MENTORSHIP RELATIONSHIPS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY INVESTIGATING EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY TEACHERS

by

Jodi Lee Wilson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate teachers' experiences in their mentoring relationships. This study investigated the experiences of 12 secondary teachers with varying levels of teaching experience from the Camel County School District in northeastern Wyoming. Kram's (1983) original mentorship model guided this study, along with social network theory. The focus of this inquiry was to explore how teachers experience the initiation and cultivation phase of the mentorship relationship within their schools, and how these mentorship relationships positively affect the teachers involved. Data collection methods included interviews, participant-written essays, and focus group sessions to answer the central research question: What are the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational career? Interviews, essays, and the focus group discussion were analyzed to find central themes among the experiences of teachers within their mentorship relationships. Findings from this study provided rich descriptions of secondary teachers' experiences with mentorship relationships, regardless of their experience level. The analysis exposed that all teachers benefit from participating in mentorship relationships whether they are new or seasoned teachers and regardless of whether they serve as the mentor or the mentee in the relationship.

Keywords: formal mentor, informal mentor, mentor, mentee, new teacher, veteran teacher

Copyright Page

Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this manuscript to my God, who has given me undeniable strength and unconditional love. Also, to my greatest inspiration, my biggest fan, and the strongest woman I have ever known: my Nanny and my namesake, Ruby Lee – for always believing I had something to offer the world and reminding me over and over again. To my husband, for pushing me, understanding my stress, taking care of supper too many times to count and helping me see the light at the end of the tunnel. And, to my children, for putting up with my endless hours of study and device usage – I pray that I have been an encouragement to you to strive to achieve all your goals.

I began my teaching career unconventionally. I had only been in the classroom as a student. I had never student taught. I had no idea what to expect. I had to learn quickly how to survive in my environment – with very little help. This manuscript is dedicated to all those teachers who have learned to not only survive, but also to thrive in their environment.

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I would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their support throughout my doctoral education:

My mommy and my big sister, for editing random sentences at a time because my eyes were too tired to continue, and for lifting me up in prayer and encouragement on several long-distance phone calls.

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List of Abbreviations

English/Language Arts (ELA)

Camel County School District (CCSD)

Bolt High School (BHS)

Camel County High School (CCHS)

Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT)

Social Network Theory (SNT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Current mentorship relationships in the education system rely on older, veteran teachers mentoring younger, new teachers (Arnett, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). It is important that these mentorship relationships continue throughout teachers' educational careers, as veteran teachers continue to need professional and content development (Tasnim, 2020). Teaching for multiple years does not mean there are no longer new aspects of the career. Veteran teachers may still seek help with incorporation of technology, new teaching strategies for different learners, etc. The continuation of mentorship relationships throughout career stages is a way to keep veteran teachers engaged and progressing (Gonzalez et al., 2019). For the new teacher, mentorship relationships build self-confidence and allow the new teacher to develop teaching strategies (Tasnim, 2020). For the veteran teacher, mentorship relationships validate their current pedagogical ideals and empower them as leaders within the educational community (Tasnim, 2020). This study investigates the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational careers. This chapter introduces mentorship relationships and their use in the educational community, the problem being addressed, and the purpose and significance of the study. Finally, research questions are presented, along with explanations of each, as well as terms that may be new to the reader.

Background

Creating positive mentorship relationships is extremely important for the success of all stakeholders within the educational community. Educational mentorship relationships are important for a variety of reasons including enhanced communication skills, the development of

problem-solving skills, and advancing pedagogical knowledge (Hudson, 2013). Increasing these positive outcomes through mentorship relationships has the potential to decrease teacher attrition, improve teacher self-efficacy, and increase student success (Saylor et al., 2018).

One of the most important reasons for mentorship relationships between teachers is the development of successful students (Glickman et al., 2018). Implementing strong, successful mentorship relationships can encourage student growth and development (Glickman et al., 2018). Implementing positive mentorship relationships helps ensure that students are not part of "constant teacher turnover and [are not] taught by a steady stream of unsupported novices" (Glickman et al., 2018, p. 281). The lack of encouragement from stakeholders for teachers to develop positive mentorship relationships unintentionally communicates a lack of support for the students. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) of the Learning Policy Institute identified high-quality mentoring programs as one of the top three ways to decrease teacher turnover and attrition. Teachers who have developed positive collaborative relationships with their peers are less likely to leave the profession and are more likely to provide a positive learning environment for their students (Glickman et al., 2018). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational careers.

Historical Contexts

The term 'mentor' is derived from the Greek mythological story of Odysseus. Mentor was the name of the trusted advisor left to care for and guide Odysseus' son, Telemachus, when Odysseus was away (Ellis et al., 2020). Mentor guarded and taught Telemachus when his father could not (Ellis et al., 2020). Today, the term 'mentor' is used to describe someone who guides, guards, and teaches another as Mentor did for Telemachus (Ellis et al., 2020).

The study of mentorship relationships is not specific to the education system. Kram began official research of mentorship relationships in 1983. Kram's (1983) initial research was conducted in an organizational setting, not the education setting. During this research, Kram discovered that mentorship relationships can persist throughout an individual's career, and that individuals can participate in multiple mentorship relationships at any given time. Kram's research set the stage for future research, not only in organizational settings, but in other settings as well.

Developing and maintaining positive mentorship relationships in the education system has been identified as a "key professional learning tool" (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 2). Mentorship relationships have been found to be so beneficial that schools across the country prescribe such relationships repeatedly (Ellis et al., 2020). Originally, mentorship relationships were only categorized as such when a senior, more mature individual took on a junior, less experienced apprentice (Ellis et al., 2020; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2019). However, over time, the idea of what a mentorship relationship entails has changed. Current mentorship relationships are associated with collaboration between any two individuals, regardless of their age or experience levels (Ellis et al., 2020). This change in meaning has led educators to perceive mentorship relationships as meaningful to all parties involved where the senior mentor is not the only contributor of knowledge and insight, but also an equal partner in the learning experience alongside the junior mentee (Arnett, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2019; Lejonberg et al., 2019). Mentorship relationships are no longer reserved for the new teacher who has never been in a classroom, but rather for any educator who wishes to enhance their abilities as a teacher (Arnett, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Gonzalez et al, 2019; Lejonberg et al., 2019).

Social Contexts

Throughout life, individuals form relationships with others for the benefit of gaining knowledge and information. These relationships are essential for every professional, regardless of their specialty (Tasnim, 2020). Most commonly known as mentorship relationships, they develop because one individual has a desire to grow their knowledge set. In the field of education, the desire is for professional development and growth (Tasnim, 2020). Mentorship relationships develop purposely and/or accidentally. Regardless of the reason for developing these relationships, they add value to those participating. Mentorship relationships enhance career development for all individuals involved by allowing for knowledge, skill, and competence growth within the organization (Kram, 1988).

Mentorship relationships have been studied across multiple organizations. This study specifies the educational community as the organization. Still, the ideas behind Kram's (1983, 1988) original study apply – individuals who participate in mentorship relationships benefit. For teachers, Glickman et al. (2018) identified these benefits as

> deeper reflection on teaching, clarification of educational beliefs, increased self-confidence, improved motivation, enhanced problem-solving skills, better classroom management, improved teaching skills, an understanding of the school's culture and norms, and a sense of belonging to and acceptance by the school community. (pp. 280-281)

Currently, there is an abundance of research that investigates how new teachers utilize mentorship relationships (Arnett, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). There is little research, however, that investigates mentorship relationships across career stages of

teachers – specifically teachers who are not new to the profession. While new teachers do need additional support, especially from veteran teachers, teachers who are not new can still benefit from collaborative relationships (Arnett, 2017; Gonzalez et al., 2019; Lejonberg et al., 2019). The educational organization is always changing, challenging teachers to adapt and progress constantly. Mentorship relationships are capable of providing an atmosphere where all participants can learn new skills that allow for adaptation and progression.

Theoretical Contexts

Several studies have been conducted concerning mentorship relationships, the effects of these relationships on teacher attrition and retention, and how these relationships may help build teacher self-worth. One of the main theories presented in the available literature is Vygotsky's (Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015) social constructivism theory. The concept of Vygotsky's social constructivism theory is that the majority of learning occurs when people are involved in interactive, collaborative learning groups rather than in isolation (Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015). Group learning and collaboration are the explicit goals of mentorship relationships. When teachers do not have the opportunity to participate in these relationships, optimal learning does not occur. This creates dissatisfying conditions and unhappy teachers who have the potential to leave the building, the district, or even the occupation altogether.

The goal of this research study was to build on this theoretical concept – the concept that learning does not occur in isolation but in collaborative groups. Social network theory, a theory like Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, is used in this research. Social network theory specifies that social relationships are used as a way for individuals to transfer and gain information (Liu et al., 2017; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Social network theory assumes that the social networks made by an individual ultimately affect how the individual behaves and

performs (Waes et al., 2018). Social network theory is appropriate for this study because of the connection of individual behavior and performance to social connections. Teachers within this study are asked about their experiences within a social connection (ie. mentorship relationships).

In addition to the social network theory, Kram's original mentorship model was applied. Kram (1938, 1988) theorized that individuals can benefit from mentorship relationships regardless of what side of the relationship they are on at the time. Kram also established stages of mentorship relationships that can be used to describe the type of interactions that take place throughout the span of the relationship. While social network theory guided this study's association with social learning, Kram's mentorship model provides the framework for the actual mentorship relationship. Applying social network theory to Kram's mentorship model added to the existing research on educational mentorship relationships.

Situation to Self

I began my teaching career non-traditionally. I had no formal training in education. My undergraduate degree is in biology, not education. Prior to my first day as a secondary science teacher, I had only been a student in the classroom. My expectations were incredibly far from the reality of what I experienced. The school where I began my teaching career had an established mentorship program for new teachers. A veteran teacher was assigned to me as a mentor. On the first day of school, my mentor gave me a candy bar, a coke, and told me to let her know when I needed something. I barely saw her throughout the rest of the year. She did not check in on me. We did not have meetings to discuss my day, week, month, or semester. Though a wonderful person and teacher, she did not help me transition from college student to teacher.

Ronfedlt and McQueen (2017) identified that new teachers who are given an in-house mentor are 18% to 22% less likely to leave the teaching profession. Arnett (2017) detailed data

from a Michigan State University study that showed that one in four new teachers leave the profession after five years. Arnette (2017) continued to explain that the reason for these losses is that new teachers do not have support from their administration and their senior teachers. I would have been part of this statistic had employment not been a necessity for my family. This was my first experience in a mentorship relationship.

Fast-forward 10 years into my educational career. I have since been a formal mentor for three new teachers, an informal mentor to several other new teachers and participated in many formal and informal mentorship relationships with seasoned teachers. My initial negative experience helped me realize the importance of strongly-developed relationships and the benefit that can be gained by all individuals involved. When I have served as a mentor, I have gained new insight and experiences. When I have acted as the mentee, I have learned new strategies and concepts. I have been able to grow my teaching toolbox. While I completely agree that positive mentorship relationships are incredibly important for the new teacher, I believe these same positive mentorship relationships are important to establish and maintain throughout a teacher's educational career.

Because of my experiences with mentorship relationships, both positive and negative, I wished to explore the experiences of various leveled teachers with mentorship relationships. It was my hope to present the differing perspectives of my participants and to develop themes within those perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is a direct characteristic of the philosophical assumption, ontology. Ontology "relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). One of the main characteristics of the ontological assumption is that participants are encouraged to share their differing realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These different realities are reported as different perspectives and used to develop themes

during data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I realize teachers will experience mentorship relationships differently. Some teachers will have positive experiences, and some will have negative experiences. My desire to see the reality of mentorship relationships through the eyes of my participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018) guided this research.

The ontological assumption specifies that different individuals within a study will have different opinions and experiences with a certain phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout this research, my goal was to report those different experiences to better understand how individual teachers experience mentorship relationships. In comparison to ontology, two other assumptions that could be considered are epistemology and axiology. The epistemological assumption requires the researcher to conduct field researcher in order to become a part of the phenomenon with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did not wish to insert myself into my participants' relationships, only to hear how they each perceive those relationships. Because of this, the epistemological assumption was not appropriate for my study. In using an axiological assumption, the researcher asserts their own opinions and values into the study along with the participants' views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I wished to bracket my biases and opinions out of the study and only report those of my participants. Because of this, the axiological assumption was not appropriate for my study.

Because I work in the education field and spend much of my time teaching, the most appropriate framework to guide this study was the social constructivism framework. The social constructivism framework employs researchers to attempt to better understand the environment where they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My days are spent interacting with other teachers. It was my goal to understand how these teacher-teacher interactions are impacting the teaching environment. I wanted to understand specifically how mentorship relationships

positively affect a teacher's self-worth and student success. In investigating these relationships, I relied solely on the participants' views and opinions of their experiences of mentorship relationships. Relying on such views allowed me to develop themes and patterns of the experiences of teacher-teacher relationships, an important characteristic of the social constructivism framework. Analyzing these themes allowed me to interpret the meanings of mentorship relationships to teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Understanding these meanings could help all educational stakeholders develop atmospheres of positivity, trust, and growth.

I am a devoted educator. When I am not in the classroom, I am thinking of and researching ways to be the best teacher. Teaching is not only my profession but my passion and hobby also. My fellow teachers are my friends and my family. It is important to me to understand the factors that affect the environment where I spend much of my time. Mentorship relationships greatly affect teachers, as well as other individuals in the school. Understanding how teachers experience mentorship relationships will help me contribute to the environment and culture I hold so dear.

Problem Statement

Teacher attrition has seen a steady increase over the last few years (Borman & Dowling, 2017; Taylor & West, 2019; Harris et al., 2019) with at least eight percent of teachers leaving the profession yearly (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This percentage is consistent despite years of experience (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Decreased student achievement is a negative consequence of constant teacher turnover because of the lack of experienced and supported educators in the classroom (Glickman et al., 2018). Henry and Redding (2020) concluded that having a teacher leave during the school year may cause students to lose up to six months of instructional time and have significantly lower student test scores.

Implementing mentorship programs has been identified as one of the top three ways to decrease teacher turnover and attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Without positive mentorship relationships, teachers do not receive the immediate support they need to properly serve their students, creating a learning environment that does not serve the learner but instead inhibits the learner (Glickman et al, 2018; Padaw et al., 2019). It is important to understand if continued mentorship relationships help provide the support needed for educators. Existing literature focuses on mentoring relationships geared toward new teachers (Arnett, 2017; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). Using a phenomenological approach, this qualitative study investigated Northeastern Wyoming secondary teachers' experiences in mentorship relationships throughout their educational careers, from new teacher to veteran teacher. The problem is that when teachers of all levels of experience do not initiate and cultivate mentorship relationships with their teacher peers, they may begin to feel alone and isolated, leading to feelings of inadequacy, decreased student achievement, and possibly untimely teacher attrition (Gonzalez et al., 2019; Lynn & Nguyen, 2020; Morettini et al., 2019).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels of experience in their educational career. At this stage in the research, mentorship relationships will be defined as "relationships that inspire mutual growth, learning, and development" (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 3). Kram's (1983) original mentorship model and social network theory guided this study. Kram (1983, 1988) theorized that individuals participate in mentorship relationships with many people at any point in time (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Kram identified four phases of mentor

relationships: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. The first two of the four phases guided this study. The initiation phase is the first phase of the relationship where both individuals discover the importance of the relationship (Kram, 1983, 1988). The cultivation phase is the second phase of the mentorship relationship and is attained when both individuals reach their maximum functionality within the relationship (Kram, 1983, 1988). This study focused on how teachers of all levels, new and not new, experience mentorship relationships.

Significance of the Study

During the 2017-2018 school year, there were 3.5 million full and part-time public-school teachers in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This number is 18% higher than the number of teachers during the 1999-2000 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This rise in teachers was accompanied by a rise in the number of students provided for in the public education system – an eight percent increase (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Teachers are faced with many problems including isolation, psychological frustration, and inadequate induction of beginning teachers (Glickman et al., 2018). Mentorship relationships help provide the support needed for teachers to limit the negative effects of these problems (Glickman et al., 2018).

Theoretical Significance of the Study

Current research concerning mentorship relationships focuses on Vygotsky's social constructivism theory which asserts that learning takes place through shared experiences and collaboration with others (Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015). While this theory is appropriate and seen often in the literature, this study focused on the application of social network theory, with Kram's more specific mentorship model and functions of mentorship relationships. Kram (1983, 1988) asserted that mentor/mentee relationships can occur at different age levels and that an

individual can participate in multiple mentorship relationships at any given time. This study built on Kram's model in hopes of investigating how mentorship relationships are experienced from different teachers, at multiple levels within their teaching careers. Because this study investigated teachers' experiences at multiple levels, new insight was discovered that current and previous research does not investigate (Arnett, 2017; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). Another addition this study made to the current literature was that this study investigated individuals as both mentors and mentees simultaneously, a phenomenon not currently studied in the education system but supported by Kram's mentorship model.

Empirical Significance of the Study

The impact of positive mentorship relationships is strong. Research has found that mentorship relationships have the potential to positively affect student achievement, build organizational relationships, and increase teacher retention (US Official News, 2018). Mentorship relationships help to increase the pedagogical knowledge set, instructional strategies known, and problem-solving abilities of individuals involved (Hong & Matsko, 2019). The development of these qualities is essential for teachers to reach their optimal potential and to provide relevant and rigorous instruction for students. Without these relationships, teachers may feel isolated. This feeling of isolation can create a less motivated teacher, lead to attrition, and decrease student achievement (Padaw et al., 2019). Most current research focuses on mentoring the new teacher but there is a strong need for research on mentorship relationships throughout teachers' educational careers, especially since teacher attrition percentages are consistent despite years of experience (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

This study contributed to the body of literature on mentorship relationships between

teachers. While most studies focus on the mentorship relationships of a new teacher mentee with a veteran teacher mentor (Arnett, 2017; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016), this study focused on mentorship relationships throughout the educational community. Mentorship relationships can occur at any time during one's educational career. In fact, individuals may have multiple mentorship relationships where they serve as either the mentor or the mentee (Kram, 1983). Mentorship relationships may also overlap. Individuals may have multiple mentors and/or mentees at any one point (Higgins & Kram, 2001). This study investigated the mentorship relationship at all levels of education, examining both the experiences of the mentor and the mentee with the potential to help teachers and educational leaders understand the necessity of collaborative learning as a prerequisite of school and student success.

Practical Significance of the Study

Teachers in the public school system are incredibly important to the daily functionality of the nation and individual communities. This research directly impacts teachers and their administrators providing a better understanding of how teachers experience mentorship relationships and how these relationships help them better serve their students. Based on Kram's (1983) types of support, I will better understand how mentorship relationships affect individual teachers' career and psychosocial advancement. This study has the potential to improve the lives of teachers as administrators can examine the importance of mentorship relationships. This could influence future professional development and requirements for professional learning communities within the school. Having a better understanding of mentorship relationships and the support they offer teachers at all levels has the potential to increase student achievement. Increasing support systems for teachers may limit teacher turnover and create a more positive

learning environment for students. This has the potential to positively affect all external stakeholders, parents and other community members, by developing a community with dedicated educators and successful students.

Research Questions

Mentorship relationships are relationships that encourage growth, learning and development. This study of how individuals experience these relationships was guided by one central research question and three research sub-questions. The theory that individuals develop and learn more efficiently when part of a social network (social network theory) (Waes et al., 2018) and Kram's (1983, 1988) identified stages of mentorship, initiation and cultivation, were used to develop these questions. The use of these questions was meant to describe the experiences of secondary teachers within mentorship relationships and experiences of how these mentorship relationships are initiated and cultivated.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational career?

The purpose of this research question was to investigate the experiences of individual teachers, the utilization of mentorship relationships, how relationships differ as teachers' careers change, if the individual teacher migrates back and forth from mentee to mentor, and if the individual teacher occupies different mentorship relationships at any one time (Kram, 1983). This research question helped understand how teachers at different levels utilize mentorship relationships and what role teachers of different levels play in the mentorship process. This research question purposely separated mentorship relationships from induction programs. Induction programs are normally set aside for new teachers. This research question specified

teachers from different levels as it is important to explore the experiences of teachers from all levels of their teaching careers (Spooner, 2016).

Research Sub-questions (SQ)

SQ 1: How do teachers describe their experiences with the initiation of mentorship relationships?

Research sub-question one was directly related to Kram's (1983, 1988) four phases of mentoring relationships: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Because of the duration of this study, the separation and redefinition phases were not addressed. Initiation, the first of the four phases, begins the mentorship relationship (Kram, 1983, 1988). This is the period of time when the relationship becomes important to both individuals (Kram, 1983, 1988). Understanding teachers' experiences in initiating mentorship relationships helped to better understand what situations and/or reasons cause teachers to seek out mentorship relationships.

SQ 2: How do teachers describe their experiences in cultivating mentorship relationships?

Research sub-question two was directly related to the second of Kram's (1983, 1988) four phases of mentoring relationships. Cultivation is the period of time when the functionality of the relationship peaks (Kram, 1983, 1988). In gaining insight into the experiences of cultivating mentorship relationships, there was a better understanding of what conditions help breed positive mentorships. Understanding why and how mentorship relationships are initiated and cultivated helped to better understand the importance of mentorship relationships at all teaching levels.

SQ 3: How do teachers describe the effects of participating in mentorship relationships?

Research sub-question three approached understanding of the research problem and the connection between positive mentorship relationships, increased student success and decreased teacher attrition. This research question directly related to the application of social network theory to mentorship relationships. Social network theory asserts that individuals who participate in collaborative groups are more likely to be successful professionally and personally. This research question investigated how the collaborative group experience in a mentorship relationship encourages the success of participants involved in the mentorship relationship. A lack of support systems has been identified as a reason for increased teacher attrition and decreased student success (Glickman et al, 2018). Understanding the support system provided for teachers through mentorship relationships could help all stakeholders comprehend the importance of such relationships for teachers of all levels. This understanding could coax internal stakeholders to encourage teachers to partake in such relationships.

Definitions

1. *Cultivation* – the second stage of Kram's mentorship model where the mentor and the mentee work closely together to establish mutuality (Kram 1983, 1988)
2. *External Stakeholder* – a member of the learning community who is not physically in the school building (parent, community member) (RMC Research Corporation, 2009)
3. *Formal Mentor* – a mentor who is assigned to the mentee by the school administration (Desimone et al., 2014).
4. *Informal Mentor* – a mentor who is not assigned but sought out by the mentee separately (Desimone et al., 2014).

5. *Internal Stakeholder* – a member of the learning community who is physically in the school building (principal, associate principal, teacher, student) (RMC Research Corporation, 2009)
6. *Initiation* – the first stage of Kram's mentorship model where relationships are built (Kram, 1983, 1988)
7. *Mentor* – a more experienced individual (Ragins & Kram, 2007)
8. *Mentorship Relationship* – a relationship that inspires mutual growth, learning, and development (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 3).
9. *Mentee* – a less experienced protégé (Ragins & Kram, 2007)
10. *New Teacher* – teacher with less than three years of teaching experience (Tolan et al., 2020)
11. *Teacher Attrition* – individuals leaving the teaching profession (Kelchtermans, 2017)
12. *Veteran Teacher* – teacher with more than 10 years of teaching experience (Darragh & Boyd, 2019)

Summary

The goal of this phenomenological study was to investigate teachers' experiences in mentorship relationships throughout their educational career, from new teacher to veteran teacher and all levels in between. Effective mentorship relationships have multiple benefits for all individuals involved, including more in-depth teaching reflection, increased self-efficacy and motivation, better problem-solving skills and classroom management, increased pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills, and improved culture and more feelings of acceptance into the whole school community (Glickman et al., 2018).

Teachers who partake in these relationships feel better about their abilities as teachers and their careers and thus provide for their students much more effectively, decreasing attrition and increasing student success. Without positive mentorship relationships, teachers do not receive the immediate support they need to properly serve their students, creating a learning environment that does not serve the learner but inhibits the learner. It is important to understand if continued mentorship relationships help provide the support needed for educators.

