MENTORING AS A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES: WHO MENTORS THE MENTORS?

Abstract

School districts across America have responded to the accountability movement by increasing professional development activities, including the utilization of onsite coaching strategies for educators. But who is mentoring the mentors? This descriptive study in one Western state found that 56% of instructional coaches reported they did not have a mentor, yet 90% of respondents thought mentoring was important for beginning instructional coaches, and 58% thought mentoring was important even for experienced instructional coaches. This study also reported on the areas that instructional coaches thought were important to be mentored in and the barriers that hindered their district in providing a mentoring program.

As the accountability movement sweeps across the educational landscape of the United States, the pressure on educators has been mounting. As schools search for more effective methods of influencing student achievement we can observe increased spending on alternative ways to address professional development; among these are instructional coaching and peer coaching programs (Stichter, Lewis, Richter, Johnson, & Bradley, 2006). This approach provides training that is sustained over time as teachers work one-on-one with an equally or more experienced teacher (Boyle, Lamprianou, & Boyle, 2005). Such an approach requires an onsite coach who provides not only training, but also modeling and feedback on the instructional strategies being implemented (Knight, 2007).

As schools invest more heavily in training their educators in new instructional strategies, it becomes important to ensure that the instructional coaches themselves are provided the support and training they need to become successful. Principals and instructional facilitators alike recognize the need for mentoring, even for those individuals with experience (Duncan & Stock, 2009; Stock & Duncan, 2009).

Since 2006, school districts in the state of Wyoming have been provided additional funding outside the normal school funding formula for the purpose of hiring instructional facilitators. As of 2009, 398 facilitators were working with K–12 teachers in Wyoming schools. This study examines how these instructional facilitators were mentored and what instructional facilitators saw as their mentoring needs. Who is mentoring the mentors?

Background

In 1995, 31 of Wyoming's 49 school districts brought a lawsuit before the Wyoming Supreme Court alleging inequities in school funding (Dayton, 1997). The Wyoming Supreme Court's decision in *Campbell County Sch. Dist. v. State* ultimately resulted in a court ordered reconstruction of the Wyoming school funding formula (Ryan, 2008). As a result of these legal challenges, school districts were eventually provided a significant increase in school funding and increases in funding outside the base funding model for the purpose of professional development.

On March 10, 2006, the Wyoming House of Representatives of the 58th Legislature passed the School-Based Instructional Facilitators/Instructional Coaches Grant. The purpose of the grant was to provide school districts funds outside of Wyoming's school funding model for school-based instructional facilitators and instructional coaches (Mockelmann, 2007). To be eligible for these non-competitive funds, the school districts completed an application process. The original grant process funded 344 teachers as instructional facilitators with 45 of 48 school districts participating throughout the state of Wyoming. The grant has continued in subsequent years, and in 2008–2009 it provided all 48 Wyoming school districts statewide the opportunity to hire a total of 398 teachers as instructional facilitators/coaches. Under the School-Based Instructional Facilitators/Instructional Coaches Grant guidelines, the role of instructional facilitators has three main purposes (Mockelmann, 2007). The first purpose for instructional facilitators is to provide professional development. The second main goal is to work directly with teachers to improve teaching practices, and the third is to use instructional facilitators to lead alignment of instruction with curriculum standards and assessment tools.

As instructional facilitator funding is a new initiative in Wyoming, not much is known about how school districts train and mentor their new instructional facilitators, or what the instructional facilitators perceive as barriers to supporting and mentoring them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the following aspects of the implementation of this professional development initiative: What is the academic, professional, and demographic profile of instructional facilitators in Wyoming and how does it compare with the teaching population statewide? Do instructional facilitators report the need to receive mentoring? In what areas do instructional facilitators perceive the need for mentoring? Do elementary and secondary facilitators differ in the areas in which they perceive a need for mentoring? What are the perceived barriers to providing a mentoring program for instructional facilitators? How often are instructional facilitators evaluated and who evaluates them?

