edick, Ph.D., is assistant professor at the University of Nebraska, Omaha and executive director of the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium.

in this comprehensive induction program improved their effectiveness faster than their peers not in such a program.<sup>5</sup> Another study has showed that nine out of ten teachers participating in this induction program remained in teaching at a much higher retention rate than the national averages.<sup>6</sup>

This data led us to the conclusion that our overall teacher induction program promotes teacher retention and teacher quality. A key component of the induction program is mentoring. Mentoring is expensive and time-intensive. This article specifically addresses the mentoring and its contribution to teacher retention and teacher quality. We wondered what mentors did to keep novice teachers from giving up. We wondered what types of support mentors provided that resulted in teacher growth and development.

In a search for specific data on how capable and caring mentors support teacher retention and promote teacher quality, mentors and novice teachers were asked to respond to the following question:

What stories or examples do you have of mentoring experiences that you believe have promoted teacher retention and/or teacher quality?

Mentors' and novice teachers' names were changed to pseudonyms for this article. Here are their stories, and we believe they support the notion that retention and teacher quality are outcomes of effective teacher mentoring.

## Retention

Inman and Marlow<sup>7</sup> tell us that teachers just entering the classroom experience classroom or reality shock and often mistake the uneasiness they feel as an indication that they have made a mistake in their choice of profession. Educational researchers have shown that a lack of support systems, professionalism, and collegiality contribute to teachers leaving teaching.<sup>8,9,10</sup> The following stories address the ability of mentors to provide needed support and collegiality by helping new teachers gain perspective and

encouragement, implement strategies to get started, avoid isolation and manage workload. All are issues that promote teacher retention.

## Gain Perspective and Encouragement.

Novice teachers gained new perspective and encouragement as mentors shared examples and stories from their own teaching. This helped them to stick with it!

**Joseph:** I could tell my mentor anything, and he would have an example about what had happened to him. It really helped me to compare my experiences with his. Sometimes, I really needed a perspective on what was going on. You know, step back and reflect.

**Suzanne:** My mentor always brought up stories about things that had happened to her. She always encouraged me to try new things and not worry if things didn't work perfectly the first time. I remember her story about one of her students who'd had special needs. He'd had a temper and sometimes would act out if he became too frustrated. She had worked with him a long time to overcome his temper and inappropriate behavior. It had taken most of the school year and peer coaching to help this boy. But my mentor had never given up on him. This story has inspired me not to give up so fast when I face a difficult challenge.

## Implement Strategies to Get Started

New teachers can feel overwhelmed. Mentors help novices get started through team teaching and by giving instructional suggestions. By implementing strategies that her mentor had demonstrated, Sally adjusted instead of becoming discouraged and leaving her teaching assignment.

**Sally:** I was given the assignment to work in a self-contained primary special education classroom. This assignment overwhelmed me after only one week. My mentor had great suggestions and even came to class and team-taught a few lessons with me to help me get adjusted. She had some experience with similar kids and told me all kind of stories about her



teaching in special education. I learned a lot from her.

### **Avoid Isolation**

A frequently cited reason for attrition is teacher isolation. Eleanor's story addresses the importance of a mentor's role in helping new teachers understand the need for professionals to support each other and to avoid working in isolation.

**Eleanor:** The new teacher I mentor was in survival mode and instead of showing up for duty on time, he was preparing for class. I explained that he could end up being the only other witness for his fellow teachers and that he should always want that support in return. This seemed to impress him with the need to show up for duty on time and how crucial he was for the professional support of his colleagues.

### **Manage Workload**

Poor management and organizational skills are reasons that can contribute to a new teacher seeking another career. Larry's experience as a mentor relates how he helped the novice teacher organize idealism into realistic practice.

**Larry:** A middle school teacher that I mentor had a goal of using response journals in her classroom. She had 125 students and she said that she was going to collect the journals daily and respond to them. I asked what the management of that would look like and what her plans were for responding to 125 journals daily. After thinking through the math of 125 journals a day, she decided it would be an impossible task. She had to re-think how to manage the response journals effectively.

### **Teacher Quality**

Mentors intervene in timely ways to help novice teachers develop expertise. With an effective mentor, the novice implements positive instructional improvements faster and demonstrates a wider range of instructional strategies than without a mentor.<sup>11</sup> The

following stories address the ability of the mentor to promote teacher quality by helping novices use data to drive instructional decisions, by assisting in implementation of best practice and by promoting reflective thinking.

### **Helping Novices Use Data to Drive Instructional Decisions**

Novice teachers may lack expertise in efficient ways to assess students' learning needs in order to organize instruction. The mentor's intervention can help the novice successfully improve instruction through applying classroom and research data. These stories indicate how mentors help novice teachers utilize data to inform instructional decisions.

**Daniel:** The novice I mentored was concerned about how to establish guided reading groups and routine in her classroom. I showed her the variety of assessment tools that could be used to identify a student's reading level. After discussing the pros and cons of each assessment, we decided on the one that would best meet her needs for collecting data. I was then able to provide the novice with the time to give the oral assessment to all fifty students.