Social network theory was used to demonstrate how individuals, specifically teachers, learn best and more when networking with other individuals. Social network theory was also applied to Kram's mentorship model asserting that individuals often participate in multiple mentorship relationships at once and contribute to mentorship relationships as both the mentor and mentee simultaneously. Teachers learning together while participating in mentorship relationships demonstrate social network theory, while specific relational interactions demonstrate Kram's mentorship model. Benefits of participating in mentorship relationships were researched, along with the negative impacts of not participating in such relationships. Chapter Two provides a literature review demonstrating the gap in literature concerning educational mentorship relationships.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Many studies exist that investigate how teachers experience and utilize mentorship relationships (Arnett, 2017; Beck et al., 2020; Bressman et al., 2018; Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Daniel et al., 2019; Gozalez et al., 2019; Greiman et al., 2007; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Hudson, 2013; Lejonberg et al., 2019; Lynn & Nguyen, 2020; Morettini et al., 2019; Saylor et al., 2018; Shanks, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016; Tasnim, 2020; Weimer, 2018). The majority of these studies focus on the benefit to the new teacher (Arnett, 2017; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016) rather than the benefits of these relationships to all teachers, regardless of if they are just beginning their teaching career or if they have been teaching for many years. Wiemer (2018) called mentorship relationships a "win-win" for all teachers participating in a mentorship relationship, asserting that both parties benefit professionally and personally (p. 18).

This chapter explains the two theories used in this study that support mentorship relationships: the social network theory which explains that individuals are positively impacted by the social networks in which they participate (Waes et al., 2018) and Kram's (1983, 1988) original mentorship model, which categorizes the process of mentorship relationships within the organizational context. Both of these theories assert that individuals who participate in mentorship relationships have the potential to grow professionally and personally. These theories are demonstrated in the education system when teachers form informal and formal mentorship relationships to increase their content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, classroom management skills, and developmental knowledge (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Waes et al., 2018).

It is evident that positive mentorship relationships within the education system can

benefit the entire system. Teachers who have developed positive collaborative relationships with their peers are less likely to leave the profession and are more likely to provide a positive learning environment for their students (Glickman et al., 2018). Creating this positive learning environment creates a more positive school culture benefitting all those who work within the building: the internal stakeholders. Relating to this positive learning environment is the ability to grow pedagogical and content knowledge, increasing student achievement and success (Gonzalez et al., 2019). This increased student achievement reflects positively on the community – the external stakeholders. During this study, I hoped to investigate teachers' experiences in mentorship relationships throughout their educational careers, from new teacher to veteran teacher, to better understand the potential benefits of these types of relationships.

In this chapter, I analyze related literature that defines mentorship relationships and teachers of different levels of teaching experiences. I also examine formal and informal mentorship relationships including the benefits for both internal and external stakeholders. Topics directly related to the research questions, including initiation, cultivation, teacher attrition, and student achievement, are also reviewed. Because of the limited research on teachers of all levels of experience with mentorship relationships, gaps in the literature are explored, along with explanations of how this study will assist in filling those gaps.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories steered this study: social network theory and Kram's mentorship model. The social network theory was the guiding theoretical framework for this study. In addition to the social network theory, Kram's original mentorship model was applied. Social network theory, the role of social relationships as a way for individuals to transfer and gain information (Liu et al., 2017), has been applied to Kram's original mentorship model in attempts to better

understand mentorship relationships (Ragins & Kram, 2007). The social network theory provides "a language and method for describing and understanding" (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 660) the different levels of support that are presented by Kram's mentorship model. While Kram's mentorship model was the basis for this research, including the language used in the research questions, the social network theory was the theory that guided Kram's mentorship model.

Social Network Theory

The premise of the social network theory is that the way individuals behave and perform is directly affected by the network of social connections they have (Waes et al., 2018). Social network theory was originally introduced in the United States by Jacob Moreno in 1934 (Fredericks & Durland, 2005). Moreno's original investigations were based on determining "how an individual's group relations affected his or her actions" (Fredericks & Durland, 2005, p. 16). Moreno created a sociogram as an illustration, where dots represented individuals and lines connecting the dots represented the individuals' interactions with others (Fredericks & Durland, 2005).

Cartwright and Harary built upon the sociogram concept by including positive and negative line values to represent either positive or negative interactions (Fredericks & Durland, 2005). The first major studies to use sociograms to depict relationships were the Hawthorne studies by Elton Mayo in 1927 and 1938 (Fredericks & Durland, 2005). Following these studies was a study of community members in a small New England community in 1941 where individuals were found to have connected circles (Fredericks & Durland, 2005). This study introduced the term *clique* and began the creation of a social network specific vocabulary (Fredericks & Durland, 2005).

Early social networking was very mathematical and quantitative; however, recent adaptations of the theory have created both qualitative and graphical approaches to the theory (Fredericks & Durland, 2005). Over the years, social network theory has been a prominent theory used in social science research including inter-organizational relations in health services, social support networks, family planning methods, communication research, and even politics (Fredericks & Durland, 2005). The use of social networking theory in education is limited. Applying social network theory in this study to investigate how teachers interact with one another during mentorship relationship helped fill this gap in social network theory research.

Waes et al. (2018) applied social network theory to a research study of teachers. The researchers asserted that social network theory is appropriate for use in studying teachers because of the shift of teacher development from individualized to collaborative (Waes et al., 2018). One of the main assumptions of the social network theory is that individuals' performance and behavior is "affected by the way that they are tied into a larger web of social connections" (Waes et al., 2018, p. 35). Moses et al. (2009) applied social network theory to a research study of participants' use of educational networks. Based on the social network theory, assumptions were made that individuals who participated in educational networks were more likely to remain in their teaching positions and would be more productive.

The social network theory asserts that individuals who participate in collaborative groups are more likely to be successful professional and personally. The social network theory has limited application in the educational field, and even smaller applications in the development of teacher collaborative groups. This research study has the potential to advance the use of the social network theory in both areas, specifically, because mentorship relationships are intended to build the social connections of all parties involved. The mentorship relationships between

teachers are intended to positively impact the social networks created by teachers. In applying this theory to the study of mentorship relationships, I explored how these social networks (mentorship relationships) benefit the educational community. This study applied social network theory to the educational field and to the development of successful teachers, increasing the current research in these two areas and increasing the use of social network theory in education as a social science field.

Social network theory was directly applicable to this study because it supports the idea that individuals grow and benefit by creating networks of relationships that encourage development. Applying the social network theory to this study asserted that networking is a valuable resource, that networking can help all members of the network increase their knowledge set, and that participating in such a network can decrease the workload and stress felt by the individual. In this study, the social networks created were mentorship relationships. Investigating the experiences of multi-leveled teachers within their mentorship relationships illustrates how these teachers have utilized their social network, why these social networks were created, and how these networks are managed. There is an increase among researchers to understand how teachers' social networks' function and how to increase teachers' access to varying resources through these social networks (Waes et al., 2018). Applying social network theory to this study further develops the study of teachers' use of social networks in increasing their pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Kram's Mentorship Model

Kram developed her original mentoring model in the article *Phases of the Mentor Relationship* in 1983, and in the 1988 book *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationship in Organizational Life*. Kram has since published over 60 publications on the topic of mentor

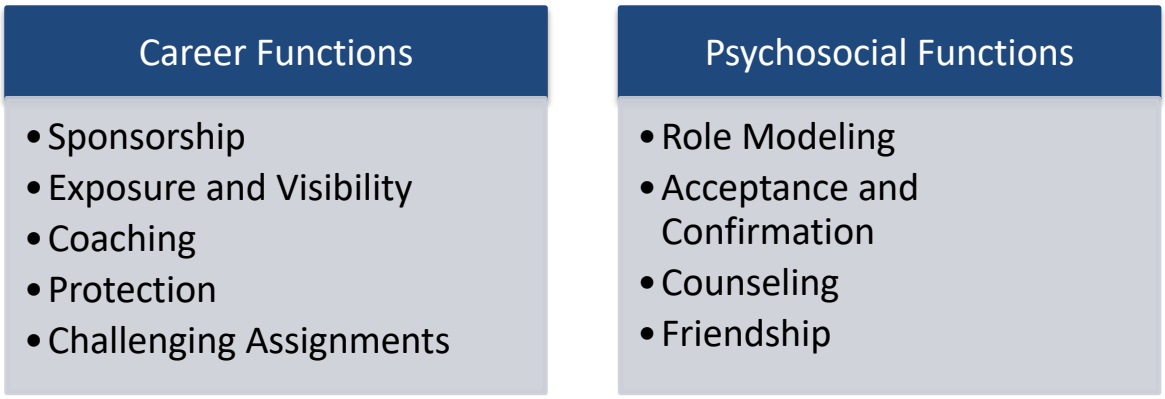
relationships. Kram (1983, 1988) asserted that mentor relationships have the potential to encourage growth and development among both the mentor and the mentee. Kram specified the mentor as an older, more experienced individual and the mentee as a younger, more naïve individual just entering the workforce, establishing that the mentor would benefit from the relationship because of an increased sense of worth during mid-life and the mentee would benefit from the increase of knowledge and skill set.

In order for mentorship relationships to have a positive effect on participants, there are certain developmental aspects of the relationship that enhance the individuals' growth and advancement (Kram, 1988). These are known as mentoring functions (Kram, 1988). Kram (1983, 1988) originally identified two primary functions of mentorship relationships. These two functions include providing psychosocial and career support (Kram 1983, 1988).

Psychosocial support is explained as the "aspects of the relationship that enhance sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role" (Kram, 1988, p. 23). Career support includes the "aspects of the relationship that enhance career advancement" (Kram, 1988, p. 23). Kram (1988) asserted that career support focuses on giving the mentee the support needed to achieve success within the professional organization. Conversely, psychosocial support focuses on reaching a personal level by increasing self-efficacy within and outside of the professional organization. There are certain ways to provide support for each aspect. For example, coaching and protection are types of career functions. Counseling and friendship are types of psychosocial functions. Further examples of types of functions can be seen below in Figure 2.1. Psychosocial and career support work hand-in-hand to help the mentorship relationship succeed and provide positive support for the individuals involved.

Figure 2.1

Career and Psychosocial Functions

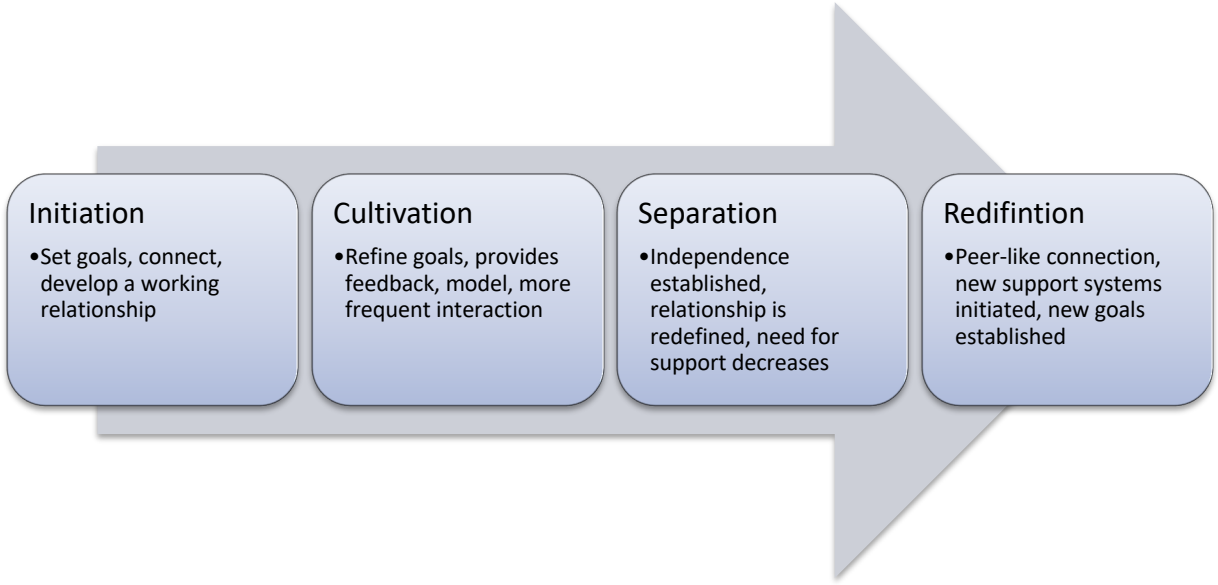


Note. Adapted from *Mentoring At Work: Developmental Relationships In Organizational Life*, by K.E. Kram. 1988. Copyright 1988 by University Press of American, Inc.

Kram (1983, 1988) theorized that individuals participate in mentorship relationships with many people at any point in time (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Kram (1983, 1988) and Fowler et al. (2018) further identified four phases of mentor relationships: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. These four phases of mentor relationships are shown below in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2

Kram's Mentoring Relationship Phases



Note. Adapted from "Mentoring Pharmacy Staff to Implement A Medication Support Service: An Evaluation of Process and Outcomes," by J.L. Fowler, B. McConachie, L. Hattingh, and A.J. Wheeler, 2018, *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning, 10*(7), 886-894, (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.04.004).

The initiation phase is the first phase of the relationship where both individuals discover the importance of the relationship (Kram, 1983, 1988). The initiation phase occurs at the beginning of the relationship and lasts about six months to a year (Kram, 1983, 1988). The cultivation phase is the second phase of the mentorship relationship and is reached when both individuals achieve their maximum functionality within the relationship (Kram, 1983, 1988). The cultivation phase lasts from about two to five years during the primary interaction of the two individuals (Kram, 1983, 1988). The separation phase is the third phase of the mentorship relationship and is reached when the mentee reaches a point of autonomy and the mentor becomes unavailable because of life's demands (Kram, 1983, 1988). The separation phase occurs

after the relationship has shifted functionally and lasts from about six months to two years (Kram, 1983, 1988). The fourth phase is redefinition and is characterized by a transition of mentor/mentee relationship to a relationship of friendship (Kram 1983, 1988). The redefinition phase has an indefinite time period (Kram, 1983, 1988).

This study specifically focused on Kram's first two phases of mentor relationships: initiation and cultivation. In exploring teacher-teacher mentorship relationships, it was important to understand how and why teachers initiate these relationships. It was of interest to determine what characteristics of the school system encourage teachers to seek mentorship relationships. In addition to initiating these relationships, how do teachers cultivate them? At what point in the relationship do teachers reach their maximum potential? It was of interest to understand how and why teachers initiate and cultivate mentorship relationships. In understanding this phenomenon, stakeholders will better understand what aspects of the school community encourage teachers to reach out to other teachers.

Kram's original mentor model was designed for the business institution. In this research study, Kram's mentor model was applied to the educational institution, specifically the secondary educational institution. While this mentor model has been applied in educational system studies (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Greiman et al., 2007; Montgomery & Page, n.d.), this study increased the studies applying the mentor model to the education system, specifically the secondary school setting.

Related Literature

Teachers' experiences in mentorship relationships at different levels of their teaching careers is the focus of this study. Glickman (2018) stated that effective mentorship relationships have multiple benefits for all individuals involved, including:

> deeper reflection on teaching, clarification of educational beliefs, increased self-confidence, improved motivation, enhanced problem-solving skills, better classroom management, improved teaching skills, an understanding of the school's culture and norms, and a sense of belonging to and acceptance by the school community (pp. 280-281).

Teachers who partake in these relationships feel better about their abilities as teachers and their careers and thus provide for their students much more effectively, decreasing attrition and increasing student success. The following sections encompass the literature review of related studies and discussion of multiple characteristics of mentorship relationships. Specific related topics include formal versus informal mentorship relationships, benefits for internal and external stakeholders, initiation and cultivation of mentorship relationships, teacher attrition and student achievement.

Mentorship Relationships

"Mentoring is perceived to be an invaluable part of teacher education" (Shanks, 2017, p. 159). Within the literature, mentoring is given a variety of definitions. Mullen and Klimaitis (2019) outlined standard definitions of mentoring including guidance seeking, close, meaningful, informal or formal, goal-oriented and, results-driven. Mullen and Klimaitis also explain the functionality of traditional mentoring situations where "a mentor and mentee share a learning experience over time" (p. 3). This "collaborative mentoring" as sometimes labeled starts with introducing and modeling new techniques and/or strategies and leads to the implementation of such techniques in classrooms (Gonzalez et al., 2019).

The Committee on Effective Mentoring in STEMM and the Board on Higher Education and Workforce (2019) outlined the different shapes mentorship relationships can take. The

mentor relationship is most often described as the relationship between two individuals, a mentor and a mentee who are working towards a common goal. This particular set-up is referred to as mentorship dyad. In the dyad, the mentor relationship is very similar to what an apprentice relationship might be, where the more experienced mentor teaches the less experienced mentee how to function in a certain environment.

The Committee on Effective Mentoring in STEMM and the Board on Higher Education and Workforce (2019) outlined that while the mentorship dyad is the most recognized type of relationship, there are three other types of mentor relationships that have been recently identified in research. These are the triad, the group or collective, and the network. The mentorship triad can look different depending on the situation. The triad may consist of a co-mentorship where two mentors work together with one mentee or where three individuals switch roles depending on the goals of the relationship. The collective (or group) mentorship relationship is as it sounds – a collaborative group of five or more individuals working together to reach a common goal. The mentorship relationship referred to as 'network' happens when one mentee accesses multiple resources and mentors.

Characteristics of positive mentorship relationships include "mutual reciprocity" (Eisler, 2017, p. 50). This reciprocity explains the mutuality between the mentor and the mentee. The mentee should not expect to be given all the answers from the mentor. The mentee should make contributions to the relationship as well, not expecting the mentor to provide all the information, data, guidance, etc.

Another characteristic of a positive mentorship relationship is openness from both the mentor and mentee (Eisler, 2017; Lejonberg & Tiplic, 2016). Additionally, the mentee should be open to the unknown. The mentor may be able to provide information to the mentee that the

mentee had not previously considered, and the mentee may need to step outside the box. Likewise, the mentor needs to possess a quality of open-mindedness. The mentor is just as likely to learn from the mentee as vice-versa (Lejonberg et al., 2019). The mentor must be open to considering ideas from the mentee. There is a possibility that the mentee can teach the mentor something during the extent of the relationship. “School mentors can experience that their own beliefs about teaching are challenged by mentees, and may also learn new ideas and strategies through discussion…” (Lejonberg et al., 2019, p. 534). This learning-together philosophy strengthens the mentorship relationship, encouraging both participants to increase their pedagogical expertise (Lejonberg et al., 2019).

A third characteristic of a positive mentorship relationship is genuine care and vulnerability (Eisler, 2017). It is important for both the mentor and mentee to care about the relationship. The ability to care about the relationship produces a bond between the members of the relationship and allows both parties to work side-by-side to achieve the goals of the relationship. Vulnerability within the relationship allows for mutual respect and honesty, which leads to an integrous relationship.

In their study, Fowler et al. (2018) classified mentorship relationships as “an on-going support mechanism” (p. 888). They gave three specific reasons were given for the implementation of mentorship relationships in professional settings. First, the mentorship relationship is an efficient tool to be utilized in the development and enhancement of knowledge and skills. This development is particularly beneficial to individuals who are new to the system, tasks, or processes now required of them. Second, not only a professional relationship develops. Participants of the mentorship relationship tend to develop a personal relationship that encourages follow-up after the original goals of the relationship have been reached. Because of

this, the relationship makes a difference for both parties beyond a professional capacity. The third reason to implement a mentorship relationship is because mentorship relationships are tailored to the individuals participating. These relationships are formed with specific goals in mind and are prioritized within the relationship by both parties. Because of this goal mind-set, the relationship makes a true difference in the development of both parties (Fowler et al., 2018).

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons to implement mentorship relationships, Hairon et al. (2019) found that implementing such relationships can alleviate some of the frustrations associated with the constant changes in the education system. Teachers are faced with issues of creating and teaching curriculum that encourages students to be global citizens as well as 21st century citizens. Working collaboratively with another teacher helps teachers to constantly and effectively adapt the curriculum to fit the needs of the current student population.

According to Nnabuife et al. (2021), establishing strong mentorship relationships can limit the number of mistakes made within the organization as the mentor and mentee are constantly learning from one another, increasing their chances of success and limiting their failures. Strong, positive mentorship relationships often result in friendships with participants learning from each other and providing support for one another.

Teachers of Different Levels of Experience

Experience is often related to success. Podolsky et al. (2019) found that in the education field, there is an expected relationship between teaching experience and teachers' effectiveness which implies that teachers who have been in the classroom longer are more likely to see higher student growth and achievement. Teachers early in their careers tend to grow substantially compared to their older, more experienced teacher peers. Even though teachers are not learning and growing as much as they need in their later years of teaching, teachers at various levels are

still increasing their knowledge set and growing as educators. It is not until a teacher reaches at least their 28th year of teaching that their effectiveness and growth begin to wane (Podolsky et al., 2019).

There is often an easy distinction between new teacher and veteran teacher in the literature. Veteran teachers are given the term when they have been in the classroom more than 10 years (Darragh & Boyd, 2019). Because of their many years of education experience, veteran teachers have a wealth of pedagogical and content knowledge in their teaching toolbox (Gomez, 2019). In addition to their years of experience, veteran teachers are also able to apply their knowledge using different strategies and in various circumstances (Gomez, 2019). This comes from years of experimentation in the classroom. However, veteran teachers are less likely to willingly attend professional development opportunities and participate in training opportunities (Tolan et al., 2020).

Tolan et al. (2020) found that new teachers, those often defined as having been in the classroom for less than three years, do not have the experience veteran teachers do. They have not spent enough time in the classroom or been able to effectively experiment with different strategies and approaches to learning. New teachers are more likely to be motivated to receive training or guidance to increase their teaching abilities than their veteran teacher peers. Because they are still building their teaching toolbox, new teachers are more likely to willingly attend professional development opportunities (Tolan et al., 2020).

In a study conducted with newly qualified teachers, Attard Tonna (2019) identified that not only were the new teachers positively impacted by their mentorship relationships, but that the mentor, the veteran teacher, was also positively affected. This study identified that both the mentee and mentor, regardless of their level of experience in the teaching profession, increased

their sense of confidence, enhanced their school culture, and even developed greater loyalty to their specific school through their mentorship relationship. For the mentor teacher, there was an increase in the reflective process that allowed the teacher to improve their own teaching (Attard Tonna, 2019).

In the traditional mentoring situation, the mentor is usually the older, more experienced member of the relationship while the mentee is the younger, less experienced member (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2019). However, positive mentorship relationships have the potential to impact all parties involved. In fact, Arnett (2017) identified that having teacher mentors as "the most critical influence on how a teacher experiences the profession in the first five years, and an emphasis… on interpersonal learning and relationships is key to any teacher retention conversation" (p. 50).

Not only are the new teachers positively influenced but the veteran teacher as well. "Veteran teachers are strengthened along the way, and job satisfaction is boosted because they are allowed to make a difference in meaningful ways" (Arnett, 2017, p. 52). These relationships create equality among teachers in different content areas, at different teaching levels, with varied levels of experience, and of different ages (Gonzalez et al., 2019). This equalization allows teachers to work towards a common goal without constraints of age and hierarchy.

Formal Versus Informal Mentorship Relationships

Whether formal or informal, mentorship relationships are beneficial to all parties involved (Eisler, 2017; Quinnell, 2017). These relationships help teachers feel involved in the community of the school and feel more accepted (Morettini et al., 2019). These relationships can either be pre-determined, prescribed relationships (formal) or relationships teachers seek out on their own (informal).

Formal mentoring is characteristically a relationship where a specific mentor is assigned to a mentee as part of an organizational program (Committee on Effective Mentoring in STEMM & Board on Higher Education and Workforce, 2019). Formal mentoring is most prescribed by the district or individual school administration and can sometimes be called "traditional mentoring" (Quinnell, 2017, p. 6), characterized by an assigning of a mentor and mentee to work together to develop the mentee's goals (Quinnell, 2017).

Another term given to formal mentoring is structured mentoring (Hairon et al., 2019). Structured mentoring is characterized by specified functions of the mentee-mentor relationship prescribed by the district or building-level administration (Hairon et al., 2019). In formal mentoring, teachers are assigned a mentor teacher who is supposed to offer instructional and behavioral support (Morettini et al., 2019). These formal mentorship relationships are "guided, timely, and have specific goals" (Quinnell, 2017, p.6). Previous studies of formal mentorship relationships have identified certain aspects of the relationships that make these types of relationships most successful (Nnabuife et al., 2021). These aspects include: (a) program objectives, (b) selection of participants, (c) compatibility of mentors and mentees, (d) training for mentors and mentees, (e) procedures for meeting time, and (f) a goal-setting processes (Nnabuife et al., 2021).

