

**EVALUATION OF MENTORING PRACTICES EXPERIENCED BY  
STUDENT TEACHERS DURING A TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this descriptive survey study was to evaluate the mentoring that occurred in a preservice teacher education program. The mentoring literature was reviewed to select important characteristics of mentor teachers and mentoring practices during field experiences to be included in the instrument. Based on this review, the following general aspects of mentoring practices were chosen to be addressed: (a) mentoring strategies; (b) relationship between mentor and student teacher; (c) mentor as a teacher; and (d) mentor's personality characteristics. Participants for the study were 66 preservice candidates completing student teaching in a large mid-western university. Analysis of paired t-tests resulted in significant differences, in which the student teachers' ideal ratings of mentoring practices were higher than their actual ratings.

## **Evaluation of Mentoring Practices Experienced by Student Teachers during a Teacher Preparation Program**

### Introduction

The national concern for quality teacher education in the United States has been fostered by the *No Child Left Behind* Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) adopted in January 2002. ESEA requires that states take action to make sure that all teachers are highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Apparently, quality education and quality teacher education are considered as significant factors affecting the future of the society. Supporters of this national effort have been calling for higher quality teacher education programs, increased number of field experiences with trained cooperating teachers, and more collaborative efforts that connect public school and university educators (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1997).

In accordance with the importance assigned to student teaching by the national reform agenda, student teaching has been considered as the most beneficial component of teacher preparation programs by teachers, teacher education students, and teacher educators (Borko & Mayfield, 1995). Student teaching not only provides opportunities for the student teachers to demonstrate skill and knowledge in teaching, it also improves communication between universities and public schools (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996).

However, several researchers have cautioned that student teaching can have negative as well as positive influences (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). For example, a poorly chosen placement can have negative consequences for the student teacher, including feelings of inadequacy, low self-confidence, a negative attitude toward teaching (Fallin & Royse, 2000); whereas Thomson,

Beacham, and Misulis (1992) showed that extensive field experiences helped them develop confidence and self-esteem and enhanced their awareness of the profession.

Traditionally, during student teaching a triad forms, which includes the student teacher, a mentor teacher/cooperating teacher, and a university supervisor. A successful experience occurs when all parties fulfill their responsibility (Fallin & Royse, 2000) and is dependent on a school-university partnership that encourages professional development for both mentor teachers and student teacher (Feiman-Nemser, 1993). On the other hand, although the university supervisor plays a role in supervision, the mentor teacher plays the most vital role. Research studies indicated that mentor teachers have been perceived as the most significant person in the student teaching experiences (Booth, 1993). There is evidence to suggest that student teachers often move closer to the attitudes and behaviors of their mentor teachers by the end of the student teaching experience (Zeichner, 1980).

The student teacher-mentor teacher relationship is worthwhile to investigate because of its problematic nature and the potential insights it provides into the concept of “learning to teach” (Graham, 1997). However, less attention has been paid conceptually and empirically to the mentoring that occurs in teacher education program field experiences although these experiences are seen as a primary link between theory and practice (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002).

It is our contention that colleges and universities should be more concerned about the relationship between student teacher and mentor teacher that would influence greatly the development of effective classroom teachers. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the mentoring that occurs in a teacher education program. Mentoring literature was reviewed to facilitate the selection of important characteristics of mentor teachers and mentoring practices

during field experiences to be included in the instrument used in conducting this study. Based on this review, the following general aspects of mentoring practices were chosen to be addressed in this survey: (a) mentoring strategies; (b) relationship between mentor and student teacher; (c) mentor as a teacher; and (d) mentor's personality characteristics. This study investigated the student teachers' perceptions of the extent to which generally agreed upon mentor characteristics are used and should be used in practice. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Is there a significant difference between student teachers' ratings of ideal use and actual use of mentoring strategies?
2. Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of student teachers concerning the extent to which selected characteristics actually define their relationship with the mentor and the extent to which they ideally should occur?
3. Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of student teachers concerning the extent to which selected teaching characteristics actually describe their mentor and the extent to which those characteristics ideally characterize the effective mentor?
4. Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of student teachers concerning the extent to which selected personality characteristics actually describe their mentor and the extent to which those characteristics ideally characterize the effective mentor?

## Method

The design for this study was a descriptive survey research design. Student teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of mentoring practices were examined through a survey instrument, which was administered at the end of student teaching.

### *Sample*

Participants for the study were 66 student teachers, who were enrolled in the Master of Education (M.Ed.) program in a large mid-western university. The majority of the student teachers were female (84%). Eighteen of them were majoring in the field of foreign and second language education, 17 were in the field of math and science education, 14 were in the area of special education, 11 were in the area of family and consumer science education, and 6 were in the field of social studies. The programs do not differ in mentoring practices. Students are in the public school setting for most of the time and are assigned to a mentor teacher. They are required to have 10 weeks of full time student teaching experience during the winter and spring quarters. In this study, the survey was administered at the end of spring quarter.

### *Measures*

A four-page long questionnaire was administered to gather data. The first part requested demographic information. As mentioned before, the second part of the questionnaire was composed of four sections: Mentoring Strategies, Relationship between Mentor and Student Teacher, Mentor as a Teacher, and Mentor's Personality Characteristics. Scales' grounded in related literature support the content validity of the instrument. All items used a modified Likert scale (the extent to which selected mentoring characteristics are actually used and the extent to which they ideally should be used).

*Mentoring Strategies.* Strategies commonly used in mentoring practices were identified from studies of Jonson (2002), Podsen and Denmark (2000), and Reiman and Edelfelt (1991). Ten mentoring strategies were included, such as “Direct assistance,” “Demonstration technique,” “Role modeling,” and “Use of audio/videotaping to encourage reflection.” A five-point scale concerning the extent of use was utilized (1 = Never Used, 2 = Rarely Used, 3 = Moderately Used, 4 = Frequently Used, 5 = Extensively Used). The alpha reliability for student teachers was .88 for the actual extent to which mentoring strategies are used and .87 for ideal extent to which they should be used.

*Relationship with Mentor and Student Teacher.* Statements were related to studies of Gibb and Welch (1998), Jonson (2002), Podsen and Denmark (2000), Reiman and Edelfelt (1991), Rowley (1999), and Sprague and Hostinsky (2002). Fifteen relationship characteristics were put in the form of statements. These statements included “Meet regularly with the student teachers to address ongoing needs and concerns,” “Share her/his own struggles and frustrations and how she/he overcame them,” and “Develop a trusting relationship with the student teacher in that she/he can be open and honest with her/his needs.” Participants were asked to provide their level of agreement on a five-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). An alpha reliability of .95 for the actual extent and .89 for the ideal extent were found satisfactory.

*Mentor as a Teacher.* This scale addressed the student teachers’ perception of their mentor as a teacher. Using the studies of Jonson (2002), Podsen and Denmark (2000), and Reiman and Edelfelt (1991), seven teaching characteristics were put in the form of statements. Items included such statements as “Demonstrate effective classroom management practices,” “Have a thorough command of curriculum being taught,” and “Be a skillful teacher.” All items

were scored on a scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The alpha reliabilities were .90 for the actual extent and .92 for the ideal extent.

*Mentor's Personality Characteristics.* Statements were related to the study of Podsen and Denmark (2000). Four personality characteristics were put in the form of statements including "Be enthusiastic, hopeful, and optimistic," "Be patient, helpful, and caring," and "Be genuine and sincere in helping others." A five-point scale was utilized ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The alpha reliability for student teachers for the actual extent was .92 and .90 for the ideal extent.

#### *Data Collection*

Participants were provided with a written script explaining the nature and purposes of the research. At the time, they were informed that the survey instrument was part of a research project, that their participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Their completion and return of the survey was considered consent to participate in the research. The survey was administered in a single session by either the researcher or the university faculty. It took 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

#### Results and Discussion

Paired t-tests were conducted to examine the differences between student teachers' actual and ideal ratings of "mentoring strategies," "relationship between mentor and student teacher," "mentor as a teacher," and "mentor's personality characteristics." Because the analysis involved multiple statistical tests, which increased the risk of Type 1 error, for all analyses an alpha level of .01 was adopted. T-tests revealed significant differences in ratings of all characteristics assessed. Student teachers' ideal ratings were higher than actual ratings (Table 1, 2, 3, & 4).

Table 1

*Differences between student teachers' actual and ideal ratings of mentoring strategies used*

	Actual ratings		Ideal ratings		Paired Differences		df	t
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Item 7	2.25	1.29	3.26	1.04	-1.01	1.33	64	-6.16*
Item 8	2.45	1.37	3.32	1.26	-0.87	1.55	64	-4.57*
Item 10	3.20	1.45	3.95	1.10	-0.75	1.40	64	-4.33*
Item 2	3.37	1.15	4.11	0.87	-0.74	1.05	64	-5.67*
Item 6	3.69	1.37	4.39	0.94	-0.70	1.38	63	-4.09*
Item 5	3.89	1.21	4.54	0.75	-0.65	1.23	64	-4.24*
Item 4	3.72	1.17	4.31	0.88	-0.59	1.00	64	-4.72*
Item 9	3.57	1.30	4.14	0.90	-0.57	1.22	64	-3.75*
Item 1	3.20	1.24	3.61	0.94	-0.41	0.96	63	-3.40*
Item 3	4.09	1.26	4.46	0.77	-0.37	1.29	64	-2.30*

\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2

*Differences between student teachers' actual and ideal ratings of relationship with their mentor*

	Actual ratings		Ideal ratings		Paired Differences		df	t
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Item 4	3.82	1.11	4.65	0.54	-0.83	1.17	65	-5.78*
Item 6	4.05	1.13	4.74	0.59	-0.70	1.19	65	-4.76*
Item 12	3.76	1.14	4.44	0.83	-0.68	1.22	65	-4.55*
Item 3	3.98	1.16	4.65	0.73	-0.67	1.26	65	-4.31*
Item 9	4.08	1.18	4.69	0.53	-0.62	1.21	64	-4.11*
Item 11	4.12	1.09	4.70	0.53	-0.58	1.05	65	-4.44*
Item 13	4.06	1.11	4.62	0.55	-0.56	1.07	65	-4.26*
Item 10	4.21	1.21	4.76	0.43	-0.55	1.15	65	-3.84*
Item 2	4.24	0.99	4.77	0.42	-0.53	0.99	65	-4.33*
Item 7	3.95	1.01	3.95	1.01	-0.52	0.92	65	-4.57*
Item 5	3.97	1.08	4.41	0.84	-0.44	0.96	65	-3.71*
Item 1	4.29	0.99	4.65	0.51	-0.36	0.85	65	-3.46*
Item 8	3.94	1.08	4.29	0.80	-0.35	1.03	65	-2.75*
Item 14	3.82	1.16	4.15	0.93	-0.33	1.07	65	-2.53*
Item 15	4.29	1.03	4.59	0.66	-0.44	1.04	65	-3.43*

\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 3

*Differences between student teachers' actual and ideal ratings of mentor as a teacher*

	Actual ratings		Ideal ratings		Paired Differences		df	T
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Item 1	4.12	0.93	4.78	0.41	-0.66	0.96	64	-5.58*
Item 3	4.16	1.14	4.82	0.39	-0.66	1.18	64	-4.53*
Item 7	4.18	1.11	4.70	0.61	-0.52	1.17	65	-3.59*
Item 2	4.28	0.91	4.75	0.50	-0.47	0.97	64	-3.96*
Item 6	4.24	1.10	4.73	0.48	-0.49	1.13	65	-3.50*
Item 5	4.20	0.87	4.63	0.63	-0.43	0.90	64	-3.86*
Item 4	4.37	0.88	4.74	0.51	-0.37	0.88	64	-3.40*

\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 4

*Differences between student teachers' actual and ideal ratings of mentor's personality characteristics*

	Actual ratings		Ideal ratings		Paired Differences		df	T
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Item 4	4.15	1.14	4.79	0.45	-0.64	1.13	65	-4.57*
Item 3	4.17	1.09	4.76	0.50	-0.59	1.08	65	-4.44*
Item 1	4.30	1.08	4.70	0.50	-0.40	1.15	65	-2.79*
Item 2	4.47	0.79	4.76	0.50	-0.29	0.84	65	-2.79*

\*  $p < .01$ .

Each item within each subscale was also examined based on the discrepancy value to present more explanatory information. The following mentoring strategies were rated with largest need by student teachers: use of video/audiotaping (Item 7) and journal writing (Item 8). Both strategies encourage reflection, which is very important in the teaching profession. Following interviews with 22 mentors, Shulman and Colbert (1988) reported that “mentors suggested that teaching teachers how to reflect on their own teaching is what mentoring should ultimately include, because it will engender teachers with a mode for life-long improvement and revitalization” (p. 9).

When we examined the discrepancies in the “relationship between mentor and student teacher” subscale (Table 2), we found that student teachers believed that mentors should be more helpful in their developing different teaching strategies (Item 4) and lesson plans (Item 12). In addition, they want their mentors to keep things confidential that would promote more trusting relationship between them (Item 6).

When student teachers were asked to evaluate their mentors as a teacher (see Table 3), the largest discrepancy values between ideal and actual rating were found in the following items: “Demonstrate effective teaching practices in the classroom” (Item 1) and “Demonstrate effective classroom management practices” (Item 3). On the other hand, the smallest discrepancy value was found with student teachers assessing their mentors’ knowledge in the subject matter (Item 4). Finally, investigating discrepancies in the last subscale (mentor’s personality characteristics) showed that student teachers perceived that their mentors should be more “patient, caring, and helpful” (Item 4) (Table 4).

An instrument was developed in this study to assess mentoring practices that occur during student teaching. It has four parts: mentoring strategies, relationship between mentor and student teacher, mentor as a teacher, and mentor’s personality characteristics. The items on each part are conceptually meaningful and based on the mentoring literature. Cronbach alpha coefficients for each part showed that the instrument produced reliable information. However, evidence was not provided for construct validity of the scales.

Another limitation is that it was assumed student teachers’ reported perceptions reflect their actual behaviors. Other measures are recommended for further studies such as observations of mentors and their relationship with student teachers, in-depth interviews with student teachers and mentors, and the perceptions of mentors. Finally, because census sampling was utilized,

these findings can only be generalized beyond the sample in this study with great caution. This study should be replicated with a larger randomly selected sample.

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