She observed me giving the assessment so that she would be confident about doing so. Together we used the data to help determine the reading level of the students and develop the guided reading groups. We then organized the routine of the guided reading groups. I used questions to help her with some anticipated problems so that she had a proactive system to deal with the organizational issues that could arise with differentiated groups working in your classroom.

Once the guided reading groups were implemented, I used questioning to help her reflect on the students' learning. Most of my questions focused on student learning and making sure that the attained curriculum matched the intended and taught curriculum. I now see the new teacher self-reflecting and making changes as a result. She has a structured

routine in her classroom for guided reading. She continues to use data to support her instructional decisions, differentiate to meet individual needs, reflect on student learning and make adjustments when necessary.

**Andrea:** This was Fred's first year. In his Current Issues and Trends class he saw a graph of research data indicating that students' attention and learning decreased dramatically after the first twenty minutes of sustained instruction. Fred drew the graph for me told me how his math students were not understanding and how the structure of his class was not working. He would spend the first part of the period going over the homework and then lecture on a new concept.

Several students were being unruly and he wasn't sure what to do. I suggested giving his lecture first when attention was high, then going to the homework that would be more of a hands-on activity. The next day I observed his class. He had the new schedule on the board providing students with an anticipatory set. One student asked, "Why the change?" He then drew the diagram for learning on the board and explained why the change. The class began well, but he spent forty-five minutes on the lecture. Afterward I asked him how it went. He said, "Okay."

I had noticed that several students were having difficulty paying attention. I suggested breaking up the period into two twenty-minute blocks. For each block, cover one concept, then do an activity and end by summarizing the two concepts. He listened and the next day told me that is what he did. I asked him, "Did the class to better?" He exclaimed, "Yes!"

### **Assisting in Implementation of Best Practice**

Teacher quality is improved by the implementation of best teaching practice. Mentoring plays a significant role in the implementation of best practices by asking reflective questions, modeling effective instruction, and providing curriculum resources.

**Barbara:** After visiting other classrooms,

my mentor and I had a great discussion about guided reading and reading instruction. After our discussion, I was able to try several different instructional strategies and then found one that worked best for my students and me. Now I consistently use specific strategies my mentor shared.

**Samantha:** The fifth grade teacher I mentor wanted help with teaching grammar and writing. After discussing what she wanted to accomplish, the goals, and standards, we came up with a plan. She was still worried about how to teach writing. So I offered to model writing lessons. For three weeks, I taught in her room three times a week. She helped and observed. I gave her the rationale, standards, and lessons that I was teaching and we had discussions about what had happened in the classroom. I gave her books about teaching writing. She told me that she has learned so much in the last three weeks just from watching. In my experiences, telling teachers how they should do something is not as effective as modeling it, then discussing what the novice observed.

**Diane:** The second grade teacher I mentor felt she was not being as effective as she should be. After observing her, I noticed some ways that she could be more effective, but I did not tell her. I modeled lessons and had her tell me what she saw that was effective. It was amazing what her insights were. Through watching me, she realized what was not working for her. She was able to verbalize it.

**Wayne:** One of the teachers I mentor knew nothing about how to use the Internet in the classroom as a learning tool. After giving her a crash course in web-based instruction, the two of us began developing Web Quests, web-based research projects and differentiation stations, where kids could access ready-to-use enrichment or remedial activities. As the year progressed, her use of computer-based instruction and differentiation increased. She also began to do a better job of matching her classroom activities to the ability levels of her students.



### Promoting Reflective Thinking

These mentors' stories support the notion that reflection is essential to teachers' growth and development. The mentor has a unique opportunity to prompt the reflection of novice teachers, thereby promoting teacher quality.

**LaTasha:** I believe that our mentoring conversations and reflections gave the new teacher the confidence to seek and try better instructional practices. For example, we had extensive conversations about how reading and writing workshops should be implemented. Her ideas did not match those of other veteran teachers in her building. But because of mentoring, she had the time and space to talk through her ideas, develop them, incorporate my feedback and implement them without the feeling that she was acting in isolation.

**Juanita:** I am mentoring a second grade teacher in a three-section building. Because the teachers plan all their lessons together by grade level, the novice started the year by doing what she thought the other teachers on her grade level were doing. When I visited her classroom, I noted that the students were not engaged and the teacher wasn't happy. As the days progressed, she became more vocal about her dissatisfaction about the way she was going about her instruction. Her discomfort really increased when it came time to write her beliefs statement and she realized that her beliefs in no way aligned with what was happening in her classroom.

Through constant coaching, I helped her to understand that she had the power to do what she wanted in her classroom and was, in fact, obligated to use what she knew to be best practice. I helped connect her with an experienced teacher who had a similar teaching philosophy, as well as the literacy facilitator for her building. I created sample lesson plans, modeled and created centers for her and gave her the words to use with her teaching colleagues to help her explain her choices of different instructional strategies, but not to alienate them.

Walking into her room this week was so

powerful to me. Students were all engaged in hands-on learning centers, guided reading groups and other activities appropriate to their level. The students and teacher were happy, smiling and completely engaged. Discipline problems had greatly diminished. One student was overheard saying to another, "Learning really can be fun."

### Summary and Conclusions

Our findings indicate that mentoring has an impact on both teacher retention and teacher quality. Mentors do make a positive difference in teacher retention. They help novice teachers decide when to give up or give in and when to persist. The teacher stories in this article show that mentors help novices gain perspective and encouragement, implement strategies to get started, avoid isolation and manage workload. These are all ways mentors promote teacher retention.

Mentors do make a positive difference in teacher quality. Mentors intervene in timely ways to help novice teachers develop expertise. With effective mentoring, the novice implements instructional improvements faster and demonstrates a wider range of instructional strategies than without a mentor. The teacher stories shared in this article show that mentors promote teacher quality by helping novices use data to drive instructional decisions, by assisting in implementation of best practice and by promoting reflective thinking.

There is a reciprocal relationship between teacher retention and teacher quality. Persistence in teaching allows teachers to grow in their craft. Yet as teacher quality is enhanced, teachers are more likely to stay in teaching. Teacher retention and teacher quality work interactively. Capable and caring mentoring is vital to developing and keeping good teachers.

Our study of mentoring teachers' stories shows that effective mentoring does have a positive impact on teacher retention and on teacher quality. We also see that the stories of guidance, coaching, hints and encouragement

of mentors are a vital legacy without which novices may not persist in teaching and develop expertise. As a profession, we need to do all we can to enable capable and experienced teachers to pass on a legacy of expertise to every novice teacher.  $\Delta$

## References

1. Huling-Austin, Leslie, Sandra J. Odell, P. Ishler, R. Kay, and Roy A. Edelfelt, eds. *Assisting the Beginning Teacher*. Reston, VA: Association of Teacher Educators, 1989.
2. Pearson, M.J., and Bill Honig. "Problems Confronting Beginning Teachers." In *Success for Beginning Teacher: The California New Teacher Project* (pp. 5-14). Sacramento: California Department of Education, California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
3. Sergioanni, Thomas J. "Collegiality as a Professional Virtue." In *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.
4. Jonson, Kathleen F. *Being an Effective Mentor: How to Help Beginning Teachers Succeed*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc., 2002.
5. McGlamery, Sheryl, Jarene Fluckiger, and Nancy Edick. "The CADRE Project: Looking at the Development of Beginning Teachers." *Educational Considerations* In Press, (2005).
6. McGlamery, Sheryl and Nancy Edick. "The CADRE Project: A Retention Study." *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 71 no.1 (2004): 43-46.
7. Inman, Duane, and Leslie Marlow. "Teacher Retention: Why Do Beginning Teachers Remain in the Profession?" *Education*, 124, no. 4 (2004): 605-614.
8. Cochran-Smith, Marilyn. "Stayers, Leavers, Lovers, and Dreamers: Insights About Teacher Retention." *Journal of Teacher Education* 55, no.5 (2004): 387-392.
9. Ingersoll, Richard. "Is there really a teacher shortage?" A report co-sponsored by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy Research in Education. Seattle: University of Washington, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2003.
10. *Recruitment and Retention Project. Why Do Teachers Stay? Why Do Teachers Leave?* Western Oregon University: Teacher Research Division, 2004.
11. Fidler, Elizabeth and David Haselkorn. *Learning the Ropes: Urban Teacher Induction Programs and Practices in the United States*. Belmont, MA: Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 1999.



## Can Using Teacher Stories Enhance Teacher Candidates' Teaching Knowledge? (Continued from page 7.)

teacher candidates as these early experiences are the framework upon which future teachers become familiar with the practices and procedures of classroom life.<sup>9</sup> And, it is this type of field experience that may prove teacher candidates with the experiences necessary to build the complex schema required in order to understand and learn from teacher stories.  $\Delta$

## References

1. Jalongo, Mary Renck & Joan P. Isenberg. *Teacher Stories: From Personal Narrative to Professional Insight*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1995.
2. Schon, Donald A. *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York, NY: Basic Books. 1996.
3. Clandinin, D. Jean and F. Michael Connelly, F. M. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass. 2000.
4. Jalongo, Mary Renck & Joan P. Isenberg.
5. Schon, Donald A.
6. Jalongo, Mary Renck & Joan P. Isenberg.
7. Bullough, Robert V., Andrew David Gitlin, and Andrew Gitlin. *Becoming a Student of Teaching: Linking Knowledge Production and Practice*. NY: Garland. 2001.
8. Jalongo, Mary Renck & Joan P. Isenberg.
9. Scott, Margaret, Susan Szabo & Stacey Elsasser. "August Experience: Preparing for the First Days of School." *The Journal of the Oklahoma Association of Teacher Educators*, 4, 38-45. 2000.

Copyright of Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin is the property of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.