These aspects of the formal mentorship relationship allow the creation of a mentorship relationship that will be successful and allow for the growth and development of the mentee and the mentor within the relationship (Nnabuife et al., 2021).

Formal mentoring is a common induction tool for new teachers where a veteran teacher is assigned to a new teacher (Hairon et al., 2019; Morettini et al., 2019). This type of mentorship relationship is usually set up by administrative personnel or the instructional facilitator. As a

result, the mentee and mentor may or may not know each other, may or may not teach the same content, and may or may not be physically near each other in the school building (Gonzalez et al., 2019).

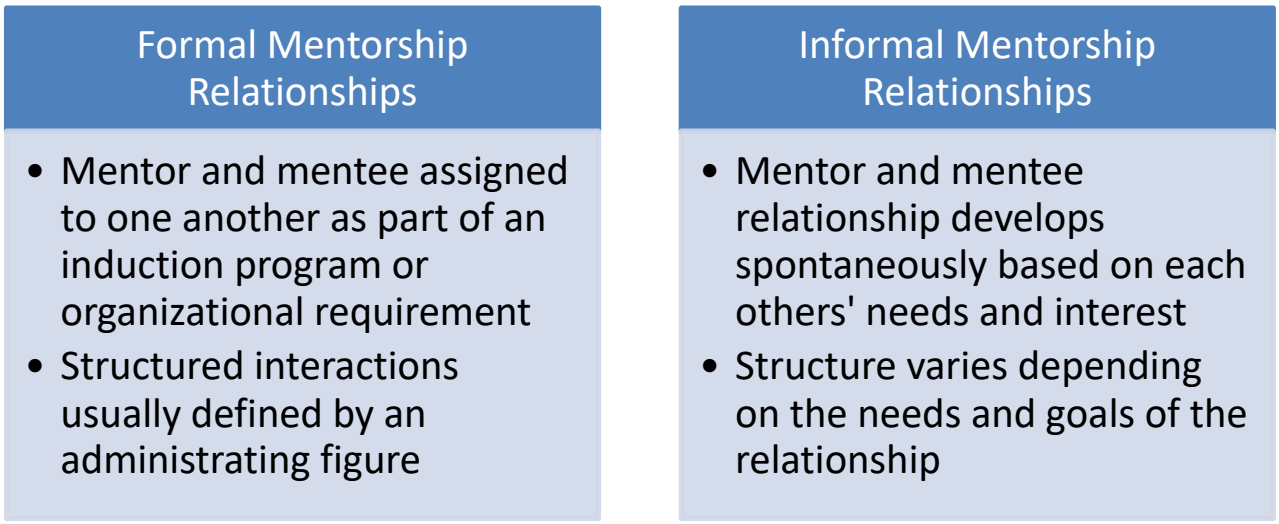
Informal mentorship relationships are the non-appointed relationships that occur naturally between individuals (Bressman et al., 2018). These relationships tend to be self-selected by the participants, are based on mutual interest, and provide better experiences overall because of the self-selection by mentors and mentees based on similar backgrounds and goals (Committee on Effective Mentoring in STEMM & Board on Higher Education and Workforce, 2019; Quinnell, 2017). Informal mentorship relationships are usually created among individuals who already know one another and/or are friends (Bressman et al., 2018). These individuals create this informal relationship to "share resources, ideas, strategies, and educational philosophies" (Bressman et al., 2018, p. 163). Informal mentorship relationships are not assessed by an administrative team, so teachers tend to feel less judged and are able to share more freely within their mentorship relationship pair (Bressman et al., 2018). In some instances, informal mentorship relationships may be more genuine than formal mentorship relationships because mentees find mentors who are relevant and knowledgeable about whatever task for which the mentee is seeking guidance (Eisler, 2017).

The Committee on Effective Mentoring in STEMM and the Board on Higher Education and Workforce (2019) asserted that informal relationships develop out of desire and common goals. Because of this, within these relationships mentees tend to report more satisfaction in their career and psychosocial support, likely due to greater mutual respect with their mentor. While informal mentorship relationships are often seen to be more effective to the mentee because of the authenticity and commonalities, formal mentorship relationships provide assistance for the

mentee who may not have access to individuals or resources needed. Characteristics of formal versus informal mentorship relationships can be seen in Figure 2.3 below.

Figure 2.3

Formal Mentorship Relationships Versus Informal Mentorship Relationships



Note. Adapted from "The Science of Effective Mentorship In STEMM," by Committee on Effective Mentoring in STEMM & Board on Higher Education and Workforce, 2019, In A. Byars-Winston and M.L. Dahlberg (Eds.), *National Academy of Sciences*, (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK552772/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK552772.pdf). Copyright 2019 by the National Academy of Sciences.

Benefits of Mentorship Relationships

Research continually supports that teachers who collaborate with other teachers in mentoring programs are more effective than those who do not (Morettini et al., 2019). Mentoring programs offer engaging learning, collaboration, and supportive guidance (Morettini et al., 2019) for teachers involved. In fact, new teachers who participate in these mentorship relationships are much more likely to return to their original school than new teachers who do not participate in mentorship relationships (Morettini et al., 2019). For the new teacher,

mentorship relationships offer professional, social, and emotional growth and support, all of which promote advancement of knowledge in the teaching profession (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). In addition, "allowing novice teachers access to teacher-leaders helps encourage the new teachers in the things they're seeing in the classroom and encourages them around sound pedagogy to up the ante on their effectiveness" (Arnett, 2017, p. 52). The benefits for new teachers involved in mentorship relationships are numerous including increased self-efficacy, increased content and pedagogy knowledge, increased behavioral management skills, increased community acceptance, and a more overall positive experience in their initial years teaching (Arnett, 2017; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). New teachers who have been involved in mentorship relationships develop better management skills, have more positive interactions with students, and have strengthened beliefs in their own teaching abilities (Lejonberg & Tiplic, 2016).

Veteran teachers also benefit from the mentorship relationships in which they are involved. In fact, in most cases, purposeful mentorship relationships are more beneficial to veteran teachers than other forms of professional development (Gonzalez et al., 2019). When the veteran teacher is placed in the role of mentee, the veteran teacher is given the opportunity to increase content knowledge, learn new or advanced pedagogy skills, improve self-esteem, and renew their energy for the teaching profession (Gonzalez et al., 2019). Open conversations held during mentor meetings allow for the development of higher order thinking skills, along with more critical thinking skills (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020) for all participants.

When compared to schools without mentorship environments, schools that foster these collaborative relationships produce more effective teachers (Podolsky et al., 2019). Not only are these teachers more effective but they are also more satisfied with their job (Toropova et al.,

2019). The use of mentorship relationships in the school setting can keep teachers engaged in the content being taught as well as a recommitment to teaching and learning (Gonzalez et al., 2019). Another benefit of the mentorship relationship for teachers is the decreased feeling of isolation that results (Gonzalez et al., 2019). Previous studies have identified mentorship relationships to have positive effects not only on the mentor and the mentee, but also on the institution where the relationships occur. These identified benefits can be seen in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1

Benefits of Mentorship Relationships

	Benefits
Mentor	1. Opportunity to view the classroom setting through a fresh lens 2. Chance to self-examine and tweak own techniques 3. Affirmation and validation of knowledge and experience from the education staff and mentee 4. Pride in the accomplishment(s) of mentee 5. Excitement about the prospects and success of future partnerships
Mentee	1. Access to someone willing to answer questions, provide guidance, and give advice 2. Opportunity to become acquainted and familiar with the inner workings of the school (culture) 3. Boost toward achieving own personal goals 4. Ally in working toward overall excellent in education 5. Growth and increased confidence
Institution	1. Staff who appreciate and support one another, encouraging stronger relationships among internal stakeholders 2. Older, more experienced staff relates with newer, less experienced staff 3. Collaboration among stakeholders becomes normal, encouraging constant building-wide improvement and innovation 4. Collaboration encourages increased academic progress 5. Increases commitment and productivity in school 6. Decreases turnover in school 7. Fiscal savings when, in lieu of outside training sources, schools utilize and reward in-house capabilities

Note. Adapted from "Mentoring: The Way to Academic Excellence," by E.K. Nnabuife, I.E.

Okoli, N.P. Nwakoby, and A.N. Ifechi, 2021, *Education Quarterly Reviews*, *4*(1), p. 135 (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3797664) Copyright 2021 by the authors.

Initiating Mentorship Relationships

Initiation is the first stage in Kram's (1983, 1988) mentorship model. During this stage of the mentorship relationship, the mentor and mentee are attempting to learn the working style of the other (Daniel et al., 2019). The initiation stage is where the mentor and mentee begin to get to know one another (Nnabuife et al., 2021). During the initiation phase, the relationship is built. It is during this stage of the relationship that strong ties are created (Daniel et al., 2019; Nnabuife et al., 2021). The initiation stage occurs because one or both participants initiate a working relationship (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). During this phase, the participants begin to share goals, build trust and generate mutual respect (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). This phase is like a trial run of a new product. Both participants are determining the suitability of the relationship (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). Participants figure out if personalities, goals, and values are compatible enough to delve in the relationship further (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). During the initiation phase, there is a seeking of information, advice, counseling, and feedback from the mentee of the mentor (Fowler et al., 2018). The mentee is seeking to determine whether this particular person will serve well as a mentor for the purpose and goal of the relationship.

Humberd and Rouse (2016) showed that mentorship relationships can be formally or informally initiated. The formal initiation begins because an administrating group deems the relationship necessary and plans for the participants. The informal initiation begins because either one or both participants feel a need to create the relationship and do so on their own. In a formal mentorship relationship, the initiation phase is shortened because the mentor and mentee

have been designated by an outside person. This initiation phase may last longer in an informal mentorship relationship because the mentee is looking for a mentor for a specific reason.

Cultivating Mentorship Relationships

Cultivation is the second stage in Kram's (1983, 1988) mentorship model. This phase of the mentorship relationship tends to be the most intense time during the relationship and the stage where the most benefits are received for participants (Daniel et al., 2019). This phase is also seen as the phase where most mentor support is needed (Fowler at al., 2019). During the cultivation stage, the mentee usually learns the most from the mentor and feels most protected by the mentor (Daniel et al., 2019). The cultivation stage is beneficial to both the mentor and the mentee as they are equally learning from one another and growing as a result of the relationship (Daniel et al., 2019).

The cultivation stage generally lasts longer than the initiation phase and creates more benefits for the participants (Daniel et al., 2019; Nnabuife et al., 2021). The cultivation phase tends to consist of both formal and informal relationship patterns as the mentor and mentee meet for reasons other than originally intended (Daniel et al., 2019). During the cultivation phase, the mentor and the mentee have multiple and frequent interactions that lead to a mutual development among the participants (Nnabuife et al., 2021). The relationship has developed in such a way that both the mentor and mentee feel comfortable with one another, ask questions openly, seek constructive feedback, and are both gaining new insight and strategies because of the relationship (Daniel et al., 2019; Fowler et al., 2018). Because of these characteristics, the cultivation phase is sometimes referred to as the 'negotiating' and 'enabling' phase (Fowler et al., 2019).

Respect, comfort, and help are intensified during the cultivation phase of the mentorship relationship (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). During the cultivation stage, both parties are deemed

equals (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). The mentor and the mentee contribute to the relationship equally (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). Because of the mutual respect nurtured during the cultivation phase, both participants feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). This openness allows for learning goals to be acknowledged and focused upon (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). The cultivation phase can be the most dynamic and growing phase of the mentorship relationship. The primary goal of the cultivation phase is to build self-efficacy and confidence of not only the mentee but the mentor as well (Fowler et al., 2019).

Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition "refers to teachers leaving the profession" (Kelchtermans, 2017, p. 962). Even more specifically, this leaving must occur before the teacher has reached the age of retirement (Kelchtermans, 2017). About half of teacher attrition in the United States is due to teachers leaving the education field and the other half is due to teachers moving from one school to another (Borman & Dowling, 2008). A Michigan State University study found that half of new teachers leave their initial school by their fifth year of teaching and that one in four leave the teaching profession altogether before the end of their fifth year (Arnett, 2017). The United States Labor Department reported that in 2018, during the first 10 months of the school year, public school teachers left at a rate of 83 per 10,000 each month (Farmer, 2020). More teachers leave for reasons other than retirement than do stay in the classroom until retirement age (Glazer, 2018). It is often assumed that teacher attrition occurs in only new teachers, but research has shown that attrition rates continue throughout educational careers (Glazer, 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2019). Teachers who are well into their careers are also leaving for reasons other than retirement (Glazer, 2018). Veteran teachers leave the classroom because they feel burned out, no longer enjoy teaching, or simply are dissatisfied with their jobs (Gonzalez et al., 2019).

Teacher attrition has seen a steady increase over the last few years (Harris et al., 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reported that the percentage of teachers who left the profession in 1989 was six percent while the percentage in 2013 was eight percent. Of this eight percent in 2013, 21% of these teachers had less than three years of experience, seven percent had between four and 10 years, five percent had between 11 and 20 years, and 22% of these teachers had greater than 20 years of experience in the teaching profession (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

According to Attard Tonna (2019), teacher isolation has been identified as a major cause of teacher attrition. In the school building, teachers tend to be self-reliant, work in their classrooms independently and collaborate with other adults on a limited basis. This professional isolation decreases levels of happiness and self-efficacy in teaching, especially for new teachers. These feelings of discord can lead to attrition and often times do.

Harris et al., (2019) found that increased levels of teacher turnover are harmful for both the school and the student. Negative impacts include decreased culture and staff cohesion within a certain building and/or district, decreased student achievement because of inconsistencies between the leaving teacher and the new teachers, and cost. Harris et al. (2019) reported that "replacing an individual teacher in the United States costs between $4,400 and $17,900" (p. 2). These researchers continued to say that individual state costs for teacher turnover in the United States is estimated to be over one billion dollars yearly. This use of educational resources for teacher turnover rather than for the use of student development reflects poorly on the education system and limits student achievement.

Teacher attrition "disrupts essential educational processes and threatens their valued continuity" (Kelchtermans, 2017, p. 964). Kelchtermans (2017) also found that teacher attrition

leads to reduced instructional continuity which can have a negative impact on student achievement. Also affecting student achievement, having one teacher leave the school increases the risk that students will then be taught by a less-experienced, less-competent teacher causing more delinquency in student growth and achievement. Ronfeldt et al. (2012) concluded that students who experience high levels of teacher turnover score lower in both ELA and Mathematics. This same study also found that when teacher turnover was eliminated and students learned consistently, mathematics achievement increased. Another study conducted by Henry and Redding (2020) concluded that having a teacher leave the school and be replaced by another teacher mid-year could cause students to lose up to six months of instructional time and have significantly lower test scores. This data supports the idea that increased turnover decreases student achievement, creating a negative relationship between teacher and students, and identifying these leaving teachers as disrupting the community of students served.

In addition to negatively affecting student achievement, teacher attrition negatively affects the school culture and community (Kelchtermans, 2017). The school community left behind by the leaving teacher is forced to fill in the gaps, introduce new teachers into the community, build new relationships and redefine the organizational community (Kelchtermans, 2017). Teachers and administrators in the building are left to pick up the pieces (Ronfeldt et al., 2012). When teachers leave, administrators are left to fill the position and reteach expectations to a newcomer, all of which alters the organizational relationships (Ronfeldt et al., 2012). Teachers who remain in the building must rebuild relationships, attempt to maintain the current school culture or rebuild the culture (Ronfeldt et al., 2012). The teachers who leave the school take with them curriculum and student-specific knowledge unknown to the remaining teachers and administrators (Henry & Redding, 2020). This lack of knowledge leaves a hole that must be

filled either by the remaining teachers, substitute teachers, or a teacher new to the building (Henry & Redding, 2020).

External stakeholders such as parents and community members are also affected by teacher attrition. In fact, in one study, 63% of interviewed parents speculated that expectations of teachers become overwhelming especially with limited support systems (Harris et al., 2019). The community is affected because with less successful students comes less educated individuals contributing to society. Schools are considered extensions of the local community (Gordon & Louis, 2009). A school with limited relationships, increased teacher turnover, and decreased student achievement reflects poorly on that community.

According to Farmer (2020), teachers who build positive relationships with other staff members have been found to decrease teacher stress that leads to attrition. Teachers who participated in positive staff relationships within their building were more likely to stay in that school and district (Farmer, 2020). Teachers identified positive relationships as those that are trust-worthy, collaborative, and supportive. Teachers who utilized these types of relationships identified increased levels of stability and decreased levels of stress (Farmer, 2020). Because these teachers feel they have an outlet for their stress and a team to work with, they are less likely to leave the teaching profession.

It has also been found that schools that are able to offer mentor programs and/or networking and collaboration for teachers have lower attrition rates when compared to schools who do not offer such (Toropova et al., 2019). In fact, positive correlations have been identified between the use of mentoring in schools and decreased teacher attrition (Attard Tonna, 2019). This association is because of the support mentors provide to the mentee, both instructional and emotional (Attard Tonna, 2019).

According to Beck et al. (2020), mentorship relationships in the form of professional learning communities increase retention among new and veteran teachers. When teachers have a supportive environment and can interact with other teachers, they feel more of a sense of belonging in the school and have higher feelings of respect and appreciation for the institution (Beck et al., 2020). These positive feelings exist because of mentorship relationships and greatly reduce teacher attrition.

Student Achievement

Student achievement is the most commonly used indicator of teacher success (Canales & Maldonado, 2018; Attard Tonna, 2019; Muckenthaler et al., 2018). One of the common associations made with student achievement is teacher experience (Canales & Maldonado, 2018). Canales and Maldonado (2018) found that teachers who have more teaching experience tend to show greater student achievement. However, new teachers tend to increase student achievement steadily from year three to year five. In addition to years of teaching experience, the type of education and professional development a teacher has impacts student achievement (Canales & Maldonado, 2018).

According to Attard Tonna (2019), new teachers who partake in a mentorship relationship have defined supportive teacher development. This support from an experienced teacher helps increase the efficiency of the new teacher, contributing to their teacher self-efficacy. The use of collaboration between the mentor and mentee increases the chance for the mentee to receive constructive feedback and model practices from the mentor teacher. When partaking in an effective mentorship relationship, the new teacher experiences stronger morale, increased risk-taking, greater problem-solving, classroom management, and organizational skills,

and ultimately becomes more effective in the classroom (Attard Tonna, 2019). This increase of classroom effectiveness has the potential to increase student achievement.

Muckenthaler et al. (2018) found that when student achievement is used to indicate a school's success, schools with high levels of collaboration and cohesion among teachers report higher success. When teachers form collaborative groups and pairs, they are able to discuss and implement teaching strategies that benefit student learning. Teachers in these collaborative relationships are also able to share the workload and develop supportive environments. The use of collaborative planning directly impacts student achievement, positively affecting the students and the school.

Mentorship relationships can be used as professional development opportunities for teachers to increase their content and pedagogical knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2019). When teachers interact in these mentorship relationships, they are increasing the strategies they can employ for students thus increasing the likelihood of increased student growth and achievement (Gonzalez et al., 2019).

Summary

While much research exists concerning educational mentorship relationships, most studies focus on how teachers new to the classroom utilize such relationships (Arnett, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). Much less is known about how teachers of all levels, new to veteran, experience mentorship relationships. There are very few published studies that focus on teachers who are not new.

This chapter focused on the theoretical frameworks for this study. Kram's (1983, 1988) mentorship model, along with social network theory, will guide this study. Kram's phases of

mentorship relationships and the concept that individuals can experience mentorship relationships as both the mentor and the mentee at the same time demonstrates how educators initiate and cultivate the relationships they participate in and how they experience the relationship. Social network theory asserts that individuals learn more effectively when they are part of a network. This supports the idea that teachers who create a network have the potential to be more successful educators.

The literature focused on educational mentorship relationships and how they can benefit the entire educational community. Information about teachers of different levels was discussed along with how formal relationships differ from informal relationships. This is important in understanding why teachers initiate mentorship relationships, whether they are initiated based on a need recognized by the teacher herself or from a higher authority. Benefits of participating in mentorship relationships were also included.

Mentorship relationships offer benefits to all parties involved. Whether new teacher or veteran teacher, there are benefits to participating in these relationships. These mentorship relationships may be formal or informal in nature depending on the needs of the teacher. Participating in mentorship relationships has the potential to decrease teacher attrition because teachers feel more invested, more accepted, and more engaged in the teaching profession. In addition to decreasing teacher attrition, participating in these mentorship relationships can increase student achievement because teachers are sharing teaching strategies, developing their teaching toolboxes, and encouraging one another professionally and personally. Teachers feel less isolated, more valued, and part of the school community when participating in these collaborative mentorship relationships. Most research studies (Arnett, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017;

Spooner-Lane, 2016) discuss the impacts of mentoring on the new teacher while neglecting the more experienced teacher. As seen from the literature, benefits are abundant. In this study, I explored how these mentorship relationships affect teachers of all teaching experiences rather than focusing on the new teacher.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This study investigates the experiences of secondary teachers within mentorship relationships. There is a multitude of research on how new teachers experience and benefit from mentorship relationships (Arnett, 2017; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016); however, limited research exists that studies how teachers who are not new to the classroom experience these relationships. This research examines the experiences of multiple levels of secondary teachers, focusing on what encourages these teachers to initiate and cultivate mentorship relationships. Understanding why these mentorship relationships are initiated and cultivated, and how teachers self-report the benefits of these relationships, helps all stakeholders understand the importance of such relationships for all teachers regardless of their years of experience. This chapter presents the procedures and research design for this study. Qualitative, transcendental phenomenology is explained as the chosen research design for this study. Research questions are listed. An explanation of how the setting and participants were chosen is included. Procedures for the study are outlined. The researcher's role is provided, explaining my own role within the study and how my biases were bracketed out of the study. Data analysis is given in full detail including the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study. Ethical considerations for the study are also explained to ensure the study is principled and positively contributing to the education community.

Design

Aspers and Corte (2019) described qualitative research as research that focuses on the "meaning and motivations that underlie…personal experiences" (p. 142). Qualitative research

does not focus on “numerical representation, but with the deepening of understanding of a given problem” (Queiros et al., 2017, p. 370). The main purpose of qualitative research is to understand concepts and problems that cannot be quantified, such as abstract situations that focus on beliefs, experiences, and relationships. (Queiros et al., 2017). For this specific study, quantitative research was not appropriate because of its focus on quantifying research, its highly structured and objective nature, and large sample groups (Queiros et al., 2017). Because of my desire to understand the experiences of certain individuals with a phenomenon that cannot be operationally quantified, qualitative research was used for this study.

This description of qualitative research provides evidence of the appropriateness of qualitative research for this specific research problem. I examined the meaning and motivations of different leveled teachers and their personal experiences within mentorship relationships. Aspers and Corte (2019) also explained that qualitative research attempts to understand the experiences and meanings individuals assign to their personal experiences. This characteristic of qualitative research also gives evidence as to why qualitative research was appropriate for this study.

The qualitative design chosen for this study was phenomenological research. Creswell and Poth (2018) defined phenomenological research as “the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon” (p. 75). Phenomenological research focuses on describing the commonalities of lived experiences between different participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth described phenomenological research as having a “strong philosophical component to it,” pulling largely from the writings of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (p. 75). Most of these thinkers shared the philosophical assumption that phenomenology was the study of conscious, lived experiences of different

individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moustakas (1994) explained that the understanding of such phenomenon lives within intention and intuition. Intentionality is the concept of consciousness to one's surroundings, the ability to understand how we are experiencing what we are experiencing (Moustakas, 1994). The concept of intuition refers to the clear understanding of phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This clear and evident understanding comes from "intuition-reflection processes, through a transformation of what is seen: first intuitively in the common appearance, in the manner in which something is presented and then in the fullness and clarity of an intuitive-reflective process" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). The intuition process allows for the clear understanding of the phenomenon, not from conscious reasoning, but from reflection upon the experience-based phenomenon.

The focus of phenomenological research is understanding and describing what commonalities exist between individuals who experience the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The common phenomenon for this study was mentorship relationships. Phenomenological research was selected because of my desire to understand and describe the experiences teachers have during their mentorship relationships. Creswell and Poth (2018) also explained that phenomenological research is used to bracket the researcher out, to view the research with fresh eyes. Because of my desire to bracket myself and my experiences out and to interview individuals who have experience with the same phenomenon, phenomenological research was appropriate for this study.

There are two types of phenomenology: hermeneutical and transcendental. Hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on relating lived experiences as a whole phenomenon as an interpretive process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The specific phenomenological approach chosen for this study

was transcendental. Transcendental phenomenology was chosen because of the specific steps associated with transcendental phenomenology research: “identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one’s experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). This collected data is then analyzed to find certain themes throughout. This specific strategy appropriates transcendental phenomenology for this study. Individual experiences from the phenomenon, mentorship relationships, were analyzed to find common themes. These themes were then used to describe what was experienced and how it was experienced, a characteristic of transcendental phenomenology research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Husserl, the father of phenomenology, believed that in using phenomenological designs, specifically transcendental phenomenological designs, theoretical frameworks were obsolete (Peoples, 2021). Husserl believed theoretical frameworks were obsolete because in completing phenomenological research, nothing “should be assumed or taken for granted when trying to understand a phenomenon” (Peoples, 2021, p. 30). Phenomenological research is defined by this lack of assumptions.

The focus of phenomenological research is understanding and describing what commonalities exist between individuals who experience the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The common phenomenon for my dissertation study was mentorship relationships among teachers of varied levels of teaching experience. Phenomenological research was appropriate because of my desire to understand and describe the experiences teachers have during their mentorship relationships. Moustakas’s (1994) explanation of the epoché step in phenomenological research describes my desire to bracket out myself and my experiences. The ultimate goal was to see the phenomenon, experiences with mentorship relationships, with a

fresh set of eyes. In addition to bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018) my own experiences with mentorship relationships, I wanted to understand how individuals personally experience mentorship relationships. Based on my goals, phenomenological research is the best, most effective, design for this study.

Research Questions

This study of the experiences of different leveled teachers' mentorship relationships was guided by one central research question and three research sub-questions.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational career?

Research Sub-questions (SQ)

SQ 1: How do teachers describe their experiences with the initiation of mentorship relationships?

SQ 2: How do teachers describe their experiences in cultivating mentorship relationships?

SQ 3: How do teachers describe the effects of participating in mentorship relationships?

Setting

The setting for this study were the main secondary schools within a large school district in northeastern Wyoming. The pseudonym used for the district is Camel County School District (CCSD) and the pseudonyms used for the two schools are Camel County High School (CCHS), and Bolt High School (BHS). Bolt High School serves the southern part of the county and Camel County High School serves the northern part of the county. Bolt High School is the younger of the two main secondary schools within Camel County School District, operating in its fifth year.

Both schools have a hierarchy of certified staff. In both buildings, there is a head principal and three associate principals. Each principal has specific content areas they focus on. Each principal also has certain students they check in on and discipline as needed based on the starting letter of their last name. Each principal is responsible for their content area teachers and alphabet-determined students.

BHS has 82 certified staff members and CCHS has 88 certified staff members (Campbell County School District, 2022). Some of these staff members do not hold teaching positions in the building and are thereby not reported in the certified teacher numbers that follow. Fifteen teachers at BHS have five years or less of teaching experience, 16 teachers have between six and 15 years of teaching experience, 23 teachers have between 16 and 25 years of teaching experience, and 12 have over 25 years of teaching experience (Campbell County School District). Eighteen teachers at CCHS have five years or less of teaching experience, 19 teachers have between six and 15 years of teaching experience, 23 teachers have between 16 and 25 years of teaching experience, and 10 teachers have over 25 years of teaching experience (Campbell County School District). A visual explanation of this data can be seen in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

Teachers' Experience Levels at BHS and CCHS

Teachers' Experience Level	BHS	CCHS
5 years or less	15	18
6 – 15 years	16	19
16 – 25 years	23	23
More than 25 years	15	10

The teacher attrition rate within CCSD is also relatively high, being equal to or higher than the national average three out of the last four years (Campbell County School District, 2020). In 2018, BHS had an attrition rate of 7.69% while CCHS had an attrition rate of 7.00% (Campbell County School District, 2020). In 2019, the attrition rate for BHS was 3.75% and 4.00% for CCHS. In 2020, the attrition rate for BHS was 9.88% and 8.85% for CCHS (Campbell County School District, 2020). In 2021, the attrition rate for BHS was 7.23% and 7.87 % for CCHS (Campbell County School District, 2022). A visual explanation of this data can be seen in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2

Attrition Rate Percentages by Year for BHS and CCHS

Attrition Rate by Year	BHS	CCHS
2018	7.69	7.00
2019	3.75	4.00
2020	9.88	8.85
2021	7.23	7.87

The Camel County School District was selected for this study because of the wide range of teaching levels represented, the increased teacher attrition rate, and the presence of mentorship relationships (both formal and informal).

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used within this study because intentional selection was a priority; the sample group must be a selection of people that best fit the research phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because of the nature of this study, the specific sampling method used

was criterion sampling. In criterion sampling, the sample group must meet the criteria of having been involved in the phenomenon of mentorship relationships (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on the sample size range, teachers were selected based on their level of teaching experience: two to four teachers who have less than five years of teaching experience, two to four teachers who have between six and 15 years of teaching experience, two to four teachers who have between 16 and 25 years of teaching experience, and two to four teachers who have greater than 25 years of teaching experience. It is important that these different levels of teaching experiences were represented because the research questions were based on different levels of teaching experience. I wanted to know how teachers early in their careers initiate and cultivate mentorship relationships, as well as teachers well-invested in their teaching career. It is important that all teaching levels were represented as this study was based on all teachers, not just new teachers or veteran teachers.

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified a considerably large range for a phenomenological study, anywhere from one to 325 participants. Moser and Korstjens (2016) recommended using at least 10 individuals for a phenomenological study. Sim et al. (2018) concluded that the appropriate sample size for a phenomenological study depended on the questions asked and the answers received. Therefore, a sample size range of eight to 16 was identified as appropriate for this study. The exact number of participants in this study was 10. This particular sample size was appropriate because enough experiences were included to not generalize information, but to ascertain experiences of several different individuals and to specify their experiences.

Participants for this study were in-service teachers currently teaching at secondary schools within the Camel County School District. To ensure participants met the criteria for this study, a screening instrument was administered. This screening instrument consisted of 10 questions:

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Are you a certified secondary teacher in Camel County School District?
3. Have you ever been a participant in an informal or formal mentorship relationship as either a mentor or mentee?
4. What is your current age?
5. How many full years of teaching experience do you have?
6. Sometime during your teaching career, have you participated in an informal or formal mentorship relationship?
7. Are you currently a participant of an informal or formal mentorship relationship?
8. Have you participated in an informal or formal mentorship relationship where you served as the mentor?
9. Have you participated in an informal or formal mentorship relationship where you served as the mentee?
10. Please include your name and email so the researcher may contact you to schedule an interview and focus group.

This screening instrument was given as a Google Form. Data collected was in the form of a spreadsheet with prospective participants' responses. Gender and ethnicity were not topics of interest in this study and were therefore not identifiable characteristics. Age was included because of its relationship to years of teaching experience. Age of participants varied from approximately 26 years to 64 years. A candidate was identified if they answered yes to question three or six and yes to question eight or nine. Teachers did not need to answer yes to every question to be considered for this study. Contact information was obtained from the survey and from the staff directory published for all teachers' use as needed.

Procedures

Following a successful proposal defense, proper documentation was submitted to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), including consent form, permission letter, and recruitment letter. Once IRB approval was given, participant recruitment began along with interview preparations. The IRB approval can be found in Appendix A.

To begin recruitment of participants within the school district, contact was made with the superintendent for permission to conduct the study. After permission was granted from the superintendent, contact was made with each school principal to explain the research and seek additional permission to use teachers within their buildings. Once principal permission was obtained, recommendations for teacher candidates was obtained from the principal of each building. Purposeful and criterion sampling were used to determine a sample of eight to 16 individuals. A screening instrument was used to determine if a teacher met the criteria to participate in the study. This screening instrument consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix C). This screening instrument was given as a Google Form. Data collected was in the form of a spreadsheet with prospective participants' responses.

Following review of the screening instrument, participants were selected based on their years of teaching experience and their affiliation with mentorship relationships. Potential participants were then sent an introduction letter in email form (see Appendix D). Individuals who agreed to participate completed the participant consent form (see Appendix E).

Participants were given the date range for interviews and were asked to select a time slot that was convenient for them. Participants were reminded a week prior to their interview, as well as a day prior to their interview and the day of their interview to ensure participation. Interviews were conducted and lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to one and a half hours. Each participant

was interviewed separately. Interviews were recorded using an iPhone and an iPad for back-up purposes. Interviews were transcribed, and participants were asked to review transcripts of their interviews to correct any misrepresentations or add any missed items.

In addition to individual interviews, participants were asked to write an essay explaining their experiences with mentorship relationships. Participants were given instructions (see Appendix F) for their essay at the end of their interview and were expected to return the essay within a week. Following the individual interviews and completed essays, participants attended a focus group session. At the focus group session, participants discussed their affiliation with mentorship relationships, their found value or lack thereof in mentorship relationships, and how they tend to initiate and cultivate these relationships. Dialogue for the focus group session was relaxed, allowing for participants to speak freely with limited prompting.

Throughout the data collection process, I kept a reflection journal. This journal was used to reflect upon my own attitudes, assumptions, and opinions of the research. This journal was intended to limit any biases I may have had and to ensure I was allowing participants' voices to be heard. This is a direct characteristic of Moustakas's (1994) idea of transcendental phenomenology. All electronic data were stored on a password protected device and any non-electronic data were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

The Researcher's Role

My name is Jodi Lee Wilson. I am a teacher at Bolt High School within the Camel County School District in northeastern Wyoming where I teach three different content area sciences. I have also previously taught at another high school and middle school. While teaching at all three locations, I have been part of some type of mentorship relationship. Some of these relationships have been formal and some informal. I have been the mentor, the mentee, and both

at the same time. Because of my direct interactions within mentorship relationships, I hold some biases about how mentorship relationships should function and what the mentee and mentor should be contributing to the relationship. I believe that mentorship relationships can both harm and help teachers. When formal mentorship relationships are enforced too strongly, relationships lose their essence and teachers do not seek to form informal relationships. It is also my belief that negative mentorship relationships can breed resentment and trigger teacher attrition, while positive mentorship relationships can build teacher self-efficacy and decrease teacher attrition. Depending on how these mentorship relationships are initiated and cultivated determines their lasting effects.

I am choosing to bracket out my experiences and focus on the experiences of others. I journaled before, during, and after data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I acknowledged what biases I do have using this strategy. This helped to ensure I did not let my biases affect the significant statements and themes found in participants' data.

Because I am a teacher at one of the two main secondary schools within the Camel County School District, there is a possibility that I have had an affiliation with one or more of the chosen participants. However, with such a large pool, this is a small concern and can be avoided if need be. Because of my decision to conduct a transcendental phenomenological study, I chose to ignore my personal and professional relationships with these individuals and focus on understanding their personal experiences. This is consistent with the explanation of bracketing by Creswell and Poth (2018). I set aside my personal experiences in order to see mentorship relationships in a new, fresh light.

I have been teaching in this district for four years. I have served in various capacities including multiple science PLCs, the PBIS team, the BIT team, administrative intern, and

classroom teacher. This setting is important to me. I hope to continue to help the stakeholders of my community grow and positively influence the students and staff within CCSD. This research study has the potential to assist in creating meaningful relationships within the district, decrease teacher attrition, and increase student achievement.

Data Collection

Three different types of data collection were utilized in this study. These types were interviews, essays, and focus group sessions. All participants were interviewed and audio recorded. Participants each wrote an essay describing their thoughts regarding mentorship relationships. Focus group sessions were conducted to allow for participants to speak with others about their experiences, in an attempt to uncover previously unrevealed experiences.

Interviews

Interviewing is the most appropriate form of data collection for this phenomenological study because of the desire to collect data from individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) described a qualitative interview as a purposeful, structured conversation – "a careful questioning and listening approach" with the purpose of obtaining knowledge (p. 58). The specific form of interviewing, semi-structured life-world interview, is explained as obtaining descriptions of a specific phenomenon from the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The semi-structured life-world interview was used in this study because of the focus on the phenomenon of mentorship relationships and the goal of interpreting the meaning of and describing these relationships (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

All participants were interviewed and asked the same structured questions. However, answers varied and led to other question(s) for clarification or insight. One-on-one interviews

were held after school except for one that was completed during the teacher's lunch hour. All one-on-one interviews were conducted in the teacher's personal classroom except one that was completed in the lunch room of the teacher's building. Participants chose their own interview time based on a created interview schedule. I worked around the schedule of the participants to ensure the interview was given adequate time and the interviewee did not feel rushed. Interviews were audio recorded using two electronic recording devices, an iPhone and an iPad. The interview was intended to be a personal experience between myself and the interviewee. We were the only two in attendance during the interview experience.

The central research question and three sub-questions were addressed during the interview process. Interviewees were asked about their mentorship experiences, specifically in initiating and cultivating the relationship. Responses from the interview were used to understand and describe mentorship relationships (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2) and to address research sub-question three: How do mentorship relationships encourage increased student success and decreased teacher attrition? Table 3.3 below lists the interview questions and the research questions each interview question is intended to address.

Table 3.3

Interview Questions

Ques. #	Question	RQ Addressed
1a	Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.	Background
1b	How old are you? (if not answered with 1a)	Background
1c	How many total years have you been teaching? (if not answered with 1a)	Background
2	Describe your teaching career to me, as thoroughly as possible.	Background

3	Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession?	Background
4	For what reasons have you considered leaving the teaching profession?	Background
5	Explain your understanding of mentorship relationships, both formal and informal.	CRQ
6	Describe your experiences, if any, with formal mentorship relationships.	CRQ
7	Why were these formal mentorship relationships first initiated?	SQ1
8	Describe how these formal mentorship relationships were initiated.	SQ1
9	Describe ways you cultivated these formal mentorship relationships.	SQ2
10	Describe your experiences, if any, with informal mentorship relationship.	CRQ
11	Why were these informal mentorship relationships first initiated?	SQ1
12	Describe how these informal mentorship relationships were initiated.	SQ1
13	Describe ways you cultivated these informal mentorship relationships.	SQ2
14	Historically, mentorship relationships have occurred between an older mentor and a younger mentee – has that always been the case for you? Please describe. a. (Have you ever had a mentor who was younger than you?)	CRQ
15	Describe your opinion on the effects of participating in mentorship relationships.	SQ3
16	Have you ever had a mentorship relationship that encouraged you to remain in the education field? Please describe.	SQ3
17	Describe a mentorship relationship, if any, that helped you grow as an educator and in turn helped your students better succeed.	SQ3
18	Describe a mentorship relationship, if any, that dynamically changed your opinion of your position in the education field.	SQ3
19	Explain your feelings concerning the value of mentorship relationships.	SQ3

20	What else do you think would be important for me to know about your experiences with mentorship relationships?	Any/All

I chose these interview questions because of their relation to the research questions and their ability to assess how teachers experience, initiate, and cultivate mentorship relationships. Interview questions 1 through 4 are used as engagement questions to break the ice and get to know the participant, their teaching experience, and their connection to mentorship relationships. Cypress (2018) recommended such "ice-breaker" questions to help the participants feel comfortable and at-ease during the interview process. Not only does Question 1 serve as an icebreaker question, but it also helps to acquire data to separate participants' responses into teaching levels by experience and age.

Questions 5, 6, 10, and 14 focus on answering the central research question. Lejonberg et al. (2019) and Fowler et al. (2018) asserted that positive mentorship relationships support both the mentor and the mentee regardless of their current level of experience. These interview questions sought to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences the participants have had with mentorship relationships throughout their teaching career.

Interview questions 7, 8, 11, and 12 allowed participants to describe why and how they initiated mentorship relationships. These questions relate directly to sub-question 1. It is during the initiation phase that the mentor and mentee are determining why the relationship is needed and how they will work together (Daniel et al., 2019). During the initiation phase, goals are shared, trust is built and mutual respect between the participants grows (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). These questions provide a deeper understanding of why teachers seek out mentorship relationships and how they are initiated.

Interview questions 9 and 13 allowed participants to describe the characteristics that encouraged the cultivation of a relationship between participating individuals. These questions focus on sub-question 2. Daniel et al. (2019) and Fowler et al. (2018) proposed that the cultivation phase of the mentorship relationship is the longest because individuals are developing strategies and characteristics of a collaborative pair. During the cultivation phase, learning goals are focused upon and participants exhibit the most growth (Lynn & Nguyen, 2020). These questions provide a deeper understanding of what characteristics allow teachers to cultivate a working mentorship relationship.

Interview questions 15 through 19 allowed participants to share their beliefs on the effects of utilizing mentorship relationships relating to sub-question three. There is much research to support the positive benefits for teachers when they participate in mentorship relationships. Teachers who participate in such relationships have higher self-efficacy, increased content and pedagogy knowledge, better management skills, and more positive interactions with students (Arnett, 2017; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Lejonberg & Tiplic, 2016; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). These questions provided a deeper understanding as to how teachers perceive the effects of mentorship relationships.

The last interview question was used to allow participants to provide any information they deemed relevant to the topic of mentorship relationships. This question had the potential to relate to the central research question and all sub-questions depending on the answers given by the participants.

After each interview, I downloaded the recording and transcribed the interview. I then reviewed the initial transcription and corrected as needed to ensure that the recording and the

transcription matched identically. I listened to the recording multiple times to confirm the accuracy of the transcription. The final transcription was emailed to the participant for validation. A shortened example of a transcribed interview can be found in Appendix J.

Essay

A different form of data collection used in this study was participant essays. As used in a study by Groenewald (2004), each participant was asked to write an essay based on their experiences with the specific phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2018) encouraged qualitative researchers to use data collection methods that are outside the box and unique to the specific study. Creswell and Poth also asserted that using depictions of the research phenomenon other than interviews for phenomenological research increases the diversity of data collection for the study. Using the participants' written essays allowed insight into the participants' experiences from their first-hand accounts.

Participants were given instructions on what to include in their essay (see Appendix F). Participants were asked to address each of the questions listed in Table 3.4 in their essays. Table 3.4 also outlines which research question each essay question addressed.

Table 3.4

Essay Questions

Ques. #	Question	RQ Addressed
1	What does it mean to be part of a mentorship relationship?	CRQ
2	What does it mean to be the mentor in a mentorship relationship?	CRQ
3	What does it mean to be the mentee in a mentorship relationship?	CRQ
4	In your teaching career, how have you served as a mentor in a mentorship relationship?	CRQ

5	Were there any specific times during your teaching career where someone sought you out as a mentor? Please explain.	CRQ
6	In your teaching career, how have you served as a mentee in a mentorship relationship?	CRQ
7	Were there any specific times during your teaching career where you sought someone out to mentor you? Please explain.	CRQ
8	Do you feel that participating in a mentorship relationship has helped you increase your success as a secondary teacher? a. If yes, why and how? b. If no, why not?	SQ3

Participants received these instructions at the end of their scheduled interviews and were asked to return their completed essay within a week. Participants submitted hard-copies and/or electronic copies of their essays. These essays were used to investigate the central research question: What are the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational career? The essays were also used to investigate research sub-question 3: How do mentorship relationships encourage increased student success and decrease teacher attrition? The essays addressed how teachers experience mentorship relationships in their teaching careers and how these relationships affect their personal success as teachers. The use of these essays was similar to the use of a follow-up interview, in that participants were able to think through their interview answers, ponder answers longer, and respond without implications of an onlooker. A shortened example of a participant essay can be found in Appendix K.

Focus Group

A third, and final, form of data collection was focus group sessions. Focus groups are used to facilitate discussion among participants (Leung & Savithiri, 2009). The collaborative

discussion allowed in focus groups tends to encourage individuals to speak more freely and offer more candid responses (Leung & Savithiri, 2009). During focus group discussions, participants tend to piggyback off other participants' responses allowing for more in-depth or idea-rich responses (Leung & Savithiri, 2009).

Two different focus groups were held, each with five participants and myself. Focus group sessions were conducted in my personal classroom after school hours. The purpose of the focus group was to engage the participants in discussion with one another, rather than with me as with the one-on-one interview. During the focus group, I was the facilitator of the conversation guiding participant discussion using a set of open-ended questions. Focus group questions are listed below along with the research question addressed by each. This information can also be found in Appendix H.

Table 3.5

Focus Group Questions

Ques. #	Question	RQ Addressed
1	Please introduce yourself to the group as if we have all just met one another. How many full years of teaching experience do you have? At what levels?	Background
2	Explain your experiences with mentorship relationships as a secondary teacher. Have you served as a mentor? Have you participated as a mentee?	CRQ
3	What are your thoughts and beliefs about mentor programs for new teachers? For veteran teachers?	CRQ
4	What characteristics are important for teachers to cultivate formal relationships?	SQ2

5	What characteristics are important for teachers to cultivate informal relationships?	SQ2
6	What are your thoughts and beliefs about initiation of mentorship relationships as teachers become more experienced? a. Are there differences between a new teacher initiating such relationships and a veteran teacher? If so, what are the differences?	CRQ/SQ1
7	Explain the successes/failures of mentorship relationships.	SQ3

The focus group was recorded, with both audio and video, using an iPhone, an iPad, and a MacBook for backup. I downloaded the recording and transcribed the interview using the Temi electronic application. I reviewed the initial transcription and made corrections as needed to ensure that the recording and transcription matched identically. I listened to the recording multiple times to confirm the accuracy of the transcription. The final transcription was emailed to all participants for validation. A shortened example of a transcribed focus group session can be found in Appendix L. I also took field notes during the focus group to reference during data analysis.

All digital recordings were stored on a password-protected computer. All hard copies were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I made notes in my reflection journal during and after the interview process and focus group sessions to bracket out my own biases and ideas. My reflection journal was also stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office during this time.

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) explained that phenomenological research is characterized by four distinct steps. The first step in phenomenological research is the epoché. During this step, the

researcher's "prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas" are set aside (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained Moustakas' epoché as *bracketing* where the researcher sets aside their own experiences so the specified phenomenon is viewed with a new, fresh perspective. The second step is phenomenological reduction. During phenomenological reduction, experiences with the specific phenomenon are explained as descriptively as possible for the researcher, mentally retracing steps and memories as much as need to recount experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The third step is imaginative variation. Imaginative variation is the process of looking for possible meanings (Moustakas, 1994). "Describing the essential structures of a phenomenon is the major task of the imaginative variation" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). This step in phenomenological research depends on intuition and how the researcher is best able to understand the experiences with the specified phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The fourth step is synthesis of meaning and essences. This is the final step and is where descriptions of the experiences are presented in a unified statement (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas asserted that this final step is not exhaustive and that experiences can be ever evolving. Following these four steps allows for the exploration of how individuals experience specific phenomenon, which allows the research to better understand how the phenomenon is experienced by different individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epoché

To properly follow the epoché stage outlined by Moustakas (1994), my own personal experiences with mentorship relationships were documented through the journaling process. As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), "this is an attempt to set aside the researcher's personal experiences" (p. 78). To document my own personal experiences, I journaled my "understandings, judgments, and knowings" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33) of mentorship

relationships. I journaled prior to conducting interviews. I journaled prior to interviews so that my biases were documented before I had contact with any participants' views of mentorship relationships. By journaling before interacting with participants, my views were realized and participants' views were focused upon. In bracketing out my own personal views, I was able to see mentorship relationships with a new, enlightened perspective.

Phenomenological Reduction

After the epoché, bracketing was done to ensure that all views besides the views of participants had been set aside; thus began the reduction phase. Interviews with participants were transcribed and then organized. Transcribed interviews were read through and marginal notes were made (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data files were created and organized. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Interviews were recorded using an electronic recording device, in this case an iPhone and iPad. A word processing program was used to transcribe each individual interview. Interviews were compiled as separate documents. Transcriptions were outlined just as interview questions were outlined. During the interview, notes were also taken. These notes were used as a separate data file but for the creation of significant statements. This process allowed me to read and make notes on transcribed copies. Having tangible dictation notes allowed for further analysis. Records for document analysis and essays were also given their own separate data file but used for creation of significant statements later in the analysis of data.