Review of Literature

Instructional coaches or instructional facilitators are professional educators who typically work with other classroom teachers to help them improve their practice (Knight, 2007). Mentoring is the process of providing help, advice, and guidance to people with less experience for the purpose of helping them with their personal and career development (Bell, 2000; Carruthers, 1993; Roberts, 2000). Instructional coaching is different from mentoring in that coaching often involves an instructional modeling and feedback loop that may or may not be present in a typical mentoring program (Knight, 2007).

Although the main purpose of mentoring is to help the new and perhaps less experienced person, the mentor often finds the process personally beneficial. Talley and Henry (2008) described the process of mentoring as helping both the mentee and the mentor by increasing their satisfaction and their knowledge. Another positive impact of some mentoring programs is the leadership development potential provided for the mentors (Hanson & Moir, 2008).

Mentoring is different from supervising employees. Supervisors possess an authority that alters the mentoring relationship due to the power imbalance that supervisors have over employees (Manathunga, 2007). The process of mentoring is also different from induction, although effective induction programs often include a mentoring component that matches new teachers with more experienced colleagues (Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, & Cowan-Hathcock, 2007). Induction programs for new teachers often include orientation programs and specific training offered by the organization but include mentoring as a way of easing the transition from the university to the classroom (Stanulis & Ames, 2009). Mentoring without specific and targeted support risks becoming merely a "buddy system" (Stanulis & Ames, 2009). While this format may help with retention of employees it may have little to no impact on their effectiveness (Stanulis & Floden, 2009).

There are often differences of opinion or conflicts between mentors and mentees. Bradbury and Koballa (2008) identified communication and differences in beliefs about teaching as areas of potential conflict or difference between mentees and mentors. Other issues causing problems for mentors are confusing roles, lack of time, mismatching of mentors and novices, and a lack of goals (Hall, 2008). Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of over 300 studies on mentoring and reported that lack of time and training were common problems reported in the literature.

While much has been written about mentoring of teachers and mentoring in general, little is known about how and to what extent teacher leaders and specifically instructional facilitators are mentored. Who is mentoring those who coach and in many cases mentor the teachers?

Research Design and Methods

This study used a survey research design. The population was all instructional facilitators ($N = 398$) working in Wyoming public schools in the spring of 2009.

Participants

A mailing list of all instructional facilitators was obtained from the Wyoming Department of Education. The survey and a personally addressed letter of consent explaining the purpose of the study were mailed to all instructional facilitators on the list, along with a stamped addressed envelope for return. For the purposes of this study, respondents were grouped in two categories, K–8 or 9–12 depending on which grade span they worked with most often. One hundred and seventy-one surveys of 398 were returned, giving a return rate of 43%. Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents by gender and grade categories.

Table 1

Profile of Instructional Facilitator Respondents by Gender and Grade Categories

	n (% of *N*)		
Gender	Grades K–8	Grades 9–12	Total *n* (% of *N*)
Male	5 (3.0)	24 (14.6)	29 (17.6)
Female	60 (36.5)	75 (45.7)	135 (82.3)
Total	65 (39.6)	99 (60.3)	[a]164 (99.9)

[a]Seven individuals of the 171 did not respond to these survey items.

Demographic data indicated 82% of the instructional facilitators who responded were female and 18% were male. Of the 398 instructional facilitators in Wyoming, 78% are female and 22% are male. The overall profile of instructional facilitators responding to the survey was very similar to the profile of instructional facilitators statewide.

Instrument

The instrument contained questions regarding gender, years in the instructional facilitator position, level of education, school size and grade level, district size, the types of mentoring programs available in their district, whether they had a mentor, and whether mentoring was a district policy. Participants were also asked to rate on a Likert-type scale of 1–5 the importance of topics in which they would like to be mentored and their perceptions of potential barriers to creating a mentoring program for instructional facilitators. In addition to the multiple choice questions, there

were prompts requesting that respondents write responses to open-ended questions. This allowed respondents to clarify their responses or add additional information pertinent to the study. Data were analyzed with SPSS 17 using descriptive statistics, and independent samples *t*-tests.

Results

What is the profile of instructional facilitators in Wyoming and how does it compare with the teaching population statewide?

