Impact of New Educator Support System Activities on Beginning Teachers’ Teaching Practices

by
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Danielle Bradley under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Fischler School of Education and Human Services and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Abstract


This applied dissertation was designed to investigate the impact of New Educator Support System (NESS) activities on beginning teachers’ knowledge of effective teaching practices and their perceptions of the quality of the NESS activities. Beginning teachers at a south Florida high school were working in classrooms with weak classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and instructional skills, which concerned school administrators and coaching mentors in that they negatively impacted student achievement and behaviors.

Three quantitative research questions evolved from the study’s problem statement:
1. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ classroom management skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?
2. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ lesson-plan development as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?
3. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ instructional skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?

Two qualitative research questions evolved from the study’s problem statement:
1. What are the beginning teachers’ perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the NESS activities utilized by beginning teachers?
2. What recommendations can be made to school administrators based on the analyzed data and literature review?

Data were collected through the use of a survey instrument and interviews. Based on a 4-point scale, the mean for classroom management was 2.65, lesson-plan development was 2.35, and instructional skills was 2.78. Participants’ perceived strengths of the NESS activities included (a) assigned mentor, (b) resources for lesson planning, (c) sharing of best practices, (d) observations of beginning teachers, and (e) observations of mentors. Perceived weaknesses included (a) lack of organization and structure, (b) presentation style of group meetings, (c) meeting teachers’ needs, and (d) lack of time with mentor. Recommendations for improving NESS activities included mandatory observations of veteran teachers, a comprehensive needs assessment, separate group meetings for only new teachers, a manual providing new teachers with valuable resources to survive the 1st year of teaching successfully, and an orientation 2 weeks prior to the start of the school year.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Many states and individual school districts rely heavily on induction and mentoring programs to support beginning teachers. Mentoring programs are extremely important in education due to high attrition rates. According to Villani (2002), “The National Education Association projects that 200,000 new teachers will be hired in each of the next ten years. Other estimates suggest we will hire 2.5 million new teachers in the next decade” (p. 3). Utilizing mentoring programs is one method to combat high attrition rates and build a staff of effective teachers. Villani indicated partnerships between mentors and new teachers have positive impacts on a “new teacher’s orientation to the school system, socialization to the school culture, and improved effectiveness in promoting student learning” (p. 7).

School districts with mentoring programs in place show greater evidence of having a positive impact on teachers and their retention (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). Such programs are imperative as the cost of high attrition rates continues to mount for many school districts in the nation. A longitudinal study conducted in Florida by Shockley et al. (2005) documented that new-hire attrition rates varied by school district. The focus of the study involved two school districts in south Florida during the 2004-2005 school year, including the researcher’s employer. The smaller of the two districts had a turnover of 320 teachers out of a total of 1,952 teachers and spent $4,631 to replace a teacher. The larger school district had a turnover of 1,206 teachers out of a total of 16,648 teachers and spent $12,652 per teacher. Even though the larger school district accrued a higher cost for replacing a teacher, it retained 73% of teachers more than 4 years. The smaller district only retained 45% of teachers over the same period. According to Shockley et al., the
higher retention rate was due in large part to the district’s induction and support program that represented “a significant investment and commitment by the school district to support and retain new teachers” (p. 112).

Statement of the Problem

The Florida Master Plan for K-20 Education (Florida Teachers and the Teaching Profession, 2004) dictated the Florida Department of Education create guidelines and identify best practices for mentors of new teachers and new teacher support programs. Each school board was instructed to adopt policies relating to mentors and support of new teachers. The researcher’s school district had an existing mentoring program in place, the New Educator Support System (NESS). NESS, which was created in 1998, is a site-based induction program that provides mentoring and coaching to new educators. Although the original intent of NESS was to focus on new teachers, a change occurred. As of 2002, NESS consisted of four levels and encompassed teachers with no previous teaching experience through experienced national board certified teachers. The common thread among all NESS levels is the inclusion of an instructional coach, a mentor. The NESS school liaison and building-level administrator within each school collaborated to develop the program that would best support the new educators at their site. The researcher’s work setting, a secondary school in south Florida, followed the district’s policies regarding the NESS program. Even with a required mentoring program in place, new educators were consistently thrown into classrooms without sufficient skills and resources and with an overwhelming sense of isolation from fellow colleagues.

The problem at the researcher’s school was beginning teachers were working in classrooms with weak classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and instructional skills. The combination of these weaknesses concerned school
administrators and coaching mentors in that they negatively impacted student achievement and behaviors.

Purpose Statement

NESS was designed to assess beginning teachers in six domains. More emphasis was needed in three of the domains beginning teachers struggle with the most, which included classroom management, planning, and instructional organization, and development practices. The NESS program was intended to serve as a support group and bank of resources for new educators in order to perform at an optimal level during the first year of teaching, but many beginning teachers continued to feel overwhelmed and frustrated. The purpose of this dissertation research study was to investigate the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ knowledge of effective teaching practices and their perceptions of the quality of the NESS activities.

Background and Significance of the Problem

The researcher conducted a needs assessment of new educators, administrators, and mentor coaches during the 2006-2007 school year, utilizing interviews and a survey instrument created by the researcher. Based on the findings of this assessment, it was apparent that beginning teachers and administrators believed the NESS program could be improved for greater impact in the classroom. All of the new educators surveyed felt overwhelmed and frustrated. A general theme among beginning teachers suggested a lack of information and resources surrounding curriculum materials and everyday procedures and expectations. One administrator noted beginning teachers entering the profession from other fields often struggled with the daily routine of managing the classroom. It should be noted that, during the collection of data for the needs assessment, one beginning teacher quit the profession. It is vital to understand a mentoring program not
only aids in teacher effectiveness, but, according to Wong (2005), it can also “answer questions of survival” (p. 44).

Teachers spend their days extensively interacting with children but very little time interacting with colleagues. It is very difficult for beginning teachers to feel supported and well adjusted when working in isolation. When beginning teachers are left alone with the reality shock of first-year teaching demands, they often become frustrated and overwhelmed. Pairing new teachers with mentors provided an opportunity for an in-depth orientation to the school’s policies and procedures and improved effectiveness in promoting student learning. Villani (2002) stated, “Mentor teachers have become known as occupational life savers known for offering technical, social, and emotional support” (p. 7).

Setting of the Study

The setting for this dissertation study was a secondary school located in south Florida in 2008. The secondary school was in its 4th year of existence, serving a diverse population of more than 2,400 students. New teachers at this secondary school spent a majority of time trying to acclimate to Florida’s new academic standards and standardized testing requirements, such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Rigorous testing standards coupled with stresses of new teacher preparation lead to continuous teacher shortages in Florida. The Florida Association for Colleges for Teacher Education (2003) said, “It is estimated that over 30,000 new teachers and over 30,000 additional classrooms will be needed over the next few years to address the class size limits” (p. 2). The importance of new educator support was addressed as part of the secondary school’s mission and vision.

The researcher served multiple roles in relation to the secondary school’s mission
and vision for new educators. The researcher was a ninth-grade English teacher, the school’s writing coach, and a NESS coach. As part of these multiple roles, the researcher had a large arena of influence over an assigned new educator each year as well as other new educators who were in need of assistance and support. Working as the school’s writing coach allowed the researcher to help students and teachers from all grade levels and subject areas.

**Research Questions**

Three quantitative research questions evolved from this study’s problem statement. The three quantitative questions are as follows:

1. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ classroom management skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?

2. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ lesson-plan development as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?

3. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ instructional skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?

Two qualitative research questions evolved from this study’s problem statement. The qualitative questions are as follows:

1. What are the beginning teachers’ perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the NESS activities utilized by beginning teachers?

2. What recommendations can be made to school administrators based on the analyzed data and literature review?
Definition of Terms

Several key terms relating to beginning teachers, teaching practices, and mentoring programs are discussed in this research study. A list of these key terms and definitions is provided for clarification to ensure the study is readily understood.

**Administrator.** A school administrator is a principal or assistant principal supervising teachers.

**Beginning teacher.** For the purpose of this study, a beginning teacher is defined as a teacher in the first 3 years of the profession who is currently completing the NESS program or has previously completed the program.

**Classroom management.** Classroom management is defined by Campbell (1999) as “establishing and maintaining a routine in the classroom that allows teaching and learning to proceed effectively” (p. 45).

**FCAT.** The FCAT is a part of Florida’s plan to increase student achievement by implementing higher standards. Students in Grades 3-11 are administered a criterion- and norm-referenced test measuring benchmarks in mathematics, reading, science, and writing (Florida Department of Education, 2007).

**Mentor.** A mentor is a teacher with 3 or more years of teaching experience who serves as a guide or coach to a beginning teacher. Mentors in the NESS program are required to complete a training course and obtain certification prior to serving as a mentor.

**Mentoring program.** For the purpose of this study, as defined by Blank and Kersaw (2002), a mentoring program is a process that pairs a veteran teacher with a new teacher to provide support through open communication, analysis, and reflection designed to help the new teacher succeed.
NESS. NESS is a site-based induction program that provides mentoring and coaching to beginning teachers.

Secondary school. A secondary school hosts Grades 9 through 12.

Summary

This study was designed to evaluate the impact of NESS activities on beginning teachers’ teaching practices. More specifically, the study was intended to determine the helpfulness of the activities in regard to the teachers’ classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and effective instructional skills. A major component of the NESS activities included the required pairing of beginning teachers with a mentor coach. The research questions utilized in the study were designed to assess the perceptions of beginning teachers in the first 3 years of the profession at a secondary school.

Chapter 1 included a brief overview of mentoring and its increased use in the light of rising attrition rates. A background of the NESS program was provided as it related to the study’s problem and purpose statements. The chapter also discussed the setting of the study, the researcher’s role, and research questions. Last, key terms relating to the study were defined.
Chapter 2: Review of the Related Literature

Introduction

The primary objective of this research study was to investigate the impact of NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ knowledge of effective teaching practices and their perceptions of the quality of the NESS activities. Extensive literary research was conducted in order to determine what types of learning activities, skills, and techniques are associated with mentoring programs. In order to determine the impact of the NESS activities properly, it was necessary to research thoroughly aspects relating to the needs of beginning teachers, need for mentoring, role of mentors and importance of mentor training, and benefits of mentoring. The culmination of the literary research was three major components of beginning teachers’ weaknesses, including (a) classroom management skills, (b) lesson-plan development, and (c) effective instructional skills. The information gathered from the research was utilized in the development of the data-collection instrument for this study.

The Beginning Teacher

Beginning teachers in today’s classrooms do not necessarily meet the typical stereotype of a new teacher entering the profession directly from college. An increasing number of beginning teachers are older adults changing careers, while some younger teachers do not plan to remain in the profession for their entire careers. More importantly, according to Ganser (2005), “a growing proportion of new teachers have been prepared in alternative route certification programs rather than in traditional undergraduate four-year programs” (p. 7). All of these factors greatly contribute to the enormous role mentoring plays in the success or failure of new teachers. Ganser said, “There is no better form of professional development for teachers than a thoughtfully designed and carefully
implemented mentoring program” (p. 16).

The knowledge, support, and resources mentors are capable of providing to new educators are invaluable for a successful mentoring program. This is especially true when considering the facts of why many new teachers fail. According to Wong (2005),

[1.] Thirty-three percent of new teachers are hired after the school year has already started.
[2.] Fifty-six percent of new teachers report no extra assistance is available to them as new teachers.
[3.] Eighty-seven percent of the new teachers in a particular state said they had a mentor, but only 17% said their mentors ever observed them teach.
[4.] Few teachers begin with a clear, operational curriculum in hand.
[5.] Only 1% of new teachers currently receive the ongoing support that constitutes comprehensive induction when they enter the profession. (pp. 41-42)

Only about 50% of new educators remain in the classroom longer than 5 years, and according to Rogers and Babinski (2002), “one in five teachers leave the profession after three years” (p. 3).

Teachers experience an enormous amount of pressure and isolation during the first years of teaching; therefore, it is not a huge surprise that attrition rates are on the rise. Beginning teachers are faced with the most hectic time of their teaching careers, and many are discouraged from remaining in the profession (Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Veenman, de Laat, & Staring, 1998). Beginning teachers face challenges such as multiple teaching assignments, lowest achieving students, traveling to more than one classroom, and extracurricular activities (Looney, 1997; Stansbury, 2001). Principals and other school administrators unfairly assume the beginning teacher is ready to accept responsibility for students and a classroom on the very first day of school. It is imperative that beginning teachers’ needs are seriously considered and understood before a sink-or-swim mentality occurs (Dollase, 1992).
Beginning Teachers’ Needs

The needs of beginning teachers have not drastically changed over the past 20 years. The same basic needs and wants continue to elude beginning teachers, even with the vast amount of research shedding light on this important topic. The earliest research on teachers’ needs focused on Veenman’s study (1984), which consisted of an extensive review of literature on beginning teachers and their needs. According to Veenman’s findings, the most pressing needs in rank order include (a) classroom discipline, (b) motivating students, (c) dealing with individual differences, (d) assessing students’ work, (e) relationships with parents, (f) organization of class work, (g) insufficient materials and supplies, and (h) dealing with the problems of individual students. The issue of classroom discipline continues to plague beginning teachers; however, needs relating to curriculum resources, instructional strategies, and knowledge of the school culture play a large role in a successful first year of teaching.

M. Freiberg, Zbikowski, and Ganser’s (1994) study discovered beginning teachers requested the most assistance in learning about district and school policies, obtaining more curriculum resources, understanding what is expected of them, and receiving more feedback on their performance. Curriculum and instructional planning were also concerns for beginning teachers. Similar teacher needs existed 10 years prior, according to Odell (1986), who categorized and ranked beginning teachers’ needs to include (a) system information, (b) resources and materials, (c) instructional, (d) emotional, (e) classroom management, (f) environment, and (g) demonstration teaching.

More recent studies substantiated familiar needs of beginning teachers. Wilkinson’s (1997) state-wide study focused on beginning teachers in Missouri. Results showed more than 93% of new teachers requested more help in locating curriculum
resources and supplies, 86% of new teachers showed concern over discipline, and 51% wanted more assistance creating lesson plans. Most importantly, according to Wilkinson, a staggering “90% of new teachers wanted assistance, but only 33% received such help” (p. 48). A study involving beginning teachers in West Virginia by McKee (1991) confirmed 84% wanted more assistance with instructional strategies, 82% with classroom management, and 76% with county policies.

Gordon and Maxey (2000) identified 12 priority needs for beginning teachers:

[1.] Managing the classroom.
[2.] Acquiring information about the school system.
[3.] Obtaining instructional resources and materials.
[4.] Planning, organizing, and managing instruction as well as other professional responsibilities.
[5.] Assessing students and evaluating student progress.
[6.] Motivating students.
[7.] Using effective teaching methods.
[8.] Dealing with individual students’ needs, interests, abilities, and problems.
[9.] Communicating with colleagues, including administrators, supervisors, and other teachers.
[10.] Communicating with parents.
[11.] Adjusting to the teaching environment and role.
[12.] Receiving emotional support. (p. 6)

Even with countless studies all corroborating teacher needs, administrators fail to acknowledge beginning teachers when planning mentoring activities. An effective mentoring program must account for the needs of beginning teachers beyond offering basic emotional support (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; McKee, 1991). Beginning teachers’ learning needs are not always met during preservice training or basic orientation sessions. Rather than viewing teachers’ needs as deficiencies, administrators should determine areas of concern to address specifically in mentoring programs. Purposeful mentoring could exist if general guidelines for mentoring activities were constructed based on identified new teacher needs (McKee). Asking new teachers for
input in a program directly affecting them seems obvious, but it is often overlooked.

Many skills cannot be learned prior to entering the classroom; therefore, it is important for administrators to reflect on new-teacher needs. The New Teacher Induction Study (Feiman-Nemser, 2003) brought principals, mentors, and new teachers from three induction programs together to discuss this issue. The findings of the study provided insight into both teacher needs and wants. Beginning teachers want activities geared toward curriculum instruction that address students’ needs. At the same time, they need to learn how to teach subject matter in varying approaches, how to fit into the school’s current culture, and be provided an opportunity of 3 to 4 years to achieve proficiency. Administrators must make a point to provide an environment of constant dialogue in order to promote support rather than create a sense of isolation.

A Need for Mentoring

A variety of factors serve as motivation for beginning teacher support. Offering support to beginning teachers provides an outlet for teachers to handle daily stresses, learn to teach effectively, and promote professional development. Possibly the most vital factor for teacher support is retention. High rates of attrition among beginning teachers, approximately twice the rate of experienced teachers, remains at the forefront of teacher support (Gold, 1996; Looney, 1997; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). The national cost of teacher attrition is staggering. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2005), citing data from the National Center for Education Statistics, estimated the nation spent $2.2 billion in 1999 to replace public school teachers who left the profession. The amount of money spent is only part of the problem when the nation strives to place and retain highly qualified teachers in all classrooms.

It is difficult to retain highly qualified teachers when academically talented
teachers leave the profession early in their careers (Gold, 1996; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Shen, 1997). Providing support through mentoring can aid in eliminating or lowering attrition rates and retaining teachers. School districts in New York and Ohio have reduced attrition rates by over two thirds simply by providing mentors to new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). The need for mentoring is evident, according to a study by Odell and Ferraro (1992), which focused on beginning elementary teachers 4 years after participating in a mentoring program. Results showed 96% of the teachers remained in the profession over the 4-year period and 80% envisioned themselves in the classroom for at least another 5 years. Odell and Ferraro posited mentors provide an emotional support that ultimately impacts teacher retention.

In order to develop and design mentoring activities that will benefit beginning teachers, administrators should first understand why so many teachers leave the profession after only one year. Ingersoll and Smith (2003), citing statistics from a 1994 Teacher Followup Survey, provided reasons for why beginning teachers are so dissatisfied with the profession. Aside from salary, the largest reasons involved student discipline problems, poor administrative support, lack of faculty influence, and inadequate time. Administrators lack control over teacher salaries, but they can increase support, provide more classroom supplies, and offer well-developed mentoring activities. If an increase in teacher support results in a decrease of teacher attrition, than mentoring is perhaps the most effective method of providing support.

Mentoring Beginning Teachers

It did not take policymakers and administrators long to realize and understand the value of mentoring in the teaching profession. Concerns over attrition rates and beginning teachers’ needs forged the way for a new form of support. Since the early 1980s, when
mentoring first appeared in schools, the number of mentoring programs has continued to increase. In 1996, more than 30 states had mandated some form of mentoring support as part of their new teacher induction programs (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Portner, 2003). Mentoring provides beginning teachers with an opportunity to enter the profession with guidance and support from a veteran teacher. According to Huling-Austin and Murphy (1987), “The assignment of a support teacher may well be the most powerful and cost-effective induction practice available to program developers” (pp. 35-36).

The term mentor originates from a character in Homer’s epic poem, *The Odyssey*, who was selected to guide, educate, and support Odysseus’ son Telemachus (Gold, 1996; Villani, 2002; Young & Wright, 2001). As the use of mentoring continued to increase, so too did the plethora of definitions surrounding the word. Healy and Welchert (1990) defined the *mentoring process* as a “dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career development of both” (p. 17). Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, and Niles (1992) more broadly defined a mentor as an experienced teacher who “can provide assistance tailored to the circumstances of beginning teachers in individual schools” (p. 205). Another definition by Young and Wright (2001) described mentoring as a process of “an integrated approach to advising, coaching, and nurturing, focused on creating a viable relationship to enhance individual career/personal/professional growth and development” (p. 203). Regardless of widely viewed definitions, mentoring remains a viable intervention to combat high attrition rates and beginning teachers’ concerns (Looney, 1997). It is necessary to examine the role of mentors and benefits to those involved in the mentoring process closely.
Role of the Mentor

Mentoring programs vary at the local, regional, and state levels. Mentors are frequently used in school districts to demonstrate a commitment to beginning teachers (M. Freiberg et al., 1994; Ganser, 1996). In the school setting, mentors receive training and incentives for participating in a program, and others are simply asked by administrators to volunteer for participation. In some cases, mentors are removed from daily teaching assignments to work full time on mentoring responsibilities (Ganser, 1995). It is vital to understand the role and importance of mentors in order to sustain a successful mentoring program.

A mentor’s responsibilities are more complex than simply offering emotional support to a beginning teacher. A mentor must be extensively familiar with curriculum content and effective instructional practices, possess an ability to collaborate with other adults positively, and remain current on educational issues and trends (Kyle, Moore, & Sanders, 1999). Mentors should also be familiar with the complex characteristics of the teaching profession, understand the stages of teacher development, acknowledge and incorporate innovative teaching strategies in their own classrooms, and understand what is taught in teacher preparation programs (Ganser, 1996). According to Jones, Reid, and Bevins (1997), mentors incorporate practical help such as the following:

[1.] Providing guidance.
[2.] Observing the teachers’ teaching and classroom management.
[3.] Providing feedback.
[4.] Enabling teachers’ understanding.
[5.] Helping with time management.
[6.] Providing encouragement.
[7.] Introducing teachers to whole school issues. (p. 255)

Villani (2002) described four main roles of a good mentor: (a) provide emotional support and encouragement, (b) provide information about the daily workings of the
school and cultural norms of the school community, (c) promote cultural proficiency regarding students and their families, and (d) provide cognitive coaching. Coaching is an important element in the mentoring process that allows the veteran and beginning teacher to self-reflect following nonjudgmental classroom observations. Ongoing coaching aids in moving beginning teachers beyond basic school orientation and toward more problem-solving and conflict-resolution strategies (Villani). According to Veenman et al. (1998), cognitive coaching positively affects “self-confidence, classroom management, teaching styles, self-awareness, and instructional dialogues with colleagues” (p. 6).

Equally important as the mentor’s role are characteristics and qualities of a good mentor. Effective mentors are typically involved in various school activities and staff development training programs, have experience working with student teachers, are well liked by other school personnel, and demonstrate the ability to work well with others (Jones et al., 1997; Kyle et al., 1999). Good mentors should not only want to learn for themselves but also to share their knowledge with others. In order to aid beginning teachers most successfully, mentors should be able to plan and implement meaningful lesson plans and impart best teaching practices. Rowley (2005) contended six essential qualities of high-performing mentor teachers include the following:

1. Committing to the roles and responsibilities of mentoring.
2. Accepting the beginning teacher as a developing person and professional.
3. Reflecting on interpersonal communication.
5. Modeling personal and professional growth.
6. Communicating hope and optimism for the future. (pp. 109-110)

Mentors rated their own helpful characteristics, according to DeBolt (1992), for their mentoring as the following:

1. Approachability.
2. Integrity.
3. Ability to listen.
4. Sincerity.
5. Willingness to spend time.
7. Teaching competence.
8. Trustworthiness.
9. Receptivity.
10. Willingness to work hard.
12. Confidence.
13. Commitment to the profession.
15. Experience in teaching.
16. Tactfulness.
17. Cooperativeness.
18. Flexibility.

The ultimate attribute of a successful mentor is believing learning can take place when colleagues put forth the effort to learn together (Portner, 2003).

Mentors rely on their positive attributes working closely with beginning teachers by utilizing formal and informal interventions. One of the more common interventions is observations. Mentors observe beginning teachers prior to a formal administrative evaluation (Gonzales & Salinas, 1993). Mentors use the information gathered from the observations to assist beginning teachers with classroom discipline and lesson planning.
and enhance instructional skills. It is just as valuable for beginning teachers to observe their mentors teach. Mentors are available to answer a variety of questions ranging from school policies to conducting parent conferences. Mentors can also provide a vast amount of resources and instructional materials, such as books, lesson plans, visuals, and equipment. In order for mentors and mentoring activities to be effective, proper and sufficient training must occur.

*Mentor Training*

Successful mentoring programs depend on highly trained and prepared mentors. It should never be assumed that veteran teachers are innately proficient in mentoring skills. Mentors are trained over a period of time and rely on continuous staff development opportunities and feedback from administrators, protégés, and other mentors (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Mills, Moore, & Keane, 2001). Villani (2002) stated, “Understanding about adult development, the needs of new teachers, and strategies that promote reflection and growth makes mentors more effective” (p. 14). It is imperative for training to occur before mentors meet with beginning teachers so that mentors enter their new role with confidence. Veteran teachers become effective mentors through training, not by chance (Portner, 2003).

The length and variety of mentor training vary among school districts, states, and universities. One successful mentoring program in Texas, the Tarleton Model for Accelerated Teacher Education, provides 12 hours of training in peer coaching, the needs of beginning teachers, and conferencing with beginning teachers (Littleton, Tally-Foos, & Wolaver, 1992). A 1988 survey of opinions of mentors in the Tarleton Model for Accelerated Teacher Education program found mentors wanted and needed more training in coaching for improvement of instruction, classroom management, and effective
teaching strategies (Littleton et al.). According to Mills et al. (2001), mentoring programs in Michigan provide professional development training for mentors pertaining to the following topics:

[1.] Methods for classroom management.
[2.] Student discipline.
[3.] Time management.
[4.] Assessment of student work.
[5.] Accommodating to varying levels of student needs in the classroom.

(p. 125)

The Teacher Induction Program in North Carolina provides inservice training in adult development, observation and coaching skills, and the mentor’s role (Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992).

Utilizing data from mentor teachers’ logs, Odell (as cited in Huling-Austin, 1992) suggested mentors need training relating to the workings of induction programs. Areas of training could include the school district’s needs and priorities, operating procedures, and philosophy. In addition, mentors would benefit from training on how to work with adult learners, conduct classroom observations, conference with new teachers, and foster self-esteem.

Providing mentor training can only aid in promoting helpful and productive mentoring relationships. According to a study by Veenman et al. (1998), programs designed to train teachers in skills needed to coach and mentor beginning teachers positively affected the coaching skills of the mentors. In fact, expert raters scored the trained mentors higher than the untrained mentors. Veenman et al. found explicit training allows mentors to “reflect on their actions in order to move them to higher levels of professional thinking” (p. 5). A similar study by Evertson and Smithey (2000) analyzed two groups of mentors: one group received a 4-day workshop training program, and the
second group received a 1-day orientation session. Study findings supported the importance of a mentor with the proper knowledge and skills of how to mentor. According to Evertson and Smithey, protégés of mentors receiving 4 days of training showed increased evidence of “developing and sustaining more workable classroom routines, managed instruction more smoothly, and gained student cooperation in academic tasks more effectively” (p. 314).

Even with necessary training and support, mentors and beginning teachers still face obstacles and concerns. At times, external or contextual conditions can detract from the mentoring relationship (Wildman et al., 1992). The more common contextual factors involve the school working environment. For instance, mentors and protégés may lack common available time to meet, teach different subject areas and grade levels, and not work in the same building or classrooms close to each other. This combination of obstacles prevents crucial mentoring interactions, especially at the beginning of the year when they are of utmost importance. If teaching different subjects and grade levels, mentors are less likely to provide vital instructional and curriculum expertise and knowledge. External conditions affecting the mentoring relationship include mentors’ numerous responsibilities that take time away from the beginning teachers and mentors’ personalities and emotional stability when interacting with beginning teachers (Wildman et al.).

A study by Ganser (1993) intended to add to the knowledge of the mentor’s role, mentoring benefits, and mentoring obstacles. Based on study findings, mentors discussed the following as the most common mentoring obstacles in rank order:

1. Lack of time for meetings, observations.
2. Personality conflicts between beginning teacher and mentor.
3. Lack of administrative support.
4. New role for mentor, lack of training.
5. Mismatch between beginning teacher and mentor in terms of teaching assignment.
6. Other personal or professional interference.
7. Lack of physical proximity to one another.
8. Goals of mentoring unclear, unrealistic.
9. Roles of beginning teacher and mentor unclear.
10. Aspects of university mentoring programs.
11. Low commitment of beginning teacher and/or mentor.
12. Negative attitude of other teachers or administrators toward mentoring.
14. Lack of incentives or rewards for mentor. (p. 20)

*Mentoring Benefits*

Regardless of any possible obstacles, well-planned mentoring programs involving trained mentors have a positive influence on beginning teachers, individual schools and students, and mentors as well. Mentoring benefits beginning teachers in numerous respects. Mentoring aids in eliminating feelings of isolation while providing emotional and instructional support. This leads to less stress and more confidence for the beginning teachers (Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). Mentoring also assists beginning teachers improve teaching practices through reflective conversations and activities. Perhaps most importantly, research by Holloway (2001) supported mentoring programs as an avenue for lowering attrition rates among beginning teachers.

Similar benefits are evident in varying mentor programs around the country. Storm, Wing, Junks, Banks, and Cavazos (as cited in Holloway, 2001) found beginning teachers participating in the California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers were able to improve lesson-planning skills and instructional practices through personal reflection. A 1989 study of the Tarleton Model for Accelerated Teacher Education program in Texas found 99% of mentors believed mentoring improved teacher instructions, and 64% of mentors believed mentored beginning teachers performed better.
than nonmentored beginning teachers (Littleton et al., 1992). Further benefits for beginning teachers include fitting into the school culture and learning about policies and procedures, receiving help in dealing with children, and providing a smoother transition from college to work (Ganser, 1993).

Beginning teachers are not the sole beneficiaries of mentoring programs and activities. Individual schools and students are positively affected by improved teaching practices and confident teachers. Colbert and Wolff (1992) studied the California New Teacher Project, which was established to provide models of beginning teacher support and assessment. Colbert and Wolff (1992) found participating beginning teachers used more effective instructional practices that “led to more learning opportunities for students and higher student engagement rates than no project participants” (p. 197). Beginning teachers receiving the most support were not afraid to use a variety of resources and more challenging lesson plans. Schaffer et al. (1992) agreed beginning teachers can learn effective teaching behaviors from mentors that increase student achievement. Such behaviors include minimizing classroom disruptions, maximizing instructional time, and thoughtful questioning and praise.

Perhaps the group often overlooked in the mentoring relationship is the mentors. Research by DeBolt (1991) supported the benefits that accrue to mentors. Mentoring provides challenges and excitement for veteran teachers who may be searching for new stimulation. Mentoring also creates incentives for veteran teachers to remain longer in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003). During the process of sharing knowledge with beginning teachers, mentors explore their own teaching practices for needed improvements or advancements. According to Wolman-Bonilla (1997), benefits for mentors include “(a) recognition of their expertise, (b) development of leadership skills,
(c) development of professional friendships, (d) opportunities to learn from newer teachers, and (e) the resulting tendency to reflect on established practices” (p. 50).

During interviews with 19 mentors in a Rhode Island public school district, Wolman-Bonilla (1997) discovered mentoring had contributed to the mentors’ professional development by (a) boosting self-esteem due to recognition, (b) reducing feelings of isolation, (c) reflecting on their own practice, and (d) learning from protégés. According to Wolman-Bonilla, the mentors “gained as much knowledge of teaching, learning, and professional behavior from their protégés as the protégés learned from the mentors’ knowledge of the culture and daily workings of the school” (p. 51). Simply stated, mentors receive as much as they provide for beginning teachers.

Pondering the vast array of benefits mentoring provides, three areas of importance cannot be overlooked. Classroom management, lesson-plan development, and effective instructional skills are top priorities on lists of beginning teachers’ needs and should be the main focus of mentoring programs. Research by Evertson and Smithey (2000) supported beginning teachers participating in mentoring programs with well-trained mentors can balance the many demands of the profession while establishing classroom management practices, valuable lesson plans, and effective teaching skills. It is, therefore, necessary to examine research in these three areas.

Classroom Management

Teachers are in the spotlight every moment they are in the classroom environment. The classroom is dynamic with constant human interactions, daily routines, students’ responses, and instruction. Above all, the classroom environment is unpredictable. Such chaos can often lead to classroom discipline problems, especially in classrooms where students are not involved or are uninterested in the curriculum.
Establishing and maintaining classroom management is a top priority of beginning teachers; however, competency and comfort levels are usually developed with experience on the job and subsequent years in the profession (Tauber, 1999). As beginning teachers are left isolated and scared in their classrooms, they are forced to learn classroom management skills on their own. Beginning teachers must learn how to prevent discipline problems before they occur, yet many report maintaining discipline is their most serious problem (Ryan, 1992). Classroom management is vital for beginning teachers to establish on the first day of school because how a teacher manages the classroom is the primary determinant of how well students will learn. Wong and Wong (1998) said, “Student achievement at the end of the year is directly related to the degree to which the teacher establishes good control of the classroom procedures in the very first week of the school year” (p. 4).

Too often, beginning teachers view classroom management as completely losing control of the classroom or only dealing with individual students’ misbehavior. Training is necessary to demonstrate to beginning teachers classroom management is a continuous process that accommodates all students in a complex social setting during an extended learning period (Cangelosi, 1987). A majority of student misbehavior can be avoided if expectations and management routines are established at the beginning of the school year. Brainard (2001) said, “Effective classroom management involves teacher attitude and desire, setting of expectations, and positive action” (p. 207). Sound discipline creates a positive classroom environment that ultimately leads to student learning (Alderman, 2001; Brainard, 2001; Simplicio, 1999). The first step is to train beginning teachers on how to establish effective management routines.

Management routines. It is not enough for teachers to simply tell students what
the classroom rules and procedures are, but they need to teach students how and why to follow them. Management routines are established not only to improve behavior but also manage materials, classroom instruction, and student participation in the learning process (Rademacher, Callahan, & Pederson-Seelye, 1998). As part of a management routine, a teacher continuously monitors classroom behaviors related to class rules and policies. Effective management routines require planning, teaching, and evaluating. According to Rademacher et al.,

> when planning, it is important to (a) create well-designed rules based on cooperative and productive learning behavior; (b) identify specific student behaviors for rule compliance; (c) define teacher responsibilities for rule compliance; (d) establish logical negative consequences for noncompliance and positive reinforcers for rule compliance; and (e) create communication links among teachers, students, and parents. (pp. 284-285)

The planning stage also involves reflection and anticipation (Campbell, 1999). Teachers can reflect on previous experiences in order to determine any possible problems that may arise during the current school year. Anticipating the arrangement of seats, procedure for collecting student work, and various transitions throughout the class period aids in preparing teachers for a successful and effectively functioning classroom. Planning also requires teachers to consider the types of students entering the classroom and natural balance of the room. For instance, the ages and ability levels of the students will play a role in establishing rules and procedures. Just as important are the seating arrangements, traffic patterns, and accessibility to workstations or textbooks (Campbell). Planning also includes the teacher’s behavior expectations and enforcement of these expectations (Petterle, 1997).

During the teaching or instructional phase of management routines, teachers must determine how students will obtain a clear understanding of class rules and procedures.
The first step is for teachers to provide a direct explanation of the rule routine. Teachers then provide a rationale for each class rule with a clarification for positive and negative consequences of each behavior. Next, teachers should demonstrate and model the rules consistently throughout the school year. It may be necessary to role-play with students or conduct practice activities until the students become competent following the rules. Last, teachers should utilize feedback that is positive and corrective in order to encourage students to remain successful in the future (Rademacher et al., 1998).

The evaluation stage involves a constant monitoring of student progress. The best method for tracking behavior patterns is utilizing records or log sheets (Petterle, 1997; Rademacher et al., 1998). After several weeks of monitoring behavior, teachers will notice patterns of individual students, number of infractions per day or week, and the total number of violations of each classroom rule. Tracking behavior trends and tendencies allows teachers to make adjustments or reteach rules and procedures. Evaluating progress is key for maintaining a successful management routine that produces classroom discipline (Rademacher et al.).

*Good discipline.* One component of an effective management routine is classroom discipline. Beginning teachers struggle with the basics of classroom discipline and rely on common errors to survive their first year in the classroom. There are six basic rules to establishing classroom discipline that will assist any new teachers (Alderman, 2001). The first is to establish public rules but discipline students in private. When a teacher publicly addresses a misbehaving student, the teacher disrupts all students and can easily engage in a power struggle. Whenever possible, the teacher should speak to the misbehaving student quietly at his or her desk or outside of the classroom. Second, a teacher should emphasize a rule but not the problem behaviors. Rather than reprimanding students for
speaking out of turn, a teacher should remind students of the class rule to raise their hands and wait for permission to speak. The third rule involves using voice as a discipline tool. Teachers who raise their voices and even scream at their students are less effective classroom managers. Over time, students will become conditioned not to respond, and teachers will speak louder and louder. Instead, teachers should maintain a steady and firm tone and continue to rely on private interventions.

The fourth rule is to utilize more positive than negative consequences. According to Alderman (2001), teachers using four times as many positive consequences are more effective and retain more self-control in the classroom. Relying heavily on negative consequences could result in passive-aggressive student behavior. The fifth rule is to target specific behaviors. It is difficult for teachers to correct too many behaviors at once or even be too general when correcting behaviors. The best method is to focus on one or two behaviors for correction and improvement. Last, teachers can prevent discipline problems by circulating around the classroom. Students are less likely to break a rule when the teacher is in close proximity and using low-profile private interventions.

Part of establishing and maintaining good classroom discipline is self-evaluation. Teachers should take time to assess and reflect upon their own classroom management skills. Four areas of assessment include relating to students in a positive manner, preventing student misbehavior, handling student discipline situations, and providing classroom leadership (Brainard, 2001). Simple ways to relate positively to students are to

1. Greet students at the door prior to each class.
2. Encourage appropriate behavior.
3. Try to relate to each student in a supportive manner.
4. Praise students for good work.
5. Treat each student with kindness and respect.

Teachers can prevent student misbehavior by

1. Using preventative discipline and identifying problems before they develop.
2. Providing at least one activity in which all students can experience success.
3. Providing a variety of learning activities.
4. Adjusting lessons to account for students’ span of attention and life situations.
5. Correcting student misbehavior in a positive, private, and respectful manner.

Suggestions for handling student discipline situations include

1. Thinking through discipline decisions before acting.
2. Only making discipline decisions that can be enforced.
3. Seeking assistance from administrators before allowing misbehavior problems to become acute.

Suggestions for providing classroom leadership include

1. Establishing time-saving routines for collecting papers and distributing materials.
2. Giving directions one step at a time and keeping them brief and concise.
3. Varying teaching methods and learning activities.
4. Remaining patient with students and reteaching concepts.
5. Involving students in setting learning goals for teaching.

If teachers consistently self-evaluate their own classroom management skills and develop and implement effective management routines, their students and classrooms will flourish. This means discipline problems can usually be prevented (Campbell, 1999).

Lesson-Plan Development

Educators, especially beginning teachers, are required to cover an increasing
amount of material in their classrooms. This ranges from county-required curriculum to benchmarks covered on state standardized tests to daily life and career skills. As beginning teachers attempt to plan lessons to cover all necessary material, they must also consider students’ various learning levels and even language and cultural backgrounds. The reality is beginning teachers are unprepared and lack a repertoire of teaching strategies (H. Freiberg, 2002). Beginning teachers will spend more time planning lessons than veteran teachers, but mentors can help new teachers plan more effectively. Planning lessons involves organizing materials, varying methods of instruction, assessing student knowledge, and creating lessons for a diverse group of learners.

*Lesson-plan strategies.* Organizing lessons includes the initial planning stage as well as coordinating the lesson design and pacing of activities. Organizing strategies are usually the most difficult to master for beginning teachers (H. Freiberg, 2002). The first step in planning lessons is to determine the outcome or objective of the lesson. Even before presenting the lesson, the teacher should anticipate his or her teaching and the students’ responses. Once teaching begins, a lesson may be changed or adjusted to reflect students’ needs or responses. For instance, students may not be engaged or may find the lesson too easy or difficult. The teacher needs to be able to make instant modifications.

At the completion of each lesson, the teacher should assess what went well and what changes should be made for future instruction. According to H. Freiberg and Driscoll (2000), effective lessons should include the following components: (a) focus, (b) objective, (c) explanation, (d) check for understanding, (e) guided practice, (f) individual practice, and (g) closure.

Varying methods of instruction is just as vital as the early planning stages especially in a technologically based world. Students want to be entertained, and teachers
compete with the Internet and other technological devices for students’ time and attention (Simplicio, 2000). Teachers must be well prepared in order to develop and incorporate exciting and innovative lessons. Beginning teachers rely on teacher-centered instructional strategies, such as teacher lectures. During times of stress or pressure, new teachers tend to revert back to these lessons. When beginning teachers are trained and feel more confident, they are capable of creating more student-centered lessons, such as class discussion, cooperative learning groups, and research projects (H. Freiberg, 2002). Student-centered lessons force students to become active participants in the learning process.

Once planned lessons are implemented, teachers must decide how to assess student learning. As with lesson planning, most beginning teachers have a limited repertoire of assessment strategies (H. Freiberg, 2002). Beginning teachers tend to limit assessment to multiple-choice and short-answer essay tests. Assessments should be varied according to students’ learning abilities. This means teachers should develop creative and flexible assessment instruments (Simplicio, 2000). Writing portfolios, research projects, and even lab experiments demonstrate student learning. According to Simplicio (2002), simply by “changing how they teach, what material they use in their teaching, and how they assess what their students have learned, teachers infuse their classrooms with excitement, curiosity, and most of all creativity” (p. 678).

Planning for diverse learners. Today’s beginning teachers must contend with more than just varying learning styles and multiple intelligences. Although there is value in knowing the learning styles of each student in class, it is even more valuable for teachers to become familiar with all aspects of the students’ lives. Teachers interact with students from neglectful and unstable homes who lack energy to learn, whose parents
cannot afford to buy basic school supplies, and who are too hungry to concentrate (Ebeling, 2000). Teachers must be reminded of each individual student in the class when developing lesson plans. According to Ebeling, teachers can follow four steps to adapt lessons to increase the chance more students will learn.

The first step is to plan lessons for the entire class. Before teachers can adapt the lesson, there must be a lesson with which to begin. This involves writing down what will be taught, the area of curriculum, time involved for the lesson, and the objective or outcome of the lesson. Teachers should also write down the strategies and methods used to teach the lesson. The second step is to consider the lesson plan in terms of specific learners. Teachers must determine if any students in the class would fail to learn the material and identify these students and list their names for further adaptations. The third step is for teachers to analyze the lesson and specific learners looking for ways to adapt their teaching. For example, the size, time, or complexity of the lesson could be adapted. Last, Step 4 involves observing the effectiveness of the lesson adaptations. During and after the lesson, teachers should assess whether or not lesson adaptations increased student learning. Further customization may be necessary with certain students (Ebeling, 2000).

Mastery of effective lesson planning and instruction requires training and observation. Beginning teachers should view lessons from other teachers in order to gain new perspectives and insights on how to develop innovative lesson plans. Mentors can share their own expertise and ideas with beginning teachers, and administrators can provide meaningful staff development training for both new and veteran teachers (Simplicio, 2000). The outcome of well-developed and implemented lesson plans is better skilled and behaved students. Carefully planning classroom lessons and activities
of a lesson and the more precise the directions on what is to be accomplished, the higher
the achievement rate” (p. 209).

Effective Instructional Skills

The concept of teacher effectiveness is difficult to define and understand in the
light of schools in the 21st century. Changes in technology, public accountability,
demanding educational tasks and complex goals, and expanding and challenging roles for
teachers all add to the murkiness surrounding the term effective teaching (Cheng & Tsui,
1999). The more parents and politicians demand high-quality education, the more
effective teaching is thrown into the spotlight. When evaluating what constitutes effective
teaching, it is important to consider more than just teacher behaviors or skills. Research
related to teaching models and teacher artistry should also be analyzed.

Effective teaching behaviors. Previous research on effective teachers focused on
the connection between teacher personalities and student achievement (Borich, 1988;
Getzels & Jackson, 1963). Over time, more interest developed in relation to teacher
behaviors and their correlation with student success. A 1980 study by Powell (as cited in
Harris, 1998) found student achievement occurred more frequently in classrooms with
organized teachers who maximized instructional time with students. A clear presentation,
feedback, and effective questioning also affect student learning. According to Doyle (as
cited in Harris), students achieve more when teachers emphasize direct instruction. Such
instruction may include clearly emphasizing academic goals and what students are to
learn as well as frequently asking direct and specific questions to monitor students’
progress and correcting mistakes. In addition, students achieve more when teachers
review regularly and provide feedback to ensure success.
Effective teaching skills are just as important as teacher behaviors. Complex skills are necessary for developing and teaching lessons and facilitating student learning. Three important skills are knowledge, decision making, and action (Harris, 1998). First and foremost, teachers must possess knowledge in the subject area taught and curriculum used in teaching. Teachers should also be good decision makers before, during, and after a lesson to ensure objectives were met. Action includes the behaviors used by teachers to foster student learning. Mortimore (as cited in Harris) narrowed effective teaching into seven skills, including (a) organizational, (b) analytical, (c) synthesizing, (d) presentational, (e) assessing, (f) managerial, and (g) evaluative.

*Effective teaching models and artistry.* Research by Cheng and Tsui (1999) included seven models of teacher effectiveness. Each model emphasizes factors related to teacher performance and effectiveness. The seven models include (a) goal and task, which emphasizes teachers’ personal achievement goals and tasks and school goals; (b) resource utilization, which requires teachers’ effective use and procuration of school resources to achieve goals; (c) process, which stresses teachers’ contributions to effective teaching and school process; (d) school constituencies satisfaction, which expects teachers to meet the needs of their students, parents, school, and community; (e) accountability, which focuses on teachers’ accountability and professional reputation; (f) absence of problems, which requires teachers to identify and avoid potential problems, weakness, dysfunction, and crisis; and (g) continuous learning, which emphasizes teachers’ awareness of environmental changes and continuous improvement and development. It is important for beginning teachers to focus on identifying their own problems and weaknesses for improvement, rather than on excellence in performance (Cheng & Tsui).
Teacher behaviors, skills, and even models can be learned in teacher training programs, college classrooms, or through years of experience. One unique area of teacher effectiveness is teacher artistry. Artistry recognizes a teacher’s creativity and personal activity (Harris, 1998). More specifically, according to Harris, it characterizes a “highly personalized and individualistic approach to the study of teaching” (p. 179). A teacher who provides effective teaching in a classroom where effective learning takes place exhibits artistry. Rubin (1985) stated,

There is a striking quality to fine classrooms. Pupils are caught up in learning; excitement abounds; and playfulness and seriousness blend easily because the purposes are clear, the goals sensible, and an unmistakable feeling of well-being prevails. Artist teachers achieve these qualities by knowing both their subject matter and their students; by guiding the learning with deft control—a control that itself is born out of perception, intuition, and creative impulse. (p. v)

Effective teaching encompasses a variety of behaviors, skills, models, and styles. Effective teaching also requires a commitment to teaching, students, the school, and local community. Effective teachers seek continuous improvement, constant reflection, and professional development opportunities. Glasser (1990) indicated creative teachers are never satisfied and explore alternative strategies to lead to greater success; effective teaching is perhaps the “most difficult job of all in our society” (p. 14).

Summary

The implications of this literature review involve an increased production among beginning teachers as well as a possible increase in teacher retention with the addition of a mentoring program. Mentors provide a valuable and necessary service for beginning teachers that benefits teachers, students, and the school community. According to Wong (2005), teachers “want training, they want to fit in, and they want their students to learn and achieve” (p. 45). Even if teachers earned degrees and are certified in their subject
areas, school officials must realize there is still so much more to learn once the job begins. It should never be assumed that beginning teachers enter the classroom with all the necessary knowledge to achieve optimal performance. Based on literature findings, there is too much information for beginning teachers to learn, digest, and become comfortable with in a short period of time. Teaching is a profession that involves constant learning, growth, and self-assessment.

Research (Alderman, 2001; Ebeling, 2000) also supported the necessity of good classroom management and lesson-plan development in order to obtain and maintain student achievement. Effective teachers are able to maximize student learning by utilizing adapted lessons that meet all students’ needs. When students are engaged and empowered by creative and meaningful activities, they are well behaved and rarely disruptive. Classroom management and lesson-plan development are two areas of significant concern for beginning teachers. Mentors’ advice and expertise in these areas are vital for beginning teachers. Ultimately, beginning teachers receiving support are more likely to remain and succeed in the profession. Villani (2002) stated mentoring programs that “emphasize long-term support and focus on instructional practice through cognitive coaching, the benefits of role-taking, and reflection to new teacher and veteran teachers are likely to be significant” (p. 25).
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The overall goals and objectives of teacher mentoring programs, providing new teachers with guidance, typically remain constant in school districts across the nation. The mentoring program models and activities often widely vary. For instance, some mentoring programs involve a single meeting between a beginning teacher and mentor, other programs function for a full year, and some programs are highly structured to include frequent meetings and support over several years. It is also important to consider whether a mentoring program is voluntary or mandatory and is provided for only first-year teachers or any new teachers to the school district. Although numerous studies have been conducted on mentoring programs over the past two decades, according to Ingersoll and Kralik (2004), there is still a need “for assessment of the existing empirical research on teacher induction and mentoring in order to determine its scope and merit, and the conclusions that may be drawn from it” (Introduction section, ¶ 12).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ knowledge of effective teaching practices and their perceptions of the quality of the NESS activities. Specifically, this study was intended to address the effectiveness of the mentoring program based on the beginning teachers’ personal experiences in relation to classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and effective instructional skills. Based on study findings, recommendations were provided by the researcher to ensure the mentoring program was aiding in the beginning teachers’ effective teaching practices.

This research study utilized a mixed-methods approach to address the quantitative and qualitative research questions. Creswell (2003) stated, “The advantages of collecting
both closed-ended quantitative data and open-ended qualitative data prove advantageous
to best understand a research problem” (p. 22). Based on this study’s purpose, it proved
useful to first survey beginning teachers and follow-up by interviewing teachers to “elicit
views and opinions” (p. 188) as recommended by Creswell. More specifically, the
researcher selected to use the sequential explanatory strategy mixed-methods approach.
Following this strategy, the researcher collected quantitative data first followed by the
qualitative data. The two methods were integrated and interpreted together. Creswell
stated, “The purpose of this sequential explanatory design typically is to use qualitative
results to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of a primarily quantitative
study” (p. 215). This chapter identifies the study participants, describes the data-gathering
instruments, and describes the data-collection procedures.

Participants

The target population for this study was secondary educators (Grades 9-12) in a
south Florida high school. The participants in this study were selected based on the
following criteria: (a) they are beginning teachers in their first 3 years of teaching in the
school district and (b) they are currently completing or have previously completed the
NESS program. The school’s principal identified all potential teachers on his staff who
matched these criteria. Based on school data, 40 teachers were invited to participate in the
study. Participation in the study remained anonymous and completely voluntary.

The 40 participants were diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity. Twenty
participants were male, and 20 were female. Although several of the participants were
recent college graduates, a majority of the participants were transfers from school
systems in other states or teachers changing professions. The participants taught a variety
of subject areas and grade levels. Of the 40 teachers, 20 teachers completed the
anonymous survey, and 15 participated in interviews.

**Instruments**

The researcher developed the survey instrument and interview guide used in this study. The researcher utilized Domains 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 from the NESS instructional coach observation forms in addition to information gathered from the literature review in the development of the survey instrument. The study’s three quantitative research questions are reflected in the three sections of the survey instrument, including (a) classroom management, (b) lesson-plan development, and (c) effective instructional skills. The New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument (see Appendix A) consisted of 28 Likert-scale statements that included the following response choices: *did not help* = 1, *helped a little* = 2, *helped somewhat* = 3, and *helped a lot* = 4. Demographic questions on the survey instrument included gender, age, education level, years teaching, subject area taught, and grade level taught. The New Educator Effective Teaching Practice Instrument served as an inexpensive method to collect data, ensuring anonymity and encouraging more honest responses.

In order to increase validity of the survey instrument, the researcher asked five veteran teachers with similar experiences to the participants to review a copy of the survey instrument. The veteran teachers were asked to comment on the construction of questions, which allowed the researcher to determine if questions were consistently understood. The survey questions also clearly specified the content to be measured, which included classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and effective instructional skills. Last, according to Salvia and Ysseldyke (2004), valid tests are reliable, and the researcher tested for reliability.

In order to increase reliability, a test-retest was conducted utilizing the same five
veteran teachers. The five veteran teachers were asked to respond to the survey statements. Approximately one week later, they were asked to respond in the same manner. Such a procedure allowed the researcher to determine a reliability coefficient, which, according to Salvia and Ysseldyke (2004), “indicates the proportions of variability in a set of scores that reflects true differences among individuals” (p. 122). In this test-retest procedure, two equivalent forms of the survey existed; therefore, the results from these tests were tabulated utilizing Pearson’s correlation coefficient between scores to determine the reliability coefficient of the survey instrument. Correlation coefficients for the five test-retests were .776, .757, .849, .730, and .788. Correlation coefficients of .700 or higher are considered to be an acceptable reliability coefficient (Salvia & Ysseldyke).

The researcher also created the interview guide (see Appendix B) utilized in this study. The interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions reflecting the study’s two qualitative research questions. Conducting interviews allowed for clarification based on the survey results and provided relevant data in relation to what resources would best fit the beginning teachers’ needs. During each interview, participants were given enough time to elicit honest and thoughtful responses. In order to increase content validity and reliability of the interview guide, the researcher conducted practice interviews with five different veteran teachers. Based on the veteran teachers’ feedback and recommendations, the researcher made any necessary revisions to the questions.

Procedures

This study utilized a similar data-gathering and data-analysis process for all three quantitative research questions. Participants shared their views regarding the helpfulness of NESS on both a survey and during interviews, which provided insight into the study’s two qualitative research questions.
Quantitative data. Data collection commenced following approval from the school district’s Institutional Review Board and Nova Southeastern University’s Institutional Review Board. During the eighth month of the 2007-2008 school year, the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument was distributed to participants. The same procedures were followed for all three quantitative research questions. Research Question 1 was designed to determine the impact of NESS activities on beginning teachers’ classroom management skills as reflected in Section I of the survey instrument. Research Question 2 was designed to determine the impact of NESS activities on beginning teachers’ lesson-plan development as reflected in Section II of the survey instrument. Finally, Research Question 3 was designed to determine the impact of NESS activities on beginning teachers’ effective instructional skills as reflected in Section III of the survey instrument.

All potential participants received an e-mail message (see Appendix C) inviting them to participate in the study, while also introducing the research study and its purpose. The e-mail informed participants of the specific time period data collection would occur. The survey instrument was then placed in each participant’s personal mailbox along with a brief set of instructions and consent form. A large envelope was stored in the researcher’s personal mailbox for collection of completed surveys. Approximately one week after distribution, the surveys were collected from the envelope. All surveys were not returned; therefore, a reminder e-mail was sent to all participants in an attempt to garner 100% participation. Approximately one week after sending the e-mail reminder, any remaining surveys were collected from the envelope in the researcher’s personal mailbox.

During the collection and analysis of data, it is important to maintain
confidentiality. Sieber (1998) said, “The researcher must employ adequate safeguards of confidentiality” (p. 141). Confidentiality was addressed in the study’s participation letter. The participation letter ensured participants that no names would be used in collecting or transcribing survey data, which would eliminate the link between the participants and data information. During the data-collection and data-analysis time periods, all survey instruments were stored and reviewed only in the researcher’s home. Data information was only reviewed by the researcher and dissertation committee members.

Once all data collection was complete, a descriptive survey research design was utilized in this study. This method was selected in order to distribute the survey instrument and analyze the descriptive statistics to respond to each section of the survey instrument. More specifically, the same analysis procedures were used for each of the three quantitative research questions, which are reflected in the three sections of the survey instrument. The data collected from each section of the survey instrument was placed into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 13.0) database. Descriptive statistics were used to respond to each research question. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003), descriptive statistics are “mathematical techniques for organizing and summarizing a set of numerical data” (p. 131). Utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences database, the researcher calculated the frequencies and equivalent percentages of each statement within each corresponding section of the survey instrument. The mean for each survey question was also determined. This allowed the researcher to determine the beginning teachers’ perceived impact of NESS activities on their classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and effective instructional skills.

Qualitative data. The study’s two qualitative research questions were addressed
by using an interview guide consisting of 10 open-ended questions. The researcher introduced and explained the need for interview participants at the same time the survey instrument was introduced. Following analysis of the survey data, this researcher invited all 40 eligible teachers to participate via an e-mail message. Eligible participants must have been willing to have their responses tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and summarized in the research document. Fifteen of the 40 teachers agreed to participate in the interviews. All interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and took place at an agreed-upon location within the school setting. To ensure accuracy and validity, all interviews were conducted by the researcher using tape recording and researcher transcription.

Maintaining confidentiality of interview data was also important. Those electing to participate were provided a written consent form guaranteeing confidentiality and authorizing the tape recording and transcription of the interview. Information shared during the interviews was presented as part of the research only in summarized form. No one person’s responses could be identified. During the collection and analysis of interview data, all materials and tape recordings were stored and reviewed in the researcher’s home only. Data information was only reviewed by the researcher and dissertation committee members.

In order to analyze the interview data, the researcher first transcribed all interview tape recordings. Transcriptions of participants’ responses were searched for themes and commonalities in the perceptions of beginning teachers regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the NESS activities. The emerging themes were organized into categories. Conclusions were drawn from the emerging categories to draw answers for the two qualitative research questions.
Summary

This chapter presented a description of the mixed-methods approach of this study to examine the impact of NESS activities on beginning teachers’ effective teaching practices, specifically regarding classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and effective instructional skills. In order to assess the beginning teachers’ perceptions of the NESS activities, the researcher developed a survey that was distributed to 40 secondary teachers and an interview guide. This chapter also identified study participants and explained the data-gathering and data-analysis process.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ knowledge of effective teaching practices and their perceptions of the quality of the NESS activities. Specifically, the study was intended to address the effectiveness of the mentoring program based on the beginning teachers’ personal experiences in relation to classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and effective instructional skills.

Data were collected through the use of surveys and face-to-face interviews. Surveys were distributed to 40 beginning teachers with a return rate of 20 surveys (50%). Interviews were conducted with 15 beginning teachers. The interviews were conducted at the participants’ school site at an agreed-upon location. The average length of each interview was 20 minutes. An overview of participants’ demographic data is presented in Appendix D.

The results of this study were organized according to the research questions. Data from the three quantitative research questions are discussed in the text and summarized in Tables 1-3 and Appendixes E-G. Data from the two qualitative research questions are presented based on the themes and categories that emerged during the interviews.

Quantitative Research

Research Question 1 asked, what is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ classroom management skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument? Data were collected from 20 beginning teachers. The survey used a 4-point Likert-type scale, which was 1 = did not help, 2 = helped a little, 3 = helped somewhat, and 4 = helped a lot.
Research Question 1 correlated with Section I of the survey instrument, which consisted of eight survey items. The maximum score a teacher could obtain for Research Question 1 was 32 points. The minimum score was 8 points. For example, if a teacher circled *did not help* for each of the eight statements in Section I of the survey, 8 points were awarded to the teacher. If the teacher circled *helped a lot* for each of the eight statements in Section I of the survey, 32 points were awarded. The lowest score was 8, and the highest score was 32, which is a range of 24. The mean score for teachers in Section I of the survey was 21.25 with a standard deviation of 7.67.

The data were further analyzed to determine the frequencies and percentages for the results of each of the eight survey questions in Section I (see Appendix E). This information was used to understand better the impact of NESS activities on beginning teachers’ classroom management as perceived by the beginning teachers. Based on results, beginning teachers circled *helped a lot* most frequently in relation to “praising students who are on task” (35%). Beginning teachers circled *helped somewhat* most frequently in relation to “identifying and correcting potential behavioral problems before they develop” (40%), “disciplining students in private and remaining on task during class time” (40%), “praising students individually or as a group using specific conduct” (35%), and “developing class rules and defining desired behaviors and class expectations” (35%). Beginning teachers circled *helped a little* most frequently in relation to “specifying, clarifying, and practicing class rules, while reprimanding rule infractions” (30%). Beginning teachers were evenly split on the helpfulness of NESS activities in relation to “controlling class reactions to misconduct” (25%).

The data were also analyzed to determine the mean and standard deviation for each of the eight survey items in Section I (see Table 1). The lowest mean was 2.50 for
both “controlling class reaction to misconduct” and “identifying and correcting potential behavioral problems before they develop” with a standard deviation of 1.14. The highest mean was 2.85 for “praising students who are on-task” with a standard deviation of 1.04.

Table 1

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Classroom Management Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Developing class rules and defining desired behaviors and class expectations</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Specifying, clarifying, and practicing class rules, while reprimanding rule infractions</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Desisting students causing class disruptions and suggest alternative behavior</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Controlling class reactions to misconduct</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Identifying and correcting potential behavioral problems before they develop</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Praising students individually or as a group using specific conduct</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Praising students who are on task</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Disciplining students in private and remaining on task during class time</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, of the 20 beginning teachers who completed the survey, 57% perceived NESS activities helped their classroom management somewhat or helped a lot, and 43% perceived NESS activities did not help or only helped a little. All eight items of Section I on the survey instrument had an overall mean of 2.65. Data showed that
beginning teachers perceived NESS activities to have a moderate impact on their classroom management skills.

Research Question 2 asked, what is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ lesson-plan development as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument? Data were collected from 20 beginning teachers. The survey used a 4-point Likert-type scale, which was 1 = *did not help*, 2 = *helped a little*, 3 = *helped somewhat*, and 4 = *helped a lot*.

Research Question 2 correlated with Section II of the survey instrument, which consisted of 10 survey items. The maximum score a teacher could obtain for Research Question 2 was 40 points. The minimum score was 10 points. For example, if a teacher circled *did not help* for each of the 10 statements in Section II of the survey, 10 points were awarded to the teacher. If the teacher circled *helped a lot* for each of the 10 statements in Section II of the survey, 40 points were awarded. The lowest score was 10, and the highest score was 40, which is a range of 30. The mean score for teachers in Section II of the survey was 23.35 with a standard deviation of 8.89.

The data were further analyzed to determine the frequencies and percentages for the results of each of the 10 survey questions in Section II (see Appendix F). This information was used to understand better the impact of NESS activities on beginning teachers’ lesson-plan development as perceived by the beginning teachers. Based on results, beginning teachers circled *helped somewhat* most frequently in relation to “identifying state standards and developing learner objectives, both general and specific” (45%); “separating learning activities into components while pacing the activities appropriately” (40%); and “listing the necessary materials and preparing materials in advance” (30%). Beginning teachers circled *helped a little* most frequently in relation to
“identifying a student’s level and selecting lessons based upon the student’s needs” (45%), “evaluating whether students have mastered the set objective(s)” (50%), “separating content into distinct elements or parts and specifying amount of time needed for each component” (40%), “selecting activities and judging appropriateness of the activities” (35%), “organizing the class effectively for instructional activity” (30%), and “judging appropriateness of materials based on student’s level and the content to be learned” (35%). Beginning teachers believed NESS activities both helped a little and helped somewhat (30%) with “judging appropriateness of content based on student’s level.” Beginning teachers did not circle a high frequency of helped a lot for Section II of the survey.

The data were also analyzed to determine the mean and standard deviation for each of the 10 survey items in Section II (see Table 2). The lowest mean was 2.20 for both “evaluating whether students have mastered the set objective(s)” with a standard deviation of .89 and “separating content into distinct elements or parts and specifying amount of time needed for each component” with a standard deviation of .95. The highest mean was 2.60 for “identifying state standards and developing learner objectives, both general and specific” with a standard deviation of .94.

In summary, of the 20 beginning teachers who completed the survey, 57% perceived NESS activities did not help or only helped a little in their lesson-plan development, and 43% perceived NESS activities helped somewhat or a lot. All 10 items of Section II on the survey instrument had an overall mean of 2.35. Data showed that beginning teachers perceived NESS activities to have a low to moderate impact on their lesson-plan development.

Research Question 3 asked, what is the impact of the NESS activities on the
beginning teachers’ instructional skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument? Data were collected from 20 beginning teachers. The survey used a 4-point Likert-type scale, which was $1 = \text{did not help}$, $2 = \text{helped a little}$, $3 = \text{helped somewhat}$, and $4 = \text{helped a lot}$.

Table 2

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Lesson-plan Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Identifying state standards and developing learner objectives, both general and specific</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Identifying a student’s level and selecting lessons based upon student’s needs</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Evaluating whether students have mastered the set objective(s)</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Judging appropriateness of content based on student’s level</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Separating content into distinct elements or parts and specifying amount of time needed for each component</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Selecting activities and judging appropriateness of the activities</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Separating learning activities into components while pacing the activities appropriately</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Organizing the class effectively for instructional activity</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Listing the necessary materials and preparing materials in advance</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Judging appropriateness of materials based on student’s level and the content to be learned</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3 correlated with Section III of the survey instrument, which consisted of 10 survey items. The maximum score a teacher could obtain for Research Question 1 was 40 points. The minimum score was 10 points. For example, if a teacher circled did not help for each of the 10 statements in Section III of the survey, 10 points were awarded to the teacher. If the teacher circled helped a lot for each of the 10 statements in Section III of the survey, 40 points were awarded. The lowest score was 10, and the highest score was 40, which is a range of 30. The mean score for teachers in Section III of the survey was 27.85 with a standard deviation of 10.02.

The data were further analyzed to determine the frequencies and percentages for the results of each of the 10 survey questions in Section III (see Appendix G). This information was used to understand better the impact of NESS activities on beginning teachers’ effective teaching skills as perceived by the beginning teachers. Based on results, beginning teachers circled helped a lot most frequently in relation to “conducting a lesson initiating review, summary of the lesson, and review at the end of the lesson” (40%); “questioning students’ comprehension using high- and low-order questions” (40%); “utilizing various instructional techniques to promote higher student achievement” (35%); and “circulating and assisting students” (40%). Beginning teachers circled helped somewhat most frequently in relation to “beginning class promptly with a clear purpose” (40%), “orienting students to classwork and specifying purpose of activities” (40%), “providing corrective feedback for incorrect responses” (40%), “evaluating students’ learning in order to appropriately adapt teaching to increase likelihood of student understanding” (40%), and “using positive rather than negative reinforcements” (40%). Beginning teachers were split in relation to “providing students with relevant activities and attending to students’ needs” with both helped a lot and
helped somewhat circled at the same frequency (30%). Beginning teachers did not circle a high frequency of did not help and helped a little for Section III of the survey.

Data were also analyzed to determine the mean and standard deviation for each of the 10 survey items in Section III (see Table 3). The lowest mean was 2.55 for “evaluating students’ learning in order to appropriately adapt teaching to increase likelihood of student understanding” with a standard deviation of 1.09. The highest mean was 3.00 for “beginning class promptly with a clear purpose” with a standard deviation of .97.

In summary, of the 20 beginning teachers who completed the survey, 65.5% perceived NESS activities helped somewhat or helped a lot, and 34.5% perceived NESS activities did not help or helped a little. All 10 items of Section III on the survey instrument had an overall mean of 2.78. Data showed that beginning teachers perceived NESS activities to have a moderate impact on their effective instructional skills.

Qualitative Research

Research Question 1 asked, what are the beginning teachers’ perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the NESS activities utilized by beginning teachers? Interview respondents expressed their thoughts on the most successful aspects of the NESS activities. The following strengths of the NESS activities were identified: (a) assigned mentor, (b) resources for lesson planning, (c) sharing of best practices, (d) observations of beginning teachers, and (e) observations of mentors.

All beginning teachers interviewed were assigned a mentor coach as part of the NESS activities. The assigned mentor was a great strength of NESS, according to many of the beginning teachers. One teacher said the mentor was “the most valuable part. Where I could explain to her my situations I was going through, and she could give me
advice."

Table 3

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Effective Instructional Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. Beginning class promptly with a clear purpose</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Providing students with relevant activities and attend to students’ needs</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Conducing a lesson initiating review, summary of the lesson, and review at the end of the lesson</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Orienting students to class work and specifying purpose of activities</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Questioning students’ comprehension using high- and low-order questions</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Providing corrective feedback for incorrect responses</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Evaluating students’ learning in order to appropriately adapt teaching to increase likelihood of student understanding</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Using positive rather than negative reinforcements</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Utilizing various instructional techniques to promote higher student achievement</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Circulating and assisting students</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mentors served as both role models and counselors. One teacher said, “He was checking up on me just to make sure everything was all right. I know that, if I have a specific question, this is the person I can go and target.” Another teacher said, “I was able to bounce ideas off her, and she was able to help me.” Finally, one teacher attested to the
strength of having a mentor by stating, “My coach and I are still close to this day. I still go to her with questions.”

Teachers consistently indicated specific help from their mentors played a large role in learning and understanding how to develop adequate lesson plans. One teacher believed being paired with a mentor in the same subject area helped because “my coach had a lot of resources that I could use.” Another agreed, stating, “She was able to give me feedback and examples. Anything you wanted, as long as she had it, it was available.” Other teachers and mentors planned lessons together. One teacher said, “We compared lessons, and I modeled my lesson plans after hers.” When beginning teachers were not working with their mentors, they also relied on the strengths of other veteran teachers during required monthly group meetings. What helped one teacher was “meeting with other new teachers and veterans talking about what does and doesn’t work.” Another teacher talked “primarily with people who were working in my grade level with the class I was teaching. That’s where I got the most help on lesson planning and what I should do next.”

Even with support from their own mentors, the beginning teachers also found it helpful seeking advice and guidance from the other veteran teachers during the monthly group meetings. The sharing of best practices proved positive for many participants. One teacher did not have a great individual mentoring experience but believed “there were plenty of NESS coaches who were very good at what they did, so meeting some other experienced teachers who would talk and share information was helpful.” Another teacher agreed listening to others’ feedback in monthly meetings allowed “me to implement ideas or try to fit what I heard into my classroom.”

The one activity mentioned most frequently for effectively helping with
classroom management and lesson-plan development was required classroom observations by the mentors. The beginning teachers consistently stated observations as a strength of NESS due to the feedback provided by their mentors. One teacher stated,

I thought it was helpful in the beginning of the year when she actually came in and was able to check off and say this is what you did and these are the kinds of things you should be doing. It’s a little nerve-racking, but in the long run, I did find that helpful.

Another teacher was quick to respond, stating, “By far in every aspect of my relationship with the NESS coach, the observations were the best. She could see what my life was like and figure out how to tailor her advice.”

Although not a mandated activity, some of the beginning teachers found observing their mentors and other veteran teachers a definite strength. One teacher said, “That was something I did. That is where I got a lot of help too as far as implementation and classroom management.” Even observing teachers in different subject areas can prove valuable as one teacher said,

I feel observing other teachers, both in and outside my content area, greatly helped. I was lucky enough to share a room last year with another teacher, who was a science teacher, but I learned a lot just from watching her.

Beginning teachers also expressed their thoughts on the weaknesses of the NESS activities. The weaknesses identified from the interviews included (a) lack of organization and structure, (b) presentation style of group meetings, (c) meeting teachers’ needs, and (d) lack of time with the mentor.

Participants overwhelmingly expressed concern over the required monthly group meetings, which teachers described as “not being structured in any sort of way that helps me learn how to teach.” One teacher was not even sure what the purpose of the NESS program was because it was not introduced at the first meeting. She said, “This might be
silly, but I didn’t know what NESS was supposed to be doing until maybe the second or third meeting. I wasn’t sure when we started what was what. I just knew I had to be there.” Some of the teachers did not feel the monthly meetings were structured to cover important issues with which beginning teachers often struggle. One stated,

I didn’t necessarily feel like the program itself was designed particularly to help with classroom management or designed to help newer teachers become better at lesson planning. I don’t know what their design or goal was, but it seemed it was designed more to show what the expectations are and the terminology so you can take that and do what you can with it.

Another teacher echoed similar thoughts and said,

The monthly meetings were like a chore, and it felt like when we went there, they were just covering stuff because that’s what they were supposed to cover. To me, very little of that information was helpful. They didn’t spend a day on classroom management, a day on tailoring lesson plans to meet state standards, or anything like that.

The organization and timeliness of the meetings were just as important for other teachers as one teacher remembered, “one time we talked about doing quarterly grades the week after quarterly grades were due.”

Another weakness for the beginning teachers involved the style in which monthly group meetings were held. Many participants did not find the lecture presentation style beneficial. One teacher said, “More time should be spent in smaller groups instead of having someone in the front talk to us. More time with my NESS mentor, rather than listening to people talk, would be more helpful.” Another teacher shared similar views on the presentation style stating,

It would be excellent for new teachers to hear from other teachers, especially for mentors to raise their hands and share how they handle a situation and what seems to work well for them. I think that type of discussion in NESS meetings would be better than a facilitator leading a majority of the conversation in sort of a PowerPoint presentation style where you just passively sit back and have to take notes and listen to all the information that is there.
A main goal of new teacher support groups is to meet new teachers’ needs during the first year of teaching. Interview participants were not satisfied and often left the program feeling let down and unprepared. One teacher believed the program was more about jumping through hoops and signing your name on a paper to show you were there. I don’t feel the meetings we went to were genuinely directed to help us get better as teachers, as struggling new teachers to the school.

Another teacher said, “There were a couple of things I walked away with, but if I was brand new to education or brand new to teaching, the program itself I didn’t think significantly helped.” Another issue concerned experienced teachers who were new to the county but were also required to complete NESS activities. One of the experienced teachers believed the monthly group meetings were “a complete waste of time, but for the most part you sat there and you were bored because this was information that you knew.” Sharing similar views, a second experienced teacher believed “teachers with extensive teaching experience can be put through a shorter program that deals with mostly requirements for the county as opposed to things that may or may not benefit them in the classroom.”

Last, a frustrating weakness for some of the beginning teachers was a lack of available time with their mentors. Teachers found it challenging finding time to meet with mentors who were very active either serving as department head or handling afterschool activities. One teacher believed the only weakness of NESS was a lack of time, stating,

My coach was a very busy woman. She still is. If I was thinking about becoming a NESS coach at some point, I would be very conscious of the fact that it takes a lot of time. Be very careful what else you take on.

Another participant agreed she often struggled because the mentoring component of the
NESS activities was not as strong as it should have been, stating,

He was very busy with other school activities, and he didn’t have much time to meet with me. Once or twice a week he would ask how I was doing only if he saw me for a few minutes in the morning before school. The only time he actually sat down and spent time was when I went to him panicking about making sure that my binder was ready to turn in at the end of the program.

Research Question 2 asked, what recommendations can be made to school administrators based on the analyzed data and literature review? During the interviews, the participants were asked if there were areas of change or improvement that could enhance the impact of NESS activities. The following recommendations were made:

1. “Be more conscious of pairing up new teachers with mentors in the same subject area.”
2. “Allow more mentee input on what is discussed in the meetings, and each month one mentor and mentee group would discuss a topic and provide handouts.”
3. “Conduct a needs assessment to better cater to the needs of the new teacher.”
4. “More time and information provided on how to handle more technical aspects, such as using CAB [Communicating Across Broward e-mail system] and Pinnacle.”
5. “Mandating the new teacher observe the experienced teacher instead of only the other way around.”
6. “Tell the NESS coaches in advance what is going to be discussed at each meeting so they are better prepared to explain this to their new educators.”
7. “Provide more useful professional development that would be helpful to the teacher in the classroom.”
8. “Implement a screening process for potential NESS mentors, especially since a supplement is offered.”
9. “Allow time for more hypothetical discussion during the monthly meetings.”
10. “Provide time for just the new teachers to sit and discuss the struggles going on in their classrooms and propose those struggles as a group during monthly meetings.”

11. “Provide a published guide or manual with a table of contents so new teachers can go item by item covering everything they should know about the school.”

12. “If possible, pair up mentors and new teachers before the school year starts.”

13. “Allow the opportunity for new teachers to receive in-service points for completing NESS activities.”

14. “Mandate new teachers keep a reflection journal they can discuss and share with their mentors.”

15. “Assign a designated NESS liaison or point person over the summer to answer new teachers’ questions and concerns to better prepare for the start of the school year.”

16. “Arrange an orientation for new teachers prior to the first week of school so teachers do not feel rushed or panicked with all the work and meetings when starting the school year.”

Summary

The analysis of the data collected from beginning teachers revealed the impact of NESS activities on their teaching practices ranged from helping a little to helping somewhat. With mean scores of 2.78 and 2.65, respectively, NESS activities had a larger impact helping teachers’ effective instructional skills and classroom management.

Beginning teachers believed NESS activities were significantly less helpful in developing lesson plans with a mean score of 2.35. The mandatory assignment of a mentor had the greatest impact on beginning teachers serving as a resource for improving classroom management and lesson-plan development.

Effective support programs for beginning teachers should contain elements to
bring about positive results for teachers. Beginning teachers revealed that assigning mentors, sharing of best practices, observing beginning teachers, and observing mentors were among the strongest NESS activities. However, a lack of organized and structured group meetings presented in a lecture style, dissatisfaction in meeting teachers’ needs, and lack of time with mentors were definite weaknesses of the NESS activities.

Data revealed beginning teachers contributed helpful suggestions for improving NESS activities. Among those suggestions were (a) mandatory observations of veteran teachers, (b) providing new teachers with a manual of vital school information, (c) a separate new teacher orientation prior to the first week of school, (d) separate group meetings for new teachers only, and (e) a change in the group meeting format to include more open discussion.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of the Applied Dissertation

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ knowledge of effective teaching practices and their perceptions of the quality of the NESS activities. Specifically, the study was intended to address the effectiveness of the mentoring program based on the beginning teachers’ personal experiences in relation to classroom management, lesson-plan development, and effective instructional skills.

The problem examined in this study revolved around beginning teachers at the researcher’s south Florida high school working in classrooms with weak classroom management skills, lesson-plan development, and instructional skills. The combination of these weaknesses concerned school administrators and coaching mentors in that they negatively impacted student achievement and behaviors. The following three quantitative research questions evolved from this study’s problem statement:

1. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ classroom management skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?

2. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ lesson-plan development as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?

3. What is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ instructional skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument?

The following two qualitative research questions evolved from this study’s problem
1. What are the beginning teachers’ perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the NESS activities utilized by beginning teachers?

2. What recommendations can be made to school administrators based on the analyzed data and literature review?

Data were collected through a survey, New Educator Effective Teaching Practice Instrument, and interviews. Surveys were distributed to 40 potential participants with a return rate of 20 surveys. Fifteen beginning teachers participated in interviews.

Implications of the Findings

Guided by three quantitative and two qualitative research questions, participants in this study identified positive and negative aspects of NESS activities that are congruent with the literature. Participants also suggested ways to enhance NESS activities that are also congruent with the literature. Findings based on data analysis are summarized here as they related to each research question.

Quantitative research questions. Research Question 1 asked, what is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ classroom management skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument? The overall perceived helpfulness of NESS activities regarding classroom management was represented by a mean score of 2.65. The range of possible scores from the data collection instrument was as follows: 1 = did not help, 2 = helped a little, 3 = helped somewhat, and 4 = helped a lot. A total mean of 2.65 shows NESS activities were perceived by beginning teachers as providing a fair amount of assistance.

Examining the data more closely, NESS activities were perceived to be most helpful in two areas of classroom management. With mean scores of 2.85 and 2.80,
respectively, “praising students individually or as a group using specific conduct” and “praising students who are on task” were impacted the most. Utilizing positive praise and reinforcements can strengthen behavior and motivate students (Breaux, 2005; Burden, 2003). Students should be awarded for appropriate actions to ensure correct behavior continues. According to Burden, several techniques of reinforcement can be used in the classroom, including (a) social reinforcers, (b) activities and privileges, (c) tangible reinforcers, and (d) token reinforcers. Burden said, “Many of these reinforcers can be used with both individual students and the entire class” (p. 108).

Beginning teachers believed NESS activities helped the least in “controlling class reaction to misconduct” and “identifying and correcting potential behavioral problems before they developed” with mean scores of 2.50. It is necessary to assist beginning teachers in managing discipline problems before and when they occur because, according to Kopkowski (2008), “they erode desire to invest time and energy in lesson plans that make the content come alive for students” (p. 23). According to Burden (2003), teachers can prevent behavior problems and promote classrooms that are conducive to learning by addressing the following factors: (a) reduce the use of punitive methods of control, (b) provide clear rules for student conduct and discipline, (c) use appropriate behavior management procedures, (d) respect and understand ethnic and cultural differences, (e) support students’ involvement, and (f) teach critical social skills.

Research Question 2 asked, what is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ lesson-plan development as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument? The overall perceived helpfulness of NESS activities regarding lesson-plan development was represented by a mean score of 2.35. The range of possible scores from the data collection instrument was as follows: 1= did not help, 2 =
helped a little, 3 = helped somewhat, and 4 = helped a lot. A total mean of 2.35 suggests beginning teachers did ascertain some help with this aspect of teaching. However, this score of 2.35 is 0.30 lower than that of the classroom management component.

NESS activities were perceived to be most helpful in “identifying state standards and developing learner objectives, both general and specific” with a mean of 2.60. One reason beginning teachers may have felt more comfortable identifying state standards is due to the use of individualized textbooks. Student textbooks, including teacher editions, are conveniently mapped out according to the state’s benchmark standards, which are thoroughly discussed and listed in each chapter or unit. Teachers are also provided with a curriculum map designated by the county, which further specifies the required curriculum to be taught throughout the school year. This map serves as a guide for teachers who may not be completely confident in preparing learner objectives as part of the lesson-planning process. According to Glasgow and Hicks (2003), most teachers trust “the textbook to cover the mandated content and colleagues to help provide the timeline or pace, choice of specific content, and related activities” (p. 59).

Beginning teachers believed NESS activities helped the least in “evaluating whether students have mastered the set objective(s)” and “separating content into distinct elements or parts and specifying amount of time needed for each component” with a mean of 2.20. It is vital for both the student and teacher to be aware of what the student knows and what the student cannot do well. According to Glasgow and Hicks (2003), teachers must provide meaningful feedback in a timely fashion to assess student learning better. They stated, “The assessment and feedback must be authentic and not just rubber-stamped as completed or you run the risk of devaluing the students’ effort and work” (p. 87). Often, new teachers struggle to assess student mastery because they are not clear on
what type of assessments work best for their particular students (Glasgow & Hicks).

New teachers also require more help pacing activities as part of the lesson-planning process. This often requires excellent time-management skills, which is often learned through experience. Glasgow and Hicks (2003) believed beginning teachers often fail to “take into account the off-task time they devote to managing student behavior, managing classroom activities, and dealing with announcements and interruptions” (p. 73). A suggestion for teachers when planning lessons is to allow time for students to digest the material covered, while also assessing student comprehension and clarifying information when needed (Glasgow & Hicks). Planning lessons is more than just focusing on what material must be covered but rather the entire time needed for students to digest and retain the information as well.

Research Question 3 asked, what is the impact of the NESS activities on the beginning teachers’ instructional skills as measured by the New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument? The overall perceived helpfulness of NESS activities regarding effective instructional skills was represented by a mean score of 2.78. The range of possible scores from the data collection instrument was as follows: 1 = did not help, 2 = helped a little, 3 = helped somewhat, and 4 = helped a lot. A total mean of 2.78 suggests beginning teachers did ascertain a moderate amount of help with this aspect of teaching. This score of 2.75 is 0.10 higher than that of the classroom-management component and 0.40 higher than that of the lesson-plan development component. Data results show beginning teachers perceived NESS activities to have the greatest impact on improving their instructional skills.

NESS activities were perceived to be the most helpful in “beginning class promptly with a clear purpose” with a mean of 3.00. It is possible this activity scored
highly among beginning teachers because the school requires all teachers to post a daily agenda on their classroom boards as well as provide an opening activity to be completed during the first 5 minutes of class. Glasgow and Hicks (2003) agreed using a daily agenda is beneficial for arousing students’ thinking about the day’s topics to be covered. They also stated that the daily agenda can also benefit teachers after a lesson by using the agenda to “make notes about pacing, transitions, and lesson evaluations to be used in subsequent years” (p. 51).

Beginning class promptly with bellwork also alerts students to what will be an integral part of the day’s lesson. Bellwork is a small activity that lasts only a few minutes and changes from day to day (Breaux, 2005). This is a valuable method new teachers can use to engage students at the beginning of class, while allowing time for the teacher to take attendance or prepare materials or equipment for the day’s lesson. According to Breaux, teachers should consider the following in order for bellwork to be efficient and meaningful: (a) use a timer to ensure work is completed in 3 to 5 minutes, (b) let students know their bellwork will be needed later on in the lesson, (c) have a designated place in the room where the bellwork assignment is always written, and (d) points should be awarded for bellwork.

Beginning teachers believed NESS activities helped the least in “evaluating students’ learning in order to appropriately adapt teaching to increase likelihood of student understanding” with a mean of 2.55. In order for new teachers to evaluate students successfully and plan appropriate lessons for their needs, many issues must be considered. According to Glasgow and Hicks (2003), new teachers must consider not only the lesson’s goals and objectives but also how information will be delivered and assessed in a fair and reliable manner. If student evaluation is addressed prior to
beginning the lesson, Glasgow and Hicks said, “the teacher will know what the students need to be successful as the lesson progresses and will always have that in mind” (p. 90).

**Qualitative research questions.** Research Question 1 asked, what are the beginning teachers’ perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the NESS activities utilized by beginning teachers? Interview respondents shared the areas for which they most appreciated the NESS activities. The following strengths of the NESS activities were identified: (a) assigned mentor, (b) resources for lesson planning, (c) sharing of best practices, (d) observations of beginning teachers, and (e) observations of mentors.

All but 2 of the 15 interview participants cited their mentors as the biggest strength of the NESS activities. Working with their mentors allowed the beginning teachers to feel more at ease during the first year of teaching and provided a nonthreatening source of information and help. According to Daresh (2003), mentoring relationships are powerful learning opportunities; “protégés learn more about their professional lives and gain more insight into their personal needs, visions, and values than through any other kind of learning experience” (p. 5).

Mentors can provide more than just emotional support as the beginning teachers noted help with lesson plans as an added strength. Many of the teachers planned lessons with their mentors, especially because all but one pair taught in the same subject area. Collaborating with a mentor is one way to improve a new teacher’s performance (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000). Many options exist for the beginning teacher and mentor such as planning a unit together, teaching a unit together, sharing activities, or joining in a joint action inquiry (Boreen et al.).

Beyond an assigned mentor, the beginning teachers also found it useful to meet
with other veteran teachers on a regular basis. Monthly group meetings provided an opportunity for sharing of best practices. Veteran teachers are often willing to share advice and answer questions if asked. Beginning teachers should feel confident asking for suggestions during face-to-face conversations or even during a faculty meeting or on an advertisement placed in the teachers’ planning room (Portner, 2002).

All of the beginning teachers were required to be observed by their mentors several times throughout the school year as a mandated NESS activity. Although the observations were described as “nerve-racking” by one teacher, the overall response was extremely positive. The observations allowed mentors to focus on each teacher’s individual needs, especially in the areas of classroom management and lesson-plan development. In order to be effective, the beginning teachers’ needs should be discussed prior to the observation, and a follow-up dialogue should occur after the observation. According to Gordon and Maxey (2000), data collection should also be “carried out by the mentor in an objective, nonjudgmental manner” (p. 52).

Last, several of the beginning teachers took it upon themselves to observe their mentors teach. Although not mandated, the teachers found this only enhanced their own teaching skills and confidence. When observing other classrooms, Gordon and Maxey (2000) stated the new teacher might focus on “classroom organization, how the teacher opens the lesson, how directions are given, teacher questioning, student learning activities, and lesson closure” (p. 75). It is even more helpful if the new teacher can observe veteran teachers in varying subject areas and grade levels.

Interview respondents also shared the areas for which they least appreciated the NESS activities. The following weaknesses of the NESS activities were identified: (a) lack of organization and structure, (b) presentation style of group meetings, (c) meeting
teachers’ needs, and (d) lack of time with the mentor.

All of the interview participants felt an overall lack of organization and structure regarding the monthly group meetings. The only constant was the assigned day and time each meeting occurred. Beginning teachers reported many of the meetings covered material too late to be useful in the classroom, such as classroom-management techniques during the final semester of the school year. Another concern for the teachers was not receiving the meeting agendas early enough to plan and discuss questions with their mentors. One way to facilitate structured and meaningful meetings is to create a monthly calendar at the beginning of the school based on an early needs assessment. The monthly calendar can be modified as necessary over the course of the school year (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

Another concern for the beginning teachers during the monthly group meetings was the presentation style in which information was presented in the form of lectures. Many participants were unable to feel involved during the meetings and believed their input was lacking. Providing more time for a forum discussion would allow the beginning teachers to feel morally supported. Gordon and Maxey (2000) said, “Moral support is one of the most vital forms of assistance the induction team can provide for the beginning teacher” (p. 67). Such a format would also allow the beginning and veteran teachers to discuss professional issues of concern, ranging from classroom management to school procedures.

None of the 15 interview respondents believed the monthly group meetings met their needs as beginning teachers. The beginning teachers found the information presented was very general and often centered on issues pertinent to the individual school. Many believed a simple needs assessment at the beginning of the school year
would allow for more specific and meaningful topics to be discussed. Gordon and Maxey (2000) posited regular opportunities for informal discussion, which can occur during group sessions, provide for ongoing assessment of beginning teachers’ needs. Assessment can occur in the form of questionnaires provided to beginning teachers at various points throughout the school year, small-group interviews of beginning teachers, or informal discussions between the new teacher and mentor.

Finally, available time to meet with mentors was another concern for the beginning teachers. In some cases, mentors were busy tending to other school activities or duties, such as department head or baseball coach. One of the most important characteristics of a successful mentor, according to Gordon and Maxey (2000), is the commitment of time and attention. It is important for mentors to realize the amount of time required to train for their role as well as the time needed to meet with and observe the new teacher over the course of the school year. Gordon and Maxey said, “To merely add mentoring responsibilities to an already full work schedule is a disservice to the mentor and the beginning teacher, and almost surely lowers the quality of support provided to the beginner” (p. 46).

Research Question 2 asked, what recommendations can be made to school administrators based on the analyzed data and literature review? Interview participants made various suggestions for program improvement. The suggestion that recurred most frequently was a separate orientation for new teachers prior to the beginning of the school year. Even though a one-day orientation did occur for the new teachers, the information presented was not pertinent for all of the teachers. Information that could be shared during a more in-depth orientation includes community norms and customs, school district policies and procedures, subject-area curriculum, school policies and tour,
beginning teacher’s responsibilities, and assistance for surviving the first week of school (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

Other recommendations for improvement included mandatory observation of veteran teachers, a comprehensive needs assessment prior to the first group meeting, separate group meetings for only new teachers, and a manual or guidebook providing new teachers with valuable resources to survive the first year of teaching successfully. It should be noted that all respondents indicated there was at least one area for improvement.

The implications of this study involve an increase in effective classroom teachers as well as an increase in teacher retention. When evaluating and improving upon the NESS activities, those involved in the process must understand the importance of on-the-job training. According to Wong (2005), teachers “want training, they want to fit in, and they want their students to learn and achieve” (p. 45). Even if teachers earned education degrees and were certified in their subject areas, school administrators must realize there is still too much more to learn once the job begins. It should never be assumed that teachers enter the classroom with all the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve optimal performance.

Limitations

Although it is assumed this study was beneficial to the performance of teachers at this research site, the study may have limitations centering on the areas of internal and external validity. The internal validity of a study deals with how research findings coincide with reality (Merriam, 1998). The findings of this study relied solely on the participants’ perceptions of the reality regarding the helpfulness of the NESS activities. There is a chance that a participant’s perception regarding various aspects of the program
may not have matched how the NESS activities actually affected them personally. The external validity of a study centers on the extent that a study’s findings may be applied to other situations (Merriam). The data collected for this study relied on the perceptions of only 20 participants involved with the NESS program. Any noteworthy patterns discovered can only be related to the participants being studied and not the school’s entire staff. This study was also delimited to teachers in a secondary school and may not be generalized to educators who teach in elementary or middle schools.

It is also important to clarify the bias the researcher may bring to the study. According to Maxwell (1988), bias refers to “ways in which data collection or analysis are distorted by the researcher’s theory, value, or preconceptions” (p. 92). The researcher served as a NESS coach and worked closely with beginning teachers. It may be impossible for the researcher to eliminate completely any preconceptions regarding NESS activities and beginning teachers; however, it is necessary to understand and be aware of potential biases. Self-reflection aids in creating an honest response to the issue (Creswell, 2003).

**Recommendations for Improvements to NESS Activities**

Based on an analysis of the participants’ responses, the following recommendations for improvements to the NESS activities are offered:

1. A summer orientation should be held for all new teachers beginning approximately 2 weeks prior to the first day of school. The orientation would allow new teachers to obtain all necessary curriculum guides and resources, such as textbooks, teacher editions, and state standards, for their subject areas. This time would also allow new educators to gain access to their classrooms so they could organize the room for the first day of school. Further, it would serve as an opportunity for new educators to learn
about the school’s policies, receive training on using the online grading system, meet
their NESS coaches and administrators, and become familiar with the campus. According
to Barbazette (1999), an employee orientation would make the first days on the job easier
by having all supplies and work spaces ready, while also providing detailed information
about the organization’s “norms, customs, and traditions” (p. 151). A summer orientation
would be beneficial for the new educators based on their requests for more time to
prepare and the potential benefit to the school. Barbazette indicated, “New employees
who are fully oriented and trained are more productive than those who are poorly
oriented and trained” (p. 154).

2. Beginning teachers should be mandated to observe at least three veteran
teachers in the first quarter of the school year and at least one veteran teacher in each
subsequent quarter. The new educators could observe veteran teachers participating in the
NESS program or teachers not affiliated with the program. Such an observation process
would allow the entire staff to engage in relationships with the new educators. According
to Wong (2005), “It has been found that teachers remain with a district when they feel
strong bonds of connection to a professional learning community that has, at its heart,
high-quality interpersonal relationships founded on trust and respect” (p. 45).
Observations of veteran teachers would also improve effectiveness and efficiency among
the new teachers because lessons and feedback could be targeted to the new teachers’
individual needs (Murray, 1999).

3. Administrators should implement a new teacher support group. Such a group
would provide a forum for new teachers to enhance problem solving, encourage dialogue
and reflection, and provide support for beginning teachers (Rogers & Babinski, 2002).
The new teacher support group should become a mandatory component of the NESS
program; however, the new teachers’ participation should remain confidential, and the
participants would set their own agenda for each meeting. The group of new teachers
could meet once a month at a time and location they select. