

1999

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Carmen Giebelhaus  
*University of Dayton*

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### Recommended Citation

Giebelhaus, Carmen (1999) "Leading the Way . . . State Initiatives and Mentoring," *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*. Vol. 12: Iss. 4, Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/mwer/vol12/iss4/6>

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# Leading the Way . . . State Initiatives and Mentoring

Carmen Giebelhaus  
University of Dayton

Since the early 1830s, a debate has raged across the United States concerning how we should prepare teachers. It began when Horace Mann first declared that teachers required special preparation (Cruikshank, et. al, 1996). But not everyone agreed then, just as not all agree now. Even those who agreed, did not agree to the form the preparation should take: the amount and type of preparation. There are those who believe that a strong academic background in the subjects they will teach is all that is necessary; others contend that there is a specialized knowledge-base that informs best pedagogical practice that teachers need to know and be able to do; and still others argue for both. In recent years, there have also been those who insist not only that is there specialized pedagogical knowledge and skills, but that it is different based on the developmental and cognitive levels of the children. The challenge for those responsible for the preparation of America's teachers is to make informed decisions given the abundant rhetoric and vociferous debate. What do teachers need to know and be able to do? Who should inform such preparation? By whom and how should such preparation "standards" be developed, implemented, and enforced?

The reform rhetoric surrounding teacher preparation has been symbolic of the 1980s and 90s. It appears that almost every agency, professional organization, and group of academicians has called for some type of teacher preparation reform. The sources of the rhetoric include private foundations, interested individuals, university teacher education units, teacher associations (both at K-12 and higher education), academic learned societies, and federal and state governments. Some of these proposals were intended to address perceived failures in the actual preparation of teachers, others looked to address scientific/technological, economic, and societal demands placed on schools. Some plead for extending the preparation period, while others suggest less control or elimination of formalized teacher preparation all together. Amid all the reform rhetoric, little attention has been given to establishing standards for ensuring that the preparation that does occur produces teachers that have the knowledge and skill to be successful practitioners once they enter their own classroom. Nor has there been much attention given to the use of assessment of the knowledge and skill to make decisions about entry and retention in the profession.

Historically, the preparation of teachers has been the exclusive domain of teacher education institutions, both pre-service education and professional development. States have made certification requirements for continuing education, but rarely has there been any "official" notice of what a be-

ginning teacher needs in order to be successful during that first year of full time teaching. That is until recently. A developing trend in teacher education reform is that states are mandating certification/licensure requirements for teacher preparation, along with induction year programs as part of teacher preparation or licensure. With these state initiatives, three primary issues, problems and concerns have surfaced:

1. A lack of consistency in the definition of what constitutes mentoring and support among the stakeholders both between states and within the states;
2. A need for the development of appropriate and effective models for mentoring; and
3. A need for adequate funding to develop, initiate and sustain an effective mentoring program.

These issues, problems, and concerns are faced by every state and the local school districts that hire beginning teachers. States that mandate beginning teacher support programs must address these concerns if they are going to meet the needs of our beginning teachers and ultimately, the children they teach.

## Defining Mentoring

What is mentoring? Is a mentor a "buddy" or is the person recognized for his expertise as a teacher and leader within the professional community? Will we provide such support to all first year teachers within a building, or only to those who are first year within the profession? Will some beginning teachers be exempted and under what conditions? How will mentors be selected? What support will mentors be given to facilitate the fulfillment of their role? Without clear definition of what constitutes a good mentoring program, state policy may not meet the expectations and needs of the beginning teacher.

There is wide variation in how the term mentoring is used and in the programs that are offered. Clearly, mentoring means different things to different stakeholders. Bendixen-Noe and Giebelhaus (1997) discussed the origin of the term from the classic poem *The Odyssey* by Homer and defining characteristics of mentoring. From this epic poem, the characteristics of mentoring emerge as a more experienced, wiser person entrusted with the growth and development of a younger, less experienced person—a novice. It is a relationship between two individual where the mentor educates and advises the novice as he progresses through life. The expectation for the novice is to respect and learn from the care of the more experienced mentor.

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From this earliest description in Greek mythology, mentors and mentoring have been described in many ways: non-parental career model, role model, professional facilitator, advisor, counselor, teacher. Alleman, Cochran, Doverspike and Newman (1980) defined mentoring as “a relationship in which a person of greater rank or expertise teaches, guides, and develops a novice” (p. 329). Schmidt and Wolfe (1980) listed three broad categories as functions of mentoring including role model, consultant-advisor, and sponsor. Schein (1978) suggested eight mentor roles: teacher, confidant, sponsor, opener of doors, role model, developer of talent, protector, and successful leader. As states look to mandates for entry-year mentoring support, they too have established definitions to guide policy implementation. Ohio’s entry-year standards define mentoring as “a program of support provided by a school district . . . to meet the unique needs of an individual in the first year of employment . . .” and a mentor as “a person assigned to an individual in the first year of employment under a classroom teaching certificate or an educational personnel certificate.” (Administrative Code, Rule 3301-22-02)

Establishing formal programs to assist entry persons into a profession by using more experienced employees was introduced into the world of business and government in the 1970s (Bendixen-Noe and Giebelhaus, 1997). Gold (1996) and Tellez (1992) state that attempts to establish such programs in schools, colleges and universities, and states in an effort to help new teachers as they entered the profession began in the 1980s.

As states grapple for direction, they often look to each other; however, with regard to mentoring, state initiatives that extend teacher preparation into the first year of teaching vary in terms of both procedures and processes. The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education (NASDTEC), notes the variation in programs across states in the 1996-1997 NASDTEC *Manual*. Of the just 28 states noted in the *Manual* as having mentoring programs or Beginning Teacher Support Systems (BTSS), only 15 require all beginning teachers to participate in the programs. Most state initiatives included some sort of training for the beginning teacher (20), but only 16 states have allocated additional funding to support beginning teacher mentoring programs. In addition, there is little mention of mentor selection and/or training and few of the states involve the teacher preparation institutions in the support system for beginning teachers. Finally, the policies regarding the evaluation of mentoring programs and those which extend support beyond the first year vary greatly from state to state. Without clear focus of what constitutes effective mentoring, that is models, there is little wonder why inconsistency and lack of focus may occur in mentoring programs.

### Mentoring Models

The need to develop models, therefore, which can provide consistency and focus to the development of local

mentoring programs is warranted. These models should include: a framework for selection and training of mentors; opportunities for mentors and their protégé to work together—including opportunities for direct observations of teaching; opportunities for beginning teachers to participate in on-going professional development; and guidelines for assessment and evaluation of the mentoring program.

The selection of mentors is critical to the success of any mentoring model. The role of mentor implies that the experienced teacher selected will be not only a highly competent teacher that understands pedagogy and has extensive content knowledge, but one who has the desire and ability to nurture others. Not all experienced teachers possess these traits. Therefore, it is important for mentoring programs to have guidelines for selection that address the characteristics valued in mentors. Enz (1992) four considerations that should be examined as a district develops criteria for selection of mentors: personal characteristics, professional skills, functional concerns, and practical concerns. Personal characteristics include such attributes as thoughtfulness (reflectivity), facilitativeness, and integrity. Professional skills incorporate pedagogical and communicative skills. A mentor should “possess current professional knowledge and demonstrate a high degree of instructional expertise, such as the understanding of their students’ social, physical and emotional development, mastery of curriculum, content, and instructional pedagogy” (p. 67). Further, functional and practical concerns must be considered if the mentoring program is to succeed. Functionally, mentors must view themselves as more than “buddies”; effective mentoring requires that mentors not only possess expertise in teaching, but have knowledge of teacher development, beginning teacher problems, adult development and the skills associated with recognizing effective teaching, and conducting observations/supervision (O’Dell, 1987). Finally there are practical issues that should be addressed. For example, teaching assignments should be considered. Huffman and Leak (1986) note that matching grade and/or content specialty maximizes the mentor’s opportunity to use the knowledge and skill attributes and increases the likelihood that the protégé will benefit from such expertise. In addition a mentor should not only have the time to provide quality mentoring, but should be close enough in proximity (e.g. same school) to allow opportunities to interact with the beginning teacher.

Once the selection criteria has been established, effective mentoring programs provide training for the development of good mentors. Although recognized as highly competent and effective teachers, prospective mentors may not have a framework of how to talk about teaching and learning in a logical, systematic way. Providing such a framework enhances the communication and interaction between mentor and protégé. In Ohio, where mentoring of all entry-year teachers is mandated, the 1996 Teacher Education and Licensure Standards (Administrative Code 3301-24) state that mentors “will offer the support necessary to successfully transition into ‘real world,’ full-time classroom chal-

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lenges” (p. 3) with no mention of how this should be accomplished. This process is left up to each school district to determine even though what districts do with regard to mentoring - or do not do - may impact how well beginning teachers are prepared for the state’s performance-based assessment for licensure. Recent research (Giebelhaus and Bowman, 1997, 1999; Giebelhaus, Bendixen-Noe, and Nichelson, 1999) indicates that training of mentors does increase the effectiveness of mentoring with regard to the demonstration of identified effective teaching behaviors. Training can provide focused interaction vital if mentoring programs are to achieve the ultimate goal - providing competent teachers for every child.

Mentoring also requires time for both mentor and protégé. It is impossible for a mentor with his/her own classroom responsibilities to find the time to establish a relationship with a beginning teacher, much less to conduct observations and give feedback, without some form of “time” support from the administration. Support for the development of such relationships is critical in the success of mentoring programs. School district administrators cannot assume that by naming a mentor, mentoring will occur. Sufficient support includes proximity of mentor to protégé and time for interactions, both formal and informal.

Just as mentors require initial training in their role and the associated skills, continuing professional development of the beginning teacher through in-service training is another aspect of mentoring programs that should be considered. These activities can be informal workshops and seminars where beginning teachers meet with each others and with their mentors to address specific issues, problems, or concerns. Incentives for additional “formal” training can also be established for beginning teachers to extend their knowledge and skills through additional university course work.

And finally, models of mentoring programs should include a means for gathering information to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Such data could come from a variety of sources including teacher (administrator, mentor and protégé) surveys, retention rates, student surveys and/or achievement information, and participation data. Information should be gathered and analyzed in order to determine whether the needs of the state, district, school and individuals are being met.

If models of effective mentoring programs are to be developed based on state initiative and regulations, the state must support and encourage that process. Expectation need to be clear. Resources and technical assistance must be available. Providing leadership by offering various ways in which mentoring programs can be developed is critical. Finally, when state policy requires school districts to implement mandates, it must disseminate information about the models that work. Once the policy has been established, the role of the state is to assist districts as they attempt to negotiate the unfamiliar territory.

## Funding

Perhaps the most critical issue facing states is that of funding generally. When it comes to mandated initiatives, the term “unfunded mandate” sends chills down the spine of district boards of education and superintendents. The requirement to implement mandated mentoring for induction year programs is just one more item—one more mandate—that demands a “slice” of the district’s fiscal pie. For states then, the questions are, “Where do the funds come from?”, “How do we disburse funds equitably to all school districts?” and “How much and to whom is the funding given?” It is obvious that to train mentors, to provide them with time to work with new teachers and to collect information and disseminate the results . . . all of this takes money. States send a clear message to local school districts regarding the importance of mentoring programs by the amount and kinds of funds that are allocated.

Some states have initiated the “unfunded mandate”, which guarantees uneven compliance or in many cases non-compliance! Other states have adopted the system of competitive grants. Again, there is an enormous opening for uneven compliance and unequal opportunity. If a mentoring and support system for beginning teachers is mandated, then the funding should accompany the law. The manner in which the funding is dispersed is not as important as the fact that money is available to support model building and implement the requirements established within the state policy decision.

In at least one state, Ohio, where the mandate was first initiated as an “unfunded mandate” for most school districts in the late 1980s, it has since become part of the Teacher Education and Licensure Standards (1996). Funding has been provided through grants, both federal and state. In the grant proposal requirements, local school districts and institutions of higher education have been encouraged to work together to establish mentoring networks. The state has developed and adopted a framework for mentor training which includes identification of and discussion around specific effective teaching behaviors. Although each local school district develops their own model for mentoring meeting their unique needs, all are linked to the performance-based licensing requirements for new teachers. Because the funding is currently limited to those who successful apply for grants, funding in Ohio to meet the mandated requirement for mentoring of beginning teachers is unequal. Will this impact the success of beginning teachers on the mandated performance-based assessment for licensure?

Recent studies (Giebelhaus and Bowman, 1997, 1999; Giebelhaus, Bendixen-Noe, and Nichelson, 1999) suggest that it very well may. In a quasi-experimental study of student teachers and their mentors, Giebelhaus and Bowman (1997, 1999) found that student teachers whose mentor (co-operating teacher) were trained in a common framework for discussing teaching and learning—Pathwise (ETS, 1995)—demonstrated more effective teaching behaviors than those

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whose mentor had no such training. Findings from a causal comparative study by Giebelhaus, Bendixen-Noe and Nicholson (1999) reveal that entry year teachers whose mentors were trained and who used specific strategies like observation and conferencing around a framework of specific teaching skills were more successful than those who did not have such mentoring opportunities.

These studies would suggest that quality and type of mentoring program within a district may be a factor that prospective teachers should discuss and consider as they decide where to teach, especially where “high stakes” performance assessments for licensure are in place, such as Ohio.

### Conclusions

For states trying to establish and implement high standards for teacher preparation and professional development through initiatives like mandated beginning teacher support programs, the on-going challenge is to engage the stakeholders while maintaining consistent standards for each. With regard to mentoring, stakeholders include not just beginning teachers and the children they teach, but the school districts that hire them and the colleges and universities that prepare them. Mentoring, although well supported in the literature as likely to produce more effective practitioners, is a change from the norm; change is a challenge to some, but to others it is difficult and threatening. State agency representatives who are charged with the implementation of such policies must have the fortitude to stand fast and maintaining consistency in order to provide opportunities for such mandates to reach their full potential. In Ohio, the state has implemented a statewide program for training mentors to work with beginning teachers. The state has also developed a source of funding such programs. The challenge for any state, including Ohio, once it has begun the journey down the long road of successful implementation of initiatives which force change, is maintaining the momentum of change without veering off the road.

Linda Darling-Hammond (1996) stated that the lack of effective mentoring is one of the barriers to having competent teachers for every child. If this is true, and there is increasing evidence to support this, then it is imperative that

states take the leadership role in developing, ensuring, and maintaining comprehensive, systematic mentoring and support programs for all beginning teachers. If successful, the journey towards effective mentoring programs for beginning teachers will reach far beyond tomorrow . . . it is a journey that should strengthen the profession and ensure competent teachers for every child.

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