The data showed that a large majority of instructional facilitators have advanced degrees. Seventy-six percent of the instructional facilitators reported having a Master's Degree and 21% reported having a Bachelor's Degree. One percent had a Doctoral Degree and 1% reported having an advanced degree in another field. Only 15% of respondents reported a graduate degree in Educational Leadership. Overall, the gender profile of respondents was very similar to the gender profile of the state population of instructional facilitators.

In what areas do instructional facilitators perceive the need for mentoring?

Eighty-six percent of the respondents indicated they had three years experience or less as an instructional facilitator. Since Wyoming's instructional facilitator program was only three years old at the time of the study, this result is not surprising. While most instructional facilitators are relatively inexperienced in their new positions, 56% of them reported they do not have mentors. Ninety percent of the respondents, however, indicated they felt mentoring was important for beginning instructional facilitators, compared with 58% who believed it was also important for more experienced instructional facilitators. Table 2 shows the experience levels reported by instructional facilitators.

Table 2

Reported Years of Experience for Instructional Facilitators

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
1	44	26.5
2	26	15.7
3	71	42.8
4	7	4.2
5	7	4.2
6	3	1.8
7	2	1.2

(continued)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
8	2	1.2
11	1	0.6
13	1	0.6
Total		

Note. Not all respondents answered all the questions.

What types of mentoring programs are in place?

Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated their district had a formal or informal mentoring program. Fifty percent of the respondents said their district did not have an informal or formal mentoring plan and 16% reported they didn't know if their district had a mentoring plan. For those instructional facilitators who reported they had a mentoring program, 45.6% said their mentoring program was perceived "very positively" in their district; 36.8% indicated it was viewed "somewhat positively;" 15.7% indicated the perception was "neutral" and 1.7% indicated it was viewed "somewhat negatively."

In what areas do instructional facilitators perceive the need for mentoring?

Participants were asked to rate how important (1 = not important; 5 = very important) a mentor could be in exploring and developing certain areas. The areas where facilitators indicated mentoring would be most important were instructional leadership, using data, working with difficult staff members and creating a collegial faculty. Table 3 shows the areas that instructional facilitators perceived as important for mentoring.

Table 3

Instructional Facilitators and their Perceived Areas of Importance for Mentoring

Item	N	M	SD
Instructional leadership	152	4.25	.966
Using data	152	4.18	1.006
Working with difficult staff	152	4.13	1.067
Creating a collegial faculty	152	4.00	1.067
Sustaining personal motivation	152	3.97	1.127
Working with difficult students	152	3.67	1.254
Working with difficult parents	150	3.30	1.225

(continued)

Table 3 *(continued)*

Item	N	M	SD
Working with community	149	3.24	1.063
Working with outside agencies	152	3.14	1.147
Dealing with diversity issues	147	3.10	1.129
Dealing with legal issues	150	3.02	1.181
Working with school board	151	3.00	1.104
Working with school budget and finance	151	2.88	1.163
Working with media	151	2.79	1.133

Note. Not all respondents answered all the questions. Likert scale 1–5, where 1= not important and 5 = very important.

How do K–8 facilitators differ from facilitators in grades 9-12 in the areas they perceive important for mentoring?

Table 4 shows the top five areas of perceived importance for mentoring for K–8 facilitators and 9–12 instructional facilitators. The highest ranked areas of importance for K–8 facilitators were instructional leadership, using data, sustaining personal motivation, creating a collegial faculty and dealing with difficult staff. For instructional facilitators in grades 9–12 the highest area of importance for mentoring was in dealing with difficult staff, followed by instructional leadership, using data, creating a collegial faculty and sustaining personal motivation.

Table 4

Ranked Areas of Perceived Importance for Mentoring by K–8 and Grade 9–12 Facilitators

Topic	M	SD
	K–8 instructional facilitators	
Instructional leadership	* 4.45	.81
Using data	* 4.37	.95
Sustaining personal motivation	4.15	1.11
Creating a collegial faculty	4.10	.99
Dealing with difficult staff	4.09	1.19
	9–12 instructional facilitators	
Dealing with difficult staff	4.17	.97
Instructional leadership	* 4.11	1.04
Using data	* 4.04	1.02
Creating a collegial faculty	3.92	1.11

(continued)

Table 4 *(continued)*

Topic	*M*	*SD*
Sustaining personal motivation	3.84	1.12

Note. For this set of questions there were 151 responses from 177 surveys returned. Likert scale 1–5, where 1 = not important and 5 = very important.
* significant at $p < 0.05$

The highest ranked areas of importance for both groups were all internal needs that deal with personal relationships or specific professional needs that deal with the immediate tasks at hand such as using data or being an instructional leader. In both groups the lowest areas of importance were all external factors that lie outside their immediate job functions. Topics such as dealing with media, dealing with outside agencies, school budget issues and legal issues were all ranked low by both elementary and secondary facilitators. Although diversity issues could be viewed as an internal school factor, it was ranked low. With Wyoming's lack of diversity in the schools in comparison to other states, this is not a surprising finding. The areas with statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the K–8 facilitators and 9–12 instructional facilitators were using data ($p = .046$) and instructional leadership ($p = .032$).

What are the perceived barriers to providing a mentoring program for instructional facilitators?

The biggest barriers to providing a mentoring program were lack of time for mentoring, limited state guidance, and no training. Table 5 shows the perceived barriers to an instructional facilitator mentoring program.

Table 5

Perceived Barriers to Instructional Facilitator Mentoring Programs

Barriers to mentoring	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Lack of time for IF mentors	149	3.83	1.090
State guidance is limited	142	3.61	1.180
No training	150	3.52	1.300
Lack of time for beginning IFs	148	3.27	1.330
No interest at district for mentoring IFs	144	3.20	1.180
No recompense	149	3.19	1.200
No supplementary materials and resources	150	3.05	1.252
District unwilling to oversee	149	2.86	1.333
No interest by beginning IFs	150	2.70	1.333

Note. Not all respondents answered all the questions.

Responses to open-ended questions

Respondents were given an opportunity to make additional comments regarding their thoughts on mentoring programs for instructional facilitators. One common theme that emerged from these open-ended comments was the lack of time. One person wrote, "It is hard enough to complete all that is required and requested of me, let alone to find time for me to be mentored." With regards to training one person stated, "Our district just put good teachers into these positions without any training. Unfortunately being good teachers doesn't always mean that they will be good facilitators to help other teachers." Another comment was, "There were no prep programs in our state – just what the district provides." Comments such as, "the state provides little support," and "instructional facilitators need training (more than 2–3 days) prior to taking on this job," were representative of responses to the open-ended prompts.

These perceived barriers are not surprising in light of the sudden availability of the instructional facilitator funds without prior advance training or preparation within individual districts in Wyoming. Despite the high ranking indicating an overall lack of state guidance, a number of respondents commented in the open ended sections that they were pleased with their local school districts' training and overall professional development for instructional facilitators. One respondent wrote, "Our district has our own plan for professional development for instructional coaches that matches our initiatives." Another respondent stated, "Mentors have a great support system within our school district."

While there were no separate survey questions specifically regarding role definitions and job descriptions for instructional facilitators, respondents made numerous comments about role confusion. One instructional facilitator wrote, "The district needs to know/learn the needs/roles of the instructional facilitators." Another one stated, "I believe teachers need to be educated as to what an instructional facilitator's duties are. They seem woefully uninformed." And yet another facilitator wrote, "Roles need to be defined more specifically—some facilitators may be expected to have very different roles in different buildings depending on principal leadership."

How often are instructional facilitators evaluated and who evaluates them?

Seventy-four percent of instructional facilitators reported they are evaluated at least once a year. When asked who evaluates them, 6.7% reported no one evaluates them, 65.9% indicated the principal evaluates them, 5.5% reported that other building level personnel evaluate them, 9.8% said the superintendent evaluates them and 12.2% said other central office personnel evaluate them. Fifty-one percent reported that instructional facilitators have their own evaluation form and process and 49% indicated they do not have a separate evaluation form or process.

Discussion

While some research exists around the topic of mentoring teachers and administrators, there is a scarcity of studies that explore the use of mentoring of instructional facilitators. As Daresh and Playko (1992) explained, many adults in various phases of life might find mentoring to be of benefit to them. This study highlights the areas in which instructional facilitators feel a need for mentoring and describes the areas in which they feel barriers to mentoring programs exist. It is interesting to note that the areas of importance for mentoring reported by instructional facilitators are very closely aligned with the reported goals of the Wyoming School-Based Instructional Facilitators/Instructional Coaches Grant (Mockelmann, 2007). The purposes listed in the grant were for the facilitators to administer professional development, work directly with teachers to improve teaching practices, and conduct alignment of instruction with curriculum standards and assessment tools. The top areas of importance for mentoring mentioned by facilitators were instructional leadership, using data, dealing with difficult staff, creating a collegial faculty and sustaining personal motivation. It appears that instructional facilitators see the need for both professional development and personal development in dealing with the staff. The majority of instructional facilitators report that mentoring is important not only for new instructional facilitators but for veterans as well.

This study also demonstrates that instructional facilitators perceive the need for more preparation and role definition at the state and district levels to prepare them for their new roles. There is very little known about how instructional facilitators were deployed in the state, what the decision-making process was, and who made those decisions. One area for further research would be to explore how instructional facilitators were assigned in their districts and what decision-making processes were used across the state.

Conclusions

The results of this survey indicate that the majority of instructional facilitators do not have a mentor, yet most of the respondents indicated they felt mentoring was important for beginning instructional facilitators and most believed it was important even for more experienced instructional facilitators. It appears that facilitators recognize the value of mentoring for their work, even for those with experience.

Survey respondents indicated that time and lack of state guidance were important barriers in creating mentoring programs for instructional facilitators. This does not seem surprising, given the sudden implementation of the Wyoming School-Based Instructional Facilitators/Instructional Coaches Grant. The funding was provided before training and orientation were provided to Wyoming school districts, as many respondents reported.

The reported barriers to mentoring programs for instructional facilitators, such as lack of time and lack of training, were also consistent with a meta-analysis of the literature on mentoring (Ehrich, Hanford & Tennant, 2004). One possible implication for policy makers and decision makers who are considering implementing an instructional facilitator program is to provide training and professional development opportunities in advance of program implementation, possibly including a mentoring program for facilitators.

Respondents also indicated that a mentor would be important to them in learning how to use data. The age of accountability has clearly increased the pressure on all educators to produce documentable results. Facilitators have reported this as one of their top concerns and this study confirms the need that educators have to better understand how to use data to improve instruction. This finding may have implications for professional developers and those responsible for scheduling and implementing training and mentoring opportunities for instructional coaches.

Another finding with possible implications for staff developers, trainers and mentors is the reported need to work with difficult staff members. This research identified it as a top-rated concern for facilitators in grades 9–12, perhaps giving further credence to the perception that secondary school teachers are more resistant to change (Smyth, 2007).

Another finding with implications is that facilitators report a need for mentoring in developing their instructional leadership skills. It is ironic that instructional facilitators are increasingly thrust into leadership situations where they must lead individuals who are reluctant to change, yet the facilitators have had little mentoring or advance preparation in the field of leadership. While it is not known how many facilitators had informal training or experience in the field of leadership, this survey did show that only 15% had formal degrees in educational leadership. All the areas discussed above are specific areas that are identified as important purposes for the School-Based Instructional Facilitators/Instructional Coaches Grant.

Respondents' comments regarding the lack of time for mentoring reveal the dilemma that instructional facilitators face. While they acknowledged the need for advance training and mentoring in a variety of areas, they also see lack of time as a real barrier to being mentored. The implication may be that those responsible for mentoring and training instructional facilitators should consider weaving the training and mentoring into the fabric of the work day so that it is not viewed as "just another thing" to add to their already crowded plates (Ezarik, 2002).

The use of instructional facilitators and instructional coaches to provide quality support for educators is a practice that has the potential to support schools in their efforts to improve public education. As with any innovation, careful planning and advance preparation is critical to effective implementation. As states throughout the nation compete for federal dollars through Race To The Top grants and other funding streams meant to spark innovation and school reform, it might be wise for policy makers and deci-

sion makers who implement these programs to consider the question, "Who mentors the mentors?" As revealed by this study, instructional facilitators also have mentoring and training needs that deserve careful consideration.

References

Algozzine, B., Gretes, J., Queen, A., & Cowan-Hathcock, M. (2007, January). Beginning teachers' perceptions of their induction program experiences. *Clearing House, 80*(3), 137–143.

Bell, C. (2000). The mentor as partner. *Training and Development, 54*(2), 52–56.

Boyle, B., Lamprianou, I., & Boyle, T. (2005, March). A longitudinal study of teacher change: What makes professional development effective? Report of the second year of the study. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement, 16*(1), 1–27.

Bradbury, L., & Koballa, T. (2008, November). Borders to cross: Identifying sources of tension in mentor–intern relationships. *Teaching & Teacher Education, 24*(8), 2132-2145. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2008.03.002

Carruthers, J. (1993). The principles and practice of mentoring. In B. Caldwell & E. Carter (Eds.), *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning.* London: Falmer Press.

Daresh, J., & Playko, M. (1992, June). Mentoring for headteachers: A review of major issues. *School Organization, 12*(2), 145.

Dayton, J. (1997). Rural school funding inequities: An analysis of political, legal and fiscal issues. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 14*(3), 142–148.

Duncan, H. E., & Stock, M. (2009, October). *Mentoring school principals: What are Wyoming districts doing and what do principals want?* Paper presented at the Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association Conference, Jackson, WY.

Ehrich, L., Hansford, B., & Tennent, L. (2004). Formal mentoring programs in education and other professions: A review of the literature. *Educational Administration Quarterly 40,* 518–540.

Ezarik, M. (2002). It Takes TIME. *District Administration, 38*(3), 62.

Hall, P. (2008). Building bridges: Strengthening the principal induction process through intentional mentoring. *Phi Delta Kappan, 89*(6), 449–452.

Hanson, S., & Moir, E. (2008). Beyond Mentoring: Influencing the Professional Practice and Careers of Experienced Teachers. *Phi Delta Kappan, 89*(6), 453–458.

Knight, J. (2007). *Instructional coaching: A partnership approach to improving instruction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Manathunga, C. (2007, July). Supervision as mentoring: the role of power and boundary crossing. *Studies in Continuing Education, 29*(2), 207–221. doi:10.1080/01580370701424650.

Mockelmann, J. (2007, December 6). *School-based instructional facilitators/instructional coaches grant: Report to the Wyoming joint education interim committee.* Retrieved June 23, 2009, from http://www.crook1.com/Facilitator_Stuff/JEIC_Instructional_Facilitators_Report.htm

Roberts, A. (2000) Mentoring revisited: A phenomenological reading of the literature. *Mentoring and Tutoring, 8*(2), 145–170.

Ryan, J. (2008, May). Standards, testing, and school finance litigation. *Texas Law Review, 86*(6), 1223–1262.

Smyth, J. (2007). Pedagogy, school culture and teacher learning: Towards more durable and resistant approaches to secondary school literacy. *Language & Education: An International Journal, 21*(5), 406–419.

Stanulis, R., & Ames, K. (2009, Spring). Learning to mentor: Evidence and observation as tools in learning to teach. *Professional Educator, 33*(1), 28–38.

Stanulis, R. N., & Floden, R. E. (2009). Intensive mentoring as a way to help beginning teachers develop a balanced instruction. *Journal of Teacher Education, 60*(2), 112–122.

Stichter, J., Lewis, T., Richter, M., Johnson, N., & Bradley, L. (2006, November). Assessing antecedent variables: The effects of instructional variables on student outcomes through in-service and peer coaching professional development models. *Education & Treatment of Children, 29*(4), 665–692.

Stock, M., & Duncan, H. E. (2009, October). *Instructional facilitators in Wyoming: Who is mentoring the mentors?* Paper presented at the Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association Conference, Jackson, WY.

Talley V., & Henry C. (2008). Mentoring: The courage to cultivate new leaders. *AANA Journal, 76*(5), 331–334. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Mark J. Stock is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Professional Studies at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming.

Heather E. Duncan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Professional Studies at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming.