

2006

Mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of mentor support

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Mentor and Mentee Perceptions of the Importance
and Effectiveness of Mentor Support

by

Cenira Holcomb

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
College of Education
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Date of Approval:
October 31, 2006

Keywords: special education teacher, mentor teacher, novice teacher, mentor program,
action research

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Dedication

Without my husband Scott, my daughter Lindsey, and my family and friends, this dissertation would not have been possible. Their continuous support has been invaluable throughout the research and writing of this dissertation. More importantly, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother-in-law Sylvia A. Holcomb. She has always been a source of inspiration and encouragement.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the members of my dissertation committee for their unwavering support and guidance throughout this dissertation: Drs. Carol A. Mullen, William Blank, Darlene Y. Bruner, and Judith A. Ponticell. I wish to express appreciation in particular to Dr. Mullen, my major professor, an expert in mentoring theory and practice, for her words of encouragement and guidance, and conceptual input and detailed writing feedback. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Mullen's Writers in Training (WIT) dissertation cohort that functions as part of the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies department at the University of South Florida, which regularly offered scholarly feedback on my study.

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Mentor and Mentee Perceptions of the Importance
And Effectiveness of Mentor Support

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods action research study explored the congruence between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district-specific focus areas of mentor support. While reviewing current data pertaining to teacher attrition, the researcher observed a limited availability of investigations relating to the perceived role of the mentor teacher based on the experiences and observations of both the novice and mentor teacher.

The target population for this study was 70 novice and mentor special education teachers during the 2005–2006 school year employed at 13 middle schools in a school district located in Florida. Of the 70 beginning and mentor teachers, 4 mentor teachers and 2 novice teachers from 4 of the 13 middle schools within the district volunteered to participate. The mentor and mentee teachers who chose to take part were not mentoring pairs during the 2005–2006 school year.

Obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, the researcher contacted middle school principals to attain administrative support for the study. Novice and mentor middle school teachers alike were then contacted via postal mail requesting their participation. Concerted efforts were made to secure mentor–mentee participation.

The researcher relied on multiple data collection methods—a demographic and multi-item survey for the novice and mentor teacher (Appendixes D & E) and standardized open-ended interview questions for the novice and mentor teacher (Appendixes F & G). Lastly, the researcher conducted an analysis of pertinent district documents, more specifically thoroughly examining the information presented in the *ESE Mentor Program Resource Manual* for mentor and mentee teachers.

The major findings of this study include the following: (1) formal and informal mentoring of beginning special education teachers by experienced mentors and colleagues is a useful and productive endeavor; (2) ESE paperwork demands are rigorous for novice teacher; (3) the needs and concerns of ESE teachers vary based on classroom assignment and student population, and (4) the *ESE Mentor Program Resource Manual* provided useful information referencing the 12 areas of mentor support for beginning special educators, but did little to guide mentor and novice teachers in facilitating the mentoring process.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the next decade “nearly two million new teachers are projected to enter U.S. schools, and the challenge of supporting them effectively has become a critical issue” (Halford, 1998, p. 34). Public school leaders nationwide are becoming increasingly concerned about the high attrition rates of teachers in their first 3 to 5 years of teaching (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Fideler & Haselkom, 1999; Gold, 1996; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). Although many areas in education are experiencing teacher shortages (Bender, 2002; McKnab, 1995; Merrow, 1999), the attrition rates of beginning special education teachers is of national critical concern. Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. (1999) cites special education as an area of critical shortage according to 98% of school districts surveyed in the U.S. In addition, when compared to general educators, the burnout and attrition rate of special education teachers, including attrition through transfer to general education, is significantly higher (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Weber, 1995; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1990).

School districts nationwide have been and will continue to do their best to address the significant turnover of novice teachers. Although many states provide induction programs for beginning teachers, which traditionally include a building

level mentor teacher for the novice educator, Denbale and Feiman-Nemser (1995) note that without adequate resources, institutional support, and deliberate planning, the success of mentoring often rests on mentors' good will, intuition, and commitment.

School districts implementing induction and mentoring programs face a critical challenge in the broader context of teacher professional development-- "serious concerns about the effectiveness of much professional development practice" (Guskey, 2000, p. 3). Determining the effectiveness of professional development is important; district administrators, school board members, legislators, and parents want to know that efforts such as induction and mentoring programs "are valuable to the school organization, to individual educators, and, ultimately, to students" (p. 8).

The problem addressed in this study is the assessment of the effectiveness of the mentoring program for beginning special educators within a specific Florida school district. Not only do the findings from this action research benefit the district being studied, but also potentially districts trying to do their best to address burnout and attrition concerns of novice special educators.

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the congruence between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district specific focus areas of mentor support. Action research informed the design of the study as the intent of action research is to examine and improve a program, practice, or policy (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Framework for the Study

Beginning Teachers and Induction Support

The high attrition rates among beginning teachers has forced many states to implement induction programs for novice teachers. School districts employ these programs to provide novice educators with the support they need to learn to teach (Klein, 2004). During the induction phase, beginning teachers continue to develop their teaching skills while the mentor teacher provides instructional and psychological support. Presently, as many as 30 states have teacher induction programs in place (Seo, 2004), with only 16 of those states requiring and funding induction for all new teachers (Education Week, 2003).

Key components to the success of beginning teacher induction programs include clear support systems and the appropriate mechanisms for evaluating novice teaching (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilburn, & Kilgore, 2002). Also, high quality induction programs share these basic functions:

1. To provide instruction in classroom management and effective teaching techniques.
2. To reduce the difficulty of the transition into teaching.
3. To maximize the retention rate of highly qualified teachers
(Breaux & Wong, 2003, p. 5).

From state to state teacher induction programs vary. In short, most programs include an orientation familiarizing the new teacher with the school district's philosophy, mission, and vision and provide at least one mentor teacher for a first-year teacher. In addition, the district may provide extensive professional

development opportunities and assistance in curriculum development and best teaching practices. It is the consensus that “teachers are not finished products when they complete a teacher preparation program” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, p. 79), but rather individuals in need of comprehensive support systems to ensure their success during their initial years of teaching. A well-defined induction preparation program in conjunction with a mentor teacher allows for an easier transition into teaching whereby beginning teachers can effectively use their newly acquired skills, thus helping increase the likelihood of retention (Portner, 1998). Beginning teachers with high quality mentors and intensive teacher induction programs available to them are more likely to remain in the teaching profession for more than 5 years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Klein, 2004).

Sustained Professional Development for Beginning Teachers

Scholars identify sustained professional development as a means to give teachers continuous opportunities to improve their teaching skills (Breux & Wong, 2003). In addition, results from a study of seven urban school districts support student achievement gains due in part to extensive professional development (Cross & Rigden, 2002). Unlike formal mentoring, which is usually short-term (Mullen, 2005), sustained professional development is long term and can provide the novice teacher with instructional tools aimed at further developing the novices’ skills in the classroom and increasing teacher retention rates. However, both formal mentoring and sustained professional development

have proven to be an effective means of retaining beginning teachers (Wong, 2003).

Professional growth through professional development is also a key element of the induction process (Portner, 2005). The conventional model where educators attend a workshop in which experts tell them how to teach and then leave the teachers to figure out the classroom application of the in-service is outdated (Pennell & Firestone, 1998). Therefore, collaborative effort with teachers and other professionals to plan effective learning opportunities becomes a necessity for those who oversee professional development programs in the school district. In fact, “collaboration is a fruitful way to promote and sustain professional development” (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000, p. 85). All told, educators can no longer view professional development programs as separate from the teaching job. Instead, school leaders should be expected to infuse professional development into the daily, weekly, and yearlong job of teaching, resulting in school-wide change and improved student success (Renyi, 1998).

Special Needs of Special Educators

The U.S. Department of Education has spent approximately \$90 million annually to support the increase of special education teachers serving our nation’s students with disabilities (Seo, 2004). In fact, the fields of special education, math, and science suffer the highest turnover rate, with special education teachers having a greater likelihood of leaving the profession than any other teacher group (Ingersoll, 2001). Approximately 90% of U.S. school districts report special education shortages (ERIC, 2001; Fideler, Foster, & Schwartz, 2000). Ingersoll

also observed that recruitment alone would not solve the shortage of special education teachers if thousands of novice teachers should leave the profession within a few years.

Overall, the attrition rate of special educators is greater than the proportion of general educators who leave the profession (McLeskey, Tyler, & Saunders, 2002). Additionally, many special educators are lost to the field of general education, with a significantly higher proportion of special educators transferring to general education than the reverse (Boe, Bobbit, Cook, 1997). This trend results in a higher attrition rate for beginning special education teachers, especially those who are not given the opportunity to participate in a teacher induction program that includes mentor support (Ingersoll, 2001).

Furthermore, a number of studies supported higher levels of stress experienced by special education teachers in relation to their job responsibilities (Gersten et al., 2001; Miller et al., 1999; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). A national survey conducted by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (1998) of over 1,000 special educators concluded: “Poor teacher working conditions contribute to the high rate of special educators leaving the field, teacher burnout, and substandard quality of education for students with special needs” (p. 2).

Many studies support mentoring programs for special educators as a means of enhancing retention rates and sustaining the novice teacher (e.g., Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Whitaker, 2000). Results from these studies suggest a link between the effectiveness of mentoring for new teachers and both job

satisfaction and retention in special education. Recently, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that new teachers who experience one-to-one mentoring as well as a comprehensive induction program had a higher retention rate than new teachers who only had formal mentors. Although relatively little is known about the effectiveness of different types and sources of support for new teachers (Gold, 1996), studies suggest that special educators need special education mentors, even if that mentor works in a different school (White & Mason, 2001).

School districts that support well-developed induction programs including mentor programs for beginning teachers find that 93% of new teachers are retained after the first year (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 1999b). The National Education Association (2001) exclaimed that beginning teachers who do not participate in an induction program are twice as likely to leave as those who do participate. Results from this study suggested a link between the effectiveness of mentoring and job satisfaction to the retention rates of novice special educators. Although an important support for novice teachers, mentoring is only one component of an effective induction strategy. However, for school districts sustaining mentoring programs as part of the induction of beginning teachers, the results can prove to be remarkable (American Teacher, 2002).

Purpose and Rationale of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the congruence between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district specific focus areas of mentor support. Both the novice and mentor teachers' perceptions of the mentoring role as well as what novice and mentor

teachers perceive to be a beginning teacher's major needs during their initial year of teaching constitute this study's focus. Researchers (Bender, 2002; Boe et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 2001; Whitaker, 2000 & 2001) acknowledge that shortages in special education personnel are prevalent nationwide. Factors noted that persuade novice special educators to explore alternative teaching options, such as transfers to general education, include inadequate teacher induction programs, stress and burnout, lack of administrative support, and difficulty managing paperwork.

While reviewing current data pertaining to teacher attrition, the researcher observed a limited availability of investigations relating to the perceived role of the mentor teacher based on the experiences and observations of both the novice and mentor teacher. This observation in turn justified the study's focus and purpose.

Action research informed the design of the study as the intent of action research is to examine and improve a program, practice, or policy (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The participating school district in central Florida had developed a mentoring program based on 12 areas of mentoring support:

1. Classroom management and organization
2. Curriculum
3. Communication/conferencing skills
4. IEP/TIEP/matrix
5. Assessment/evaluations/re-evaluations
6. School based ESE records and procedures
7. ESE resource personnel

8. Behavior management/secured seclusion/time out
9. Documentation and data collection
10. Legal issues and IDEA
11. Articulation
12. Resources

These 12 areas of mentoring support serve as a guideline for mentor teachers for determining mentees' level of need, which in turn inform the development of an individualized mentoring plan for the novice special educator. As of December 2006 the participating school district had not assessed the perceived effectiveness of these 12 areas of mentoring support.

Research Questions

Developing a better understanding of the support systems in place for novice special educators and the complexity of beginning teacher induction programs is of great interest to U.S. school districts. Because the literature acknowledges high attrition rates among beginning special educators citing limited resources and, specifically, the need for mentor and novice teachers to learn from and collaborate with one another, this study focuses on the perceptions of novice and mentor special educators.

The primary research questions guiding this study are:

1. In relation to the 12 areas of focus, what mentor actions do beginning teachers perceive as most and least beneficial to novice special educators?

2. In relation to the 12 areas of focus, what mentor actions do mentors perceive as most and least beneficial to novice special educators?
3. What similarities exist between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the school district's 12 areas of mentor support?
4. What differences exist between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the school district's 12 areas of mentor support?

Significance of this Study

Extensive research exists regarding the high attrition rates among novice teachers, especially beginning special education teachers (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Brownell & Smith, 1992; Platt & Olsen, 1990). In addition to lack of support from administrators (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Karge & Freiberg, 1992; Westling & Whitten, 1996), major identified factors influencing attrition are excessive paperwork, general education teachers, and parental demands and expectations (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Brownell & Smith, 1992; Platt & Olsen, 1990).

For these reasons, there are both practical and theoretical reasons for conducting this study. From a practical perspective, knowing the novices' perceptions of their mentor teachers as well as which characteristics the mentor teachers perceive as most beneficial for teachers during their first year of teaching provides information that could be valuable to the participating school district

administration in its efforts to improve the mentoring program. Similarly, school districts considering developing mentoring programs for beginning special educators may gain insights related to their own district contexts or situations.

On a theoretical level, limited studies have examined the needs and concerns of beginning special education teachers. Significant research, however, has addressed the needs and concerns of beginning general educators. Scholars have called for additional empirical studies to explain how the mentor teacher is meeting the needs of the novice special education teacher and to provide insight into the perceived role of the mentor (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Boe et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 2001; Whitaker, 2000 & 2001). This study has potential for adding to our knowledge of the induction needs of beginning special educators.

Scope and Study Limitations

It was expected that anywhere from 8 to 20 mentor and beginning special education teachers from 3 to 8 middle schools in a central Florida school district would provide input for this study. Novice middle school ESE teachers were the target population. The transition period from elementary to middle school is a particularly important time and presents challenges for students, families, and teachers (Fowler, 1988). Teachers at this level are dealing with students who have a wide range of needs and skills.

The primary focus of the researcher was to provide valuable information regarding perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district specific focus areas of mentor support to a school district in central Florida, in order to assist the school district in reviewing and improving its mentoring program. It

was not the intent of this study to generalize results to all schools in the district or to school districts in Florida, other states, or across the nation.

Another limitation is the researcher's personal bias and limited amount of time spent with study respondents building relationships that contribute to trustworthy data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I am a veteran teacher with 12 years of experience teaching students with disabilities who has served as a mentor teacher to several beginning special and basic education teacher. My experiences in the field of special education and in the school district being studied have given me the opportunity to develop a position on some of the school and district policies regarding mentor teacher training and the induction program available to beginning teachers. To minimize any personal biases, the researcher has used multiple data sources. Novice and mentor teachers were asked to complete a survey and to participate in an interview, and the district's ESE Mentor Program Resource Manual was reviewed. Participants also had the opportunity to verify that the researcher accurately depicted their perspectives. Each received a copy of her own interview transcript for review and approval. In addition, the researcher shared working drafts of this study with the Writers in Training (WITs), a group of doctoral students and candidates that work closely with Dr. Carol Mullen, her major professor, to help develop and maintain an awareness of her subjectivity and to assist with all other major aspects of this study.

Unfortunately, time constraints meant the researcher had minimal contact with study participants. As a result, teachers may have been less likely to candidly provide information regarding their perceptions of mentor support.

Given these limitations, the findings of this study provide insight into the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) mentor support in this school district with respect to better addressing the needs of beginning teachers. Readers will need to determine the extent to which the results yielded apply to their current situation (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Definitions of Significant Terminology

Definitions are necessary for establishing a common understanding of the terms used in this study.

Attrition—“Teachers who leave the occupation of teaching altogether” (Breux & Wong, 2003, p. 88).

Induction preparation program— “A comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers, which then seamlessly guides them into a lifelong learning program” (Portner, 2005, p. 43).

Mentor teacher— “A single person, whose basic function is to help a new teacher. Mentoring is not induction; it is a component of the induction process” (Portner, 2005, p. 43).

Middle school teacher—A teacher of young adolescent students from grades 6 through 8. Children in these grades are often referred to as adolescents as this is a time of tremendous emotional, social, physical and cognitive changes. (Knowles & Brown, 2000).

Novice teacher—Teachers in the first two years of their careers (Ingersoll, 2001; Meyer, 2002).

Sustained professional development—Professional development in which the new teacher is “guided by expert colleagues, responsive to their teaching, and continuous throughout their early years in the classroom” (Breaux & Wong, 2003, p. 73).

Retention—Teachers who remain in the “same teaching assignment and the same school as the previous year or ~~a~~ teachers who transfer to another special education teaching position” (Billingsley, 2004).

Special education teacher—A teacher of students with identified special education needs.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In this review the author first gives an overview of the issues and trends in special education, with an emphasis on important legislation passed in the mid-1970s that eased the transition of students with disabilities into the general education curriculum. Also discussed are implications of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), as well as two major components of beginning teacher induction programs, the mentor teacher and professional development opportunities for the novice teacher. The chapter concludes with a description of the role of principals and other school leaders in facilitating the induction of the novice teacher.

Key Legislation for Students with Special Needs

Public Law 94-142 (P.L. 94-142), the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), which was passed in 1975 and implemented in 1978, has proven to be important legislation helping students with disabilities obtain a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 1998). Since its inception and reauthorization in 1990 and 1997, the number of students receiving special services has consistently increased (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). After the 1990 reauthorization of P.L.94-142, the legislation was renamed

from the Education for All Handicapped Children Act to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Smith, Price, & Marsh, 1986).

The 1997 amendments to IDEA placed an emphasis on the following areas related to special education:

1. Include students with disabilities in state reform efforts.
2. Expand the availability of special education classrooms.
3. Foster researcher-validated instructional and behavioral interventions.
4. Support quality, intensive professional development for personnel involved with special education and related services (Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Conroy, 2003).

Unfortunately, specific to the fourth point the literature consistently reflects an alarming shortage of certified special education teachers in classrooms nationwide (McLeskey, Tyler, & Saunders, 2002; Seo, 2004; Smith-Davis & Billingsley, 1993).

Significant Components of IDEA

Least Restrictive Environment

The reauthorization of IDEA made in 1997 has implications for special and general education classroom teachers. IDEA required that students be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which is “a principle stating that students with disabilities are to be educated in settings as close to regular classes as appropriate for the child” (Yell, 1995, p. 193). In essence, LRE means that students with disabilities should remain with their non-disabled, chronological aged peers as much as possible during the school day. Children

with disabilities must be educated to the maximum extent in the LRS, and “education must be individualized and appropriate to the child’s needs” (Ruenda, Gallego, & Moll, 2000, p. 71). While students with severe disabilities benefit from inclusion, they generally spend less time in general education classrooms than students with less pronounced disabilities and other special needs. With the implementation of the LRE both special and general educators must share the responsibility for educating students with disabilities, requiring extensive communication between all teachers (Podemski, Marsh, Smith, & Price, 1995; Smith, Finn, & Dowdy, 1993).

Individualized Education Plan

Implementation of P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, requires that all students with disabilities have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP is based on information gathered during comprehensive assessments of the child and was developed by a team of individuals knowledgeable about students with special needs. As dictated by P.L. 94-142, this team must consist of, at minimum:

1. The child’s teacher.
2. A representative for the school, other than the teacher, who is qualified to provide or supervise special education programs.
3. One or both of the child’s parents.
4. The child, when appropriate.
5. Other individuals at the discretion of the parent or school. (Smith et al., 1998, p. 13)

Furthermore, parent participation is crucial in the development and implementation of the IEP. Not only is parental involvement mandated by the law, it is also considered best practices to include the parent in the development of their child's IEP (IDEA, 1997). In addition to the required written assessment of special needs students, this legislation also mandates the use of fair and non-discriminatory assessment practices in monitoring student progress toward IEP goals and objectives (Marston, 1988).

Due Process Safeguards

Due process safeguards are procedures that ideally make parents and schools equal partners in the educational process. These protect students from receiving unfair punishment for behaviors beyond their control (Erwin & Soodak, 1995), and they ensure that parents and children take part in the decision-making process regarding special education services. Legal safeguards included in the 1997 revisions to IDEA require schools to:

1. Allow parents the opportunity to examine all educational records.
2. Give parents the right to obtain an independent evaluation of their child at the school's expense.
3. Provide written notice to parents before initiating any changes in placement of the child.
4. Communicate all proposed actions in the parent's native language.
5. Allow the parent or school to dispute any disagreement over identification, evaluation, or placement in a due process hearing.

(Smith et al., 1998)

Litigation has played a major role in the development of present services for students with disabilities (Smith et al., 1998). Beginning with the Brown V. Board of Education case and spanning several decades later, litigation has helped radicalize the service students with disabilities receive in public school (Prasse & Reschly, 1986). Prominent litigation has focused on a number of issues, including:

1. The right to education for students with disabilities.
2. Nonbiased assessments for students.
3. Procedural safeguards for students with disabilities.
4. The right to extend the school year at the expense of the public school for some students.
5. Related services for students.
6. The right to be educated in general education classrooms.
7. The interpretation by the U.S. Supreme Court of the intent of Congress in P.L. 94-142. (Smith et al., 1998, p. 15)

Nondiscriminatory Assessments

To classify a student as disabled and eligible for special education services, the student must undergo a comprehensive evaluation which includes standardized testing. The tests given must be nondiscriminatory in nature and must accurately capture the student's abilities. The intent of the law governing student evaluation practices is to protect minority and low socioeconomic students.

Related Services and Free and Appropriate Public Education

Related services refer to the transportation, developmental, corrective and other supportive services, such as speech therapy and physical therapy that assists children with disabilities and allows them to benefit from special education services (Downing, 2004). FAPE requires that students with special needs receive a free and appropriate public education and related services at the expense of the school system. In addition, “related services constitute one of the mechanisms districts may use to provide FAPE and to facilitate successful placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment” (Downing, 2004, p. 196).

As a result of the number of services available to special needs students and the extensive time necessary to implement the policies set forth by IDEA, special educators often experience higher stress levels in relation to their job responsibilities than general educators (Gersten et al., 2001; Miller et al., 1999; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Stresses for special education teachers include a significant amount of paperwork, time consuming conferences with parents and school meetings, limited opportunities for individualized student attention, and the task of teaching students with varied levels of performance, all contributing to higher attrition rates among special educators (Whitaker, 2003).

Beginning Teacher Attrition Concerns

Attrition rates among beginning special educators have proven exceptionally problematic. The literature consistently reflects an alarming shortage of certified special education teachers’ nationwide (McLeskey et al.,

2002; Seo, 2004; Smith-Davis & Billingsley, 1993). Furthermore, statistics indicate that the first few years of teaching are often the most critical in determining whether the novice teacher will remain in the teaching profession (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Klein, 2004; Miller et al., 1999; Whitaker, 2003). Approximately 15% of new special education teachers leave after their first year, while an additional 10 to 15% will leave after their second (Billingsley, 2004; Huling-Austin, 1990; Schlechty & Vance, 1983; Whitaker, 2000). With adequate support systems, one being a mentor teacher assigned to the novice during the transition from pre-service teacher to professional, first year teachers have the opportunity to develop skills necessary to forge ahead.

Although many disciplines in education are experiencing teacher shortages (McKnab, 1995; Merrow, 1999), the national shortage of certified special educators across all disability areas is of particular concern in school districts. Districts continue to have problems recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers, frequently resorting to staffing many special education classrooms with unqualified teachers on emergency or provisional credentials. The practice of this short-term fix can lead to long-term problems, due in part to shortages in hard-to-staff schools, particularly in the field of special education. Also, an additional complication is that teachers who meet requirements in one state may not meet them in another (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998).

Merrow (1999) examined national attempts to fill the shortages of qualified teachers, more importantly recruitment and the incentive efforts of several states. His study concluded that the most significant problem of shortages

in special education and have been “misdiagnosed.” Merrow claims that real concern regarding teacher attrition centers on retention efforts. In other words, “we train teachers poorly and then treat them badly and so they leave in droves” (p. 64). Research has consistently documented higher teacher turnover among special education teachers, while suggesting many reasons for this occurrence (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; McKnab, 1995; Singh & Billingley, 1996). Furthermore, evidence suggests that some teachers are leaving special education classrooms to teach in general education classes. Burnout among special educators has also been determined to be higher than it is for general education teachers (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997).

Studies have also indicated that younger, less experienced teachers are among those most likely to leave the teaching profession within 3 years (Gonzalez, 1996; Miller et al., 1999; Singer, 1992). It appears that a strong correlation exists between the special educator’s decision to remain in the field and the level of support that novices believe they are receiving (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Bogenschild, Sultana, 1996). Other studies indicate that a successful first-year teaching experience is a critical factor in the retention of special educators (Billingsley, 1993; Bogenschild et al., 1988; Harris and Associates, 1991). Still some studies imply that many pre-service and novice teachers perceive the role of mentor teacher more in terms of what Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1992) refer to as “supervision” rather than “mentoring” (Walkington, 2005).

Based on the aforementioned studies concerning beginning special education teacher attrition, it is reasonable to wonder about factors that contribute to higher attrition rates among special educators. This issue was in part addressed in a study conducted by Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Miller (1997) involving special education teachers from Florida who did not return to their teaching position after the 1992–1993 school year. The researchers concluded that the majority of special educators who left their teacher position assumed another teaching job in a different area of education, such as the general education classroom. The authors also revealed that stress, along with attempts to manage overwhelming workloads, promoted teacher burnout, which in turn led to high teacher turnover rates among special educators.

Teacher Induction Programs

New teacher induction programs that include mentor support help alleviate the tension associated with the teaching profession by providing a piece of a comprehensive induction program. Researchers continue to insist that novice teachers need to have the opportunity to communicate ideas and thoughts with other educators (Johnson & Kardos, 2005; Littleton & Tally-Foos, & Wolaver, 1992). Several decades earlier school leaders began to explore schemes to help the first-year teacher enter the profession. Since 1980 state law has mandated such induction programs as:

- Entry year assistance program
- Beginning teacher helping program
- Assistance/assessment

- Peer coaching
- Teacher mentor program

For many new teachers these induction programs are the first step in establishing a link between the novice and the school district.

The transformation from student teacher to competent career teacher is the basic intent of most teacher induction programs. Schlechty (1995) suggests that the attitudes and behaviors of the faculty and administration set the stage for new teachers, and both are observable signs of an effective induction program.

Therefore, both veteran teachers and administrators should be involved in the process of induction. They should also have a sound understanding and knowledge of the purpose of the program, knowing that their support is vital to the novice's success.

Professional Development of Beginning Teachers

Ongoing school-based professional development opportunities related to curriculum, instructional strategies, and classroom and paperwork management, are especially beneficial to novices. School districts are creating professional development activities that encourage teacher progress, rethinking the way schools approach the growth of a beginning teacher (Darling-Hammond, 1996). School reform initiatives have also placed a greater emphasis on enhancing the opportunities for teachers to learn about the curriculum and the individual needs of all students.

According to Jon Wiles and Joseph Bondi (1996), school-based professional development programs function according to three premises: (1)

teachers must be involved in deciding their own training needs, (2) growth experiences should be individualized for both teachers and students, and (3) educational change occurs from the grass-root level. A primary goal for professional development is to create a program that allows teachers to share classroom issues, solutions, and expertise. Through this process, novice and veteran teachers receive current research information and a better understanding of the effects of their teaching on students. School districts use a variety of professional development models to better accommodate the needs of their teachers. The most widely used models include school-based teacher training and teachers-teaching-teachers, such as peer coaching. Additionally, peer coaching, which has the versatility to be used with any content materials, can improve the success rate of other staff development models (Gottesman, 2002).

Staff development opportunities provide a method of increasing the possibility of implementation, maintenance, and integration of an innovative instructional program or strategy (Renyi, 1998). School-based staff development programs have proven to be extremely popular and successful. Some of the benefits of school-based programs include:

- Teacher's benefit from the educational activities that are linked to a general effort of the school.
- Individualized instruction for teachers helps meet the objectives of the training session.
- Teachers placed in an active role are more likely to use the ideas and materials generated in the training session.

In this instance, high quality teachers must be willing to learn and relearn to continuously meet the changing demands of their jobs (Odell & Ferrano, 1992).

In the Teachers-Teaching-Teachers (TTT) Model trained faculty work at various school sites to instruct other teachers on a variety of topics ranging from a specific content area to behavior management techniques (Wiles & Bondi, 1996). This model has proven cost effective and it is widely used by many school districts. Teacher trainers have first-hand experiences with the content being presented and can therefore offer novice teachers valuable insight on the integration of the material being presented in their classroom.

To better equip beginning teachers for the rigors of education, new recruits are often exposed to a variety of staff development activities. During this time new teachers can begin to establish a bond or connection with the school system while fine-tuning the teaching skills necessary to facilitate student learning. The role of school and district leaders is to collaborate with teachers and other professionals to plan professional development activities. This sense of empowerment allows teachers, especially beginning teachers, the ability to make decisions about what is best for them and gives them the opportunity to become more involved in the process of running the school. This process allows teachers to take leadership roles throughout the school system, ensuring that new teachers as well as veteran teachers gain further success in instructional performance.

Mentoring Support for Novice Teachers

Although the importance of the mentor–novice teacher relationship has been well documented (Huling-Austin, 1990; Odell & Ferraro, 1992, Whitaker,

2000), the mechanics of this process have not been well established. A mentoring relationship is likely to develop between the novice and a more experienced person in almost any profession. As severe teacher shortages rise nationally, especially in special education, induction programs have become part of the teacher induction continuum (Blair-Larsen & Bercik, 1992). Additionally, successful beginning teacher induction programs provide continuous assistance to novice teachers by assigning them a mentor teacher to help promote the effectiveness and retention of the novice (Huling-Austin, 1990).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) in 1989 adopted the following standards for beginning special education teachers to include a minimum 1-year mentorship during their first year of professional practice (Whitaker, 2000). In determining the role of the mentor teacher the CEC identified the following as purposes of a mentoring program for beginning special educators:

1. To facilitate the application of knowledge and skills.
2. To convey advanced knowledge and skills.
3. To assist timely acculturation to the school climate.
4. To reduce stress and enhance job satisfaction.
5. To support professional induction.

Those experienced teachers who choose to mentor have the great responsibility of easing the transition of the first year teacher into the profession. As is recognized by the CEC, a mentor's numerous functions include "role model teacher, motivator, communicator, resource person, counselor, supporter, advisor,

talent developer, guide, demonstrator, and protector” (McKenna, 1998, p. 49). A mentor teacher should be ready to assume all of these roles when assisting first year teachers.

Role of the Principals and Other School Leaders

Beginning teachers have identified the principal as a “key source of support and guidance” (Brock & Grady, 1998, p. 12). It is the responsibility of the administrative team to enhance the teaching experiences of a beginning teacher by providing adequate building level support system where beginning teachers thrive. Literature on principal leadership and induction indicates that school leaders can promote instructional development among beginning teachers in several ways:

- Facilitate quality mentoring by creating time for novice teachers and mentors to meet and observe one another’s classroom.
(Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992; Little, 1990)
- Integrate new teachers into school-wide learning opportunities.
Collaborative work with departments or grade-level teams and from school-wide professional development can be a learning experience for beginning teachers. (Smylie & Hart, 1999)
- Promote learning during evaluation (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005). Through classroom observations, post-observation conferences, and direct consultation principals can help first year teachers acquire and learn to apply content specific

pedagogical knowledge. (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Stein & D'Amico, 2002)

School leaders can work closely with mentors and other teachers to focus on novices' instructional growth (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Youngs, 2002). The role of school leaders must yield to more than performance evaluations and extend to include instructional support beyond help with classroom management (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005). By understanding the individual needs of the school and beginning teachers, principals can help facilitate the mentor teacher role and bridge the gap between veteran teachers and new teachers.

Implications of the No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) is a federal mandate that markedly expands the role of the federal government in education. It also prescribed mandates to states and proposes to close the student achievement gap. NCLB makes public schools accountable for student achievement, sets standards of excellence for every child, and intends to place qualified teachers in every classroom by the end of 2005–2006 school years. According to President George W. Bush, the NCLB is based on stronger accountability for standardized test results, more pedagogical freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more academic choices for parents (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004). Unfortunately many states are struggling to meet the demands of the bill's regulatory details.

The NCLB is a landmark reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), enacted in 1965, which in essence redefined the role of

the federal government in K-12 education. The objective of NCLB is to have every student in America reach state-defined proficiency by 2014. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, most commonly known as NCLB, has become a national controversy with long-term consequences for public school systems throughout the nation (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004). NCLB proposes that every teacher of core academic subject areas be “highly qualified” by the end of the 2005–2006 school year.

The NCLB mandate unfortunately poses many unreasonable challenges for policy leaders of state education and for educators. School reformers realize that evidence suggests that student achievement gains are related to teacher quality; however, there is much disagreement on what is meant by “teaching quality” or the necessary steps to make certain that every student has access to high-quality teachers (Archer, 2002).

According to the NCLB mandates, a “highly-qualified teacher” must “hold at least a bachelor’s degree from a four-year institution; hold full state certification; and demonstrate competence in their subject area” (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004, p. 685). The law also requires that state departments of education report to the public the steps being taken to improve teacher quality and the progress of efforts made, as well as indicate the distribution of “highly qualified” teachers across low and high poverty schools within school districts. Given the lack of funds and resources allotted to states, it would behoove the federal government to assume a greater role in supporting and improving the teacher development system (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004).

In July of 2003, Secretary of Education Rod Paige released the Second Annual Report on Teacher Quality, a document intended to report the progress states have made toward meeting the challenges of NCLB's "highly qualified teacher" provisions (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Despite the efforts of American public school systems striving to meet the conditions set forth by the federal government, the current leadership of the U.S. Department of Education places more weight on the need for "highly qualified" teachers to know their subject matter and little emphasis on the pedagogical knowledge needed to be considered "highly qualified."

The U.S. Department of Education seeks to improve teacher quality by simply allowing teachers to pass standardized subject matter tests and by allowing alternative certification to those wishing to pursue a career in education without providing adequate pre-service training (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004). Research by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (SECTQ) on the implementation of NCLB found that schools in the Southeastern U.S. are in desperate need of educators, particularly those who are knowledgeable and able to work successfully with an increasingly diverse population of students, especially English language learners (Berry, et al, 2004). Although important, it is apparent that subject area knowledge is necessary, but certainly not sufficient.

In their effort to implement NCLB, school officials require that teachers pass subject area tests that provide little insight into an educator's ability to teach the state standards to a diverse student population. Instructional strategies and teaching principles, such as communicating high expectations and promoting

active learning, are taking a “back seat” to the simplicity of earning a passing score on any given subject area test. Based on the SECTQ research, most states are searching for loopholes in the license definitions to maximize the number of teachers that can be designated as highly qualified (Berry, et al, 2004).

Another area of concern is the requirements for those teachers seeking alternative certification. The U.S. Department of Education (2002) allows teachers engaged in alternative certification programs to be considered highly qualified as long as satisfactory progress is being made toward full certification as dictated by the state. A trend among many school districts is to hire teachers who possess strong knowledge of their subject area, but have never had proper training on how to teach a classroom full of students with diverse needs. Teachers hired under such conditions that often find it challenging to remain in the teaching profession.

Berry, Hoke, and Hirsch (2004) outlined five guidelines that may prove helpful in recruiting and retaining “highly qualified” teachers.

1. The teaching profession needs to be available to those other than traditional college-aged students from traditional university-based preparation programs.
2. More investments need to be made in school systems and universities that recruit and prepare teachers specifically for urban and rural hard-to-staff schools.
3. Multiple and more complete measures of teachers’ knowledge of students, teaching, and community need to be created.

4. School districts and universities must be more inventive in making use of accomplish teachers to prepare and support teacher candidates in alternative-route and new-teacher-induction programs.
5. Teacher salaries and working conditions need to be improved.

It is apparent that school districts nationwide must implement new recruitment and retention tactics to help teachers succeed in the classroom. Guidelines such as those listed above can prove beneficial to school districts struggling with new teacher recruitment. These novice teachers require intensive induction activities and adequate resources to encourage them to remain in the teaching profession. Unfortunately, the NCLB Act disregards the full range of skills and knowledge teachers need to become “highly qualified,” opting instead to focus on a narrow teacher-quality agenda that is destined to place poorly qualified educators in classrooms at the expense of the students learning, creating a lose–lose situation for all involved.

Summary of the Literature Reviewed

The attrition rate of new teachers, especially among beginning special education teachers, continues to rise. School districts nationwide are faced with the difficult task of filling teacher vacancies with qualified teachers as defined by the mandates of the NCLB Act. If school districts intend to improve the retention rate of beginning special educators, it is vital that measures be taken to help alleviate the frustrations and challenges of first year teachers. Through comprehensive beginning teacher induction programs and continuous professional

development opportunities, novice teachers will feel more support and less stress during their first year of teaching.

Mentoring programs are a key component of induction programs during a teacher's first year of teaching. In turn, mentors should fully understand their role in assisting novice teachers; they should have extensive mentoring training and possess the ability to gather resources that will aid a beginning teacher. In order to be effective, the mentor should also be a veteran teacher with a background similar to that of the novice teacher (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005). Most importantly, mentor–novice relationships formed through mutual respect and trust should foster a healthy collaboration and ultimately determine the success of any mentoring program.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures the researcher utilized to investigate the congruence between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district specific focus areas of mentor support. In light of high attrition rates among beginning teachers, specifically the shortage of special educators in the United States (Bender, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001; Whitaker, 2000), it is important for school districts to understand and evaluate their current mentoring programs to determine their effectiveness for special educators. This chapter includes an overview of the context of the study, the research design, the sample selection, data collection and analysis techniques, strategies to ensure trustworthiness of findings, and study limitations.

Context of the Study

Although the county is mostly white compared to Florida's demographics, with a lower poverty rate than the state's, the school district studied is an economically and culturally diverse region of the Southeastern United States; it is considered to be one the fastest growing counties in the United States. In recent years the number of Limited English Proficient Students within the district has doubled, and nearly half of the county's students come from families living in impoverished socio-economic conditions. Approximately 46% of all students in

this county therefore qualify for free/reduced lunch. The county and school board were established in the late 1800s with one-room wooden structures employing a single teacher who taught multiple grades. On par with public schools in the U.S., the county became racially integrated in the early 1960s (anonymous, school district website, 2006).

Special education services and programs within this county serve a wide-range of learners, among them students who have been diagnosed with autism, deaf/hard of hearing, giftedness, and/or visual impairments. Delivery models for students with disabilities include integration within the basic education classroom, co-teach or team-teach, self-contained, and alternative schooling. This county's current exceptional student membership is around 13,000.

Attrition rates of special educators in the district cannot be determined as the county does not keep these statistics. The current database program that is used does not lend itself to where teachers go when they leave or their job roles (e.g., a beginning ESE teacher may transition into a basic education position and at that time leave—apparently there is no way to track this information using the database) (personal communications, Director of Human Relations, November 7, 2006).

Concerning the actions that the district has used to date to assess the effectiveness of the ESE beginning teacher mentoring program, the following strategies have been used: Survey of the beginning and mentor teachers by district level personnel who examine the program data to identify areas of development and growth, as well as what types of training are needed. The ESE department

within the school district has offered refresher mentor trainings, divided by levels (elementary and secondary grades), to keep mentor teachers up-to-date. Formal and informal discussion has occurred in the grade-level based groups to seek ways to better help new teachers. In the recent past the district offered a specialized mentor teacher training for special education teachers; however, this is no longer in place (personal communications, ESE Supervisor, November 7, 2006).

The purposes of the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) beginning teacher mentoring program in the Florida school district studied is (1) to assimilate teachers new to the county's vision and instructional programs, and (2) to provide both curricular and emotional support during their first year of induction into teaching. Objectives of the program with respect to supporting new teachers are as follows: (1) providing the necessary support services; (2) preparing for the implementation of the district's vision and programs; (3) supporting planning for instruction and assessment, and (4) demonstrating essential teaching competencies (anonymous, school district website, 2006).

The nature of this ESE mentoring program is that it involves a joint effort among the ESE district level department, the district level staff development department, and school-based administrators and mentor teachers. It is the collaborative responsibility of school administrators and mentor teachers to support the new teachers in their building. Examples of support include regularly scheduled meetings with the administrative staff, mentor teachers, and beginning teachers. This is a time for discussion where beginning teachers can address their immediate or long-term concerns and for the setting up of classroom observations

by the administrators and, in a different capacity, possibly by the mentor teachers. Expected activities undertaken between the mentor teachers and new teachers include facilitated collegial interactions with key personnel, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development, and classroom management and organization.

The district's mentoring manual was produced in connection with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B Grant. It was then adapted by school district personnel to the district's mentoring program for beginning special education teachers. The 12 focus areas of mentoring support identified in the manual serve as a guideline for mentor teachers for determining mentees' level of need. Dialogue between the novice and mentor teacher determines the novice's entry level of need, which is then used to formulate an individualized mentoring plan for the novice special educator.

The 12 focus areas are as follows (see Appendix H for further detail):

1. Classroom management and organization
2. Curriculum
3. Communication/conferencing skills
4. IEP/TIEP/matrix
5. Assessment/evaluations/re-evaluations
6. School based ESE records and procedures
7. ESE resource personnel
8. Behavior management/secured seclusion/time out
9. Documentation and data collection
10. Legal issues and IDEA

11. Articulation

12. Resources

Action Research Design

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the congruence between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district specific focus areas of mentor support.

The four central questions guiding the study are:

1. In relation to the 12 areas of focus, what mentor actions do beginning teachers perceive as most and least beneficial to novice special educators?
2. In relation to the 12 areas of focus, what mentor actions do mentors perceive as most and least beneficial to novice special educators?
3. What similarities exist between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the school district's 12 areas of mentor support?
4. What differences exist between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the school district's 12 areas of mentor support?

The research questions were of interest to the school district, as its personnel were considering the effectiveness and future direction of the present mentoring program for beginning teachers of students with special needs. Research questions 1 and 2 helped identify which of the 12 district-specific focus areas of mentoring support were perceived as most and least beneficial to the

novice and mentor teachers. Questions 3 and 4 were developed to help further distinguish similarities and differences in mentor–mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the 12 focus areas of mentor support.

Action research informed the design of the study. An action research approach can be used in an effort to collaborate with all major stakeholders to formulate an action plan as a way to improve practice. Generally speaking, action researchers “work with groups of people to make organizations, projects, curriculum, etc. better” (Glense, 1999, p. 27). The action research process requires the researcher to move through the following phases of inquiry: selecting a focus area, gathering and analyzing data, reviewing the literature including best practices, and lastly taking action (Sagor, 1992). A clear focus is important; it provides the researcher with vision and direction for the study (Miller, 2006). Practitioners who use action research often seek to use qualitative or mixed method approaches to enhance reflection on the effectiveness of a program, practice, or policy (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This study employed an action research paradigm in order to explore the quality of district-specific beginning special educators’ mentoring experiences.

In action research the role of the researcher in controlling and addressing his or her personal biases is important. The researcher was familiar with the school district being studied and most of her teaching experiences in special education and as a mentor teacher to novice special educators were acquired within it. However, she did not know four of the six participants in this study. To assist the school district the researcher entered the study without preconceived

ideas or assumptions regarding the study's results. According to Kemmis (1988), "To do action research is to plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously, than one usually chooses in everyday life" (p. 10). The results gained from this action research may lead to practical improvements in the mentoring process and overall beginning teacher induction program for beginning special educators within this school district. The investigator's intent is to add knowledge and understanding, not to impose her biases or pass judgment on a situation or setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Special Educator Teacher Participants

The target population for the study was 70 novice and mentor special education teachers during the 2005–2006 school year employed at 13 middle schools in a school district located in Florida. Of the 70 beginning and mentor teachers, 4 mentor teachers and 2 novice teachers from 4 of the 13 middle schools within the district volunteered to participate. Important to note is that the mentor and mentee teachers who chose to take part in this study were not mentoring pairs during the 2005–2006 school year. Considered in the sample were first-year special education teachers hired at the middle school level prior to the first week of school for the 2005–2006 school year and mentor teachers for the same year. Unlike elementary or high school level teachers, middle school educators deal with an age group of students who are better known as adolescents. During the transition from elementary to middle school, students experience "intellectual, moral, social, emotional, and physical changes" (Kid Source Online, 2006). In

summary, the researcher chose to limit this study to teachers at the middle school level because of the challenges often encountered by this group of educators.

Human Resources district level supervisors provided contact information extracted from forms completed by school administrators at the beginning of the school year (Basic Teacher Mentor/ESE Teacher Mentor Assignment, see Appendix I). The form provides the names of all beginning general and special education teachers currently teaching in a specific school site along with the person agreeing to serve in the capacity of mentor teacher to the neophyte.

Specific criteria used for the selection of study participants are as follows:

1. Beginning special education teachers at the middle school level with no prior teaching experience, with the exception of their pre-service teaching participation. These teachers were hired specifically for a teaching assignment during the 2005–2006 school year.
2. Beginning special education teachers at the middle school level hired during the 2005–2006 school year with certification in at least one area of special education, holding a valid Florida teaching certificate.
3. Beginning special education teachers at the middle school level hired during the 2005–2006 school year who were assigned a mentor teacher as prescribed by the school district's beginning teacher induction program.

Prior to contacting potential study participants, approval from the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and permission from the school district's research and evaluation office was obtained in April

2006. Once IRB approval was acquired, the researcher first contacted middle school principals to attain administrative approval for the study. Administrators were contacted via e-mail correspondence and then given samples of both beginning and mentor teacher survey and interview questions. Novice and mentor middle school teachers alike were then contacted via postal mail requesting their participation.

The mail correspondence included the following enclosures: (1) a letter of introduction, (2) a copy of the county research approval letter, (3) the university's approved consent form, (4) survey questions, (5) a copy of interview questions, (6) a copy of the 12 focus areas of mentoring, and (7) a self-addressed stamped envelope. Schools were selected based on the location of current mentor teachers and new teachers and their current assignments. All mentor and new special education teachers were identified simply by examining school district files given to the researcher by personnel in the district's Human Resources department. As is the case with any research, participation is voluntary and every participant was afforded the opportunity to withdraw from research at any time throughout the course of the study. In summary, 35 beginning special educators and 35 mentor teachers were sent materials inviting them to participate. The response rate was low with a total of four mentor teachers and two novice special educators agreeing to participate, resulting in a low number of responses.

It is important to note that a comprehensive effort was made to secure mentor–mentee participation. First, all ESE mentor and beginning teachers during the 2005–2006 school year were sent the enclosures (previously listed) in April

2006. Within several days of receiving this correspondence, the researcher called each teacher's place of employment, leaving messages reiterating the contents of the envelope they received and explaining the research study. This initial mailing yielded a total of two mentor teachers who agreed to participate. The researcher again mailed all of the enclosures to the mentor and mentee teachers. This subsequent mailing occurred during the month of May; again it only yielded two more mentor teacher responses, totaling four mentor teacher participants. In the meantime the school year had ended, and the researcher was forced to obtain a mailing list of the novice and mentors' home mailing addresses for the 2005–2006 school year. This directory was obtained from a district-level supervisor in human resources. For a third and final time the researcher invited the mentors and novices to participate; mailings were sent to their home addresses, where made available, followed by a phone call to the number listed in the directory. In this instance, mailings were only sent to home addresses since teachers were on summer break. This final effort resulted in two novice special education teachers agreeing to participate, for a total of six study participants.

The researcher acknowledges a low response rate—an n of 6 or 8% of the total potential respondent pool. According to Diem (2002), a response rate of 50 to 60% is considered by most as an acceptable survey return rate. With this in mind, the researcher believes that the time of the year in which the surveys were sent to mentor and beginning teachers was one of considerable demands, more specifically the development, writing and then conferencing process of completing an IEP for students with special needs. Having been an ESE teacher

within the county, the investigator can confirm that ESE teachers are under tremendous pressure during the months of April and May every year to complete last minute paperwork demands. Consequently, serving as study participants in addition to meeting end of the school year deadlines probably contributed to a low overall response rate of mentor and novice special education teachers alike for this survey research.

The Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment (DIIA), an organization that offers services to enhance teacher effectiveness and instructional support, emphasizes the following six strategies to help maximize study response rates:

1. Seek and request advanced participation.
2. Allow sufficient time for completion of the survey.
3. Include survey instructions.
4. Create clear and succinct survey questions.
5. Send friendly reminders.
6. Present each study participant with a token incentive.

All of these measures were utilized in the present research; however, some interview questions could have been more concisely addressed (see chapter 5). Concerted efforts were made to secure mentor–mentee participation. Teachers were contacted on several different occasions (three mailings were sent to mentor and beginning teachers) requesting their participation and addressing the terms of anonymity and confidentiality.

Respondents were also given ample time (at least 2 weeks) to respond to the survey, and, as mentioned, a self-addressed stamped envelope was included in the correspondence. Survey instructions were provided along with a copy of the interview questions. Teachers were contacted via telephone 3 days prior to the requested deadline, and a small incentive was awarded to all respondents upon completion of the survey and interview questions.

Data Collection Techniques

To contribute to the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher relied on multiple data collection methods—a demographic and multi-item survey for the novice and mentor teacher (see Appendixes D & E) and standardized open-ended interview questions for the novice and mentor teacher (Appendixes F & G). After the mentor and mentee teachers were asked to complete the demographic section of the survey, the researcher gathered general information based on their age, gender, areas of certification, and years of experience. This survey also reflected the frequency and importance of assistance related to mentor–mentee communication in Likert-Scale format, ending with 14 open-ended questions related to the role of the mentor teacher and forms of interactions that occurred during the mentoring process.

Respondents either mailed their surveys using the self-addressed stamped envelope or faxed the completed form to the researcher’s place of employment. With the exception of one interview that was conducted face-to-face, all other interviews were conducted via telephone. In addition, prior to conducting the

interviews (face-to-face or telephone) the researcher requested and gained permission from each teacher to tape record their responses.

The incentives participants received included teacher-related items (e.g., teaching materials and student resources, namely certificates, awards, and student reading books). The incentives given to mentor and beginning teachers who chose to take part in this study functioned as a token of appreciation; they had not been made aware of this motivation prior to consenting to participate. Also, if the teacher inquired, an overview of the study results based on data collection and analysis was made available. Having been a teacher in the school district for almost a decade, the researcher had developed numerous contacts with teachers, administrators, and district supervisors. These contacts established rapport helpful in acquiring continued access to district information.

Second, the researcher utilized a list of self-developed, standardized, open-ended interview questions to address with mentor and beginning special educators. This method was employed to “reduce the bias that can occur from having different interviews from different people” (Patton, 1987, p. 113). Standardized, open-ended interview questions seek to minimize “interviewer effects” (Patton, p. 113) by asking the same question of each individual.-

Lastly, the researcher conducted an analysis of pertinent district documents, more specifically a thorough examination of the information presented in the ESE Mentor Program Resource Manual given to mentors and mentees by the school district. A review of this document provided some insight

into the district's annual induction procedures of novice special education teachers, thus enhancing trustworthiness (see chapter 4).

Survey of Novice and Mentor Teachers

Seventy mentor and novice teachers were asked to complete a multi-item survey, which concluded with several specific questions regarding the role of the mentor teacher. Of the 70 teachers invited to participate, 4 mentor teachers and 2 beginning special education teachers expressed an interest in being part of this study. The same semi-structured questions were asked of each study participant group (mentor teacher and beginning teacher); the question sets for the groups were parallel.

The survey questions given to the mentor teacher paralleled those asked of the novice educator (Appendixes D & E). Respondents completing the survey questions were invited to provide explicit accounts and give specific examples. Each teacher participant took approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey. Some of the survey questions stem from information found in the literature (e.g., Whitaker, 2000, 2001, 2003), while many were developed and refined by the researcher in combination with the Writers in Training (WITs), a doctoral cohort of education practitioners led by the researcher's major professor. As will be discussed later in this chapter, information gained from the pilot study also assisted in the enhancement and modification of survey questions.

Novice and Mentor Teacher Interviews

Each novice special educator and mentor teacher was asked to respond to semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. As with the survey questions,

the novice and mentor teacher questions were developed and revised by the researcher, the WITs, and the researcher's dissertation supervisor. All teachers with the exception of one requested that the interview be conducted over the telephone. Each interview group was asked the same questions, and the interviews took approximately 30 minutes to complete (see Appendix F). Clarification probes such as "who," "where," "what," "when," and "how" questions were used during the interviews to "deepen the response to a question, to increase the richness of the data being obtained, and to give cues to the interviewee about the level of the response that is desired" (Patton, 1987, p. 125). All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. Mentors and novices were then afforded the opportunity to review the transcription for clarity. Similarly to the survey questions, the novice and mentor teacher interview questions were developed and revised by the researcher and the WITs.

Document Analysis

The researcher reviewed the following school district documents:

1. The school district's Exceptional Student Education Mentor Program Resource Manual.
2. A description of the school district's current mentor preparation program.
3. A description of the school district's beginning teacher induction program.

Document analysis provided context information and supplemented data gathered from the surveys and interviews. Analysis of documents enabled the researcher to

gain a better understanding of the types of support systems in place for mentor and beginning special education teachers in the Florida district studies. Data from the analysis were recorded in narrative and chart format; the results were used to corroborate survey and interview responses regarding mentor teacher training and the beginning teacher induction process. Documents can offer a rich source of information about an organization and are often referred to as material culture (Patton, 2002).

Pilot Study

The pilot study, conducted in March 2005, provided the opportunity to anticipate potential issues that may have arisen later in the research. Moreover, pilot studies serve as a good indicator of sound and flawed instrumentation (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998). This pilot study served a number of purposes. For example, early participants were able to provide the researcher with information about grammar errors, clarity, and question–topic fit. In addition, “the same trial may even provide a fortunate opportunity to improve the precision of the investigation or to streamline cumbersome methods” (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000, p. 75). In essence, the pilot was used to assess the practicality of prospective methodology, not to create statistical truth. Moreover, the pilot study served as a tool to help the researcher gather data and to inform herself about the topic of mentoring support offered to beginning special educators.

The pilot study participants consisted of one beginning middle school special educator and one mentor teacher. Both were administered their respective surveys (see Appendixes D & E), and the novice and mentor teachers were also

interviewed (see Appendixes F & G). First, the survey responses were carefully analyzed followed by data obtained from the tape-recorded interviews.

Pilot Study Results

The results from the pilot study proved informative. Consequently, the researcher revised the wording of several survey items, offering clarity of the directions and of numerous survey items. Also, several typing errors were corrected to ensure readability. Furthermore, the amount of time needed to complete the survey was changed from 15 to 30 minutes. Respondents were asked to record their beginning and ending time on the top right-hand corner of their survey; the 15-minute increase allowed respondents the opportunity to thoroughly respond. The interview time was also changed from 20 to 30 minutes and was extended to include mentor teachers as well as novice teachers. In addition, several points of clarification were made to the interview protocol. All instruments used in this study were critiqued and revised by the WIT cohort during the monthly professor-led gatherings focused on scholarly discussion and feedback.

Data Analysis

Surveys, personal interviews, and documents analyses were managed in the following ways:

1. The surveys were organized first by participant, then by survey item, and lastly by emerging patterns.
2. Personal interviews were organized first by participant, then by question, and lastly by emerging patterns and categories.

3. Documents were organized to provide an overview of the school district's mentor teacher preparation program and beginning teacher induction program, more specifically the ESE Mentor Program Resources Manual for mentor and beginning teacher.

The researcher began analysis and interpretation of the data following collection using pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify commonalities and differences in the data sets. Therefore, all data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection enabling the researcher to “focus and shape the study as it proceeds” (Glesne, 1999, p. 130). Patton (1997) defines data analysis as

the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units,” while interpretation “involves attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships and linkages among descriptive dimensions. (p. 144)

The nature of this study and of multiple data collection methods required the researcher to continuously organize and reflect on the data collected. A basic coding system was applied to reflect emerging commonalities and differences evolving from the data. Individual mentor and mentee data from the surveys and interviews were placed in an organizational chart focusing on language analysis and repetitions in order to systematically analyze the data to detect commonalities and differences in participant responses. Continuous analyses of the data

throughout the research ensured that data collected were in line with the focus of the research questions (Merriam, 2002).

Data were analyzed through inductive analysis to identify consistent and important examples, as well as commonalities and differences in the information collected (Patton, 2002). It was the intent of the researcher to categorize these in order to develop a coherent interpretation of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Data collected from each participating novice and mentor teacher were compared, and a cross-case analysis was performed “to generate new insights about how the data can be organized and to look for patterns that may not have been immediately obvious in the initial inductive analysis” (Patton, 1987, p. 155). More importantly, data collected from several study participants on the same topic helped corroborate evidence from the various perspectives of mentor and novice teacher.

Verification and Trustworthiness

The issue of validity is crucial to any research study. According to Merriam (2002), validity is “concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 207). Creswell (1998) describes eight verification procedures applicable to qualitative research; those relevant to this study are:

- Triangulation—Multiple data collection methods were used (surveys, interviews and document analysis). Identification and confirmation of “convergence” of information across data sources provided for triangulation of the data (Stake, 1995). Use of multiple data sources or

data collection methods helps to confirm results through triangulation and aids in enhancing the internal validity of a study (Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

- Peer review and debriefing—Review and comment by peers were provided by the Writers in Training, a dissertation study group, which consists of teachers and school administrators from school districts in Florida.
- Member checking—Data were shared with research participants to ensure clarity in ideas and thoughts. Member checks gave study participants the opportunity to review transcripts, verifying that the data collected accurately reflected their thoughts, feelings, and ideas (Glense, 1999).

The study's generalizability is limited. In essence, generalizability refers to the ability to generalize findings beyond the "narrow confines of the data" (Patton, 1987, p. 168). Nonetheless, the primary intent of this study was to inform the participating school district about its mentoring program for novice special educators, not to suggest that these findings could be applied to all school districts. District personnel helped inform this action research by sharing the value and impact the insights gained from this study may have for the county's ESE department; which was considering the direction of its mentor program for new special education teachers. However, although the number of participants completing the survey and interview was small, the study's findings may provide insight for school districts considering establishing a mentor program such as that

being examined. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the reader to determine the “fit” of the findings to another context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Summary

The primary focus of this action research study was to examine the perceptions of the effectiveness and importance of 12 focus areas of mentoring specific to a school district in Florida, from the perspectives of both beginning and mentor teachers.

It has been acknowledged that the number of participants in this study is small. The study, however, provides useful insights for the participating school district looking to improve its beginning special educator induction program, more specifically the mentoring aspect of induction. Clearly mentor teachers and the sustained professional development of the novice play vital roles as part of any beginning teacher induction program in preparing first-year teachers for challenges they will face. Since the first year of teaching sets the tone for future years, veteran teachers, school administrators, and district-level supervisors are faced with the responsibility of assisting new teachers in hope of retaining teachers in the field (Whitaker, 2000).

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this action research on the congruence between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district specific focus areas of mentor support. Findings are presented in the order of the data collection, that is, surveys, interviews, and finally document analysis. Data results are reported separately for mentors and mentees.

Four mentors and two beginning teachers completed a researcher developed survey (see Appendixes D & E) and interview questions (see Appendixes F & G) guided by the literature regarding the needs and challenges of a Florida school district's mentor program for beginning special educators. Participants also discussed the types of interactions that took place between mentor and mentee. In addition, these six teachers reflected on their overall satisfaction with the mentoring process and made recommendations for improving their school district's mentor program for new special education teachers. Furthermore, the researcher reviewed information presented in the ESE Mentor Program Resource Manual given to mentors and mentees by the school district.

Mentor Teacher Survey Responses

The mentor teacher survey contained 9 general demographic questions, 3 Likert-Scale questions that reflected the frequency and importance of assistance related to mentor–mentee communication, and 14 open-ended questions (see Appendix D). Questions 1 through 4 of the survey asked the mentor teachers about mentor teacher training and compensation awarded for mentoring participation. All four of the mentor teachers who responded to the survey were certified in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and held various teaching assignments during the 2005–2006 school year. All four mentor teachers were white females. Three of the four mentors were Specific Learning Disability (SLD) teachers, and the remaining teacher taught children categorized as Severely Emotionally Disturbed (SED) in grades 6, 7, or 8. Of the four mentors, two teachers had earned a master’s degrees, one a specialist’s degree, and another a bachelor’s degree. All mentors received district training to become a mentor teacher within the past 5 years and felt that the training was effective. During the school year in which these teachers served as a mentor to a novice special educator, they were compensated by the school district with a yearly stipend.

Findings from the open-ended questions follow. Again, these questions were developed by the researcher in conjunction with information gathered from the literature and with assistance from the major professor and peers.

Survey Response Item Analysis

Survey Question 5: Indicate all forms and frequency of assistance you gave the beginning special educator you mentored during the 2005–2006 school

year. Explain which form(s) of assistance you felt were most helpful to the novice teacher. Share which topic(s) were most often discussed between you and the novice teacher.

The survey asked mentor teachers to indicate the forms and frequency of assistance provided to the beginning special educator and the degree to which mentors perceived the assistance they provided to be effective. Table 1 provides an overview of the forms and frequency of assistance given to the beginning special educators.

Table 1
Forms and Frequency of Assistance Given to the Beginning Special Educator

Form of Assistance	Number of Mentors Reporting Frequency				
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
Unscheduled	1	1	1	1	0
Scheduled	0	3	1	0	0
Written	1	1	1	1	0
Telephone	0	2	0	0	2
Observation	0	0	2	2	0

The investigator established that the sum of frequency of daily, weekly, or monthly assistance constituted “sustained” assistance in this study. Given this parameter, results indicate that while unscheduled meetings varied among the respondents, ranging from daily to yearly, three mentors reported that they held unscheduled meetings with their mentee at least monthly. Two of the four mentor teachers surveyed stated in the open-ended responses that unscheduled meetings, daily or weekly, were the result of being in close proximity, either next door or in the same hallway, as the new teacher they mentored. One of these mentor teachers noted that “because the beginning teacher had so many team problems, she [the

novice] was constantly seeking my [her] assistance.” She also believed that teaching in the same hallway as the novice teacher increased opportunities for unscheduled dialogue.

Scheduled weekly meetings were the most common form of assistance. In an open-ended response, one mentor teacher stated, “In the beginning our weekly meetings helped us get to know each other. I think it helped later on in the year, in that she [the new teacher] felt comfortable coming to me for any kind of help.”

While the use of written communications varied among the respondents, ranging from daily to yearly, three of the four mentor teachers used written communication at least monthly. One mentor teacher noted in an open-ended response that “daily communication whether via e-mail or personal” was the most helpful type of assistance to the novice educator. Two of the mentors reported using telephone contact weekly, and two of the mentors reported using observations monthly.

In response to an open-ended question asking which topics were most often discussed in these contacts with novice teachers, two of the four mentor teachers reported discussing (1) social and personal concerns, such as meeting key school personnel, and (2) interactions between the novice teachers and the basic education teachers with whom they had daily contact. These two particular mentors taught in a co-teaching setting at their school. The district expected co-teachers to follow the students on their caseload into the classrooms of general education teachers who taught the core academic subject areas of language arts, math, science, and social studies. Meanwhile, in a self-contained ESE classroom,

the teacher was expected to monitor his or her own class and to actively participate in the teaching of the students. The remaining two mentors commented in the open-ended responses that ESE paperwork related to the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) of each student was often discussed with the novice teachers.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Educators (2004), national results suggest that special educators want to leave school employment because of paperwork demands. Unlike their general education counterparts, special educators are required to annually update and revise the IEPs of students on their caseload during the school year. The IEP is comprised of, at minimum, a statement of present levels of performance, addressing what the student can do, as well as areas of development, goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks, child progress and reporting requirements, services to be offered, general education involvement, accommodations on state and district-wide assessments, dates and times of services, and, in some cases, a statement of needed transition services (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2002).

Survey Question 6: Note the frequency with which the content of the assistance was offered to the beginning special educator. (See attached description of each component.) These components are the 12 focus areas of the mentor and novice teacher, according to the ESE Mentor Teacher Manual in this Florida school district.

The researcher attempted to determine the frequency with which mentors discussed the 12 areas of mentoring support with beginning special educators.

Table 2 provides an overview of the frequency with which mentors discussed these 12 focus areas. The investigator again established that the sum of frequency of daily, weekly or monthly assistance constituted “sustained” assistance in this study.

Given this parameter, results show that at least three of the four mentor teachers indicated that they discussed each focus area at least monthly. Focus areas 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 12 were discussed at least monthly by all 4 respondents.

Table 2
Frequency of Mentor Discussion of 12 Focus Areas

Focus Area	Number of Mentors Reporting Frequency				
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
(1) Classroom Management & Organization	0	1	2	1	0
(2) Curriculum	0	1	2	1	0
(3) Communication/ Conferencing skills	1	1	2	0	0
(4) IEP/TIEP/matrix	0	3	0	0	1
(5) Assessment/ Evaluation/ Re-evaluations	0	2	1	1	0
(6) School-based ESE Records & Procedures	1	2	1	0	0
(7) ESE Resource Personnel	0	1	3	0	0
(8) Behavior Management/ Secured Seclusion/ Time Out	0	1	2	0	1
(9) Documentation & Data Collection	0	1	3	0	0
(10) Legal Issues & IDEA	1	1	2	0	0
(11) Articulation	0	0	3	1	0

(12) Resources	1	2	1	0	0
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Based on this data, the focus areas associated with communication and conferencing skills, school-based ESE records and procedures, ESE resource personnel, documentation and data collection, and legal issues and IDEA were mentor support areas most often provided to mentees by their mentor teachers. Each mentor support area has numerous subcomponents that help define individual areas of focus for support (see Appendix H).

Survey Question 7: Note the effectiveness of the assistance you offered the beginning special educator in each content area during the 2005–2006 school year.

The researcher attempted to determine the degree to which mentors perceived the assistance they offered the beginning special educator to be effective. Table 3 provides an overview of the number of mentors rating the helpfulness of the assistance they provided in each of the 12 areas of mentor support. The investigator established that the sum of frequency of extremely, very, and somewhat helpful constituted perceptions of “effective” assistance in this study.

Table 3
Perceived Effectiveness of Assistance Offered by Mentors to Mentees

Focus Area	Number of Mentors Reporting Perceived Effectiveness				
	Extremely Helpful	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Fairly Helpful	Not Helpful
(1) Classroom Management & Organization	0	1	2	1	0
(2) Curriculum	0	2	2	0	0
(3) Communication/ Conferencing Skills	0	3	1	0	0
(4) IEP/TIEP/Matrix	2	1	0	0	1
(5) Assessment/ Evaluation/ Re-evaluations	1	1	2	0	0
(6) School-based ESE Records & Procedures	2	0	2	0	0
(7) ESE Resource Personnel	1	2	1	0	0
(8) Behavior Management/ Secured Seclusion/ Time Out	0	1	1	1	1
(9) Documentation & Data Collection	2	0	2	0	0
(10) Legal Issues & IDEA	0	3	1	0	0
(11) Articulation	1	1	2	0	0
(12) Resources	1	1	2	0	0

Given this parameter, results show that in all focus areas except for 1, 4, and 8 all four mentor teachers indicated that they perceived the assistance that they provided to the new teachers was at least somewhat helpful. In mentor support area 1 (Classroom Management and Organization) and 4 (IEP, TIEP and Matrix) three mentor teachers indicated that they perceived the assistance they

provided to new teachers as somewhat helpful. Three mentors responding to support area 4 indicating that they perceived the assistance they provided was at least very helpful. In mentor support area 8 (Behavior Management, Secured Seclusion and Time Out), only two mentors indicated that they perceived the assistance they provided was at least somewhat helpful while the remaining two mentors indicated that they perceived the assistance they provided in this area was fairly helpful to not helpful. The mentor who did not find the assistance to be helpful in this area (focus area 4) noted in the open-ended response that the beginning teacher she mentored had a solid understanding of the IEP process.

Survey Question 8: Briefly describe your mentoring role.

All four mentors described their role to be essentially guiding and offering direction to the novice. According to Portner (1998), a mentor teacher functions best in four related roles, one of which is guiding. The primary function of guiding is to encourage the mentor to reflect on his or her decisions by inquiry and by placing responsibility for decision making on the mentee. One mentor noted that she “felt it was her job to provide support where she [the novice] needed it.” Another mentor noted that she “offered suggestions, provided help in behavior management, explained roles, procedures, school rules, and IEP development.” Yet another mentor stated “because of the poor fit of co-teacher and [basic education] team, almost all of my time was spent trying to suggest ways to support cohesiveness of the team.”

Survey Question 9: Briefly describe what you perceived to be the needs and challenges of the novice teacher you mentored during the 2005–2006 school year.

Two of the four mentors surveyed observed that the beginning teachers were knowledgeable and ready for their teaching positions. One mentor remarked, “She just needed a sounding board. She was extremely confident about her role with the students. She was very competent in dealing with behavior issues.” Another mentor stated, “She was well prepared. I had her as an intern.” A third mentor stated, “The [novice] co-teacher did not feel she was being heard or respected by her team [basic education team].”

Kilgore and Griffin (1998) established that novice special educators state that their problems differ from those of their beginning colleagues in general education. Unlike basic education teachers who specialize in a specific subject area, such as history or math, special education teachers receive schooling in various learning techniques and strategies for all subject areas and thus their competence may be viewed differently by their basic education counterparts. This may be especially true for those novice special education teachers who teach in a co-teaching setting, which requires that special educators follow the students on their caseloads to each general education subject area classroom.

Survey Question 10: Briefly describe what types of interactions you shared with the novice teacher you mentored during the 2005–2006 school year.

One mentor explained, “We met weekly to touch base and talk about what was going on with her.” The mentor who struggled to maintain an appropriate mentor–mentee relationship wrote:

I shared organizers and documentation procedures that had been useful to me. I tried to address her [team] conflict needs without getting involved with the entire team, essentially, basic group interactions. I advised her of legal parameters and procedures concerning services for students.

In addressing the needs and concerns of special educators, researchers have identified lack of support from general education teachers as well as parents as factors in attrition (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Brownell & Smith, 1992; Platt & Olson, 1990).

Survey Question 11: What interactions seemed to you to be most helpful in addressing the beginning teacher’s needs and challenges?

The overall pattern of the responses focused on communication, be it face-to-face, e-mail, or telephone. One mentor wrote, “I felt we had very honest open communication. She was comfortable to talk to, and [we] rescheduled [meetings] if needed.” Another noted “just listening to her [the novice].” One of the mentors simply said “all” interactions were helpful to the novice. Overall, mentors had noted a positive effect from regularly scheduled and non-scheduled communication. Mentor and mentees are encouraged by school and district mentoring guidelines to set up regularly scheduled meetings to address specific topics or concerns.

Survey Question 12: Were you located in the same school as the beginning teacher you mentored? If so, were there any benefits or challenges to being located in the same school as the beginning teacher you mentored?

All four mentors indicated that they were located in the same school as their mentees. More specifically, one mentor reported “Our first period classes were directly across the hall from each other, so it was very convenient to meet right up until the beginning of class.” Being in the same school or in close proximity to one another undoubtedly allows the mentor–mentee pair the opportunity to have more personal contact (Mullen, Feyten, Holcomb, Kealy, & Keller, in review).

Another mentor teacher noted that mentoring a beginning teacher “only works if you work in the same school. You have to be available and know the resources within the school.” This mentor also acknowledged that under normal circumstances being in the same school as the mentee teacher is a “plus.” However, because the mentee was experiencing difficulty with members of her team, the proximity “became intrusive on my [her] own time in the classroom to the point that the other teachers on my team felt imposed upon.” Due to the tension that existed between the novice and her basic education colleagues, the mentor felt that her teaching schedule, and to some extent the basic education teachers with whom she (the mentor) taught, was burdened.

Survey Question 13: Did you have the same planning period as the beginning teacher you mentored? If so, were there any benefits or challenges to having or not having the same planning as the beginning teacher you mentored?

All mentor teachers reported that they did not have the same planning period as the beginning teacher they mentored. One mentor responded that she and the mentee had the same planning period prior to a team change that occurred later in the school year. Another mentor teacher said that, although they did not have the same planning period as the novice she mentored, “it is best to have the same planning, but it rarely works out that way.”

Survey Question 14: Based on your experiences as a mentor, what do mentor teachers need to know and do to best support novice special educators?

Mentor teachers reported that there is important background knowledge that a mentor needs to have to best support the novice teacher. For example, one mentor teacher noted, “I think it is important to know your own limitations and be willing to go to your administrator for help and suggestions.” Another stated, “Not becoming a referee is of paramount importance.” Two mentor teachers discussed the need to thoroughly understand ESE and school protocol. One said, “They [mentor teachers] need to be knowledgeable of the subject area.” Another noted that mentors should be “knowledgeable of school rules, procedures, IEP issues, and parent issues.” Three of the four mentors maintained that mentor teachers understood the importance of utilizing the appropriate resources when assisting the beginning special educator. A mentor teacher asserted, “The mentor should use his or her own resources to address their [mentee] situations.”

Finally, one mentor indicated that mentoring a co-teacher brought “on a whole new set of problems.” More specifically, this mentor teacher perceived that in the co-teaching setting new teachers were expected to deal with the “dynamics

of four personalities [basic education teachers for the core academic subject areas]” and also had to ask for “permission from others [basic education teachers] to observe” the novice.

Overall the data and literature suggest that mentor teachers are expected to wear many hats (e.g., advisor, colleague, guide, friend) while serving in the mentoring role (Portner, 1998; Mullen, 2005). As experienced teachers who function in the mentor role, they are expected to understand the varied dimensions and nuances of the job (Gottesman, 2002). As illustrated in the data collected for this study, not only do mentors need to be aware of their own personal limitations, but also have a thorough understand of both ESE and school procedures. In a co-teaching situation the task of one mentor was to make certain that all involved parties (especially their basic education teammates) understood the importance of providing feedback and encouragement to a novice special educator.

Beginning Teacher Survey Responses

The beginning teacher/mentee survey consisted of 9 general demographic questions, 3 Likert-Scale questions that reflected the frequency and importance of assistance related to mentor–mentee communication, and 14 open-ended questions (see Appendix E). Questions 1 through 4 of the survey asked the new teachers about the county’s beginning teacher induction program and mentor teacher assignment. Two beginning special educators chose to participate. Both were white females. Both respondents were certified ESE teachers in various teaching assignments during the 2005–2006 school year; both had previously been in careers other than teaching. One teacher’s schedule was split between

teaching several self-contained courses and co-teaching for students in grades 6 through 8. The second teacher taught language arts to students with a Specific Learning Disability for the first 3 months of the school year and then transferred to a multi-grade (6, 7, and 8) Autistic unit for the remainder of the school year.

One teacher had a master's degree while the other had a bachelor's degree in ESE. One novice was assigned a mentor teacher, who served as a liaison between two schools and was not on campus daily. The second novice was given a choice, and she "asked for someone in my [her] hall with a language arts background." She said that it would help her to have a mentor in her own subject area and within close proximity. Important to note is that the mentor teacher assigned to her was not an ESE teacher but rather a general education language arts teacher who taught several SLD co-teach classes with this particular novice teacher. Findings from the open-ended questions follow.

Survey Response Item Analysis

Survey Question 5: Indicate all forms and frequency of assistance you received from your mentor during the 2005–2006 school year. Explain which form(s) of assistance you felt were most helpful as the novice teacher. Share which topic(s) were most often discussed between you and the mentor teacher.

The researcher attempted to determine the forms of interactions that took place between a mentor and novice teacher, and the frequency of these interactions throughout the mentoring year. The survey asked the novice teachers to indicate the forms and frequency of assistance provided by the mentor and the degree to which the novice teachers perceived the assistance provided to be

effective. Table 4 provides an overview of the forms and frequency of assistance provided to the novice special educators.

Table 4
Forms and Frequency of Assistance Given to the Beginning Special Educator

Form of Assistance	Number of Mentees Reporting Frequency				
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
Unscheduled	0	0	1	0	1
Scheduled	0	2	0	0	0
Written	0	1	0	0	0
Telephone	0	1	0	0	0
Observation	0	1	0	0	0

The investigator established that the sum of frequency of daily, weekly, or monthly assistance constituted “sustained” assistance in this study. Given this parameter, results indicate that unscheduled meetings varied among the respondents, ranging from monthly to never. However, both novice teachers reported receiving assistance through weekly scheduled meetings. Written communications, telephone communications, and observations were noted by one novice. The other new teacher did not respond to the survey question about written communications, telephone communications, and observations. One beginning teacher stated in a open-ended response, “Unscheduled meetings were ideal as they allowed me to ask questions as they came up and that was best for me.” The second novice noted that the times she and her mentor spent together gave them the opportunity to “share ideas.”

In response to an open-ended question asking the novice teachers to identify topics most often discussed with their mentors, both teachers referenced

classroom management. One novice noted that the development of lesson plans was most often talked about with her mentor teacher. The second novice stated that determining which approach to behavior management was most helpful to her students was among the topics most frequently discussed with her mentor. Across various studies (e.g., Huling-Austin & Murphy, 1987; Odell, 1986, Veenman, 1984) classroom management consistently emerges as one of the most important topics discussed between mentor and mentee teacher.

Survey Question 6: State how often your mentor teacher provided assistance in the following area (See attached description of each component). These components are the 12 focus areas of the mentor and novice teacher according to the ESE Mentor Teacher Manual in this Florida school district.

The researcher attempted to determine the frequency with which mentors discussed the 12 areas of mentoring support with novice special educators. Table 5 provides an overview of the frequency with which mentors discussed these 12 focus areas. She again established that the sum of frequency of daily, weekly or monthly assistance constituted “sustained” assistance in this study.

Table 5
 Frequency of Mentor Discussion of 12 Focus Areas

Focus Area	Number of Mentors Reporting Frequency				
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
(1) Classroom Management & Organization	0	1	0	1	0
(2) Curriculum	0	1	0	1	0
(3) Communication/ Conferencing Skills	0	1	0	1	0
(4) IEP/TIEP/Matrix	0	0	0	1	1
(5) Assessment/ Evaluation/ Re-evaluations	0	0	0	1	1
(6) School-based ESE Records and Procedures	0	0	1	0	1
(7) ESE Resource Personnel	0	1	0	0	1
(8) Behavior Management/ Secured Seclusion/ Time Out	0	2	0	0	0
(9) Documentation & Data Collection	0	1	0	1	0
(10) Legal Issues & IDEA	0	0	0	1	1
(11) Articulation	0	0	1	0	1
(12) Resources	0	1	0	0	1

Given this parameter, results show that focus area 8: Behavior Management/Secured Seclusion/Time-out was an area discussed weekly by both novices and their mentors. In some studies (see Johnson, Gold & Vickers, 1982; Veenman, 1984) examining the needs and concerns of beginning special education teachers, issues related to discipline and motivating students have been identified as high-ranking challenges for novice teachers.

Table 5 also indicates that the two novice teachers discussed the 12 focus areas with their mentors with different frequencies. One novice teacher reported discussing focus areas 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, and 12 weekly, and focus areas 6 and 11 monthly (see Table 5). The other novice teachers reported discussing focus areas 1, 2, 3, and 9 once in the year, and focus areas 6, 7, 11, and 12 never. Both novice teachers reported discussing focus areas 4 (IEP/TIEP/matrix), 5 (Assessment/Evaluation/Re-evaluation), and 10 (Legal issues and IDEA) yearly or less. Results suggest that these two beginning teachers required assistance in different areas.

Survey Question 7: Note the effectiveness of the assistance you received from your mentor teacher in each content area during the 2005–2006 school year.

The researcher attempted to determine the degree to which novice teachers perceived the assistance they received from their mentors to be effective. Table 6 provides an overview of the number of novices rating the helpfulness of the assistance they received in each of the 12 areas of mentor support. The investigator established that the sum of frequency of extremely, very, and somewhat helpful constituted perceptions of “effective” assistance in this study.

Given this parameter, results indicate that one novice teacher found information related to focus areas 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, and 12 at least somewhat helpful while the other novice teacher found the information related to these focus areas only fairly helpful. Both novice teachers found information related to focus areas 8 (Behavior Management/Secured Seclusion/Time) and 9 (Documentation and Data Collection) as somewhat helpful, and both novices found information

related to focus areas 4 (IEP/TIEP/Matrix) and 5 (Assessment/Evaluation/Re-evaluation) only fairly helpful.

Table 6
Perceived Effectiveness of Assistance Offered by Mentors to Mentees

Focus Area	Number of Mentors Reporting Perceived Effectiveness				
	Extremely Helpful	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Fairly Helpful	Not Helpful
(1) Classroom Management & Organization	0	0	1	1	0
(2) Curriculum	0	0	1	1	0
(3) Communication/ Conferencing Skills	0	0	1	1	0
(4) IEP/TIEP/Matrix	0	0	0	2	0
(5) Assessment/ Evaluation/ Re-evaluations	0	0	0	2	0
(6) School-based ESE Records and Procedures	0	0	1	1	0
(7) ESE Resource Personnel	0	1	0	1	0
(8) Behavior Management/ Secured Seclusion/ Time Out	0	1	1	0	0
(9) Documentation & Data Collection	0	0	2	0	0
(10) Legal Issues & IDEA	0	0	1	1	0
(11) Articulation	0	0	1	1	0
(12) Resources	0	0	1	1	0

Ironically, focus areas 4 and 5 address the IEP and other related paperwork and procedures were deemed as only fairly helpful. This result is surprising since the literature confirms that concerns with excessive amounts of

paperwork are a significant concern to many special educators (e.g., Murdick, 2005).

Survey Question 8: Briefly describe the role of the mentor teacher.

Both novice teachers described the role of their mentor teacher as a resource to the novice when needed. Essentially, “someone I could ask a question of or go to when I didn’t understand the procedures to take regarding a particular concern.” Whitaker (2003) reports that beginning special education teachers stated that emotional support, such as support from listening and sharing experiences with their mentor teacher, was considered an important need for new teachers.

Survey Question 9: Briefly describe what you perceived to be your needs and challenges during the 2005–2006 school year.

The beginning teacher who taught both the SLD self-contained class and the co-teach classes emphasized “peer tutoring” as a need because many of her students required one-on-one help due to their “very low reading skills.” The second novice wrote that “county processes and procedures throughout the year” were challenging for her since she “received different answers” during the year which lead to some confusion.

Survey Question 10: Briefly describe what types of interactions you shared with your mentor during 2005–2006 school year.

In response to this survey question, the novice who did not have prior teaching experience identified “review of the IEP process and lesson planning” as a shared interaction with her mentor. The second novice who had prior teaching

experience as a teacher aide stated learning how to create and write her “Professional Development Plan [PDP]” for the school year was something she shared with her mentor. The PDP is a plan completed by all teachers, general and special educators alike, to address individual goals to improve practice; the PDP is usually completed at the beginning of the school year.

Survey Question 11: What interactions seemed to you to be most helpful in addressing your needs and challenges?

Neither respondent answered the question posed; rather, the beginning teachers again mentioned an overview of the IEP process, lesson planning, and development of the PDP.

Survey Question 12: Were you located in the same school as your mentor teacher? If so, were there any benefits or challenges to being located in the same school as your mentor teacher?

Both beginning teachers remarked that their mentor teacher was in the same school as themselves. However, it is important to note that the mentor teacher of one novice split her time (weekly schedule) between two schools. Despite this challenge, the novice noted that “there were benefits” but did not list what they were. While the mentor teacher of the second novice teacher was in the same school, she was not an ESE teacher and was no longer in the same hallway once the novice changed teaching assignments mid-way through the school year within the same school. Although she and her mentor had the same planning period at the beginning of the school year, the novice teacher recognized that “mentors are busy, and it is very hard to match time to talk to one another.” For

this reason, the novice sought the assistance of her mentor teacher with less frequency, especially after her teaching assignment change. Instead, she requested guidance from team members in her wing or hallway.

The literature refers to cases like this as informal mentor support (Klein, 2004; Whitaker, 2000 & 2003). Research suggests that beginning teachers often seek out and receive informal support from colleagues more often than other forms of support and are thus likely to find this support helpful (Klein, 2004).

Survey Question 13: Did you have the same planning period as your mentor teacher during the 2005–2006 school year? If so, were there any benefits or challenges to having or not having the same planning as your mentor teacher?

Both respondents reported that they did not have the same planning period as their mentor teacher. One novice stated that “time to meet was a challenge!” No benefits or challenges to having the same planning period as her mentor teacher were noted by the second novice teacher. Although literature suggests that mentees showed a strong preference for mentors who taught the same grade level and same content areas as themselves (Eckert & Bey, 1990; Ganser, 1991), the literature does not address the benefits or challenges of having a common planning time.

Survey Question 14: Based on your experiences with your mentor, what do mentor teachers need to know and do to best support novice special educators?

The novice teachers reported that the mentor teacher needs “to be able to set aside time” to meet and discuss concerns with the new teacher. Also, they indicated that mentor teachers should be able “to understand and develop a time

management system for the new teacher” to help him or her better understand the deadlines for certain school related paperwork. Although the literature states that beginning teachers are likely to consider informal and/or unscheduled mentoring as effective (Whitaker, 2000), the novices in this research suggest otherwise.

Mentor Teacher Interview Responses

As with the survey, the researcher created standardized open-ended interview questions as a follow-up to the surveys (see Appendix F). This interview questionnaire was divided into four distinct sections: (1) general questions, (2) needs and challenges of the beginning teacher, (3) the mentor teacher role, and (4) overall satisfaction and recommendations. Although the first 6 questions of the interview included questions that had already been answered in the survey, the researcher used the familiarity the respondents had with them to establish a rapport between the researcher and mentor teacher. Results related to sections 2, 3, and 4 of the interview protocol noted above are described next. With the exception of a face-to-face interview with one mentor, all interviews were carried out by telephone.

Needs and Challenges of the Beginning Teacher

Section one includes five questions regarding the perceived needs and challenges of the beginning special educator, in particular those that occurred in the beginning of the year and those that happened at the end of the year, as well as the availability of the mentor teacher throughout the school year (see Appendix F). Three of the four mentor teachers interviewed were co-teachers, and the remaining mentor taught students located in a self-contained autistic unit.

Interview Question 1: Prior to being a mentor teacher, what did you perceive to be the needs and challenges of a beginning special education teacher?

One aspect of being a special education teacher is the overwhelming and often frustrating amount of paperwork that new ESE teacher's encounter (Boyer & Lee, 2001). Classroom management and curriculum issues also posed a problem for novice special educators. Finding teaching materials to meet the individual needs of the students in one's classroom can prove difficult, especially when the novice is trying to meet the specialized goals written on each student's IEP while maintaining adequate classroom management. These challenges applied to both co- and self-contained teachers alike. One mentor suggested:

I have always said that the challenges of a beginning special educator are that it is impossible to learn how to teach and fill out all of the paperwork. I just think it would be great if teachers could either spend a whole year teaching with no paperwork or spend the whole year with paperwork and no teaching. I just think the challenge is being able to do both of these things successfully.

This particular mentor was very concerned with the retention of qualified special educators and felt strongly that a beginning teacher should be afforded the opportunity to learn one aspect of the job at a time.

Another mentor noted that the greatest challenge or need of a novice teacher was "flexibility." Although the researcher did not probe further, this lone answer is poignant. Having been a co-teacher for several years, this researcher can understand why it would be important for a co-teacher to be flexible. Normally, a

co-teacher works with a team of general educators who teach the four academic subject areas: language arts, math, science, and social studies. The co-teacher follows his or her students from one class to the next and provides support for both the student who has a known or diagnosed disability and the general educator.

It is important to note that this interview was conducted face-to-face as opposed to over the telephone, as was done with the other mentor and beginning teachers. This mentor teacher was also a teacher with whom the researcher had previously worked. The mentor teacher had many years of teaching experience (10 years of experience as an SLD teacher and another 10 years as a speech and language pathologist). She [the mentor teacher] was also at least 20 years older than the researcher. I believe that in this instance I felt uncomfortable probing any further because I was talking with a veteran and elder teacher. The investigator, simply put, was uneasy asking this mentor teacher to further elaborate on her response. As previously mentioned, all mentor teachers with the exception of the latter teacher were interviewed via telephone. In this instance, I found the telephone interviews to be more meaningful and less uncomfortable than the face-to-face interview. During the phone interviews I felt less awkward and uneasy for a number of reasons, but primarily because of the distance afforded. Also, the mentor teachers being interviewed were not able to view my body language and in most instances addressed interview questions well beyond what the investigator expected.

The mentor teacher of the novice teacher who was experiencing problems with her general education colleagues stated:

I think that it [a beginning teacher challenge] would be classroom management and paperwork management. I would imagine that all of the things she learned in college should have been in place, but it's how to get through the day type of thing that I thought they [the novice] would probably need.

The final mentor, who had once supervised student teachers and had previously been a college professor, believed that the needs of a beginning teacher call for “primarily, classroom management and behavior management. Making it all flow together. Secondly, curriculum and understanding the regular and special education standard that varies from the individual student's needs. The third major need is managing the paperwork.” Although this teacher mentored a novice teacher in the autistic unit, she believed that co-teachers and self-contained teachers need to be made aware of and fully understand both regular and special standards.

Interview Question 2: Based on your experiences as a mentor teacher, what are some initial needs and challenges for beginning special education teachers?

Two of the four mentors interviewed echoed similar responses addressing personality and/or relationship issues. These specific mentor teachers were co-teachers who appeared to consider it important that the novice understand the

balance of dealing with four different personalities on a day-to-day basis.

Remarked one mentor teacher,

I really think that one of the biggest jobs for a special educator in a co-teach position is trying to educate the regular education teacher on the laws of ESE and trying to create a balance where one can create a relationship with those teachers.

Another teacher agreed that a significant challenge for the novice co-teacher is “working out personality issues with the team she [the novice] works with.”

In addition to the challenge of dealing with personality issues, one mentor teacher addressed the need to create robust student-based relationships by tailoring the curriculum to the “unique needs of your [specific] group of students.”

The final mentor addressed the need for a novice to meet key school personnel:

I think that the first thing I try to do with my mentee is to introduce them to people who can answer their questions if I’m not available. Like the guidance secretary and the staffing specialist. These are people that they will feel comfortable going to, because a lot of times with the teachers that I’ve mentored, we did not have the same planning period, and they would have questions during their planning period. I think that it’s key for them to know who will have those answers and who they can go to [when I’m not available].

In essence, this mentor felt that “there are always people in the school who know the answers” should the mentor teacher not be available. These findings emphasize the importance of collegial support. Whitaker (2000), for example, indicates that informal supports are often viewed as more helpful to first-year teachers than formalized methods. It is conceivable that informal supports are beneficial because they promote emotional support that beginning teachers value (Gold, 1996; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Odell & Ferraro, 1992).

Interview Question 3: Based on your experiences as a mentor teacher, what specific challenges do beginning special educators experience at the beginning of the school year?

One mentor teacher stated that the challenge of a beginning special educator at the start of the school year, specifically for the position of co-teacher, is “establishing your role in each individual classroom.” Another mentor commented on the frustration of being certified in the broad field of special education:

I just have a feeling that a lot of the education specialists focus on the ESE part and then you get a special educator that’s put in the classroom and they really don’t have any idea about the curriculum. A special educator gets certified in special education and then can be placed in a 6th grade self-contained math class and really have no idea what the (special education) curriculum is, or they are a co-teacher in 8th grade and have no clue about the (basic education) curriculum.

She went on to say,

I think to be an effective teacher you need to have knowledge of not only what special education requires, but what the curriculum is, especially now that special educators have to be certified in the areas that they teach in.

Novice special educators are expected to have detailed knowledge of state and district standards for special and basic education students (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000). However, these two mentor teachers suggest that knowledge of curriculum in the general education classroom is very important and a competency that general educators perceive special educators may not have.

The teacher of students in a self-contained classroom addressed the differences in teaching for general and special educators by stating:

The difference between the instruction of basic education and special education is that in basic education, you teach the whole group of children, and when a child doesn't fit in, you go and get information on that [specific] child. Whereas, in special education; it's the opposite. You look at the individual child and what that child needs and then fit him or her into the curriculum or skills. You build the curriculum around the child in special education and that's a hard concept for new teachers to get.

In 1997, IDEA increased its expectations of accountability for student progress, insisting that special educators monitor and report student progress at the same time intervals as general educators report progress to parents (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000). Also, as illustrated in the literature, special educators need to develop and maintain working relationships with their general education

counterparts in order to gain access to meaningful materials for their special needs classes (Stepien, 2002).

Interview Question 4: Based on your experiences as a mentor teacher, what specific challenges do beginning special education teachers experience at the end of the school year?

In this case all mentor teachers addressed the paperwork overload as a challenge for novices, explicitly the writing of the IEP for students who required basic and/or special education classroom accommodations. The challenge of the paperwork associated with the ESE program is often considered a source of discontent and pure frustration for novice special educators. Beginning teachers are normally stunned with the amount of time it takes away from their day to complete the paperwork accompanied with the position. Such stresses as those related to the surplus paperwork associated with the profession of special education can lead to job dissatisfaction and unhappiness (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001).

Interview Question 5: As the mentor teacher, were you readily available when the novice was experiencing initial and end of the school year challenges? If so, in what ways?

All mentor teachers expressed that they were available to their mentee throughout the school year. While the mentors reported handling most of their concerns in regularly scheduled meetings, they addressed some challenges via e-mail. One mentor teacher felt fortunate enough to have the same planning period as her mentee, noting that “with a common planning period it really cuts down on

the amount of time that a question gets answered.” Two mentors reported that most of these meetings focused on the development and/or completion of the IEP.

The Mentor Teacher Role

This section of the interview questionnaire consists of seven questions regarding the perceived mentor teacher role. More specifically, the questions in this section of the interview dealt with the focus areas that demanded the most and the least amount of time throughout the school year. Three of the four mentor teachers interviewed taught in a co-teaching setting, and the remaining mentor taught students within a self-contained, autistic unit.

Interview Question 1: What types of interactions did you and the novice teacher share throughout the school year?

Two mentor teachers established weekly meetings with their mentee throughout the school year. One remarked, “We met every Wednesday at 8 a.m., because we knew that it was a good time for both of us. This way if she had any questions or specific concerns she’d save them until then, so we would have time to sit down and talk.” Another mentor noted that “Even when it was a week when there wasn’t much going on or they [the new teacher] didn’t need me, we still met once a week, even if it was just to check-in to see if everything was okay or to check how it was going.” Mentors were required by the school district to keep mentoring logs of scheduled and unscheduled meetings with their mentee teacher. These logs are then submitted to district office personnel for review and filing.

Person-to-person daily interactions and e-mails were also prevalent types of interaction between mentee and mentor. These types of informal interactions

are accounted for in the literature (e.g., Klein, 2004; Whitaker, 2000). The teacher who mentored the mentee who was experiencing conflict with her basic education team members noted that because “she was assigned to a team with whom she was just not able to get along for whatever reason,” most of their interactions were daily and were “almost always of a crisis nature.” Kilgore and Griffin (1998) established that beginning special education teachers report different problems than their colleagues in general education. Special education teachers new to the profession often describe themselves as inadequately prepared and discouraged (Stepien, 2002).

Interview Question 2: Explain your role as the mentor teacher.

The mentor teacher role was described as one that asked the mentor to be “just a good listener,” to serve as a resource, “to answer questions,” and to provide emotional support. One mentor teacher stated, “I am here for the mentee to come to when they are just having a bad day and need some TLC.”

Another mentor noted that her:

Responsibility was making sure that the novice knew what was expected of her, knew what she is supposed to be doing, help her with her paperwork, making sure she had an idea of her curriculum, classroom management and her responsibilities as a co-teacher

She also clarified that her role was to “help with issues and problems with basic education teachers.” As noted earlier, the literature cites formal and informal mentor supports as valuable forms of assistance for beginning teachers (e.g., Klein, 2004; Whitaker, 2000). This trend is also evident in the response given by

the abovementioned mentor teacher. While it is important for a beginning special educator to have a formally assigned mentor teacher with whom he or she can confer, especially during the first several weeks of school when aspects of the job are not clear, beginning teachers have also come to rely heavily on informal mentor support received primarily from other special education teachers (Whitaker, 2003).

Interview Question 3: Identify characteristics you think beginning special education teachers appreciate most in their mentor teacher.

Mentor teachers perceived that beginning teachers appreciated a “friendly face,” “availability, objectivity, experience and knowledge,” and the offering of suggestions that included “directing them to someone who could give them an answer.” One mentor noted that “in this county we have a lot of on-site people that are available [to assist the novice teacher].” In many instances, beginning special education teachers who were assigned a mentor teacher turned to other special education teachers for assistance when necessary.

Interview Question 4: When you were not available to the novice teacher, from whom did they seek assistance?

All the mentor teachers commented that the novice sought the assistance of experienced teachers, both basic education and ESE. Although no mentor teacher mentioned that the novice visited with an administrator, one mentor teacher noted that at her school they had a “very open administration,” so the novice “would have no hesitation going to administration” if need be. Novice

teachers reportedly sought the advice and support of experienced teachers, including administrative help if need be.

Interview Question 5: Of the 12 focus areas included in the mentoring process by the school district, which area(s) demanded most of your time?

With the exception of one mentor, all stated that focus area 6: school based ESE records and procedures demanded most of their time with regard to the novice teacher. One mentor teacher asserted that the time demand for ESE procedures is “because they are always changing.” The remaining mentor felt that focus area 3: communication/conferencing skills demanded most of her time that year. She stated that “I would say communication and conferencing skills and techniques on collaborating with teachers and staff demanded most of my time.” Special educators are continuously bombarded with a steady stream of procedural and legal changes that often affect the dynamics of a classroom and that may require numerous IEP revisions and/or updates. Along with these ESE procedural and legal changes, one of the biggest barriers for numerous new teachers is the communication and collaboration involved with individuals concerned with the IEPs of students with disabilities (Blanton, Griffin, Winn, and Pugach, 1997).

Interview Question 6: Of the 12 focus areas included in the mentoring process by the school district, which area(s) demanded the least amount of your time?

One mentor reported spending the least amount of time on focus area 10: legal issues and IDEA. Another mentor in the co-teacher setting described focus area 1: classroom management as demanding less of her time: “I think if you were

mentoring a self-contained teacher that [classroom management] might be more of an issue.” However, in this case she was serving as a mentor for a co-teacher. Two mentors noted that they spent very little time on focus area 8: behavior management/secured seclusion/time out. While one mentor said, “She had a good grasp on that [behavior management],” another stated, “She was very skilled in that area; she had very few issues with it.” The responses to this question varied, and it appeared that mentors spent their time with mentees based on the needs of the beginning special educator.

Interview Question 7: Which focus area(s) was most often reviewed throughout the school year? In what ways?

All mentor teachers honed in on focus area 6: school based ESE records and procedures and focus area 4: IEP/TEIP/Matrix as the areas most often reviewed throughout the school year. Mentors appeared to have paid close attention to their mentees’ caseloads. Some reviewed IEPs, conducted re-evaluations on students who were up for their third year evaluation, and provided assistance with grades.

Overall Satisfaction and Recommendations

The final section on the interview questionnaire included three questions regarding overall satisfaction with the mentoring program as well as recommendations to help improve the school district’s beginning teacher induction program, more specifically mentor support for the novice.

Interview Question 1: Do you believe the mentoring process is helpful to a beginning special educator? If so, in what way?

All mentor teachers reported that the mentoring process is, without question, helpful to the beginning special educator. One mentor noted, “I think it is [the mentoring process] helpful because they [the novice] feel supported and they have someone to turn to.” Another stated, “I firmly believe in the mentoring process and I believe that without it they [novices] just drop like flies, so to speak, out of the field.” Yet another mentor said that having a mentor teacher helps the novice not “feel so all alone.” The final mentor shared that “there are so many laws and so many changes,” and she felt it was important for novice teachers to know that they had somebody who could answer questions and “bounce things off of” should they need to do so. The importance of ongoing mentor support is continually addressed in the literature as best practices for transitioning first year special education teachers into the profession (see Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Klein, 2004; Whitaker, 2003).

Interview Question 2: Are you satisfied with your mentoring experiences?

Three mentors were satisfied with their mentoring experiences, with one declaring, “Every year it gets easier!” Another mentor suggested “more direct observations” as a possible change to the mentoring process. She indicated that although mentors are told by their administrator that they could take a day off to observe the novice, it proved difficult to schedule a specific date for an observation. She suggested taking one or two class periods “where she [the novice] could have received more direct feedback from an observation. Plus it would have given us [the novice and mentor teacher] more time to talk about the observation.” To at least one mentor teacher, administrative support proved to be

of utmost importance in developing and sustaining strong mentor support for novices. Principals help establish the climate of the school and can enhance a special education teacher's "desire to remain in the field and in that school."

Interview Question 3: What recommendations would you make to improve the district's current beginning teacher induction program, particularly the mentoring component?

Each mentor made recommendations for the mentoring component of the beginning teacher induction program. One suggested a meet-and-greet type of gathering for mentors and mentees to assemble "within the same school to talk." This mentor teacher also suggested that mentors be included in the meetings administrators have with beginning teachers. She expressed concern with how much a mentee is "able to talk with administrators" about problems that they may have. Yet another mentor emphasized the importance of choosing "mentors who really want to do it [mentor a beginning teacher]." From her experiences, mentor teachers who "really didn't enjoy the mentoring experience continue to get asked because they are the only ones in the school qualified to do so." She continued by saying, "It really has to be a commitment that the person [mentor teacher] makes to mentor a new teacher."

Finally, one mentor addressed issues pertinent to co-teachers. She strongly believed that "it would help to have a preliminary introduction" to the novice's team of basic education teachers so that he or she is viewed as "someone knowledgeable in legal issues and IDEA." This was important "so that when suggestions are given by the mentee to his or her basic education team, there is a

realization that this is someone who has been sanctioned and that knows what they are talking about.” It is her opinion that many of the conflicts that arose within this particular mentee’s team resulted from the team not taking into consideration the suggestions made by the novice ESE teacher. It appears that these basic education teachers felt that they, as seasoned teachers, knew best.

Beginning Teacher Interview Responses

As with the survey, the researcher created standardized open-ended interview questions as a follow-up to the survey (see Appendix G). The interview was divided into four distinct sections: (1) general questions, (2) needs and challenges of the beginning teacher, (3) the mentor teacher role, and (4) overall satisfaction and recommendations. The general questions on the interview protocol included some of the demographic questions that had already been answered in the survey and that had been used to establish a rapport between the researcher and participant. Each section is discussed individually. Both beginning teachers were interviewed by the researcher over the telephone.

Needs and Challenges of the Beginning Teacher

This section of the interview included five questions regarding the perceived needs and challenges of the beginning special educator, more specifically, initial and end-of-the school needs and challenges, and the availability of the mentor teacher throughout the school year. One beginning teacher taught a combination of co-teach and self contained classes, while the second mentee taught in a co-teach language arts setting for the first 3 months of

the school year, then transferred to an ESE self contained setting for autistic children for the remainder of the school year.

Interview Question 1: While in your pre-service teaching experience, what did you perceive to be the needs and challenges of a beginning special education teacher?

The mentees interviewed were asked to think back to before they were classroom teachers and reflect on what they thought their needs and challenges would be as beginning special education teachers. One novice noted classroom management as a need, explaining, “There just isn’t enough training in classroom management for beginning teachers.” This beginning teacher touched on the subject of professional development in the area of classroom management for new teaches. Professional development opportunities allow first year teachers to better learn the profession while acquiring much needed teaching strategies and techniques to enhance student learning and facilitate teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Renyi, 1998).

The second respondent cited “patience” as a challenge for beginning teachers. Having been a substitute teacher prior to becoming a full-time teacher helped her “understand what was going on in the classroom.”

Interview Question 2: During your first year of teaching, what were your initial needs and challenges?

One novice teacher felt that her greatest challenge during her first year of teaching was not having “the tools to do my [her] job.” For example, this teacher remarked that she arrived at a school where she had “no phone, no printer and I

had to write IEPs using pen and paper instead of doing them on the computer.”

The second teacher felt that her biggest challenge was “knowing the school policies and procedures and how to handle things [situations].” She also was concerned with the fact that although each beginning teacher received a booklet outlining school and district policies and procedures from the school at the beginning of the school year, some situations arose that “made you wonder how they [the school] would handle this situation.” From her response it appears that the novice did not have a thorough understanding of the schools course of action should concerns or issues arise. She elaborated, “You did not always have someone with you at that moment, so you had to deal with it and hope that you did it [specifically discipline issues] correctly.” While one teacher was concerned with not having the appropriate tools to adequately do her job, the second novice noted that she was concerned with correctly implementing school policies and procedures. Even though both novices were prescribed mentor teachers, not having that mentor available during times of need may have sparked uncertainty.

Interview Question 3: What specific challenges did you experience at the beginning of the school year?

The first new teacher interviewee reported the limited amount of time available to “meet with other ESE team teachers” as a challenge she experienced at the beginning of the school year. Although she believed that she had strong organizational skills and was able to also manage her time “fairly well,” the time needed to meet with her colleagues was limited during the first several weeks of school. The second participant remarked that classroom management, specifically

involving the “SLD self contained” students, was a great challenge for her during her first year of teaching. However after 3 months of being an SLD self contained and co-teacher, and then transferring to teaching students in the autistic unit, her greatest challenge was “feeling my [her] way through and understanding exactly what each student’s needs were.” In her opinion, “You had to follow a different routine with the SLD kids. The wide ranges of student needs, the levels, and the varying educational abilities.” She also felt that in a “classroom with autistic kids, the kids weren’t all on the same level” and she quickly “realized that in basic education the kids aren’t all on the same level either, but there is more of a range [in student abilities] in ESE than in basic education.” She explained that theoretically in most basic education classes six students are roughly on the same level whereas in an ESE setting six students can be a varying levels with extremely varied interests. The varied needs and interests described by this novice teacher marks a definite difference between general and special educators (Stempien, 2002), one which can make teaching a daunting teaching experience for a new teacher.

Interview Question 4: What specific challenges did you experience at the end of the school year?

Like mentor teachers, both novice teachers declared that the amount of paperwork special educators encounter can be overwhelming; as an example, they cited the writing of the IEP for students who required classroom accommodations. One teacher points out the lack of time for completing all of the paperwork

involved when working with ESE students as a major factor for her during the first year. She stated that:

With autistic students it is even more of a challenge because with each student in an autistic unit you cannot just say, he needs to increase his language abilities to a 2nd grade level. That doesn't mean much to these parents. You have to actually sit down and show them what the child does understand, what you've observed in class, and be able to show what the child has done from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year. Then you have to perceive this child's rate of grasping certain things as to what we can expect for them to work on for the next year and also work with the parent to see what the parent wants that child to do.

These concerns appear to be more prevalent in self-contained classes of students with lower and varying ability levels. Managing the IEP is a complex process, often filled with stress and frustration. Unlike basic education, the sometimes complicated IEP process is unique to special education teachers (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000), which can lead to burnout and teacher turnover (Bender, 2002; McKnab, 1995; Singh & Billingsley, 1996).

Interview Question 5: Was your mentor teacher readily available when you were experiencing initial and end of the school year challenges?

Both beginning teachers expressed that their mentor teachers were available, to some extent, for mentoring assistance. One mentioned that her mentor teacher's time was split between two schools. She was "here twice a week and at a different school three days of the week." Therefore, most of the mentor-

mentee interactions occurred via e-mail to maximize their time. Whitaker (2000) explains that first year special educators indicated a strong preference for mentors located in the same school as the novice teacher.

The second beginning teacher mentioned that her mentor was readily available prior to her transfer to teaching students in the autistic unit, which required that she, the novice, be moved to another part of the school campus. Although the interactions with her mentor had significantly decreased, this particular mentee was able to find support from her teacher colleagues in the hallway, as reported, “We all work together in the autistic unit. Plus the gifted teachers in the hallway were very helpful.” Essentially, she had an ESE team of teachers to turn to instead of only her mentor teacher, which she noted “worked out fine.” She also stated that she “had the support of people who knew exactly what I [she] had to do and how to accomplish it.” This beginning teacher keenly remarked, “A mentor doesn’t have to be the person assigned to you; anyone that’s there at the time [you need them] because of their experiences” can provide guidance and support, as well as answers to questions when the mentor teacher is unavailable. Apparently this beginning teacher relied heavily on the support of other special education teachers for assistance when her mentor was unavailable.

The Mentor Teacher Role

This section of the interview questionnaire covered seven questions regarding the perceived mentor teacher role. More specifically, questions in this section pertained to the 12 focus areas that demanded the most and the least amount of mentor-mentee contact time throughout the school year. One

beginning teacher taught in the co-teach setting, while the second novice taught students who were in the self contained autistic unit.

Interview Question 1: What types of interactions did you and your mentor teacher share throughout the school year?

Both beginning special education teachers highlighted e-mail correspondence as the main type of interaction between themselves and their mentor. The first respondent remarked that she and her mentor teacher “didn’t really meet or sit down much” because her mentor was divided between two schools throughout the week. The other mentee explained that “e-mailing a question and getting a response sometime that day” helped her and her mentor keep open the lines of communication throughout the school year. Along with e-mails this specific mentee also mentioned face-to-face contacts for “quick answers.” This was especially helpful at the beginning of the school year when the novice was developing her Professional Development Plan (PDP). E-mail correspondence can prove significant to first year special educators who are unable to meet with their mentor to address a specific issue. This type of communication can be advantageous to mentor–mentee pairs who do not have the same planning period or are in difference schools. Sometimes due to chaotic schedules face-to-face mentor support can be difficult; e-mail communication makes it possible for professionals to connect (Holloway, 2001).

Interview Question 2: Explain the role of your mentor teacher.

The first novice teacher respondent asserted that her mentor was present to “basically help me [her] with the ESE paperwork.” The other respondent stated

that “a mentor can be anyone” and that, although her mentor was not always available when she had a question, when she, the mentor, was available she answered all the novice’s questions.

Interview Question 3: Identify characteristics you appreciated most in your mentor teacher.

Characteristics appreciated by the beginning teachers were “respond[ing] to my [the novice’s] e-mails” quickly and serving as a teacher model to the beginning teacher. One mentee considered her co-teaching experiences when addressing this question. Being in the co-teach setting allowed her to reflect on the mentor teacher’s teaching style and to “see how she [mentor teacher] interacted with her kids.” It was her observation that “she [basic education teacher] interacted with all of the kids in her classes in a good way.” Consequently she felt “like she [basic education teacher] had modeled a lot of how you [the teacher] treat a group as a whole” and that helped her better understand how to handle her class. Also, in this case, the novice felt that her co-teaching experiences helped her define her own teaching style as a teacher in the self contained setting. This particular teacher had the advantage of essentially having two mentor teachers, one which was assigned to her by the school district and another with whom she co-taught with on a daily basis in the basic education class.

Interview Question 4: When your mentor teacher was not available to you, from whom did you ask for assistance?

Both novice teachers commented that they received assistance from experienced teachers, both basic education and ESE teachers, whenever their mentor teacher was unavailable. One novice remarked, the “department head at my school, because he had three planning periods,” was available to her when she needed assistance. However, the other new teacher stated that at her school all beginning teachers met monthly with seasoned teachers to discuss classroom concerns and to gain feedback from their peer group. This novice added that she could “go to them [seasoned teachers] if I [she] had a concern and my [her] mentor was not available.”

Interview Question 5: Of the 12 focus areas included in the mentoring process by the school district, which area(s) demanded most of your time?

One novice asserted that classroom management demanded most of her time because “there really wasn’t a lot of support from parents and it’s especially hard as a co-teacher when the basic education teacher had a different [teaching and discipline] approach than you do.” It appears that a great deal of mentor–mentee time was spent on focus area 1: classroom management and organization.

The remaining novice declared that “IEPs demanded most of my [her] time” along with behavior management. One beginning teacher stated that focus area 6: school based ESE records and procedures demanded most of their (mentor–mentee) time. Focus areas 4: IEP/TIEP/Matrix and 8: behavior management/secured seclusion/time out were also stressed heavily between the novice and her mentor teacher. This emphasis on focus areas 4 and 8 may have been owing to the change in teaching assignment from the beginning of the school

year, an inclusive setting, to the end of the year, a self contained setting. The demands of being in a self contained ESE classroom may have been greater for this teacher, compared to that of the other novice who was in an SLD co-teaching setting.

Interview Question 6: Of the 12 focus areas included in the mentoring process by the school district, which area(s) demanded the least amount of your time?

Both beginning teachers could not pinpoint a specific focus area that demanded the least amount of their time. In both instances the researcher asked probing questions and referred them to the 12 focus areas for possible suggestions. However, a response was not forthcoming.

Interview Question 7: Which focus area(s) was most often reviewed throughout the school year? In what ways?

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) paperwork and behavior management were two specific areas that these beginning teachers stated were reviewed most often with their mentor teacher. One novice stated “we [the mentor and beginning teacher] corresponded by e-mail all of the time.” The other sought the advice of her nearby colleagues when her mentor was unavailable, clarifying that “most of my [her] concerns were reviewed with the teachers I [she] saw most often.”

Overall Satisfaction and Recommendations

The final section on the interview included four questions regarding overall satisfaction with the mentoring program, as well as recommendations to

help improve the school district's beginning teacher induction program, specifically the aspect of mentor support.

Interview Question 1: Was your mentoring experience helpful to you as a beginning teacher? If so, in what way?

Both beginning special education teachers found the mentoring experience helpful. One explained, "It was helpful, but we [mentor and mentee] didn't talk much because we weren't in the same school daily." The other novice stated, "It was helpful knowing that there was somebody there. You had a name of somebody you could seek when you didn't know too many people in the school." This particular mentor found comfort in knowing that she always had a person she could rely on when she was feeling unsure, needed a question answered, or a concern addressed.

Interview Question 2: Are you satisfied with your mentorship experience?

Both novice teachers replied that they were satisfied with their mentoring experiences. Although the first respondent's mentor was not always available she reports that "there was always someone to help me if she [her mentor teacher] wasn't available." The second teacher was not too concerned about her mentoring experiences because she felt her prior substitute teaching experiences were extremely beneficial and proved useful once she became a full time ESE teacher. She was also reassured by the fact that she "knew enough people in my [her] area to ask questions of if she needed to." This novice, however, found comfort in asking other teachers for assistance in lieu of asking her mentor teacher.

Interview Question 3: Would you recommend the mentoring program to other beginning special education teachers?

Both beginning teachers indicated that they would recommend the mentoring program to other beginning special educators. One novice explained, “You need someone to talk to, someone you can trust for the good and for the bad. It’s important to build a relationship.” The second novice stated that although having a mentor teacher is wonderful, it is important that the novice have a mentor “who is in the right [same] department” as the mentee. This she said in light of what happened between her and her mentor teacher after she transferred to a different teaching assignment within the same school. Even though the transition was not exceptionally difficult for her, she believed the change was somewhat more complex for her mentor teacher. The questions she as the novice had no longer pertained to her previous teaching assignment of co-teach language arts but instead focused on the varying ability levels of autistic self-contained students. Based on this participant’s comments it seems that proximity was more important in sustaining her mentor–mentee relationship than the interactions she had with her mentor teacher who was no longer located in the same hallway.

Interview Question 4: What recommendations would you make to improve the district’s current beginning teacher induction program, particularly the mentoring component?

Each beginning teacher made recommendations to the mentoring component of the beginning teacher induction program. One suggested having a “group of resource teachers, not just one and have [having] a round table set up”

that gives novice and veteran teachers the opportunity converse about the daily happenings in their classroom. The other novice suggested the importance of being paired with a mentor who was in the same school and readily available, stating “it wasn’t great to pair me with someone that wasn’t there [in the school] all of the time.”

Content Analysis

The school district’s mentor teacher manual (120 pages) is designed to serve as a resource to both novice and mentor teachers. The table of contents from the manual is available as Appendix J. The researcher found that, although it offered solid information regarding district resources, it did not thoroughly outline the role of the mentor and novice teacher during the mentoring process. Furthermore, the school district’s manual minimally addressed each distinct category (e.g., Specific Learning Disability, Emotionally Handicapped, and Varying Exceptionalities) within the field of special education and did not place much emphasis on the varying needs of those special educators who taught students with greater or more severe needs. Also, the manual did not specify the school district’s current mentor preparation program or provide a description of the district’s beginning teacher induction program. Instead, specific information regarding the aforementioned was found at the district’s website along with the roles and responsibilities of the mentor teacher, mentor training, and the mentor teacher supplement.

Unfortunately, the content analysis of the ESE resource manual given to new and mentor teachers in this school district did little to inform the study. The

document analysis, however, established that the school district provides a mentoring manual that highlights many areas of importance and significance to a mentor and novice teacher, and that may serve as a helpful resource for both. In neither the survey or interview questions did the researcher ask mentor or beginning teachers to give their opinion of this manual.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to explore the congruence between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district specific focus areas of mentor support in a school district in west central Florida. The intention was to gain insights into novice and mentor teachers' perceptions regarding the aforementioned 12 focus areas of coaching in this particular school district (see Appendix H). More specifically, the researcher noted the similarities and differences that exist between mentor and mentee perceptions, and determined which mentor actions beginning teachers and mentors perceive to be most and least beneficial throughout the mentoring process.

Commonalities between mentor teachers and beginning special educators in terms of perceptions and reported experiences throughout the survey and interview data are (1) the importance of establishing regularly scheduled meetings between mentor and mentee, (2) the significance of having the same planning period and being in the same school, (3) the guidance and support given to novices by their mentor teacher in the areas of IEP development and writing, (4) the value of seeking out other school professionals to clarify mentee questions or

concerns and, finally, (5) the establishment of meet-and-greet type gatherings for mentor and mentee teachers within their school.

Noted also were some differences between novice and mentor teachers: Three mentor teachers considered assistance given in focus area 4: IEP/TIEP/Matrix as extremely or very helpful, while both novice teachers noted that the support given in this area was merely fairly helpful. This sentiment was also acknowledged in the interviews. Whereas, mentor teachers remarked that a lot of support was given to beginning teachers in the area of IEP development, new teachers referenced the assistance provided and also highlighted the extensive help given in the areas of classroom and behavior management. Other differences include, specific initial challenges the mentor and mentee teachers felt they experienced at the beginning of the school year regarding the availability of the mentor. Although mentor teachers highlighted understanding the curriculum and the influx in paperwork as beginning of the school year challenges, beginning teachers remarked that classroom and behavior management were initial challenges for them. Even though mentor teachers reported that they were available to their mentee throughout the school year, the new teachers shared that mentors' availability to them was limited, which is why they had to seek the help of others.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Within this chapter, the author provides an overview of the findings and conclusions from the research conducted with mentor and beginning special educators in a Florida school district. Study participants reflected on and responded to a multi-item survey, which included 3 Likert-Scale type questions and 14 open-ended questions, followed by a scheduled interview. After the surveys and scheduled interviews were completed, data sets were compiled and analyzed, and the analysis was cross checked with an academic group. Herein the researcher will summarize and discuss practical and scholarly applications of the results of the study and recommendations for future directions.

Introduction

The available literature on mentoring special educators emphasizes that the guidance and support provided through mentoring help beginning special education teachers feel more skilled and encouraged while also increasing the likelihood of their remaining in the field of special education (Huling-Austin, 1986; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Whitaker, 2000). Researchers have called for more empirical studies that examine mentoring from the perspective of both the novice teacher (those having been in the field for less than 5 years) and the special education mentor teacher (e.g., Katsiyannis, Conderman, Franks, 1995; Whitaker, 2000).

To fulfill the goals of this study, I conducted a review of the literature noting important legislation for students with special needs, beginning teacher attrition concerns, induction programs and specifically mentoring processes relevant to novice special educators, and finally, the implications of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 for special educators and the students they teach (see chapter 2). The insights gained from the literature reviewed prompted me to explore areas of mentor support in an individual Florida school district. Finally, analyses of the study data were reported in narrative form (see chapter 4). It is important to know that mentor support for novices is incorporated into the district's beginning teacher induction program during their first year of teaching within the county. Novices are normally assigned a mentor teacher from within their school who has had mentor support training; the mentor teachers receive a stipend from the school district for mentoring a new teacher.

Some educational studies have specifically explored the needs and concerns of beginning special educators (e.g., Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Cheney, Krajewski, & Combs, 1992; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Whitaker, 2000). Cheney et al. (1992) limited their sample to nine special education teachers and concluded that novice teachers need to gain confidence in their own teaching abilities before they can redirect their complete attention to their students. Billingsley and Tomchin (1992) also had a limited sample size, in this case four first-year special education teachers; they addressed concerns of this teacher population to special needs students. The following needs related to novice special educators were identified as findings from their study: (1) pedagogical

concerns that included instructional concerns, lack of appropriate materials and resources, problems with student behavior, and observations used for beginning teacher evaluation; (2) organization and time concerns; and (3) special education issues that include mainstreaming and collaboration issues, working with paraprofessionals, individual education plans, and scheduling students.

The purpose of this action research study was to explore mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of 12 district specific focus areas (see Appendix H) of mentor support in a school district in Florida. My intent was to provide the district and the reader with a clear understanding of which of the 12 areas prescribed by this specific school district were perceived as the most and the least beneficial by mentors and beginning special educators during the novice's first year of teaching. I also hoped to glean information regarding which mentor actions were perceived as most and least beneficial to the novice from both the mentor's and mentee's perspective. From the data analysis the following focus areas were identified as main topics of discussion for beginning special educators: Exceptional Student Education (ESE) policies and procedures, classroom and behavior management, and paperwork issues related specifically to special education.

The Major Findings

Within this section I address each research question independently that helped guide the research:

1. In relation to the 12 areas of focus, what mentor actions do beginning teachers perceive as most and least beneficial to novice special educators?
2. In relation to the 12 areas of focus, what mentor actions do mentors perceive as most and least beneficial to novice special educators?
3. What similarities exist between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the school district's 12 areas of mentor support?
4. What differences exist between mentor and mentee perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the school district's 12 areas of mentor support?

Perceived Benefits of Mentor Actions

Questions 1 and 2, which center on mentor actions perceived as most and least beneficial for the beginning special educator from the perspectives of the mentor and mentee, are addressed in this section. Again the researcher acknowledges a low response rate of study participants, an n of 6 or 8% of the total respondent pool (see chapter 3). In my study, mentor and mentee teachers were asked to reflect on the needs and challenges of the novice teacher through a survey and interview. Mentor and mentees observed the need for establishing regularly scheduled meetings to address concerns, such as classroom management, ESE procedures and policies, and even social interactions and personality conflicts with other teachers in their schools.

Mentor teachers in general perceived regularly scheduled meetings as a type of interaction that was helpful to the novice special educator. Interactions between the mentor and mentee were not limited to regularly scheduled and non-scheduled meetings; however, beginning teachers also remarked that regularly scheduled face-to-face meetings assisted them with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process and the development of the Professional Development Plan (PDP). One mentor teacher noted that weekly meetings allowed for “very honest, open communication” and helped establish contact with the new teacher that allowed him or her to recognize that, among all of the faces within the school, they had someone who would listen to their concerns, someone with whom they shared a connection. Similarly, Portner (1998) confirms that in order to maintain a productive mentoring relationship, mentor–mentee pairs must be willing to share their thoughts and feelings about teaching.

The “paperwork” often referred to in the surveys and interviews were for the most part concerned with the development and writing of an Individualized Education Plan, the documentation of classroom accommodations for students with disabilities. More generally, the paperwork issue only becomes more intensified for teachers of students in the self-contained setting whose learners have more severe disabilities; these special education teachers are required to monitor student progress of goals and short-term objectives through such means as progress reports. This added stress, along with the demands of teaching, writing lesson plans, and curriculum (both regular and special education), is one

of the leading causes of high teacher burnout among special educators (Bender, 2002; Billingsley, 2004; Whitaker, 2001, 2003).

For beginning teachers in the co-teach setting, not only is the demand of having a complete understanding of IEP related paperwork a challenge, but also having the flexibility to work daily with a group of basic education teachers. Beginning teachers may experience resentment toward seasoned basic educators who feel that they know best because they have more years of experience and because they have a better understanding of curriculum standards within their specific subject area (e.g., language arts, math, science, social studies) (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000). A mentor teacher remarked that “trying to create a balance where one can create a relationship with those teachers” is crucial for the novice teacher and her students who are mainstreamed into the basic education classrooms. This balance is a unique challenge for special educators who work closely with general education teachers. For special education teachers of students being mainstreamed into the basic education setting, the amount of planning and collaboration involved can be daunting. However, it is through this collaborative effort that all involved staff are expected to share in the responsibility of IEP goals and accommodations (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000).

Mentor teachers also addressed the need for mentees to become familiar with key personnel within their school who may be able to provide guidance and support whenever the mentor was unavailable. One mentor stressed the importance of “making sure they [beginning teacher] are hooked up with the right people and not other beginning teachers who may or may not have the right

answers.” As this mentor noted, it is extremely important for the novice to comprehend that some concerns can be addressed by a seasoned teacher who have a clear understanding of school procedures. The literature consistently affirms the importance of first-year teachers becoming acquainted with school personnel other than formal mentors who may be able to provide support should their mentor teacher not be available (Whitaker, 2003).

These types of informal contacts between mentees and/or mentors or other key individuals within the school are at times perceived as more effective to beginning teachers than formal scheduled meetings (Huffman & Leak, 1986). Mullen (2005) refers to this type of informal mentoring as “group learning” wherein a group or team of individuals serves as substitute mentors to the novice teacher also ascribed the status of “multiple mentors” and “co-mentors” in the research. The job of a special educator can be quite overwhelming; however, with assistance from supportive individuals who function as mentors throughout the school, a novice teacher can experience success (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). Moreover, these types of interactions help ease anxieties throughout the school year (Whitaker, 2003).

Mentor–Mentee Perceptions Regarding the District’s

Mentor Support Areas

Here I focus on research questions 3 and 4 that spotlight similarities and differences among mentor and mentee regarding the perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the school district’s 12 areas of mentor support. As part of the beginning teacher induction program for this school district,

mentors and mentees received an ESE Mentor Program Resource Manual that outlined the 12 focus areas specific to this school district's mentoring program (see Appendix H).

Next I address the focus areas most often discussed between mentors and beginning teachers. The two new teachers surveyed and interviewed observed that information behavior management concerns were of most significance to them as beginning special educators. Mentor teachers, on the other hand, felt that they spent most of their time addressing concerns about school-based ESE records and procedures, ESE resource personnel, documentation and data collection, legal issues and IDEA, and articulation.

Behavior management issues appeared to have been a major concern for the beginning special education teachers. Whitaker (2000) states that assistance provided by mentor teachers in curriculum/instruction, discipline, and management were perceived as significantly less frequent and effective. More importantly, the novice having a firm understanding of discipline and management strategies may be helpful when dealing with special needs students. For one novice teacher this emphasis on focus areas 4 and 8 (see Appendix H), may have been owing to the change in teaching assignment from the beginning of the school year, an inclusive setting, to the end of the year, a self-contained setting. The demands of being in a self-contained ESE classroom may have been greater for this teacher, compared to that of the other novice who was in an SLD co-teaching arrangement.

When asked to reflect on the effectiveness of the support they received in each focus area, the beginning teachers noted that guidance given to them in the area of behavior management was somewhat helpful to very helpful and that support in classroom management and organization was classified as fairly to somewhat helpful. Mentors specified that they felt the assistance they provided to the mentees was very helpful in legal issues/IDEA and communication and conferencing skills. The survey data analysis also suggests that mentors had mixed reactions regarding the effectiveness of the assistance provided to mentees.

In response to overall satisfaction, all mentors and mentees stated that they were satisfied with their mentoring experiences. Both beginning teachers noted that it was “helpful” knowing that there was an expert teacher always available when they needed support or direction. As I indicated in chapter 4, one novice teacher with no prior teaching experiences had difficulties connecting with her mentor teacher because she (the mentor) was not at the novice’s school on a full-time basis. This novice, however, found comfort in asking other teachers for assistance in lieu of asking her mentor teachers.

Mentors noted that they perceived the mentoring process to be an integral part of the beginning teacher induction program. Mentor teachers said they were able to “listen, support, and guide” novice teachers through the roller coaster ride of a first-year teacher, especially special educators who are required to complete extensive amounts of paperwork in order to have a thorough understanding of the basic and special education curriculum and of individual students. Also mentors concluded that administrative support is of utmost importance in developing and

sustaining strong mentor support for novices. Principals help establish the climate of the school and can enhance a special education teacher's "desire to remain in the field and in that [particular] school."

Mentors and mentees made several suggestions to help improve the school district's current beginning teacher induction program, particularly involving the mentoring component. One novice suggested the importance of being paired with a mentor who was in the same school and who would be readily available. Mentor support can provide first year teachers with a life-line to having a successful school year as a novice teacher. Importantly, successful mentoring relationships can also prove vital in the retention of beginning special educators (Whitaker, 2000). The second mentee suggested having a group of teachers serve as mentors to the novice, thus providing a stronger support system for the beginning teacher and also giving the new teacher the opportunity to seek out the appropriate person to answer questions or deal with specific concerns.

Mentor teachers, too, provided suggestions in reference to mentor support for the novice teacher. One of the four participating mentors suggested a meet-and-greet type gathering regularly with mentees. This would give new teachers the opportunity to discuss school-related issues and provide "a little more communication" between new teachers and veteran teachers. Two mentor teachers suggested that teachers be given the choice to become a mentor, not just be assigned to a novice because they had completed the required training.

Another suggestion was to break down the mentor training sessions by levels of schooling (i.e., elementary, middle school, and secondary). This way, the

training would be geared toward teachers at a specific level who may have varying needs. This mentor teacher also explained that possible break down in mentor teacher trainings for basic education and special education teachers be required because different issues concerning students and teachers within ESE. Finally, another mentor suggested a “preliminary introduction” of the novice teacher to faculty and staff, but more importantly to the team of basic education teachers with whom the novice would be working, as well as providing mentors and mentees with the “same planning period.”

All of the suggestions derived from this research have been shared with the ESE district office personnel who work for the school district studied. My goal here has been to provide insights into the mentor and mentee perceptions of the mentor support areas that underlie the district’s mentoring program, so that the school district can use the information provided in its review of the effectiveness of the mentoring program.

Study Limitations

Despite the numerous attempts I made to contact potential study respondents and promote participation in this study (see chapters 3 and 4), my efforts yielded a total of six mentor and novice teachers (8%) participating in the study. Due to the small number of respondents, this study cannot be generalized to this district or school districts in Florida or nationwide.

However, study results can be generalized to the special educators surveyed and interviewed. Two beginning special educators and four mentor teachers from one school district in Florida agreed to participate in this research

study, which explored mentor and mentee perceptions regarding mentor support. I, the investigator, asserted early on in the research (see chapter 1) that the intent of the study was to gain insight into novice and mentor teachers' perceptions regarding 12 focus areas of mentor support in a targeted school district in Florida. Again, it is the responsibility of the reader to determine the "fit" on this study's findings to another context (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). This acknowledged, I contend, that in accordance with the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment (DIIA), response rates are less important if the intent of the researcher is to gain insight into a specific area or context as opposed to measure effects or formulate generalizations, as in my case to a larger population of mentor and beginning special education teachers in the participating school district.

I employed two methods of data collection, survey questions and interviews, and two sources of data, beginning special educators and mentor teachers. Again, the use of various data sources and collection procedures helped balance this study's low response rate.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study I conducted supports the need to further address beginning teacher induction programs throughout the state of Florida, more specifically in the area of mentor support. As aforementioned in chapter 3, due to the action research approach used in this study and a small number of participants, generalizability is limited. This action research, however, could be expanded to include several school districts within Florida. In addition study results may

provide ESE district personnel, school leaders, scholars, and teachers with information about mentor and mentee perceptions regarding this school district's current mentoring practices for new special education teachers.

Study limitations have been acknowledged in chapters 3 and 4. Future research might yield an increase in sample size and also examine mentoring from other perspectives (e.g., college supervisors, school and district leaders). In addition, the school population of this study could be expanded to different grade levels or varying exceptionalities.

Leaders in schools and mentor teachers may find the information presented in this study helpful when considering how to ascertain that the needs of the beginning teachers in their schools are being met. The literature confirms that having an administrative staff involved in helping beginning teachers succeed supports teacher retention and fostering positive teaching experiences (e.g., Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005). Finally, I suggest that further studies explore district-specific beginning teacher induction programs within Florida to determine best practices and current program areas in need of reform. Additionally, the benefits of informal mentoring (not just formal mentoring) for beginning special education teachers should also be examined.

Improvement to Instruments and Protocols

Here I address various aspects of the survey and interview that could use improvements, as well as procedural enhancements to improve on the instruments and protocols used in this study. Future scholars who may want to use my instruments really should do the following: (1) restructure mentor–mentee survey

questions to meet their particular district's needs, (2) for the mentor–mentee survey, develop and ask more open-ended questions regarding the 12 areas of mentor support, for example at minimum framing a question that references the 12 areas of mentor support within the school district studied, and (3) consolidate the mentor–mentee interview questions. The goal is to attempt to gain clear reflections from mentor and beginning special education teachers of challenges experienced by beginning special education teachers, the mentor teacher role, and overall satisfaction and recommendations of mentor support.

As I look back on this research, I can see that several areas within the survey and interview instruments require expansion and clarity. For example, several of the questions listed on the survey did not offer varied responses among the respondents. This suggests that the questions being asked were too similar in language and that the study participants, perhaps unclear as to the intent of particular questions, did not provide the richness and depth that I was seeking. I also believe that the survey could have had additional open-ended questions related to the school district's 12 focus areas of ESE mentor support. On the survey there are no open-ended questions referencing the district's 12 areas of mentor support.

Lastly, a number of interview questions could have been restructured to better address the effectiveness and importance of mentor support within the school district studied. I noted that respondents made similar replies to several interview questions, suggesting that little to no difference was perceived by the mentor and mentee teachers in relation, for example, to questions 2 and 3 on the

interview.

Improvement to the Data Collection Process

Regarding the data collection process employed in this study, as mentioned in chapter 4 potential study respondents were invited at three times to participate; my persistence yielded a total of 6 participants. To future researchers I make the following recommendations, where applicable, to enhance the overall response rate of teachers: (1) obtain email addresses of potential study respondents as another form of establishing initial and continual contact, (2) personally visit the schools of mentor and mentee teachers to explain the research study and solicit participation, (3) proactively enlist the help of site-based administrators, (4) contact district personnel to elicit their influence in encouraging meaningful study membership (i.e., suggest that the district supervisor overseeing the research contact school administrators and/or ESE mentor and beginning teachers to promote involvement), and (5) possibly considering only matched mentor and mentee pairs.

Conclusions

This study represents the perceptions of a combination of six mentor and beginning special education teachers within a school district in Florida. As a result, the following conclusions were drawn from this mixed-methods action research study: (1) formal and informal mentoring of beginning special education teachers by experienced mentors and colleagues is a useful and productive endeavor, (2) ESE paperwork demands continues to be a topic of much discussion and consideration for both mentor and novice teacher, (3) the needs and concerns

of ESE teachers vary based on classroom assignment and student population (e.g., a SLD co-teacher may have different expectations and challenges compared to a self-contained autistic teacher), and (4) the ESE Mentor Program Resource Manual provides useful information referencing the 12 areas of mentor support for beginning special educators, but does little to guide mentor and novice teachers in ways to facilitate the mentoring process.

Final Thoughts from a Practitioner–Scholar

This study has allowed me to gain insights into the dynamics of district-specific mentoring support for beginning special education teachers. It has also given me the opportunity to understand, with greater clarity, the importance of a well supported teacher induction program for improving the retention rate and quality of mentor support of beginning special educators. As a whole, special educators are a different breed of teacher, coming from various backgrounds and experiences, with a strong desire to help those in need of great support. Special educators generally have a passion for learning, teaching, and helping the very students who may prove challenging to others. Having been in the field for over a decade, I am well aware of both the difficulties and moments of great joy that a special educator often experiences daily within the classroom.

Writing this dissertation has definitely expanded my knowledge of what makes up a successful beginning teacher induction program and the importance of pooling all of one's resources to help beginning special educators thrive during and after their first year in the field. I found that mentor support for beginning special educators entails a tremendous amount of effort from the mentor teacher,

school leaders, and the mentee in ensuring a successful mentor relationship.

Successful mentoring relationship can be both exhausting and truly fulfilling; it is essentially a game of give-and-take, a “marriage” of sorts.

Overall, my experiences in this dissertation process as a researcher who is also a mentor teacher and a special educator have allowed me to become convinced of the importance of strong support for novice teachers, both formal and informal. I feel as if I have completed this stage of my metamorphosis, emerging as an informed practitioner and a blossoming scholar in the area of beginning teacher support.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Letter to Administrators

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at the University of South Florida completing my dissertation. I was an employee of the _____ County School district for nearly ten years and am currently the Learning Resource Specialist at the Academy of the Holy Names, an independent Catholic school. As part of my research, I am studying the perceptions beginning special educators have regarding the effectiveness and importance of the 12 focus areas of coaching specific to beginning special education teachers. Since the school district is annually faced with a shortage of special educators and retention is indeed a concern, it may be helpful to the district to explore how the novice teacher perceives the mentoring experience.

I am requesting permission to include teachers from your school who were beginning special education teachers and his or her mentor teacher during the 2005-2006 school year. The teachers' names and the names of the school will be known only to me, the primary investigator, and will not be used in the dissertation. I have already received permission to conduct this study from the _____ County School district (see attached letter).

The research instrumentation is in survey form, which will be completed by the novice and mentor teacher and will take approximately 45 minutes. I will distribute and wait for teachers to complete them or I will provide a stamped, addressed envelope for return mail. Forty-five minutes to one hour follow-up interviews will be conducted with beginning and mentor teachers who indicate an additional willingness to participate. These will take place at a later date if necessary. Participation is voluntary and responses will be used in combination with those from participants from other schools in _____ County. No instructional minutes will be interrupted during the implementation of the survey or interviews. Attached is a sample of the items included in the survey and interview.

I will call you in the next week to answer any questions about the study and to see whether you will grant me permission to contact teachers in your school. If you would like additional information before I reach you, please call me at (813) 318-2280 or via email at ceni@tampabay.rr.com. At the conclusion of my research, if you are interested, I will gladly share with you the results of this study. Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,
Ceni Holcomb
Learning Resource Specialist
Academy of the Holy Names
University of South Florida Contact
Dr. Carol A. Mullen, Major Professor

Appendix B: Consent Letter to Mentor Teachers

Dear _____,

Thank you for speaking with me on _____. As I mentioned during our phone conversation, I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at the University of South Florida completing my dissertation. I was an employee of the _____ County School district for ten years and am currently the Learning Resource Specialist at the Academy of the Holy Names, an independent Catholic school in Tampa. As part of my research, I am studying the perceptions beginning special educators and mentor teachers have regarding the effectiveness and importance of the 12 focus areas of coaching specific to beginning special education teachers. Because of your experiences as a mentor teacher, you have information and experiences that may help improve future mentoring programs and assist with the retention rates of beginning special educators. Information you could offer through a survey and interview will provide data about the successes and challenges of mentoring, as well as suggested direction for the future.

I request your participation in the study and ask you to carefully read the Informed Consent Form and sign it if you are interested in participating in this research. Then complete the enclosed survey and return the survey and Informed Consent Form to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope by _____. Also, please indicate your planning period and/or a best time when you can be contacted at the end of the survey. As soon as I receive your survey, I will contact you for the follow-up interview.

In order to add richness and clarity to the survey, follow-up interview questions will be conducted. These will take place a later date and will last approximately one hour. Participation is voluntary and your responses will be used only in combination with those from participants of other schools in _____ County. No instructional minutes will be interrupted during the implementation of the survey or interview.

Please note that I have received permission to conduct this study from the _____ County School district (see attached letter). At the conclusion of my research, if you are interested, I will gladly share with you the results of this study. Please accept my sincere thanks for your participation and your contributions to this educational research project. I can be reached at (813) 318-2280 or via email at zeni@tampabay.rr.com for further questions regarding this research study.

Sincerely,
Ceni Holcomb
Learning Resource Specialist
Academy of the Holy Names
University of South Florida Contact
Dr. Carol A. Mullen, Major Professor

Appendix C: Consent Letter to Beginning Teachers

Dear _____,

Thank you for speaking with me on _____. As I mentioned during our phone conversation, I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at the University of South Florida completing my dissertation. I was an employee of the _____ County School district for ten years and am currently the Learning Resource Specialist at the Academy of the Holy Names, an independent Catholic school in Tampa. As part of my research, I am studying the perceptions beginning special educators and mentor teachers have regarding the effectiveness and importance of the 12 focus areas of coaching specific to beginning special education teachers. Because of your experiences as a beginning special education teacher with an assigned mentor teacher, you have information and experiences that may help improve future mentoring programs and assist with the retention rates of beginning special educators. Information you could offer through a survey and interview will provide data about the successes and challenges of mentoring as well as suggested direction for the future.

I request your participation in the study and ask you to carefully read the Informed Consent Form and sign it if you are interested in participating in this research. Then complete the enclosed survey and return the survey and Informed Consent Form to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope by _____. Also, please indicate your planning period and/or a best time when you can be contacted at the end of the survey. As soon as I receive your survey, I will contact you for the follow-up interview.

In order to add richness and clarity to the survey, follow-up interview questions will be conducted. These will take place a later date and will last approximately one hour. Participation is voluntary and your responses will be used only in combination with those from participants of other schools in _____ County. No instructional minutes will be interrupted during the implementation of the survey or interview.

Please note that I have received permission to conduct this study from the _____ County School district (see attached letter). At the conclusion of my research, if you are interested, I will gladly share with you the results of this study. Please accept my sincere thanks for your participation and your contributions to this educational research project. I can be reached at (813) 318-2280 or via email at ceni@tampabay.rr.com for further questions regarding this research study.

Sincerely,
Ceni Holcomb
Learning Resource Specialist
Academy of the Holy Names
University of South Florida Contact
Dr. Carol A. Mullen, Major Professor

Appendix D: Survey Questions for Mentor Teachers

Instructions: Please take a few moments to complete each of the items listed under demographic information and to candidly respond to the survey questions that follow.

This information is for a study I am conducting regarding the perceptions beginning special educators and mentor teachers have of the effectiveness and importance of the 12 focus areas of coaching specific to beginning special education teachers. I am conducting this research study under the supervision of Carol A. Mullen, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at USF.

Participation is voluntary and your responses will be used only in combination with those from participants of other schools in _____ County. All results will be reported anonymously in a doctoral dissertation.

Please accept my sincere thanks for your participation and your contributions to this educational research project. Should you have any questions, I may be reached at ceni@tampabay.rr.com or (813) 318-2280.

Ceni Holcomb
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida
Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Demographic Information: Please respond to all questions accordingly.

Date

First Name

Last Initial

School of Employment during the 2005-2006 School Year

Job Title during the 2005-2006 School Year

Years of Experience in Special Education

Please List Area(s) of Certification

5) Please indicate all forms and frequency of assistance you gave the beginning special educator you mentored during the 2005-2006 school year.

Check all that apply. Then circle the frequency of each.

___ Unscheduled meetings:

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

___ Scheduled meetings

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

___ Written communication (including emails)

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

___ Telephone communication

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

___ Observations of the novice teacher

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Please explain which form(s) of assistance you felt were most helpful to the novice teacher.

Please tell which topic(s) were most often discussed between you and the novice teacher.

6) Please note the frequency with which the content of the assistance was offered to the beginning special educator. See attached description of each component. These components are the twelve focus areas of the mentor and novice teacher according to the *ESE Mentor Teacher Manual in _____ County*.

Focus Area 1: Classroom management and organization

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 2: Curriculum

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 3: Communication/conferencing skills

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 4: IEP/TIEP/Matrix information

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 5: Assessment/Evaluations/Re-evaluations

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 6: School based ESE records and procedures

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 7: ESE resource personnel

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 8: Behavior management/secured seclusion/time-out

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 9: Documentation and data collection

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 10: Legal issues and IDEA

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 11: Articulation

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 12: Resources

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

7) Please note how effective was the assistance you offered the beginning special educator in each content area during the 2005-2006 school year.

Focus Area 1: Classroom management and organization

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 2: Curriculum

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 3: Communication/conferencing skills

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 4: IEP/TIEP/Matrix information

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 5: Assessment/Evaluations/Re-evaluations

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 6: School based ESE records and procedures

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 7: ESE resource personnel

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 8: Behavior management/secured seclusion/time-out

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 9: Documentation and data collection

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 10: Legal issues and IDEA

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 11: Articulation

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 12: Resources

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

8) Please briefly describe your mentoring role.

9) Briefly describe what you perceived to be the needs and challenges of the novice teacher you mentored during the 2005-2006 school year.

10) Please briefly state what types of interactions you shared with the novice teacher you mentored during the 2005-2006 school year.

11) What interactions seemed to you to be most helpful in addressing the beginning teacher's needs and challenges?

12) Were you located in the same school as the beginning teacher you mentored during the 2005-2006 school year?

Yes No

If so, were there any benefits or challenges to being located in the same school as the beginning teacher you mentored during the 2005-2006 school year?

13) Did you have the same planning period as the beginning teacher you mentored during the 2005-2006 school year?

Yes No

If so, were there any benefits or challenges to having or not having the same planning period as the beginning teacher you mentored during the 2005-2006 school year?

14) Based on your experiences as a mentor, what do mentor teachers need to know and do to best support novice special educators?

Planning period time & a time other than your planning period when you would prefer to be contacted:

Appendix E: Survey Questions for Beginning Teachers

Instructions: Please take a few moments to complete each of the items listed under demographic information and to candidly respond to the survey questions that follow.

I am a USF doctoral candidate under the supervision of Carol A. Mullen, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at USF.

This information is for a study I am conducting regarding the perceptions beginning special educators and mentor teachers have of the effectiveness and importance of the 12 focus areas of coaching specific to beginning special education teachers. I am conducting this research study under the supervision of Carol A. Mullen, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at USF.

Participation is voluntary and your responses will be used only in combination with those from participants of other schools in _____ County. All results will be reported anonymously in a doctoral dissertation.

Please accept my sincere thanks for your participation and your contributions to this educational research project. Should you have any questions, I may be reached at ceni@tampabay.rr.com or (813) 318-2280.

Ceni Holcomb
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida
Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Demographic Information: Please respond to all questions accordingly.

Date

First Name

Last Initial

School of Employment during the 2005-2006 School Years

Job Title during the 2005-2006 School Years

Years of Experience in Special Education

Please List Area(s) of Certification

Highest Degree Attained:

Bachelors Master's Specialist Doctorate

Other (please specify) _____

Gender: Male Female

Age: 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70

Ethnicity: White Hispanic/Latino Black/African American

Asian American Indian or Alaskan Native Other

Directions: Please complete the rest of this survey to the best of your ability.

1) As part of the beginning teacher induction program for the 2005-2006 school year, were you given a mentor teacher? Yes No

If yes, please state the month and year you were given a mentor teacher.

2) As part of the beginning teacher induction program for 2005-2006 school year, was your mentor teacher assigned to you or were you given a choice?

Assigned Given a choice: If given the choice, how did you decide?

3) Please state whether or not your mentor was a special education teacher?

Yes No

If yes, please state in which area of special education (for example, EH, SLD, VE, etc.).

4) Please state the student population(s) you taught during the 2005-2006 school years as well as which subject area(s). For example, Specific Learning Disability 8th grade English.

5) Please indicate all forms and frequency of assistance you received from your mentor teacher during the 2005-2006 school year.

Check all that apply. Then circle the frequency of each.

___ Unscheduled meetings:

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

___ Scheduled meetings

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

___ Written communication (including emails)

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

___ Telephone communication

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

___ Observations of the novice teacher

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Please explain which form(s) of assistance you felt were most helpful to you as a novice teacher.

Please tell which topic(s) were most often discussed between you and your mentor teacher.

6) Please state how often your mentor-teacher provided assistance in the following areas. See attached description of each component. These components are the twelve focus areas of the mentor and novice teacher according to the *ESE Mentor Teacher Manual* in _____ County.

Focus Area 1: Classroom management and organization

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 2: Curriculum

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 3: Communication/conferencing skills

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 4: IEP/TIEP/Matrix information

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 5: Assessment/Evaluations/Re-evaluations

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 6: School based ESE records and procedures

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 7: ESE resource personnel

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 8: Behavior management/secured seclusion/time-out

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 9: Documentation and data collection

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 10: Legal issues and IDEA

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 11: Articulation

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 12: Resources

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
5	4	3	2	1

7) Please note the effectiveness of the assistance you received from your mentor teacher in each content area during the 2005-2006 school year.

Focus Area 1: Classroom management and organization

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 2: Curriculum

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 3: Communication/conferencing skills

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 4: IEP/TIEP/Matrix information

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 5: Assessment/Evaluations/Re-evaluations

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 6: School based ESE records and procedures

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 7: ESE resource personnel

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 8: Behavior management/secured seclusion/time-out

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 9: Documentation and data collection

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 10: Legal issues and IDEA

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 11: Articulation

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

Focus Area 12: Resources

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Fairly helpful	Not helpful
5	4	3	2	1

8) Please briefly describe the mentoring role of your mentor teacher.

9) Briefly describe what you perceived to be your needs and challenges during the 2005-2006 school year.

10) Please briefly state what types of interactions you shared with your mentor teacher during the 2005-2006 school year.

11) What mentor actions seemed to you to be most helpful to address your needs and challenges?

12) Were you located in the same school as your mentor teacher during the 2005-2006 school year?

Yes No

If so, were there any benefits or challenges to being located in the same school as your mentor teacher?

13) Did you have the same planning period as your mentor teacher during the 2005-2006 school year?

Yes No

If so, were there any benefits or challenges to having or not having the same planning period as your mentor teacher during the 2005-2006 school year?

14) Based on your experiences with your mentor, what do mentors need to know and do to best support novice special educators?

Planning period time & a time other than your planning period when you would prefer to be contacted:

Appendix F: Interview Questions for Mentor Teachers

Opening:

1. Introductions
2. Purpose of the interview
3. Review of demographic information

Protocol:

General Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. When and where did attend college?
3. Please state your area(s) of certification, and your teaching experiences?
4. What subject area(s) and grade level(s) did you teach during the 2005-2006 school year?
5. Were you assigned to be a mentor teacher to a novice teacher as part of the school district's beginning teacher induction program during the 2005-2006 school year?
6. Did you mentor a beginning teacher who taught in the same subject area, grade level, and/or area of certification as you?

Needs and Challenges of the Beginning Teacher:

1. Prior to being a mentor teacher, what did you perceive to be the needs and challenges of a beginning special education teacher?
2. Based on your experiences as a mentor teacher, what are some initial needs and challenges for beginning special education teachers?
3. Based on your experiences as a mentor teacher, what specific challenges do beginning special educators experience at the beginning of the school year?
4. Based on your experiences as a mentor teacher, what specific challenges do beginning special educators experience at the end of the school year?
5. As the mentor teacher, were you readily available when the novice was experiencing initial and end of the school year challenges? In what ways?

Mentor Teacher Role:

1. What types of interactions did you and the novice teacher share throughout the school year?
2. Explain your role as the mentor teacher?
3. Identify characteristics you think beginning special education teachers appreciated most in their mentor teacher.
4. When you were not available to the novice teacher, from whom did they seek assistance?
5. Of the 12 focus areas included in the mentoring process by the school district, which area(s) demanded most of your time?
6. Of the 12 focus areas included in the mentoring process by the school district, which area(s) demanded the least amount of your time?
7. Which focus area(s) was most often reviewed throughout the school year? In what ways?

Overall Satisfaction and Recommendations:

1. Do you believe the mentoring process is helpful to a beginning special educator?
If so, in what way?
2. Are you satisfied with your mentorship experiences?
3. What recommendations would you make to improve the district's current beginning teacher induction program, particularly the mentoring component?

Appendix G: Interview Questions for Beginning Teachers

Opening:

1. Introductions
2. Purpose of the interview
3. Review of demographic information

Protocol:

General Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. When and where did you attend college?
3. Please state your area(s) of certification, and your teaching experiences?
4. What subject area(s) and grade level(s) did you teach during the 2005-2006 school year?
5. Were you given a mentor teacher as part of the school district beginning teacher induction program?
6. Did your mentor teacher teach in the same subject area, grade level, and/or area of certification as you?

Needs and Challenges of the Beginning Teacher:

1. While in your pre-service teaching experience, what did you perceive to be the needs and challenges of a beginning special education teacher?
2. During your first year of teaching what were your initial needs and challenges?
3. What specific challenges did you experience at the beginning of the school year?
4. What specific challenges did you experience at the end of the school year?
5. Was your mentor teacher readily available when you were experiencing initial and end of the school year challenges? In what ways?

Mentor Teacher Role:

1. What types of interactions did you and your mentor teacher share throughout the school year?
2. Explain the role of your mentor teacher?
3. Identify characteristics you appreciated most in your mentor teacher.
4. When your mentor teacher was not available to you, from whom did you ask for assistance?
5. Of the 12 focus areas included in the mentoring process by the school district, which area(s) demanded most of your time?
6. Of the 12 focus areas included in the mentoring process by the school district, which area(s) demanded the least amount of your time?
7. Which focus area(s) was most often reviewed throughout the school year? in what ways?

Overall Satisfaction and Recommendations:

1. Was your mentoring experience helpful to you as a beginning teacher? If so, in what way?
2. Were you satisfied with your mentorship experience?
3. Would you recommend the mentoring program to other beginning special education teachers?
4. What recommendations would you make to improve our current beginning teacher induction program, particularly the mentoring component?

Appendix H: Twelve Areas of Focus of the Mentor and Beginning Teacher

1.0 Classroom Management and Organization

- 1.1 Coaching on setting up an effective and safe physical classroom environment.
- 1.2 Assisting in the process of daily scheduling of activities and itinerant services.
- 1.3 Advising on the appropriate use of Paraprofessional's, LPNs, support staff, ATEN, JPTS, and ESOL resources services.
- 1.4 Assisting in the effective use of individualization, small group, and whole class activities.
- 1.5 Providing assistance with accessing resources and technology.

2.0 Curriculum

- 2.1 Providing an orientation to the team, house, or Learning Community concept and ESE participation and role at the school site.
- 2.2 Providing information and strategies on appropriate inclusion, CBI, and ESE elective options.
- 2.3 Assisting in the development of lesson plans, including the use of Brain Based learning strategies.
- 2.4 Providing direction in the use of curriculum guides and integrated learning.
- 2.5 Providing an orientation to the Sunshine State Standards and advising on the application and documentation in lesson development and assessment.

3.0 Communication/Conferencing Skills

- 3.1 Providing assistance on parent conferencing techniques and assisting in initial meetings.
- 3.2 Suggesting techniques for collaborating with teachers and staff.
- 3.3 Identifying and assisting in agencies and support staff collaboration.
- 3.4 Coaching on telephone conferencing skills.
- 3.5 Providing assistance in the use of verbal diffusion techniques.

4.0 IEP/TIEP/Matrix

- 4.1 Assisting in developing and following the IEP process, and conducting the IEP conference.
- 4.2 Assisting in the use of Plan Maker, the matrix and its documentation of services, and related forms not on Plan Maker.
- 4.3 Providing knowledge of and assistance in the use of IEP/TIEP progress reports, school progress reports, and district report cards.
- 4.4 Orientation and clarifying the use of regular standards, special standards, and high school diploma options.
- 4.5 Providing information on transition requirements for middle and high school.
- 4.6 Coaching on the use of modifications, strategies, and accommodations.

5.0 Assessment/Evaluation/Re-evaluations

- 5.1 Assisting in the initial evaluation and re-evaluation process and responsibilities.
- 5.2 Providing an orientation of statewide and Alternate Assessment procedures and responsibilities.

6.0 School Based ESE Records and Procedures

- 6.1 Assisting in the use of cumulative records and accessibility plan.
- 6.2 Orientation to the purpose and rules governing working program files.
- 6.3 Identifying the roles of case managers and the rules that determine them.
- 6.4 Providing an overview of the service delivery models at the school and how they are determined and delivered.
- 6.5 Assisting with accessing ESE related supplies, equipment, and technology housed at the school.
- 6.6 Identifying the types and steps of staffings.
- 6.7 Identifying and assisting with job specific procedures and documentation.

7.0 ESE Resource and Personnel

- 7.1 Providing a school contact list.
- 7.2 Providing a district contact list.
- 7.3 Providing an agency contact list.

8.0 Behavior Management/Secured Seclusion/Time Out

- 8.1 Assisting in the development, use, and documentation of behavior management plans related to school and transportation.
- 8.2 Orienting in the use of Functional Assessment.
- 8.3 Advising in the appropriate use of secured seclusion/time out.
- 8.4 Providing an understanding of Manifestation Hearing and the teacher's role and responsibility in that process.
- 8.5 Providing information on the roles and responsibilities of the Behavior Specialist and EH counselor and how to access services and CPI training.

9.0 Documentation and Data Collection

- 9.1 Assisting in the process of documenting parent contacts and parent conferences.
- 9.2 Assisting in the process of documenting student data such as intervention, observations, anecdotal, grades, and assessment.
- 9.3 Assisting in the process of job specific documentation.

10.0 Legal Issues and IDEA

- 10.1 Providing an understanding of the process and components of a compliant IEP/TIEP, including Procedural Safeguards.
- 10.2 Providing access to information on IDEA requirements.
- 10.3 Assisting with the implementation of School Board policy and procedures, Florida Statutes and rules, and IDEA Regulations.

11.0 Articulation

11.1 Assisting in accessing feeder school information and completion and interpretation of articulation forms.

12.0 Resources

12.1 Providing appropriate manuals, guides, and resources.

12.2 Assisting in identifying and accessing resources and materials available at the school, district, and state level.

Appendix I: Basic Teacher Mentor/ESE Teacher Mentor Assignment Form

_____ has been employed
at _____ as a:

- ___ Long-term substitute in an ESE assignment
(Select an ESE teacher mentor)
- ___ First-year basic education teacher of _____
(Select a basic teacher mentor)
- ___ Non-education major Alternative Certification Program (ACP) candidate
(Select a basic teacher mentor)
- ___ First-year ESE certifies teacher
(Select an ESE teacher mentor)
- ___ First-year in _____ ESE certified teacher
(Select an ESE teacher mentor)
- ___ First-year ESE out-of-field teacher
(Select an ESE teacher mentor)
- ___ Second-year ESE out of field teacher
(Select an ESE teacher mentor)
- ___ MAT program participant
(Human Resources will select the ESE teacher mentor)

If an ES teacher mentor is not available, please contact Phyllis Keith in the ESE department.

Building Level Administrator _____

Teacher Mentor's Legal Name _____

Teacher Mentor's School _____

Principal Signature _____

Return to Joy P. Salerno
Supervisor of Human Resources

.....
For Human Resources Use Only
.....

Supplement Approved by _____ Date _____

Effective _____ - _____

Total Number of Days: _____

Total Number of Supplement: _____

Appendix J: ESE Mentor Program Resource Manual Table of Contents

County ESE Mentor Program

- ESE Mentor Expectations
- Participant Expectations
- ESE Mentor Meeting Log
- Materials for Program Participants
- Materials for ESE Mentors
- Materials located in the school's professional library

Component 1: Classroom Management & Organization

- Daily scheduling of activities
- Individual – small group – whole class activities
- Learning centers
- Paraprofessionals, support staff, ATEN, JPTS, and ESOL resources
- Resources & technology
- Setting up the physical environment

Component 2: Curriculum

- Curriculum guides
- Curriculum & performance based assessment portfolios
- ESE electives, APE, CBI, MOVE, PT & OT
- ESOL information & services
- Inclusion activities
- Learning communities (high school)
- Lesson planning & themes
- Running records (elementary school)
- Sunshine State Standards

Component 3: Communication & Conferencing Skills

- Basic conferencing skills
- Collaborating with teachers, staff, & agencies
- Verbal diffusion
- Working with advocates
- Written & oral conferences with parents

Component 4: IEP/TEIP/Matrix

- Data entry procedures
- Diploma options & standards being pursued
- IEP/TIEP – all components & forms
- IEP/TIEP revisions
- Invitations & procedural safeguards
- Matrix – documentation of services
- PlanMaker
- Transition requirements for middle & high school

Component 5: Assessment/Evaluations/Re-Evaluations

- Alternate assessments
- Diagnostic teaching
- Initial evaluation process & responsibilities
- Reevaluation process & responsibilities
- Specialized testing situations (FCAT, ACT, SAT)
- Statewide assessment & accommodations

Component 6: ESE Records & Procedures at School

- Accessibility plan
- ESE supplies, equipment & staff
- Case managers
- Cumulative & working files
- General school procedures
- Procedures for compliance
- Referrals for additional supports & service programs
- Service delivery models
- Staffing – In School & ESE
- Temporary Placements & Transfer Students

Component 7: ESE Resource Personnel

- Agency contact lists
- District contact lists
- District-wide school department heads
- School district lists

Component 8: Behavior Management/Time Out/Secured Seclusion

- Behavior Specialist roles & responsibilities
- CPI training
- GIST training
- Functional Behavior Assessment/Behavior Interventions Plans
- Manifestation hearings
- Referrals to more restrictive environments
- SEDNET

Component 9: Documentation & Data Collection

- Data collection for IEP goals, objectives, accommodations, & modifications
- Diagnostic teaching
- Job-specific documentation
- Observations/Anecdotal/Interventions
- Parent contact & conferences
- Statewide & alternative assessments
- Student grades/grade books/progress reports/report cards

Component 10: IDEA & Legal Issues

- ESE transportation
- Ethical considerations & confidentiality
- IDEA/FAPE/LRE
- IEP/TIEP revisions for out of school suspensions
- Legal issues
- Manifestation hearings
- Reevaluations & independent evaluations

Component 11: Articulation

- Completing articulation forms
- Feeder school contact list – programs & teachers
- Interpretation of articulation forms

Component 12: Resources & Miscellaneous

- Additional information

About the Author

Cenira Holcomb, M.Ed., is a doctoral candidate in educational leadership from the University of South Florida (USF). She earned her master's degree in varying exceptionalities with certification in educational leadership also from the USF. Her bachelor's degree is in behavior disorders with certification in elementary education. She is currently the Learning Resource Specialist at the Academy of the Holy Names, a coeducational Catholic school in Hillsborough County, Florida. Formerly she taught children who were emotionally handicapped (elementary level) and with specific learning disabilities (middle school) for nearly 10 years.

Her dissertation focuses on the perceptions of beginning special educators and mentor teachers concerning the effectiveness of coaching as part of the induction process. In 2006, she was awarded the Berbecker Fellowship from USF's College of Education. She also coauthored a book chapter describing the inception of a new faculty mentor program in a research culture (*Successful Faculty Mentoring Programs*, Christopher-Gordon Publishers, forthcoming, editor Carol A. Mullen).