Marginal notes were completed and initial theming was performed. Transcribed interviews and observation notes were re-read and marginal notes were made throughout. I made notes where important issues were mentioned. All information given by participants was "treated as having equal value" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). This process describes horizontalizing the data. Horizontalization also includes removing statements made by participants that are not part of the

research. These statements along with duplicate statements were removed, leaving only the horizons or the statements that were pertinent to the research questions. In using the horizontalized data, meaning units were created (Moustakas, 1994).

Creating meaning units allows the researcher to recognize common themes and then cluster common themes together. Grouping into broader themes provides "foundation for interpretation because it creates clusters and removes repetition" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). Using verbatim examples, textural descriptions of the experiences with mentorship relationships were created. The textural description creates a description of *what* participants in the study experienced (Creswell & Poth). These textural descriptions are intended to be the coherent clustering of themes of the phenomenon to be further specified later in the analysis process (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative Variation

Imaginative variation builds on phenomenological reduction by using textural descriptions to create structural themes (Moustakas, 1994). By using the textural descriptions and horizons, possible meanings of experiences were formulated. Formulating meanings is the first step in imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). I determined what topics were brought up several times and sorted them based on topic. These topics represented the themes or the possible meanings. After identifying common topics, I used same-color tabs for each identified theme. These same-color tabs allowed for the creation of initial structural themes, the significant statements. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that significant statements are statements about "how individuals are experiencing the topic" (p. 79).

Synthesis of Meaning and Essences

The final step in the analysis process includes creating a final composite description, an essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The composite description includes both the textural and structural description (Creswell & Poth). The composition description is the culmination of the study and is the core of the experiences of teachers with mentorship relationships. Together, the textural and structural descriptions construct the essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The essences create the common, composite description of the experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used this final process to determine the experiences of teachers during their mentorship relationships, how and why these relationships are cultivated and initiated, and what benefit teachers self-report about their mentorship relationships.

Trustworthiness

Elo et al. (2014) explains that researchers must be systematic and organized to enhance trustworthiness of their research. To ensure trustworthiness, four specific topics should be covered in the research study. These topics include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Elo et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Credibility

According to Polit and Beck (2012), credibility relates to the "confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations of them" (p. 36). To ensure credibility, participants in the study must be accurately described (Elo et al., 2014). Credibility is important because when a study is credible, the intended focus of the research is confidently addressed (Elo et al., 2014).

To ensure the credibility of this study, participants were encouraged to review their interview and focus group transcription. This is consistent with the descriptions of member

checking (Korstjens & Moster, 2017). Participants were provided with a copy of their transcribed interview and the focus group transcription and given a chance to review information and to elaborate on anything. Participants were also asked to edit the electronic document by adding comments where they felt the need to elaborate. This process increased the credibility of the study because participants were able to examine specifics and elaborate where there is vagueness. This provides a reevaluation, reducing the possibility of error of misrepresentation. This also allows for an appropriate description of the participants.

Another strategy used to ensure credibility is triangulation, specifically methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation is the use of multiple methods of data collection (Korstjen & Moser, 2017). Methodological triangulation was achieved by collecting information in three different ways: individual participant interviews, participant essays, and focus group participation. Using these three different types of data collection allowed for a well-rounded opinion of mentorship relationships from participants. This creates a more credible study.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability refers to consistency and stability (Elo et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moster, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2012). For a research study to be dependable, another researcher should be able to easily follow the path of the original researcher (Elo et al., 2014). To ensure dependability of research, an audit trail was used. An audit trail is a detailed set of notes describing decisions made during the research process, reflective thoughts, and information about data (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Confirmability refers to the neutrality and un-biased nature of the research (Elo et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moster, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2012). Confirmability is especially important in generating data that is based on the participants in the study and not on the viewpoints of the

research (Elo et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moster, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2012). To ensure confirmability of research, direct quotations from transcribed interviews and participant essays were used in data presentation. Using direct quotations allows a connection between the data and results, free of researcher opinion and in the participants' voice (Elo et al., 2014).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of the research to transfer to another setting (Elo et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moster, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2012). To ensure transferability of research, rich descriptions were included. Rich descriptions provide a "detailed account of participants' experiences where pattern and themes are put into context" (Peoples, 2021, p. 70). These detailed descriptions show the complexity of the lived experiences of the participants (Peoples, 2021). The information in this study can be used for further research on teachers' use of mentorship relationships, specifically teachers of varying levels of experience.

Ethical Considerations

To conduct an ethical research study, respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice must be planned for (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical considerations and implications were established for this research study following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) expectations. Participants were given information about the research and their responsibilities as a participant. Participants also provided consent and could have left if they felt overwhelmed or uncomfortable at any time during the process.

I am aware of my role as a researcher and strive to keep my research separate from my daily interactions. In doing this, I am protecting the data. All electronic devices used to store data and electronic files such as researcher notes, recorded interviews, transcribed interviews, essays, and documents are password protected, increasing security for such files – a suggestion outlined

by Creswell and Poth (2018). Questions from interviews with potentially negative responses could potentially harm the school district or individual school. Observations of poor mentorship relationships could portray the teacher and/or school in a negative light. Because of these possible implications, pseudonyms were used for all participants. This allowed for anonymity of participants. This also allowed participants to answer openly and honestly without fear of repercussion.

Summary

Mentorship relationships among teachers are imperative to the success of the school and the students. There is little known about how teachers of different levels in their career experience, initiate, and cultivate these relationships. To better understand the experiences of teachers in their mentorship relationships, a transcendental phenomenological study was completed. This study was intended to study the phenomenon of mentorship relationships while bracketing out my own personal experiences. Ten teachers from secondary schools within the same school district in northeastern Wyoming were interviewed to investigate the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational careers, how teachers describe their experiences in initiating mentorship relationships, how teachers describe their experiences in cultivating mentorship relationships and how mentorship relationships encourage increased student success and decreased teacher attrition.

Based on interviews, participants' essays, and focus group sessions, common themes about teachers' experiences with mentorship relationships were generated in hopes of adding to the current literature on teachers' use of mentorship relationships. More research is needed to best understand how teachers who are not new to the classroom experience, initiate, and cultivate such relationships. The intent of this chapter was to describe how the research was completed.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, will introduce the participants and the information shared during the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to investigate the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels of experience in their educational career. I want to understand how secondary teachers describe their experiences with mentorship relationships both from the perspective of the mentor and from the perspective of the mentee, including how they initiate and cultivate these relationships throughout their educational career. I also want to understand how teachers describe the benefits of participating in mentorship relationships. This chapter introduces the teachers in this study and uses their personal explanations to explain their experiences with mentorship relationships including the themes that were exposed and answers for the four research questions. Secondary teachers who had or currently have experience within mentorship relationships participated in this study.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to identify 13 prospective candidates. These 13 prospects met the criteria of the study by their level of teaching experience and experiences with mentorship relationships. The names of these individuals were identified from the screening instrument sent out to each of the building locations by the building principal. An invitation to participate in the research was sent to each of the 13 prospective candidates. Of the 13 invited, 10 agreed to participate. Both main high schools in the research district were represented.

Initially, the screening instrument was sent out to the teachers from the building principals. Seventy responses were received from both schools. Of these responses, answers to the questions were filtered out based on specific criteria, including being a certified secondary teacher and having experiences with mentorship relationships. Thirty-three prospective

participants were identified after filtering was completed. Of these 33 prospects, 13 emails were sent out to individuals explaining my research and asking them to participate in my study. Of these emails, 12 were sent first: six to each separate school. These six names for each school were randomly selected based on the experience filter. One person declined participation, so a 13th email was sent. Two people never responded to the original email. Upon response from the prospective participant, a link was sent to the individual to sign up for an individual interview time.

Table 4.1 provides the participant background information for this study.

Table 4.1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Ethnicity	Content Area	Years Taught	Current Age	Experience Bracket	Experience As Mentor/Mentee/ Both
Eddie	White	Special Education	3	29	0-5	Both
Maddie	White	Math	4	26	0-5	Both
Marie	White	Science	11	35	6-15	Both
Parker	White	Science	6	33	6-15	Both
Jane	White	Science	19	43	16-25	Both
Sunny	White	Science	25	49	16-25	Both
Hollis	White	Fine Arts	16	40	16-25	Both
Gemma	White	Physical Education	30	53	More than 25	Both
Mae	White	Math	41	64	More than 25	Both

Gabriel	White	Physical Education	36	62	More than 25	Both

Eddie

Eddie is a special-education teacher with three years of teaching experience. The pseudonym Eddie was used because of his work with special education. Eddie immediately distinguished between formal and informal mentorship relationships in explaining his understanding of these relationships. He described the formal mentorship relationship as learning the "exact ins and outs of everything that you do, the written stuff" and described the informal mentorship relationships as "the unwritten stuff, all those in-between things that we do."

Eddie has had multiple experiences as both a mentor and mentee in his short time as a teacher. Eddie mentioned that he "kind of goes about it as being as friendly and as open as possible." As a mentor, he strives to create an open and honest environment where the mentee can count on him for help and support. As a mentee, Eddie maintains communication and knows who to ask when he has certain questions. Eddie spoke continuously of the positive effects he has experienced in participating in mentorship relationships, saying they have helped him when he considered leaving the profession and encouraged him to be a better teacher for his students. Eddie said,

> I think there's always things we can learn and [that can] help us grow as educators. Whether it's I'm working with someone who's been teaching for 30 years or somebody who's been teaching for one, I think there's always something we can learn and something we can channel from each person.

Maddie

Maddie is a math-content teacher with four years of teaching experience. Because she talked about her love of math and her analytical mind, the pseudonym Maddie was used

symbolizing math-y. Interviewing Maddie was an invaluable experience. She opened up about how having a mentor teacher has greatly enhanced her career, given her opportunities to succeed, and provided her a much-needed support system. Maddie became emotional during the interview, expressing her concern for her own career when her mentor of four years retires this year. This was proof of the impact that mentorship relationships have had on this young teacher.

Maddie explained mentorship relationships as having "a person you can go to and you can get help from. And, you can learn teaching strategies and just have that person to support you through your teaching career." Maddie spoke often of how participating in mentorship relationships has helped her emotionally and professionally. She spoke of having connections with people and using them as a resource when needed. While Maddie recognized herself as a mentee mostly, she did reflect on how she has provided technological support for her older, more veteran teacher peers. In that way, Maddie has mentored her peers because she has an abundance of technology know-how. When talking about the benefits of participating in mentorship relationships, Maddie reflected on having someone there when she needed them. She said,

> I think having a strong mentorship would be… it's just really beneficial because you're not feeling like you're lost the entire time. You have someone to lean on if you're struggling, which you know, that first year teaching you're struggling the entire time before you realize you're struggling. And, so, I think it's always…I think the big part is having someone to lean on and ask questions to. And, just to be, to have someone that's supportive of you. And, willing to help you out at any point.

Marie

Marie is a science-content teacher with 11 years of teaching experience. Because she mentioned multiple times about teaching different physical sciences, the pseudonym Marie was

used - a reference to the famous chemist Marie Curie. Marie described mentorship relationships as “helping guide a person.” Marie went on to differentiate between the mentor and mentee experiences in saying that being a mentor “means to help guide the new teachers, answer questions and just be there, an eye and ear to help them out” while participating as a mentee “means to feel welcome and have someone that you can call on for help anytime.”

Marie lumped her experiences with mentorship relationships together, whether they were formal or informal. Marie did not feel as if she had truly participated in any formal mentorship relationships because there were no papers to fill out or boxes to check when she had served as a mentor. She felt that most of her experiences with mentorship relationships were informal. She referenced mentoring new teachers as they have come through her department in saying “new teacher, lots of questions – just pops into my room and asks questions a lot of time.” On the other hand, Marie recognized that she has been a mentee in the same type of situation where she was not necessarily a new teacher to the building or department but she was teaching a new content area. She found herself relying on another teacher who had taught the content before. With thoughts of this specific experience, Marie said, “When I first started teaching physics, I felt like I spent more time in her room than mine trying to figure out how to [teach] physics.”

Marie explained that mentorship relationships are reciprocal, that both the mentor and mentee benefit from the relationship. She said that “being a veteran teacher and helping young teachers reminds you of what those first years are like and allows some new ideas for the field as new teachers *can* teach old dogs tricks.” Marie mentioned that in helping others find the answers to certain questions, she benefitted because questions she didn’t know she needed to ask were being asked. She also mentioned that she believed her students benefitted from her participation in certain mentorship relationships because the other participant “would really call each other

out, like you're being grouchy today." She said this helped her students because they ultimately had a happier teacher. On the other hand, however, Marie reflected that having a mentor caused her more stress at times because she had to worry about another person.

Parker

Parker is a science-content teacher with 6 years of teaching experience. The pseudonym Parker was used because he mentioned working as a Park Ranger during the summers. When explaining his understanding of mentorship relationships, Parker automatically separated formal mentorship relationships from informal ones. Parker explained formal mentorship relationships as those that should be structured and pre-planned. He mentioned that in a formal mentorship, the mentor is "there to support you, help you figure out routines, procedures, lesson planning, unit planning." For the informal mentorship relationship, Parker related these to more of a friendship between two individuals. He described these as "just kind of teachers that you buddy up to."

Parker has had many positive experiences with mentorship relationships, both formal and informal. In reference to formal mentorship relationships, Parker reflected on his first year as a secondary teacher when he had an older, veteran teacher mentor who assisted him with the functionality of teaching – the procedures and routines. He explained his experiences with formal mentorship as "survival – teacher survival…mostly just kind of the day-to-day stuff." On the informal side, Parker explained his experiences as a new teacher contemplating leaving the education profession. He was able to find an informal mentor who took him in "was great about getting other teachers who had been in the district for a while to also form those bonds with me and try to help me out." Parker described informal mentorship relationships as meeting people who are close in proximity and figuring out who of those people will be good resources.

When comparing his participation in mentorship relationships with his success as a secondary teacher, Parker reflected:

> I absolutely believe that mentorship is an essential part of being successful in a classroom. I cannot imagine where I would be today without all the input from my mentors. Mentorship creates opportunities to let your barriers down and share your honest experiences with others for thoughtful reflection.

Jane

Jane is a science-content teacher with 19 years of teaching experience. Because she frequently mentioned in her interview that she is a life scientist by nature, the pseudonym Jane was used – a reference to the famous biologist Jane Goodall. Jane has had experiences both as a mentor and a mentee in different mentorship relationships. Jane believes that mentorship relationships are essential for educators and believes that it is in these types of relationships "where the real teacher education occurs." When asked to explain her understanding of mentorship relationships, Jane described that "mentorship is really a relationship that allows for long-term growth of both people." She continued to explain that within a mentorship relationship, the mentor is supposed to help the mentee develop their craft and be a source of emotional support for the mentee.

In explaining her experiences with mentorship relationships, Jane was quick to differentiate between formal and informal relationships. She explained formal mentorship relationships as "stiffer" and more "by the book." Jane explained that informal mentorship relationships, however, were initiated because of a need. When Jane served as a mentor in an informal mentorship relationship, she felt that the relationship was initiated because she "was the one who knew how to teach something" or because she saw a teacher in need and she "had to do

something to support them." Jane felt that there was more culture-building involved in cultivating the relationship than anything. She explained it as a "natural humanity", that "the more time you spend together with purpose, that relationship grows."

Jane described mentorship relationships as "a very powerful thing and it is what will make you a better whatever-you're-doing." As a mentor attempting to help another, newer teacher, she had to think outside of the box and research ways to help her mentee. This, in turn, helped her "to try new things to see if they work to help." Jane described this experience as an opportunity for personal growth not just for the other teacher, but for her as well. Jane felt that this use of different resources and new strategies positively affected her students, allowing them the opportunity to benefit from her new skills. When asked about the effects of participating in relationships, Jane stated that it "doesn't matter which side of it you're on, I think it does a good job of building up strength and resilience and perseverance and, it helps to remove some of that daunting pressure that sits there all the time."

Sunny

Sunny is a science-content teacher with 25 years of teaching experience. She was given the pseudonym Sunny because she has a bright, bubbly personality – a cheerleader in her younger days. Sunny described mentorship relationships as "a partnership between two or more people, where one person is leading and giving advice and the other is asking questions and receiving advice." Sunny reflected that she has served as both a mentor and mentee throughout her educational career. She did not differentiate between formal and informal mentorship relationships, often talking about her experiences with formal mentorship relationships.

Sunny did speak of having negative experiences as a formal mentor because she was not given the option of who the mentee was and their personalities did not gel. She reflected on this

experience with negativity and remorse, contemplating how she could have handled the situation differently. However, she also did some self-reflecting because of that negative experience and changed some of her own strategies because of the experience. Sunny mentioned the importance of getting to know each other outside of school in order to help cultivate the mentorship relationship. She felt that having a personal relationship helped the success of the professional relationship. Sunny did mention having younger teachers as a mentor to her, especially when she moved buildings and when she began teaching new content. Sunny also reflected on the importance of mentorship relationships for teacher retention. She said:

> I think if we're going to talk about retaining teachers, I think it is extremely valuable. It is a must. I mean, if we're going to maintain people in this industry, we've got to hook them up with someone to help them navigate. It's far too much to try to figure out on your own.

Hollis

Hollis is a band teacher with 16 years of teaching experience. The pseudonym Hollis was used because he continuously mentioned his love for the arts, especially music and band. Hollis is a reference to the folk duo Hall and Oats. Hollis explained mentorship relationships as having someone to help another during trying times and tough situations. He called mentorship relationships "a mini support group." Hollis explained how mentorship relationships help new teachers settle in, create friendships, and provide "someone that you can just talk to." Hollis distinguished between formal and informal relationships from the beginning. He openly expressed his preference for the informal mentorship relationship, saying, "I actually prefer the informal mentoring more than the formal one just because it's more of, like, having a friend. You know, someone you can actually connect with."

Hollis has had experiences with both formal and informal mentorship relationships, serving as both a mentor and mentee at different times in his educational career. Hollis spoke kindly of his first formal mentorship relationship reflecting on how his formal mentor helped him navigate the system by providing materials and teaching strategies. Hollis said, "…It worked out well, great ideas and you know, it really helped my career – being able to feel more comfortable in what I'm doing. I really enjoyed the professional mentorship." Hollis also valued his experiences with informal mentorship relationships, expressing how he had developed lasting friendships with his former mentors and mentees.

When asked about how his experiences with mentorship relationships had affected him as a teacher, Hollis expressed great appreciation for his mentors who helped him along the way. He reflected on having a mentor validate him as a teacher, saying, "That made me feel good knowing that, oh, okay, I must be good at this. So, it was just that encouragement." He also shared how he believed he had become a better teacher just by watching and learning from his mentors. Hollis further mentioned how he served as a mentor and helped other teachers. In reference to being a mentor to a new teacher, Hollis said, "It's flattering to see my way of teaching coming through how they're doing it." Hollis expressed his beliefs that mentorship relationships have greatly enhanced his career as a teacher. He said, "There are so many things that have helped in this, but mainly the mentorships have given me something to reflect on and use towards assessing my own teaching."

Gemma

Gemma is a physical education teacher with 30 years of teaching experience. Because she has spent many years as a P.E. teacher and coach, the pseudonym Gemma, coined from gym, was used. Gemma explained a mentorship relationship as having "somebody who is in your

profession who can help guide you, teach you, just give you guidance as far as just helping you learn and grow in the profession that you're in or the job that you have."

Gemma explained her experiences from both the perspective of a mentor and a mentee. She reflected on her early career when she was greatly impacted by a mentor. Gemma said "I was not prepared to jump into the profession until I actually had some time to spend with her." Gemma also reflected on being a mentor to other teachers. She thought of several formal relationships and questioned if she could have been a better formal mentor to those individuals if she would have had more preparation. Gemma explained the importance of getting to know each other in a mentorship relationship, taking time "outside of the teaching day to really spend time together to talk." She believed cultivating an outside relationship greatly impacted the success of the professional mentorship relationship. Gemma also reflected on the importance of utilizing "well-respected, super-organized" individuals as mentors.

Gemma explained an experience when a mentor affirmed her as a teacher and gave her positive reinforcement. She felt that this experience helped keep her going and remain in the education system. Gemma expressed her belief that mentorship relationships can benefit all individuals involved, regardless of the teacher's age or experience level. She said, "We have to be willing to put the time in to learn and grow, too. I'm at the tail-end of my career but I still feel like I have a lot to learn, and there are people out there that I could learn from." She continued to say, "I think that we're lifelong learners as educators and I think we have a lot to learn from our peers and our colleagues. And, I think we could spend more time fostering those mentorship relationships."

Mae

Mae is a math-content teacher with 41 years of teaching experience. Because she talked about "mommying" mentees and how she loves helping others around her, the pseudonym Mae is used – referring to ‘mother’ in Portuguese. Mae described her understanding of the mentorship relationship as helping another teacher in need. As a veteran teacher, Mae continually reflected on her position as a mentor. Though she admitted later that she is indeed a mentee at times, especially when it comes to technology, during her interview she spoke of herself primarily as a mentor. She explained that the “mentor is a safe haven where nothing is out of bounds and kindness and support are in abundance.”

Mae told multiple stories of her experiences during her 41 years as an educator, helping other teachers (new and not) navigate the systems and develop teaching strategies and classroom management, and just being there for those teachers who needed a support system. She said “That’s just what I do – just take them under my wing and I mommy them!” One of the most telling events during the interview was that the interview had to be paused half way through because two younger teachers came in to seek guidance from Mae.

Even though Mae thought of herself as more of a mentor, she has had experiences as both a mentor and mentee in both formal and informal relationships. Mae distinguished between the formal and informal relationships by saying that she has been chosen many, many times by an administrator of some sort to serve as a formal mentor to new-to-the-profession and new-to-the-district teachers. Mae mentioned that during her times as a mentor, she had the opportunity to learn from the newer teachers because they had skills she did not or because they had fresh ideas and perspectives to contribute. In reference to being a mentor to a specific new teacher, Mae remembered:

> The first time I went up to watch her teach, I was like, oh, I need a piece of paper. And, not because I need to write down the things that I was going to ask her to change, it was because I loved what she was doing in her class so much that I wanted to try them in my own.

When reflecting on her experience as a mentee, Mae thought immediately of technology. Because she grew up as a teacher without technology, she has had to rely on other (mostly younger) teachers to help her navigate that technology. She said, "As the technology comes at us faster and faster, there have been many days when I have relied on a peer to help me set things up and run new programs." It was evident that Mae is a passionate educator and loves helping other teachers find their passion. She takes participating in mentorship relationships with pride. In her personal essay, Mae said:

> It is always nice to be asked to impart my wisdom gained through my experience. And, I never take the opportunity lightly. We need good teachers throughout the building and if I can help with that even in a small way, then I am more than happy to do it.

When reflecting on the effects participating in mentorship relationships has had on her teaching career, Mae said, "Absolutely and unequivocally I will answer yes to the fact that participating in a mentorship relationship has increased my success as a teacher…each take away has made me a better person and hence, a better teacher." Mae continuously spoke of her beliefs that participating in mentorship relationships is good for both parties, the mentor and the mentee alike. She also reflected on past relationships that encouraged her to self-reflect and increase her teaching abilities. She said, "Each has something to bring to the table and the best thing you can do in your career is be open to self-reflection and new ideas."

Gabriel

Gabriel is a physical education teacher with 36 years of teaching experience. The pseudonym Gabriel was used because he spoke many times about being a Christian mentor and having Jesus as the ultimate mentor. In describing his understanding of mentorship relationships, Gabriel distinguished between formal and informal mentorships, adding that the formal mentorship relationship is a requirement and the informal is "by your role modeling, by how you act, how you act and react to those around you." Gabriel reflected that he has had more informal mentorship relationships and feels more comfortable with those types of relationships. He said, "I think the informal I'm part of have more – I think they're – I don't know if I want to say more successful. But, they go deeper." Gabriel mostly spoke of his role as a mentor – leading others, being consistent with contact, and meeting on a regular basis. In his role as a mentee, Gabriel talked of older teachers helping him navigate when he was younger. When asked about the benefits of participating in mentorship relationships, Gabriel responded, "You're going to get out of if what you put into it" suggesting that the success of the mentorship relationship is dependent on the individuals attitudes and productivity.

Results

Each individual participated in a one-on-one interview where I asked 20 open-ended questions. Following the individual interview, teachers in this study completed a personal essay explaining their experiences with mentorship relationships and their perceived effects of participating in such relationships. Thirdly, teachers in this study contributed during focus group sessions. All data inquiry focused on one central research question and three sub-questions: What are the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational career? How do teachers describe their experiences with the initiation of mentorship

relationships? How do teachers describe their experiences in cultivating mentorship relationships? How do teachers describe the effects of participating in mentorship relationships? Seven themes were identified in this study along with six associated sub-themes. An example of theme formation can be found in Appendix I. Table 4.2 below outlines the themes and sub-themes identified in this study.

Table 4.2

Themes and Sub-Themes

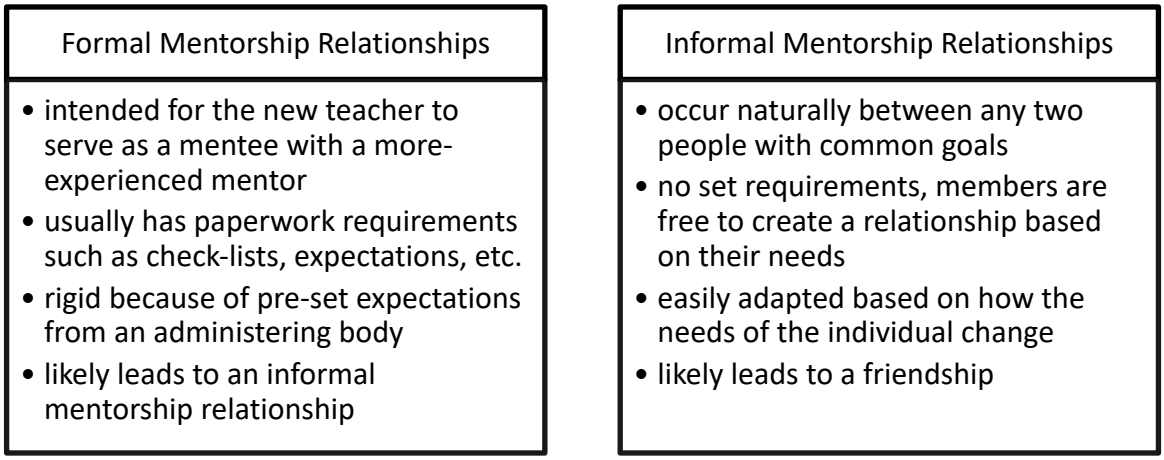
Theme	Sub-Theme
Formal Versus Informal Relationships	Informal Relationships Are More Meaningful
Benefits to Participating Teachers	Professional Development
	Technology Support
	Emotional Support
Initiation of the Relationship	Administration
	Organic
	Based on Skill, Not Age
Cultivation of the Relationship	Communication
	Outside of School
Untimely Teacher Attrition	Negative Experiences
	Future Attrition
Benefits to Students	Teaching Ability
	Positivity

Formal Versus Informal Relationships

The majority of teachers in this study (nine out of 10) saw a clear distinction between the formal and informal mentorship relationship and described formal mentorship relationships as rigid, by-the-book interactions focused on procedures and expectations of the teacher. These formal mentorship relationships were described as more procedural, more organized, and more linear. Informal mentorship relationships were described as the relationships that happen organically, are more in-the-moment and focus on the needs of the individual rather than a checklist. In his interview, Parker mentioned that in a formal mentorship, the mentor is "there to support you, help you figure out routines, procedures, lesson planning, unit planning." For the informal mentorship relationship, Parker related these to more of a friendship between two individuals. He described these in a focus group: "I had to buttress up my fellow teachers as kind of like how to win the mental game of teaching." A comparison of formal and informal mentorship relationships can be found in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1

Formal Versus Informal Mentorship Relationships



Informal Relationships Are More Meaningful

Nine out of 10 teachers in this study agreed that the most meaningful mentorship relationships were the informal relationships that came naturally. In comparison, formal mentorship relationships were too structured, conforming, and awkward, pairing people together who were not personably compatible or did not share the same pedagogy. Formal mentorships were based on formalities and were much less rewarding. Informal relationships were described as the relationships that happen organically based on the similarities among personalities, teaching strategies, content, and location. In a focus group session, Hollis asserted, "There's no personality to checking stuff off the list. You had to get through the list. It was very structured, very scheduled but there was no personality to it." The informal relationships are those that allow for random questions and in-the-moment help. Teachers agreed it was the informal relationships that were the most beneficial to them because of the freedom these relationships offered, and the needs-based aspect of them. In his interview, Eddie explained, "I think we kind of use them too much in that authoritarian way whereas they should be, at times, just informal mentorships…to

get more out of the experience." In his interview, Parker said, "It's really the mentorship, that bond that you form with that person, and all their experiences that are way more valuable than the paperwork stuff you have to do." And, in her personal essay, Jane reflected:

> The best mentor relationships happen organically. It is the amazing teacher across the hall that you finally get up the nerve to talk to and begin to ask questions about their practices to refine your own. It's a team of teachers overwhelmed and rudderless where a leader emerges and helps the group move forward.

Benefits to Participating Teachers

Nine out of 10 teachers in this study believed that the teachers who participate in mentorship relationships benefit from the interaction. Teachers expressed that they grow as teachers in mentorship relationships because they are learning new strategies and techniques. They also acknowledged that in participating in these relationships, they create a more positive culture in their departments and schools because they have someone to lean on and offer companionship to each other. Teachers feel that participating in mentorship relationships helps all individuals involved, both the mentor and the mentee. In her interview, Mae offered, "I mean, you can learn things both ways. Absolutely good for both of you." And, "I learn something new every single year and lots of times, it is from another teacher." In his personal essay, Parker asserted that his participation in mentorship relationships has been "instrumental in establishing my attitude toward teaching and establishment of routines, procedures, and practices in the classroom." In reference to serving as a mentor to a new teacher, Sunny reflected in a focus group session, "She makes me think of things that I hadn't thought of in a long time because she's completely new to teaching. Like not a stitch, you know?"

Professional Development

All teachers in this study agreed that developing professionally is the main way teachers benefit from participating in mentorship relationships. Every teacher in this study expressed that increasing their professional knowledge was the primary success of the mentorship relationships in which they had been involved in. This professional development included the ability to find answers to problems, research teaching strategies, and learn new technology. Teachers expressed that the mentorship relationship provided them the opportunity to collaborate with people and bounce ideas off of one another. Teachers recognized that being able to see how someone else interacted with the students and/or content helped them better understand how to do the same. In her personal essay, Maddie said, "The mentors that I have had suggested different methods of best practice to me that have made my teaching more successful. They helped with offering different perspectives for teaching strategies and have warned me of common student misconceptions." In reference to being a mentee in his personal interview, Hollis commented that "just seeing how she taught her students and things that she was doing, I was able to take that and apply it to how I reach my students as well." He continued with, "I think if you can use the mentorship program to link somebody with someone else who's actually doing the same job, I think it'll help them out professionally more than anything else can help."

Technology Support

Five teachers in this study agreed that participating in mentorship relationships has provided them technological support or allowed them to offer technological support to other teachers. Teachers acknowledged that technology development was one of the main professional development topics for which they sought out a mentor, specifically the teachers who have been teaching for more than 20 years. These teachers recognized that they had to reach out to younger

teachers as mentors to help them incorporate technology into their lessons and navigate new district-wide technology. Two of the youngest teachers in this study commented on their tendencies to offer technological support and guidance to other teachers, especially those who are more senior to them. In her interview, Mae added:

> Especially when we quarantined, 'cause I'd never even been on Google Classroom and all of a sudden I have to do everything on Google Classroom. So, I've learned how to do that from people who are younger than I am.

And, in her personal essay, Mae stated, "As the technology comes at us faster and faster, there have been many days when I have relied on a peer to help me set things up and run new programs." In her personal essay, Maddie inquired, "Does technology help count? I don't know that I would classify myself as a mentor, but I do help other teachers with technology issues often." And, in a focus group session, Maddie added, "I've served as a mentor through technology. I help a lot. I'm the tech person in the math department. Usually if people have issues, they come to me with that."

Emotional Support

Seven teachers in this study agreed that participating in mentorship relationships also provided emotional support. This support was felt by all individuals in the mentorship relationship. Emotional support created an environment where individuals felt as if they had someone to lean on when they were struggling and with whom they felt safe. In his interview, Hollis called the mentorship relationship "a mini support group," and in her interview, Jane added that it is "not only a place for learning but a place for just that emotional support to get them [teachers] to a better place." In her interview, Maddie very emotionally said, "And, most of it's the emotional part of it. Because teaching is stressful. And, emotional. And, just knowing

someone is there for you, believes in you…if you know that someone believes in you then you're going to be okay." In a focus group session, Marie added, "It also helps to have somebody to fall back on for the stress level. That helps to let them know they're not alone."

Initiation of the Relationship

All teachers in this study acknowledged that mentorship relationships are initiated out of both experience and need, depending on whether the relationship is recognized as a formal mentorship relationship or the relationship has occurred organically as an informal relationship. Almost all teachers in the study explained their association with a formal mentorship relationship when they first came into their current district. The initiation process for these formal mentorship relationships was solely based on their lack of experience within the district. It did not matter whether they were new teachers or seasoned teachers. Because they were new to the district, a formal mentorship relationship was initiated for them. In her interview, Mae described this initiation as "they assigned you – you had no choice."

Teachers explained that informal mentorship relationships were initiated out of an existing need. This initiation was not dependent on age or experience as a teacher, but the recognition that someone else had a skill that another teacher needed. These types of initiation were more genuine because teachers personally sought them out. In her interview, Gemma described this initiation by saying, "I felt comfortable enough just to go to her and ask her."

Administration

For the formal mentorship relationship, nine teachers in this study recognized that these relationships were dictated by some administrative personnel. The administrative personnel who assigned these relationships chose an older, more veteran teacher to mentor the younger, newer teacher. These administrative personnel were at the building level, such as the principals, or at

the district level, such as the professional development or curriculum department. During his interview, Eddie asserted, “I believe PD, our professional development people, they had a little say in it. And, then, I know the building principal at the time, he kind of assigned that.” In her interview, Jane asserted, “So, I did not initiate either of those. Those were expectations – first of the program and second of the district.” In reference to being a mentee in a formal relationship, Marie commented in a focus group session, “I participated as a mentee, both first year…I was required to be a mentee. So, they assigned somebody to mentor me.” In a focus group session, Sunny added:

> Right now, I’m in a formal – am [in] a very formal mentor/mentee relationships as a mentor with a chemistry teacher because she’s working on getting her teaching credentials. And, so, I have a lot of feedback that I’m now charged with giving to the program that she’s working through.

Organic

For the informal mentorship relationships, initiation happens more naturally. These relationships rise out of need of an individual. These are the relationships that happen because one individual recognizes they need help and seeks out help from another, without being told who to go to or what to ask. This type of initiation occurs organically. During a focus group session, Sunny summarized this initiation as “You got one person who’s got a bunch of information and another person who needs it.” Mae further summarized this type of initiation in her interview as “a seasoned teacher to help out an unseasoned teacher” and “They use your strengths to help people build up theirs.”

Based on Skill, Not Age

Eight teachers in this study agreed that often, initiation is not based on the age or teaching experience of the individual, but on the skill the teacher seeking help needs to learn. Teachers added that the education system changes rapidly and teachers' needs change throughout their careers. It is important that teachers initiate relationships with others as they see need of a new skill, regardless of how long they have been a teacher. In her interview, Gemma said, "I think you could do it throughout your teaching career and it would make you better. We get stale. We get complacent. So, go see what those new, young teachers are doing." In her personal essay, Marie exclaimed, "New teachers can teach old dogs tricks."

In a focus group session, Mae acknowledged that "mentor/mentee relationships [change] every single day depending on who is the expert." Mae also told a story during her interview about a specific relationship where she was serving as a mentor:

> And the first time I went up to watch her teach, I was like, oh, I need a piece of paper. And not because I need to write down the things that I was going to ask her to change, it was because I loved what she was doing in her class so much that I wanted to try them in my own. So, I was like writing down these notes and then I was making her really nervous so I quit writing down the notes for a while and she was like, what was I doing? I go, you were doing such a good job – I was writing notes to myself about what I should go do.

Cultivation of the Relationship

In reference to the cultivation of mentorship relationships, there was very little differentiation between formal and informal mentorship relationships. All teachers in this study felt that there was more culture-building involved in cultivating the relationship than anything. In

a focus group session, Jane explained it as a "natural humanity", that "the more time you spend together with purpose, that relationship grows." Teachers also mentioned that relationships evolve over time, adding that as the needs of the individuals changed, the conversations and the relationship would change. In reference to one specific relationship, Jane reflected in her personal essay, "Throughout our working together, we had an ebb and flow in our roles in the relationship; sometimes I was the mentee and sometimes I was the mentor."

Communication

Nine teachers in this study believed that cultivation of the relationship relies on communication. Participants recognized that teachers have to be able to communicate with one another, voicing their needs and wants to each other. Teachers must also be willing to listen to each other in order to cultivate relationships. The communication has to be two-sided, allowing for both the mentor and mentee to insert their opinions. In his personal essay, Hollis reflected:

> You need to be open to asking questions. There are many things that experienced teachers do which are just taken as a given. If you do not ask questions, there will be things that are missed and you will feel unprepared.

Teachers also acknowledged that communication must be constant and consistent. Teachers agreed that the expectations of the relationship have to be clearly communicated to ensure a successfully functioning relationship. In his personal essay, Hollis commented that "opening the line of communication is vital and will help to make the learning process much smoother." In his interview, Gabriel said, "I think just being consistent with contact – asking questions, more about their life, how are they, how are they doing emotionally, how are they doing physically? Those are pretty consistent questions that I always ask."

Teachers also reflected that communication has to be open and comfortable allowing for disagreements and constructive criticism. In a focus group session, Jane said, “You want that characteristic to be someone that you can disagree with and it’s okay, right? Like, we’re going to agree to disagree. And we’re not going to sit here and spin and have conflict.” Maddie added, “willingness to disagree and to be okay with it.” And Gabriel commented, “We have to accept differences.”

Outside of School

Teachers in this study also asserted the importance of creating relationships outside of school. Teachers communicated that it was important to build a non-professional relationship along with the professional mentorship relationship. Sunny commented in her interview:

> I tried to get to know those people not just professionally, like of their interests professionally and where they were seeking to work and where they saw themselves in terms of employment. But, also got to know them outside of school as well. Knowing things about their past, what brought them to teaching, interests, like what do they do outside of school.

Teachers reinforced that building relationships outside the school building helped the relationships within the building be more successful. Several teachers mentioned meeting outside of school for lunch, coffee, or dinner. These outside-of-school dates allowed for the building of trust and friendship within the relationship. By developing this type of non-school affiliated relationship, individuals were more likely to depend on each other within the school building. In her interview, Gemma said, “We just took some time outside of the teaching day to really spend time together to really talk.” In a focus group session, Parker added “I think it extends beyond the school, beyond the classroom, because we had a group text and we would hang out after

school, we'd go to, you know, dinner, lunch, whatnot… it does extend beyond the school." In reference to being a mentor, in her interview, Marie said, "We invited her out. We made her come out of her shell, invited her to lunch, just invited her to social gatherings." In reference to being a mentee, in her interview, Maddie added, "I just talk to her all the time!"

Untimely Teacher Attrition

Eight teachers in this study asserted that participating in positive mentorship relationships decreased untimely teacher attrition. They believed that participating in such relationships encouraged them to reach out to others, feel less isolated, and seek help when they needed it. Teachers also believed that the collaboration piece of mentorship relationships decreased some of the stress associated with being a teacher. Several teachers mentioned that it was during the mentorship relationship that they learned certain strategies that help them cope with different aspects of their educational career. Teachers also mentioned that the validation they received during mentorship relationships helped build their self-efficacy and allowed them to feel more confidence. In her interview, Gemma said, "I guess, affirmation. Um, positive reinforcement. You know what, you're good for kids, you're doing the right thing, definitely kept me going."

Negative Experiences

Some teachers (four of the 10) attested that it was because of a negative mentorship relationship or the lack of a mentorship relationship that they were part of the untimely attrition numbers within certain schools. These teachers asserted that not having someone to help them navigate was detrimental to their success in the classroom. This caused them to leave that school in search of one where they might feel less stress. In a focus group session, Mae commented, "I think that would be a case for a stronger mentor/mentee, because there's lots of teachers that just

drop out because they didn't have those collaborative opportunities and they weren't strong enough." In her interview, Gemma commented:

> When I first started teaching elementary school, that third year, I lost 20 pounds and was a stressed-out mess. A good mentor probably could've helped me through that, right? And, maybe if that experience would have been better, I could have stayed in elementary.

She also added, "I did not have that mentorship when I first came out of college. And when I came here, after three years of teaching, I learned more in three weeks having a mentor than I did in three years."

Teachers also reflected on their negative experiences as mentors, attesting that they believed they could have been stronger mentors. These teachers blamed themselves for not cultivating a positive mentorship relationship which led to another teacher's attrition. In a focus group session, Marie reflected, "I don't know if he would consider it a failed mentorship, but I do because he floundered and then went 'holy cow, this is not for me. I'm out'."

Future Attrition

All teachers in this study agreed that participating in mentorship relationships has the potential to decrease future untimely teacher attrition. They believed that encouraging a support system among teachers would decrease their sense of isolation and provide an emotional outlet for teachers. The teachers also agreed that in developing mentorship relationships with others, teachers have a more positive outlook and are less likely to experience feelings of negativity towards the school and education system. The teachers acknowledged that in participating in mentorship relationships that encourage professional growth, they felt more confident. This increase in confidence could limit thoughts of leaving the profession. In a focus group session, Sunny said, "If we're going to talk about retaining teachers, I think it is extremely valuable. It is

a must. If we're going to maintain people in this industry, we've got to hook them up with someone to help them navigate." In his interview, Parker added that "your colleagues are your best assets and you need to take advantage of it. 'Cause otherwise, you're just going to burn out. And that's what I see all the time."

Several teachers mentioned that the lack of a strong mentorship relationship may be the cause of current stress levels in new teachers and could lead to future attrition rates. In a focus group session, Mae said, "I think that would be a case for a stronger mentor/mentee because there's lot of teachers that just drop out because they didn't have those kinds of collaborative opportunities and they weren't strong enough." In her interview, Marie asserted, "I feel like some of our new teachers right now are struggling because I don't feel like they have a mentor that they can just run to at any point…" In her personal essay, Jane added that "in this current climate attracting young people to the profession is difficult at best and keeping them seems impossible. I feel like mentoring can make a difference in this issue."

Benefits to Students

Nine teachers in this study acknowledged that participating in mentorship relationships had positive effects on their students. They said that participating in such relationships allowed them to be more prepared and organized and thus more confident in their teaching abilities. This in turn positively affected their students because the teacher was better prepared to provide adequate instruction. When asked if mentorship affected his students, Eddie said, "Absolutely because I could become a better teacher and knew what I really need to focus on."

Teaching Ability

Teachers in this study agreed that working as either the mentor or the mentee increased their abilities as teachers including building teaching strategies and learning best practices. Many

teachers spoke about their increase in content-specific knowledge because of their experiences as a mentee with a mentor who was more knowledgeable in that content area. Teachers also referenced an increase in pedagogical knowledge. Teachers learned new teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, grading practices, and technological skills while working with others who had more experience in those areas. Increasing both their content and pedagogical knowledge benefitted their students because teachers had more knowledge to bestow upon their students. In her personal essay, Maddie said, "The mentors that I have had suggested different methods of best practice to me that have made my teaching more successful. They helped with offering different perspectives for teaching strategies and have warned me of common student misconceptions." In reference to being a mentee, Hollis commented in his interview that "just seeing how she taught her students and things that she was doing, I was able to take that and apply it to how I reach my students as well."

Positivity

Teachers in this study agreed that participating in mentorship relationships has allowed them to have a more positive attitude which in turn affects their students. Teachers acknowledged that students feed off of their energy and when they are more positive, their students are more positive. Teachers asserted that having a positive outlook and having students with a positive outlook created a more impactful learning environment. Teachers believed this benefitted their students by creating an environment that was more conducive for learning. In her interview, Marie said, "As far as helping the students, she made us realize that we were being, when we were being Negative Nancy's…so that helped because then the students got a happier teacher in the end."

Self-Reflection

Teachers in this study agreed that mentorship relationships benefitted their students because they became more self-reflective. When participating in mentorship relationships, teachers recognized and appreciated what other teachers were doing with their students and reflected upon how they could incorporate these actions in their classrooms. Teachers agreed that being able to collaborate with other teachers who taught differently allowed them to reflect on ideas that may increase their own students' success. In his personal essay, Hollis commented "Mainly the mentorships have given me something to reflect on and use towards assessing my own teaching." In his personal essay, Parker said:

> Mentorship creates opportunities to let your barriers down and share your honest experiences with others for thoughtful reflection. As a mentee, it established who I am in the classroom and honed it to bring out my strengths and work on my weaknesses. As a mentor, it humbles me and allows me to further refine my practices and reflect upon why I entered this profession.

Characteristics Needed to Foster a Positive Relationship

Five teachers in this study agreed that there were certain characteristics that a mentor and mentee needed to exhibit to foster a positive relationship. Teachers acknowledged that both individuals needed to be open and willing to listen, and that both the mentor and mentee needed to be kind, honest, and trusting. They agreed that individuals needed to have the ability to communicate and that they needed to develop confidence in the relationship to ensure its success. The relationship must also be purposeful and consistent to foster that positivity. Teachers recognized that both parties have to be willing to put time and effort into the relationship. A few teachers mentioned that individuals needed to share similar expectations of

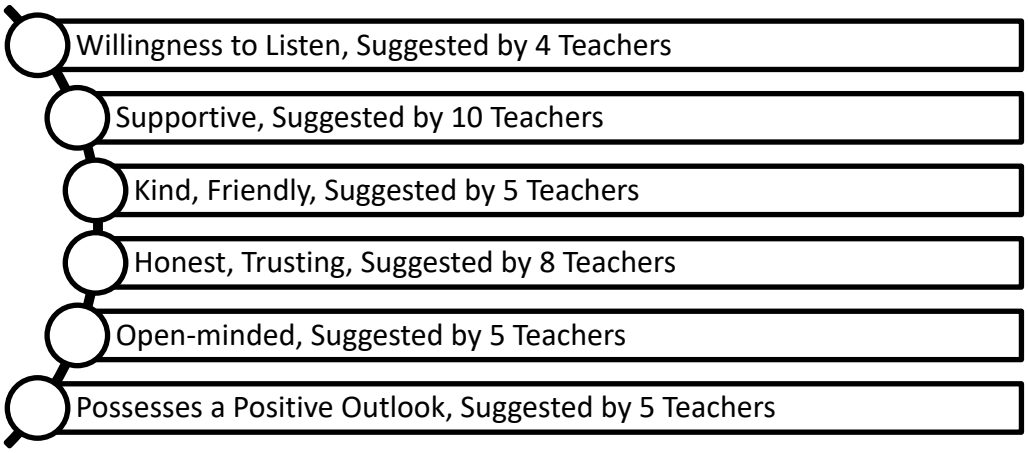
the education system and have compatible personalities. From the perspective of a mentee, Parker said in his personal essay:

> They must be honest with their mentor and open up about the struggles they may be facing in the classroom. They must be willing to listen to the experiences of their mentor and adapt and adopt the practices that best suit their teaching style.

Teachers asserted that the mentor specifically needed to have a positive outlook to encourage positivity in the mentee. In a focus group session, Jane added, "It's the positive person that draws people in." The mentor also should be someone who is well-respected, good at their craft, and known to be a successful teacher. In her interview, Maddie commented, "And, making sure that they learn from someone who is instructionally sound and understands kids and building those relationships." Figure 4.2 outlines the identified characteristics needed to foster a positive mentorship relationship.

Figure 4.2

Characteristics Needed to Foster a Positive Mentorship Relationship



Outlier Data and Findings

While much of the collected data were associated with the posed research questions, there were some unexpected findings that did not directly align with those questions. As teachers in

this study became more comfortable in the one-on-one interview and focus group session, they were more likely to express their true feelings. This is when the majority of the outliers were found. Four major outliers were identified in this study. Table 4.3 below outlines the outliers identified in this study.

Table 4.3

Major Outliers

Major Outlier
Administration Association with Mentorship Relationship
Stress of Participating in Mentorship Relationships
Formal Mentor Training
Mentor Role Effects on the Relationship

Administration Association with Mentorship Relationship

One teacher in the study recognized the absence of the governing administrative personnel in the mentorship relationship process, including school building principals and associate principals. The purpose of the formal mentorship relationship is to provide information to the new teachers, those new to the profession and new to the building. Often, but not always, a checklist is provided to mentors with a list of topics to review with the mentee. But what is the check-in system for the mentor? Is there an accountability piece? What processes are in place to ensure every new person in the building is receiving the same information from their mentors? Marie inquired:

> I am intrigued to know how mentoring would go if admin. actually paid attention. Like, how different would mentor relationships have been if I'd had that checklist and

> somebody checking to see if I was actually doing it right? Would it have been better? Would it have been worse? Would it have made more of an impact on those teachers? Would that guy still be here? Would some of those teachers that have not been rehired, would they have gotten rehired if they'd had a mentor that was being…being…so that they knew what to do? I've never had an admin. that cared, so I don't know.

Stress of Participating in Mentorship Relationships

Two teachers in the study commented that participating as a mentor in a mentorship relationship actually increases their stress load. One of these two teachers referenced that being the mentor in a formal mentorship relationship puts extra stress on the mentor because of prescribed guidelines to follow and associated deadlines. The other of the two teachers did not differentiate between the formal and informal relationship but instead commented on how caring for another increases her stress level. Marie asserted, "In some of them, it's made my job more stressful cause then you're worrying about another one – another person."

Formal Mentor Training

One teacher in the study expressed her desire to receive some type of training to be better prepared to serve as a formal mentor. She asserted that formal mentorship relationships could be more valuable if expectations were pre-set and she knew exactly what the district or school administration wanted out of her as a mentor and more specifically, what the administration wanted the mentee to gain out of the experience. Check-lists are not adequate because they are simply a list of actions. There is a need for mentors to better understand how to perform those actions and best serve the mentee. Gemma offered:

> So, not just told you're having a [mentee], like what can I specifically do to make that a more positive and valuable experience for anybody that I work with? After 30 years of

> experience, I feel like I have a lot of offer but help me prepare this person to not just… cause I teach probably differently than some people. So, what are you looking for? What do they need? How can I help them? Help prepare me to be a good mentor!

Mentor Role Effects on the Relationship

Two teachers in the study expressed their concern that their job title affects how others see them and in turn, affects the initiation and cultivation of impactful mentorship relationships. The concern was that these individuals are seen as somewhat of an administrator so others do not feel comfortable coming to them when they do need help. The misconception is that these two teachers could negatively affect the position of the teacher seeking help, though that is not the case. Jane said, "But, I try to be as relaxed possible. Though I am not an admin. of any kind, I am often seen as one. This perception often gets in the way of meaningful mentorship." Eddie further added:

> And that's been kind of a challenge because they look at me as a supervisor. And I don't necessarily like that. I don't consider myself their supervisor. Even though, like I said, I have that department head stigma. And at times that's challenging because they think I can fire them if something goes wrong. And I really have no power.

Research Question Responses

In this study, there was one central research question and three sub-questions to guide the research. The central research question asked teachers in this study to describe their experiences of mentorship relationships, both with formal and informal scenarios throughout their teaching careers. Teachers in this study were asked to explain how they have served as a mentor and as a mentee. It was important to understand each teachers' different experiences as both a mentor and mentee and at what times during their careers those experiences occurred. The three sub-

questions were all follow-up questions to the central research question. The first two sub-questions were intended to understand the initiation and cultivation of mentorship relationships. The third and final sub-question sought to find answers concerning the effects teachers in this study felt from participating in mentorship relationships. All the research questions together were meant to gather a better understanding of participation in mentorship relationships from teachers of different levels within their teaching careers.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational career? The teachers' in this study believed that mentorship relationships are an integral part of the development of teachers, both professionally and emotionally, and that these relationships are important throughout one's educational career. These experiences should not be reserved just for the new teacher. Jane said, "Mentorship is a key component in the field of education and in my opinion where the real teacher education occurs."

Teachers who were early in their career relied heavily on the mentorship relationship because they were new to the career and constantly needed help with the functionality of the job. Also, these newer teachers felt that having an embedded support system helped them to feel more at-ease and emotionally sound. Maddie said, "You can learn teaching strategies and just have that person to support you."

Seasoned teachers agreed that they were participating in mentorship relationships as both a mentor and a mentee simultaneously. As mentors, these teachers found joy in providing support for less-experienced teachers. These teachers also agreed that providing this support is of utmost importance, so they took pride in being mentors. Converseley, the seasoned teachers agreed that they were mentees in many ways – even with the less-experienced teachers. The

seasoned teachers felt that they were learning from the new teachers as well because the new teachers have a fresh set of ambitions that encourage the seasoned teachers. These teachers also agreed that because of the rapid changes within education, they are constantly seeking out mentors who are more skilled in one area or another. Mae stated,

> As the technology comes at us faster and faster, there have been many days when I have relied on a peer to help me set things up and run new programs. I look at teaching as one of the purest forms of lifelong learning there is.

Sub-Question One

How do teachers describe their experiences with the initiation of mentorship relationships? According to the teachers in this study, formal mentorship relationships are initiated differently than informal mentorship relationships. Teachers in this study explained that formal mentorship relationships are assigned to individuals and are thus initiated as a structured program with rigid requirements and agendas. Teachers in this study explained that informal mentorship relationships are initiated out of either professional or emotional need. In reference to formal mentorship relationships, Hollis said, “They told me the first day. Actually, we had the new hire breakfast. And, our school principals were there and then the mentors were there as well. And, so, the principal introduced us to the mentor.” When reflecting about informal mentorship relationships, Parker said, “It’s really, you figure out who those good teachers are and you just have to go and approach them.”

Sub-Question Two

How do teachers describe their experiences in cultivating mentorship relationships? The teachers’ perspective is that mentorship relationships are cultivated by being friendly, genuine, consistent, open, and allowing the development of a non-school associated relationship. Teachers

in this study explained that allowing time for non-school related conversations helped to build trust and positively affect the school-based mentorship relationship. Gemma said, “We just took some time outside of the teaching day to really spend time together to really talk about what I saw and how she felt.” Sunny explained “I tried to get to know those people, not just professionally.” Marie asserted that “being friendly” was necessary and Parker added, “It has to be kind of outside of school, too. Because, we share this culture. We share this profession. And we kind of commiserate together.”

Sub-Question Three

How do teachers describe the effects of participating in mentorship relationships? The teachers’ perspective is that mentorship relationships have positive effects for both the mentor and the mentee, regardless of the degree of experience of the teacher. Teachers in this study explained that having a mentor helps the teacher better function professionally because of the ability to harness new skills and bounce ideas off of someone, and also emotionally because of the development of a support system that is there when needed. Teachers in this study believed that participating in mentorship relationships allowed them to be better teachers for their students and possibly encouraged them to remain in the education field. In her essay, Mae stated:

> Absolutely and unequivocally, I will answer yes to the fact that participating in a mentorship relationship has increased my success as a teacher. Either as the mentee or the mentor, I have found in each one some take away that has made me a better person and hence, a better teacher!

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels of experience in their

educational career. The seven main themes discovered during this study included: 1) Formal Versus Informal, 2) Benefits to Participating, 3) Initiation of the Relationship, 4) Cultivation of the Relationship, 5) Untimely Teacher Attrition, 6) Benefits to Students, and 7) Characteristics Needed to Foster a Positive Relationship. There were also four major outliers identified in this study including Administration Association with Mentorship Relationship, Stress of Participating in Mentorship Relationships, Formal Mentor Training, and Mentor Role Effects on the Relationship.

Teachers in this study recognized the differences between formal and informal mentorship relationships. Teachers asserted that the most valuable mentorship relationships were the informal ones because they occurred naturally and were more valuable. Teachers identified that the two main benefits from participating in mentorship relationships are professional development and emotional support for all individuals involved in the relationship.

Teachers in this study identified that depending on whether the relationship is formal or informal determines how the relationship is initiated. Teachers in this study also recognized that initiation is often, and should be, based on the skill of the individual rather than their age. To cultivate a mentorship relationship, teachers recognized the importance of developing a non-school based relationship and building a relationship based on openness and trust. All teachers in this study acknowledged that participating in mentorship relationships encouraged teachers to remain in the education field because they felt they had a system of support in place. Teachers also recognized how participating in mentorship relationships has benefitted their students because they were more prepared and confident in the classroom. Teachers participants further acknowledged that there are certain characteristics individuals should have to create a positive

mentorship relationship on the side of the mentor and the mentee including open-mindedness, kindness, and having a positive outlook.

Along with the identified benefits of the mentorship relationship, few teachers in this study brought forth several outliers. Teachers in this study recognized the absence of building administration in the mentorship process and questioned how the influence of administrators might change the process. Teachers in this study also asserted that participating in a mentorship relationship as a mentor could add stress to the individual because they feel responsible for another person. Participants mentioned the need for formal mentor training to increase the success of the mentor in the relationship. Teacher leaders also explained how a specific job title can affect the relationship stating that being seen as a boss changes the dynamic of the relationship.

Teachers in this study identified that mentorship relationships are vitally important for the new teacher but are equally as important for the seasoned teacher. They also recognized that there are many benefits to participating in mentorship relationships, including decreasing untimely teacher attrition, increasing teachers' self-efficacy, and increasing student success. Teachers in this study asserted that mentorship relationships must be encouraged and supported in the education system because of the vast number of benefits.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to investigate the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels of experience in their educational career. Ten secondary teachers participated in this study. The teachers in this study were interviewed one-on-one over the course of one month. Each of the teachers in this study then completed a personal essay about their experiences with mentorship relationships. Finally, each individual participated in one of two focus groups. All interviews were audio recorded and all focus group sessions were video and audio recorded. The interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed by myself and using Google's speech to text function in Google Docs. Moustakas's (1994) steps of data analysis including phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation were used to synthesize meaning and essence of the study.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings of this study, followed by an interpretation of those findings. Next, implications for policy, practice, theory, and method are presented. Finally, a discussion of the limitations, delimitations and recommendations for future research are reviewed.

Discussion

Mentorship relationships that form among teachers throughout their educational careers were the focus of this study. One central research question and three sub-questions were used in this study. These research questions focused on the experiences teachers had with mentorship relationships, how they initiated and cultivated these mentorship relationships, and what perceived affects teachers had based on their participation in these relationships. Two theories guided this study, social network theory and Kram's mentorship model. The social network

theory states that individuals are affected by the network of individuals they come into contact with (Waes et al., 2018). Kram's (1983, 1988) mentorship model asserts that participating in mentorship relationships affects both the mentor and the mentee. Much of the previous research on mentorship relationships focuses on the new teacher while neglecting the veteran teacher. There is very little research that looks at participation in mentorship relationships across the educational career. Using qualitative data from one-on-one interviews, personal essays, and two focus group sessions, seven themes and 14 sub-themes were identified in this study. Table 5.1 below shows the identified themes and sub-themes.

Table 5.1

Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
Formal Versus Informal Relationships	Informal Relationships Are More Meaningful
Benefits to Participating Teachers	Professional Development Technology Support Emotional Support
Initiation of the Relationship	Administration Organic Based on Skill, Not Age
Cultivation of the Relationship	Communication Outside of School
Untimely Teacher Attrition	Negative Experiences Future Attrition
Benefits to Students	Teaching Ability Positivity Self-Reflection
Characteristics Needed to Foster a Positive Relationship	

Interpretation of Findings

Using the research questions as a guide, themes and sub-themes were developed. The research questions in this study were as follows: What are the experiences of mentorship relationships for teachers from different levels in their educational career? How do teachers describe their experiences with the initiation of mentorship relationships? How do teachers describe their experiences in cultivating mentorship relationships? How do teachers describe the effects of participating in mentorship relationships? Table 5.2 below outlines the themes and the research questions each addressed.

Table 5.2

Themes and Research Questions Addressed

Theme	Research Question
Formal Versus Informal Relationships	CRQ SQ3
Benefits to Participating Teachers	CRQ SQ3
Initiation of the Relationship	CRQ SQ1
Cultivation of the Relationship	CRQ SQ2
Untimely Teacher Attrition	CRQ SQ3
Benefits to Students	CRQ SQ3
Characteristics Needed to Foster a Positive Relationship	CRQ SQ1 SQ2

Summary of Thematic Findings

The first theme, Formal Versus Informal Relationships, established the difference between the formal mentorship relationship and the informal relationship. Teachers acknowledged that there was a clear difference between the two, asserting that the informal mentorship relationships were more impactful for their success as teachers. The second theme, Benefits to Participating Teachers, brought to light the multitude of benefits of participating in mentorship relationships for teachers including increased professional development, technological development, and emotional support. The third theme, Initiation of the Relationship, established how different mentorship relationships are initiated. Teachers asserted that formal mentorship relationships are initiated by an administrator while informal mentorship relationships initiate organically by the teacher in need. Teachers also acknowledged that initiation is often based on the skill of the individual acting as the mentor and not necessarily the age of that mentor. The fourth theme, Cultivation of the Relationship, established how mentorship relationships are cultivated by individuals. Teachers agreed that communication is imperative for the cultivation of the relationship along with building a personal relationship outside of school. Teachers asserted that building a relationship outside of school encourages a more impactful relationship in school. The fifth theme, Untimely Teacher Attrition, established how mentorship relationships can affect teachers leaving the education field. Teachers agreed that a negative experience with mentorship relationships may lead to early attrition. Teachers also acknowledged how impactful a positive relationship can be to teachers, encouraging them to remain in the education field. The sixth theme, Benefits to Students, established how participating in mentorship relationships positively affects teachers' teaching abilities, positivity, and self-reflection, which in turn benefits their students by creating an environment more

conducive to learning. The seventh and last theme, Characteristics to Foster a Positive Relationship, established the characteristics needed by both mentor and mentee to create a meaningful mentorship relationship including being kind, honest, trusting, and having a positive outlook. Using these seven themes and 14 sub-themes, interpretations were made. These interpretations focus on the major findings of the study.

Teachers participate in mentorship relationships as both mentors and mentees throughout their educational career. Teachers in this study consistently referenced their experiences as both a mentor and a mentee throughout their teaching careers. Teachers remembered instances where they served as a mentor and instances where they were the mentee in the relationship. In some cases, one individual would act as the mentor in a relationship with one individual, while acting as a mentee in a relationship with a different individual.

Throughout their educational careers, teachers act as both mentors and mentees. The role teachers take in the mentorship relationship depends upon the knowledge they have or the knowledge they wish to obtain. The role taken in the relationship does not have to be dictated by the age of the individuals participating. For example, a new teacher may act as a mentee with a seasoned teacher mentor when first becoming a teacher because they need guidance concerning the profession in general. Or, a seasoned teacher may act as a mentee when changing contents or grade levels because they have never taught that content or grade level and needs guidance from another teacher who has taught that content or grade level.

Additionally, within the same mentorship relationship, the roles may intertwine. The person serving as the mentor may change based on the current needs of the individuals in the relationship. For example, a mentorship relationship may consist of a new, mentee teacher and a veteran, mentor teacher. The relationship may start off with the veteran teacher assisting the new

teacher in adapting to the teaching profession. As time progresses, the veteran teacher may change roles and become the mentee because the new teacher has new strategies to offer the veteran teacher.

Teachers do not simply stop participating in mentorship relationships because they have reached tenure. Teachers are constantly participating in mentorship relationships because of their desire to learn new skills, and best serve their students. Teachers participate in mentorship relationships throughout their educational career, regardless of their experience level or age.

Mentorship relationships benefit both the mentor and the mentee. Regardless of the role taken in the mentorship relationship, both the individual serving as the mentor and the individual participating as the mentee benefit from the relationship – both professionally and emotionally. Teachers grow their confidence levels, build their teacher toolboxes, and create support systems. Mentors receive a sense of joy and pride because they have helped another teacher become more successful. Mentees increase their self-efficacy and build their pedagogical knowledge. Participating in mentorship relationships benefits all individuals involved.

Mentorship relationships provide a support group needed to maintain teachers. Teachers participating in mentorship relationships create a bond between one another. Teachers learn how to interact with one another to create a functional relationship. In doing this, teachers learn about one another. This cultivates a relationship that mirrors friendship. Because of this, teachers feel attached to another individual. This attachment creates a support group. This support group provides an outlet for teachers in times of frustration, isolation, and stress. Teachers can utilize their support group to overcome these feelings. Having a support group available in times of need helps decrease negative feelings in teachers. Teachers who feel less

negatively towards the education system are less likely to leave the field of education. Creating support groups among teachers is important to maintain teachers in the profession.

Seasoned teachers need mentors. Because teachers participate in mentorship relationships throughout their educational careers, there should be no distinction between relationships created for new teachers and for seasoned teachers. However, many current programs focus on the seasoned teacher as the mentor and the new teacher as the mentee (Arnett, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). This is not conducive to constant development for the seasoned teacher. Seasoned teachers need to be given the opportunities to act as mentees, and not just from other veteran teachers. Opportunities need to be afforded to seasoned teachers to learn from those around them, to visit other teachers' classrooms, and to spend time with teachers who have different strengths. Focus should not merely be on providing opportunities for the new teacher to develop these relationships but for all teachers, regardless of experience level. Seasoned teachers need mentors, too.

Teachers need more informal mentorship relationships. Typically, formal mentorship relationships are the only relationships mandated in the education system. Because of that, formal mentorship relationships are often understood to be more important. However, in this study, teachers continuously mentioned the impact of the informal mentorship relationships in which they participated. Every participant argued for the informal mentorship relationship, referencing the value they found in those organic relationships.

The informal relationship is based on common needs and goals of the individuals participating. Teachers need to be given opportunities to seek out others who could help them. The initiation and cultivation of informal mentorship relationships should be encouraged

throughout a teacher's educational career. Teachers of all experience levels need to be given the opportunity to develop more informal mentorship relationships because of the vast number of benefits to teachers.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Teachers in this study made it apparent that participating in mentorship relationships holds numerous benefits for the teachers involved, the students they teach, and the school as a whole. Teachers in this study revealed their understanding of the differences between formal and informal mentorship relationships asserting that the informal relationships are more meaningful. Teachers in this study agreed that participating in mentorship relationships benefits one both professionally and emotionally. Teachers also revealed that even students of teachers participating in mentorship relationships benefit because teachers increase their abilities and positivity. Teachers also understood that participating in mentorship relationships has the potential to decrease untimely teacher attrition. There are several implications for the information gained from this study. Findings of this study suggest implications for both policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

There was one main implication for policy identified in this study, the requirement at the state level to require mentorship relationships for the new teacher. According to the Education Commission of the States (2019), 31 of the 50 states require induction and mentoring programs for new teachers. Of these 31 states, 10 states require a mentor program for one year, 10 states require a mentor program for two years, and seven states require a mentor program for three years. The other four states have a mentor program policy but no time requirement. Wyoming is

not one of these 31 states. Wyoming does not have state educational policy mandating a mentorship program for new teachers (Education Commission of the States, 2019).

Research is clear that there are numerous benefits for the new teacher participating in mentorship relationships. The benefits for new teachers involved in mentorship relationships include increased self-efficacy, increased content and pedagogy knowledge, increased behavioral management skills, increased community acceptance, and a more overall positive experience in their initial years teaching (Arnett, 2017; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). The results of this study reiterate these findings. Teachers in this study who had less than five years of teaching experience expressed the value they found in participating in mentorship relationships including increasing their confidence levels, growing their teaching strategies and pedagogy knowledge, increasing their positivity, and allowing them to feel more accepted in the school community.

Denying new teachers the opportunity to purposely build mentorship relationships has the potential to decrease the success of those new teachers. New teachers are then left to initiate mentorship relationships on their own. This may or may not happen depending on multiple factors including the teacher's communication skills and willingness to seek help, and the teacher's location in the building to individuals who can be of help. New teachers have a tendency to be less likely to seek help on their own. New teachers are also less likely to have previous relationships with people in the school building and may simply not know who to seek for help.

Based on the findings of this study, and the current literature – it is of utmost importance to provide opportunities for the new teacher to develop mentorship relationships. It is necessary for the governing administrators within the district to initiate formal mentorship relationships for

the new teacher. In initiating these mentorship relationships for the new teacher, the new teacher has a pre-set support system available to help them develop their teaching skills, professionally and emotionally. There is a definite need for the Wyoming Board of Education to develop a state-wide policy mandating a mentorship program for new teachers.

Implications for Practice

In addition to the implication for policy regarding new teacher mentor programs, the findings of this research also have implications for practice and informing how teachers engage in the initiation and cultivation of mentorship relationships. The implications for practice mentioned below pertain to the specific school district used in this study. However, these implications may apply to all school districts.

The school district used in this study does currently have a district-wide mentorship program. New teachers to this district, whether new to the teaching profession or not, are required to participate in a mentorship program for their first three years in the district. This program is operated by the Professional Development department at the district level. There are four veteran teachers employed at the district level solely for the purpose of mentoring new-to-the-district teachers. However, these four professional development specialists must mentor all new teachers in the district regardless of grade level or content level. Based on the results of this study, it may be more beneficial to the secondary teacher to have a mentor in their building who is content specific.

In the formal mentorship relationship, the mentee is assigned to a specific mentor. The mentor is expected to follow a prescribed timeline to assist the mentee is adjusting to the teaching profession, content, or building. The formal mentorship may or may not have a checklist for the mentor to follow with deadlines and expectations. Based on the results of this

study, it may be more beneficial to the mentorship relationship if the mentor has specific training on how to be a formal mentor including expectations of the mentor and specific tools to be introduced to the mentee. Also, for the formal mentorship relationship, this study indicated that it may be more beneficial to the productivity of the mentorship relationship if the building administrators oversaw or checked-in on the mentorship process.

For the seasoned teacher, participating as a mentee in a mentorship relationship is not often encouraged. The mentee role is usually reserved for the newer, younger teacher. Based on the results of this study, it may be just as beneficial to the seasoned teacher to participate in mentorship relationships as the mentee as it is for the new teacher. The education system is constantly changing, introducing new technology and teaching strategies every day. It may be valuable to encourage seasoned teachers to learn from others as well, seeking new skills from their teacher peers.

In reference to both formal and informal mentorship relationships, it may also be helpful for teachers to be taught the benefits of participating in mentorship relationships. In doing so, teachers may begin to initiate these relationships more readily. This study outlined the apparent benefits of participating in mentorship relationships including increasing professional growth for teachers, encouraging improved student success, providing emotional support for teachers, and decreasing untimely teacher attrition. While it is clear that mentorship relationships have many benefits for this school district, it may also be true for all school settings.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The goal of this study was to investigate the experiences of teachers with mentorship relationships throughout their educational careers including how they initiate and cultivate those relationships and how they perceive the effects of participating in mentorship relationships. The

results of this study provide powerful theoretical and empirical implications for teacher participation in mentorship relationships. The results of this study contribute new knowledge in this area and have provided valuable insight into an area that has limited research about how seasoned teachers experience mentorship relationships.

Theoretical Implications

While the social network theory is the main theory applied in this study, Kram's mentorship model is also used to help understand teachers' experiences with mentorship relationships. The social network theory established the idea that individuals are impacted by the individuals they socialize with (ie. the networks created among these individuals) (Moses et al., 2009; Waes et al., 2018). The social network theory asserts that individuals are more successful when they are part of a larger social network and are afforded opportunities to increase their social connections.

In agreement with the social network theory, Kram's (1983, 1988) mentorship model states that individuals who participate in the mentorship relationship, both the mentor and mentee, have the potential for growth and development in their field. Kram's model established specific functions of mentoring, including psychosocial and career support and showed that individuals who participate in mentorship relationships are more successful psychosocially and in their career. Kram also identified phases of the mentorship relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. These phases occur at different times during the relationship and have different effects on the relationship.

The social network theory This study extends information on the social network theory. There is very limited research that applies the social network theory to the education system, especially at the secondary level. This study adds to research that applies the social network

theory to teachers within the secondary school. Results from this study agree with the concept that the way individuals behave and perform is impacted by the network of social connections they have. In this study, social connections were represented by mentorship relationships. Teachers in this study asserted that they were indeed affected by the individuals in their mentorship relationships with them. Participants agreed that other teachers impacted the way they interacted with content material, teaching strategies, and behavioral management. Teachers participating in mentorship relationships had the ability to grow their social connections to increase their knowledge about the education system.

This study also adds to the assumption that teachers who create vast social networks are more likely to remain in their teaching positions and are more productive overall. Teachers in this study agreed that participating in mentorship relationships encouraged them to remain teachers because they had a support system. Participants also agreed that because of their participation in mentorship relationships, they had grown their pedagogical and content knowledge, which helped make them more productive teachers. This study also adds to the research asserting that teacher development is shifting or has shifted from an individualized approach to a more collaborative one. Teachers in this study continuously agreed that having another teacher to support them has significantly helped them in their teaching careers. These teachers found that participating in mentorship relationships allowed them to create a support system that helped them grow as educators and provided emotional support when needed.

Kram's mentorship model This study greatly extends information on Kram's mentorship model. Kram's mentorship model was originally developed based on the business administration. There is limited research that applies Kram's model to the education system, especially the secondary school. This research study adds to the research of how secondary

teachers utilize mentorship relationships. This study agrees with Kram's concept that both the mentor and the mentee benefit from participating in mentorship relationships. Teachers in this study continuously agreed that they benefitted whether they were participating in a relationship as the mentor or the mentee. Mentor teachers agreed that they benefitted because they felt a sense of pride while helping another teacher. Mentor teachers also agreed that in having a mentee, they helped build a more positive school culture. Mentee teachers asserted that they benefitted because they gained content knowledge, teaching strategies, and behavioral management skills they needed. Mentee teachers also gained a sense of belonging in participating in mentorship relationships because they were developing relationships early on in their careers. This study also agreed with Kram's idea that individuals participate in mentorship relationships with many different people an any one point in time. Teachers in this study reflected that often times they would serve as a mentor with one teacher but as the mentee in a relationship with another teacher. Teachers also reflected that in one mentorship relationship, their role may change from mentor to mentee or vice versa based on the needs of each individual.

This study also builds upon Kram's two functions of mentorship relationships: psychosocial support and career support. Teachers in this study agreed that participating in mentorship relationships provided great psychosocial support. Teachers felt more competent as, increased their self-efficacy, and increased their effectiveness because of their participation in mentorship relationships. Teachers in this study agreed that participating in mentorship relationships provided great career support as well. Teachers were able to build their teaching toolboxes with increased professional development and technology support. Teachers in this study felt supported both emotionally and professionally because of their participation in mentorship relationships.

This study adds to Kram's phases of mentorship relationships, specifically the first two phases: initiation and cultivation. This study affirmed that mentorship relationships are first initiated and then cultivated, depending on the time of the relationship. Teachers in this study revealed that initiation varied based on whether the mentorship relationship was formal or informal. Informal relationships were initiated out of need and formal relationships were initiated out of necessity. Teachers in this study agreed that cultivation was largely responsible for the success of the relationship, and that individuals must possess certain characteristics in order to cultivate a positive relationship.

This study diverged from Kram's mentorship model in one main way. Kram often generalized mentors as the older individuals, while the mentees were the younger individuals. In this study, teachers agreed that the most meaningful mentorship relationships were those initiated out of the need of a skill. Several teachers asserted that initiation of informal mentorship relationships was out of need of a skill, rather than the age of an individual. Teachers often sought out a mentor when they needed to develop their content knowledge or when they needed technological guidance. This varies from the identified mentor/mentee role in Kram's mentorship model.

Empirical Implications

This study contributes much to the current research, especially to the use of mentorship relationships as the secondary level and of teachers from varying levels of experience in their educational careers. Multiple benefits to participating in mentorship relationships have been previously identified (Ellis et al., 2020; Glickman et al., 2018; Hudson, 2013; Morettini et al., 2019; Saylor et al., 2018). This study extends this research in agreeing with the many benefits of mentorship relationships, including an increase in self-confidence and self-efficacy, improved

classroom management and teaching skills, the development of a sense of belonging and acceptance into the school's community, and the building of a more positive school culture. These benefits to the teachers involved in mentorship relationships have the potential to increase student achievement because teachers are better prepared to serve them. This study adds to this concept because teachers in this study agreed that their participation in mentorship relationships made them more effective and valuable to their students. This study also adds to the current research in that mentorship relationships help create a support system for all those involved. The mentorship relationship allows for an increase in knowledge and skills, and also leads to a more personal relationship, and/or a friendship between the involved individuals.

This study adds to the current research concerning teacher attrition as well. Teacher attrition rates are on the rise (Harris et al., 2019). Teachers have been leaving the education system because they are stressed, feel isolated, and do not feel supported within their buildings. Teachers in this study identified that participating in mentorship relationships could decrease untimely teacher attrition rates because mentorship relationships allow teachers to develop a support system that can decrease stress and feelings of isolation. It has been previously identified that teachers who interact with other teachers and develop productive mentorship relationships have increased feelings of respect and appreciation and feel more belonging in their school buildings (Ellis et al., 2020; Glickman et al., 2018; Hudson, 2013; Morettini et al., 2019; Saylor et al., 2018). This study adds to this research in that teachers in this study identified that participating in mentorship relationships helped them feel less alone and made them feel as if someone else in the building supported them.

This study extends previous research because of the application of mentorship relationships to teachers from all levels within their educational careers. Much of the current

research is based upon providing the new teacher with an older, more veteran mentor teacher to support them (Arnett, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Hong & Matsko, 2019; Kozikoglu, 2018; Nguyen & Baldauf, 2015; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Spooner-Lane, 2016). This study focused on all teachers' use of mentorship relationships. Teachers in this study continuously asserted that individuals of all experience levels need mentorship relationships. Seasoned teachers agreed that they become stagnant and need inspiration at times. These teachers asserted that interacting with newer, more vibrant teachers encourages them to be more motivated and often rejuvenates them. Teachers in this study also found that regardless of their experience in the classroom, the education system is constantly changing and they can always learn something from those who are more skilled in certain areas than they are.

One contribution made by this study that was not studied extensively in previous research is the concept that informal mentorship relationships are more valuable than formal mentorship relationships. While previous research (Committee on Effective Mentoring in STEMM & Board on Higher Education and Workforce, 2019; Eisler, 2017; Morettini et al., 2019; Quinnell, 2017) identified the difference between formal and informal mentorship relationships, very few studies have looked into how these different types of relationships benefit the teacher. Teachers in this study continuously stated how much more meaningful their experiences with informal relationships were than their experiences with formal mentorship relationships. Informal relationships tended to be initiated more organically and were more specific to the individuals involved. Teachers of all levels within their educational careers benefitted from the informal relationships while formal mentorship relationships seemed to be geared towards only the new teacher. This study asserted that informal relationships are much more valuable to a wider range of teachers.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are the weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled by the researcher. Delimitations are the decisions made by the researcher to limit the study. Both limitations and delimitations existed in this study.

Limitations

One limitation in this study was research bias. While I made all efforts possible to remove my personal opinion from the results of the study, there is still a possibility that my personal beliefs have affected the analysis of the data. I am a secondary teacher within the district where data were collected. I do possess strong feelings towards the use of mentorship relationships and how those mentorship relationships affect those who participate. It was my utmost goal to remove my voice from the study, to bracket out my personal belief system.

Another limitation was the diversity of the teachers in this study. All teachers in this study were secondary school teachers within a certain district in one geographical location. Ethnic diversity in this geographical location is slim. Because of the limited location, all teachers in this study were Caucasian. Also, because of the location, only two secondary schools were represented. Within this district covering roughly three million acres, there are two high schools, two junior-high schools, one junior/senior high school, and one alternative high school. Only the two high schools were used in this study. This limits the diversity of the study because all teachers in this study came from only these two schools.

A final limitation existed in the form of participant hesitation and participation. Data in this study was limited to participant response during a one-on-one interview, an essay, and a focus group session. Each participant was different in their responses. One-on-one interviews varied in length, from 17 minutes to over an hour. Essays also varied in length from a response

of half a page to over three pages. During the focus group sessions, some teachers in this study were more likely to open up than others. All data were based on the responses of the individuals. Because of this, some teachers in this study provided more data than others.

Delimitations

The main delimitation in this study was my decision to use a transcendental phenomenological approach rather than any other form of qualitative study. Phenomenology was chosen because of my desire to focus on one specific phenomenon – mentorship relationships. Transcendental phenomenology was chosen for this study because of my desire to study one specific phenomenon and bracket out my personal experiences. I did not want to include my personal experiences with mentorship relationships. Because of this, I did not choose hermeneutic phenomenology. Because of my study decision choice, this study was limited to one specific phenomenon, disregarding my personal opinions.

Another delimitation in this study was my use of purposeful sampling to identify and recruit teachers in this study. There were several limiting criteria for teachers to be eligible to participate in this study. Teachers in this study had to be 18 years or older, be certified, secondary teachers within the district, and have had experiences as either a mentor or mentee in mentorship relationships. Because of these specific criteria, teachers who were not certified secondary teachers (grades 7-12) were ineligible to participate. This excluded all elementary teachers. As such, this study was limited to secondary teacher experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

My primary goal for this research study was to better understand the experiences of multi-level teachers with mentorship relationships. It was important for me to understand how secondary teachers explained their experiences initiating and cultivating mentorship

relationships, along with how they felt affected by these relationships. Although mentorship relationships in the education system are a popular theme, how teachers experience those relationships throughout their educational careers is not common. While this study added to the general research about mentorship relationships for all teachers, replicating this study with a larger sample would provide more valuable insight into the phenomenon. Repeating this study in other districts at the secondary level would also increase the number of experiences to evaluate. Also, it would be interesting to focus the experiences on only teachers with more than five years of teaching experience.

In addition to increasing or altering the sample size in this study, additional research questions arose during the data collection process. First, further research should be conducted about administrative presence in mentorship relationships and how that presence affects the outcome of the relationship. Marie, a secondary science teacher, raised this question during a focus group session. She wondered how her efforts as a mentor in a formal mentorship relationship would have been affected if a building principal or associate principal would have checked in with her. Accountability is important in ensuring certain goals are reached. Because of this, having a building administrator check in with formal mentors could increase the success of the formal mentorship relationship.

Secondly, further research should be conducted regarding the extra stress that is caused by participation in formal mentorship relationships. Both Marie and Hollis raised this question during their one-on-one interview and a focus group session. They asserted that being assigned a mentee as a seasoned teacher often adds stress to the teacher because they are concerned about their mentee. These teachers are essentially required to care for someone other than themselves and their students, and this can add some anxiety to the mentor. It would be beneficial to

understand how participating in formal mentorship relationships affects the stress levels of assigned mentors.

A third and final research question that arose was regarding specific training for the formal mentor process. Gemma, a secondary P.E. teacher, expressed her concern to actually be trained to be a formal mentor. She asserted that she believed she had something to offer but wanted to be specifically trained in how to properly train a mentee so that the mentee could find value in the relationship. This would be an interesting topic to explore since formal mentorship relationships are required in 31 out of 50 states.

Conclusion

Using the social network theory (Waes et al., 2018) and Kram's (1983, 1988) mentorship model, this study describes the perceptions of secondary teachers' use of mentorship relationships. This study researches the perceptions of teachers from all levels of their educational careers. I wanted to explain how these teachers experienced mentorship relationships but also how they initiated and cultivated those relationships. I also wanted to explain how these teachers described the effects of participating in mentorship relationships. Seven themes arose from the data analysis: formal versus informal relationships, benefits to participating teachers, initiation of the relationship, cultivation of the relationship, untimely teacher attrition, benefits to students, and characteristics needed to foster a positive relationship. Recommendations derived from the study included having more building administration present during the formal mentorship process, allowing for more time to initiate and cultivate informal relationships, and providing adequate training for the formal mentor.

Though there is an abundance of research concerning mentorship relationships in the education system, but much of that research is based on providing a mentor for the new teacher.

Because the education system is constantly changing and new teachers are not the only teachers in need of support, it is essential to understand how all teachers utilize mentorship relationships. Focusing on one central research question and three sub-questions, descriptions provided by the teachers in this study helped to fill this gap in current research. This research allowed teachers from varying levels of teaching experience to share their opinions and concerns related to educational mentorship relationships.

This study brought to light that all teachers benefit from participating in mentorship relationships, whether they serve as the mentor or the mentee and regardless of their experience level. This study affirmed that teachers value informal mentorship relationships more highly than formal mentorships because of the basis on acquisition of skills and knowledge. Finally, this study asserted that participating in mentorship relationships encourages increased student achievement and has the potential to decrease untimely teacher attrition. This study is only the beginning of the study of mentorship relationships for all teachers, especially seasoned teachers. Further research will increase the understanding of how all teachers utilize mentorship relationships and how those relationships affect their classrooms, schools, and districts.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

November 22, 2021

Jodi Wilson
Linda Holcomb

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-344 MENTORSHIP RELATIONSHIPS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY INVESTIGATING EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY TEACHERS

Dear Jodi Wilson, Linda Holcomb,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification

submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at **irb@liberty.edu**.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

District Research Request Approval

September 30, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

Ms. Jodi Wilson has been approved by [redacted] to conduct research relating to the topic of how teachers use mentorship relationships. If you have any questions relating to this persmission, please contact me at [redacted]

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Appendix C

Participant Screening Instrument

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Are you a certified secondary teacher in Campbell County School District?
3. Have you ever been a participant in an informal or formal mentorship relationship as either a mentor or mentee?
4. What is your current age?
5. How many full years of teaching experience do you have?
6. Sometime during your teaching career, have you participated in an informal or formal mentorship relationship?
7. Are you currently a participant of an informal or formal mentorship relationship?
8. Have you participated in an informal or formal mentorship relationship where you served as the mentor?
9. Have you participated in an informal or formal mentorship relationship where you served as the mentee?
10. Please include your name and email so the researcher may contact you to schedule an interview and focus group.

Appendix D

Letter of Introduction/Recruitment Letter

Date:

Dear Teacher:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of secondary teachers in using, initiating, and cultivating mentorship relationships, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, are a certified, secondary teacher within Campbell County School District, have in the past or are currently a participant in an informal or formal mentorship relationship as either a mentor or mentee and are willing to participate you will be asked to (1) participate in a recorded one-on-one interview (60 minutes), (2) complete a short personal essay (30-45 minutes), (3) participate in a recorded focus group session with other participants (90 minutes), and finally (4) check over the transcribed interview to ensure your ideas are represented accurately (30 minutes but time may vary). I will audio record interviews and video record focus group discussions for transcription purposes. It should take approximately 3.5 hours for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate please click here: [screening survey link] to confirm your eligibility. A consent document is attached to this email. If you are eligible and choose to participate, please sign and return the consent document to me via email or through the district mail service (Pony Mail) at your earliest convenience. I will work with you to schedule an interview and the focus group. The signed consent document can be emailed to me at [redacted] or given to me at the time of the interview. Participants in this study will receive a $15 gift card to a local coffee shop upon completion.

If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact me at: [redacted] or by email at [redacted] Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Jodi L. Wilson
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Appendix E

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: Mentorship Relationships: A Phenomenological Study Investigating Experiences of Secondary Teachers

Principal Investigator: Jodi Lee Wilson, Ed.S. & Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be at least 18 years of age, must be a certified, secondary teacher within Campbell County School District, and must have in the past or currently be a participant in an informal or formal mentorship relationship as either a mentor or mentee. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate teachers' experiences in the mentoring relationship. Teachers of different levels of experience will be asked to share how they have experienced, initiated, and cultivated mentorship relationships during their teaching career.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Individual Interview: You will participate in an individual interview where you will be asked a series of open-ended questions. This interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes. You will be allowed to review and edit the transcribed interview for clarification.
2. Essay: You will be asked to write an essay outlining your experiences with informal and formal mentorship relationships. This essay will vary in length as long as you have addressed the key points. It should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete the essay.
3. Focus Group Session: You will participate in a group session with three other participants and myself. You and the other participants will be guided through conversation. This interview will be audio and video recorded and then transcribed. You will be allowed to review and edit the transcribed interview for clarification.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of how mentorship relationships affect the teacher. This may benefit the educational community in the way mentorship relationships are initiated and cultivated in the future.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked device and may be used in future presentations. Hard copy data will be stored in a locked cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and hard copy data will be shredded.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked device for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. This compensation will be a $15.00 gift card for a local coffee shop which will be given to the participant after transcribed interview has been reviewed by the participant.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus

group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jodi Lee Wilson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] and/or [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Linda Holcomb, at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at **irb@liberty.edu**

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio- and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Participant Name

_____
Participant Signature

Appendix F

Essay Instructions

Please write an essay explaining your experiences with mentorship relationships. There is no minimum or maximum length for your essay. However, you should address each of the following points within your essay:

- What does it mean to be part of a mentorship relationship?
- What does it mean to be the mentor in a mentorship relationship?
- What does it mean to be the mentee in a mentorship relationship?
- In your teaching career, how have you served as a mentor in a mentorship relationship?
- Were there any specific times during your teaching career where someone sought you out as a mentor? Please explain.
- In your teaching career, how have you served as a mentee in a mentorship relationship?
- Were there any specific times during your teaching career where you sought someone out to mentor you? Please explain.
- Do you feel that participating in a mentorship relationship has helped you increase your success as a secondary teacher?
    - If yes, why and how?
    - If no, why not?

This essay should be returned either electronically or by hand to Jodi Lee Wilson within one week of receipt of these instructions. You may email this essay to jwilson@ccsd.k12.wy.us or deliver to her personally.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Appendix G

Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.
    a. How old are you? (if not answered with 1a)
    b. How many total years have you been teaching? (if not answered with 1)
2. Describe your teaching career to me, as thoroughly as possible.
3. Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession?
4. For what reasons have you considered leaving the teaching profession?
5. Explain your understanding of mentorship relationships, both formal and informal.
6. Describe your experiences, if any, with formal mentorship relationships.
7. Why were these formal mentorship relationships first initiated?
8. Describe how these formal mentorship relationships were initiated.
9. Describe ways you cultivated these formal mentorship relationships.
10. Describe your experiences, if any, with informal mentorship relationship.
11. Why were these informal mentorship relationships first initiated?
12. Describe how these informal mentorship relationships were initiated.
13. Describe ways you cultivated these informal mentorship relationships.
14. Historically, mentorship relationships have occurred between an older mentor and a younger mentee – has that always been the case for you? Please describe.
    a. (Have you ever had a mentor who was younger than you?)
15. Describe your opinion on the effects of participating in mentorship relationships.
16. Have you ever had a mentorship relationship that encouraged you to remain in the education field? Please describe.

17. Describe a mentorship relationship, if any, that helped you grow as an educator and in turn helped your students better succeed.
18. Describe a mentorship relationship, if any, that dynamically changed your opinion of your position in the education field.
19. Explain your feelings concerning the value of mentorship relationships.
20. What else do you think would be important for me to know about your experiences with mentorship relationships?

Appendix H

Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to the group as if we have all just met one another.
   How many full years of teaching experience do you have? At what levels?

2. Explain your experiences with mentorship relationships as a secondary teacher.
   Have you served as a mentor?
   Have you participated as a mentee?

3. What are your thoughts and beliefs about mentor programs for new teachers?

   For veteran teachers?

4. What characteristics are important for teachers to cultivate formal relationships?

5. What characteristics are important for teachers to cultivate informal relationships?

6. What are your thoughts and beliefs about initiation of mentorship relationships as teachers become more experienced? Are there differences between a new teacher initiating such relationships and a veteran teacher? If so, what are the differences?

7. Explain the successes/failures of mentorship relationships.

Appendix I

Theme Formation

Theme Formation	Jane	Marie	Parker	Hollis	Mae	Eddie	Sunny	Gabriel	Gemma	Maddie
Informal Versus Formal	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Professional Development	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Emotional Support	X	X	X	X	X				X	X
Characteristics Needed		X	X	X	X					X
Based on Skill, Not Age	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Negative Experience	X					X	X		X	
Initiation Depends on Experience and Need	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Cultivation Based on Trust and Transparency, Comfortability, Consistency	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Untimely Teacher Attrition	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Benefits To Teacher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Benefits to Students	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X

Appendix J

Interview Transcription Example

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.

(0:03) [name omitted] I am a math teacher at [name omitted].

   a. How old are you? (if not answered with 1a) I'm 26.

   b. How many total years have you been teaching? (if not answered with 1)

   This is year 5, so I've been teaching 4.

2. Describe your teaching career to me, as thoroughly as possible.

(0:32) I've been teaching math for all four years, the subjects have changed sporadically throughout the years. Um, but for the most part, I have freshmen through seniors. And, different ranges of math levels. I've always been here - since we split the two high schools. That was my first year and this is my fifth year since we've been here.

3. Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession?

(1:06) Yes. Though…usually it's when it's a bad day and I want to be a stay-at-home mom instead. And, I'm like - well, it could be done. And then I'm like, no! And then the next day's better. Then I realize I'm going to be okay.

4. For what reasons have you considered leaving the teaching profession?

(1:29) Most of the time it's when the kids are just being unruly and difficult to deal with, usually it's more of a classroom management stuff. Like their behavior is just stress overload - for the most part. But.

Appendix K

Essay Example

Mentorship Essay

What does it mean to be part of a mentorship relationship?

Being part of a mentorship relationship means being part of a working relationship to better the educational skills of each member. Both the mentor and mentee must be honest and trusting of the other member's commitment to each other, their students, and school.

What does it mean to be the mentor in a mentorship relationship?

Being the mentor in a mentoring relationship means being open and honest. They must share their experiences in the classroom both good and bad. Each educator experiences success and failure throughout their career. There is a steep learning curve in education and each educator learns from their mistakes. They must share these experiences with their mentee in both formal and informal mentorship relationships. The mentor must be willing to listen to the experiences of the mentee and suggest their own insights on different situations. They then need to make the time to check in and measure the successes of the mentee in the classroom.

What does it mean to be the mentee in a mentorship relationship?

Being the mentee in a mentoring relationship means being the kind of educator that is willing to try and fail. They must be honest with their mentor and open up about the struggles they may be facing in the classroom. They must be willing to listen to the experiences of their mentor and adapt and adopt the practices that best suit their teaching style.

Appendix L

Focus Group Transcription Example

You've gotta have somebody that's willing to navigate the culture of the building with you. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, mm-hmm <affirmative>, you know, that's a huge thing. Like I think about G last year from California plopped in two high schools that have completely different cultures in the departments
C (00:12:06):

And oh yeah. There's no support for that, but we're sure that he takes three classes every quarter and you know, does this, this and this. And he can open his email. Okay, good. But he needed someone to sit down with him and say, okay, this is what we're looking at.
G (00:12:19):

This is where the bathroom is. Yeah. <laugh> seriously,
C(00:12:24):

You know, and if you need something, this is who's gonna pay for it. And you know what I mean? Like there's those types of things that just kind of need to happen. And yeah, we don't talk to her on Tuesdays because she's got the us this and this and she's kind of grumpy. So just hold off and she'll be cool again, Wednesday. I'm like, Yeah, pretty much every day, but it's cool. Like, don't talk to her until she drinks her pot and a half of coffee and then she's a human again. But I mean, there's those things and that's part of mentoring. Like you don't think about it, but that's part of it, you know? And I don't know, that's the part that they need because then you build this relationship and then it's okay. So I don't actually know how to teach this.
C (00:13:04):

So can we talk about that? Because now you've built trust. It's not this weird stranger that gets plot in front of you and said, Hey, you guys are now in a very, delicate. And um, what's the word I'm looking for? Fragile relationship. Like I have to bear my soul to you and I just met you. No, I'm good. Like I am as a plus star teacher and I know how to do everything. I mean, that's how I felt when as a new teacher, I got stuck with this person and they're like, okay, good. I'm glad you're an a plus teacher. We'll just turn this piece of paper in and we're good. Yep. But that, wasn't the truth. you know,
G (00:13:40):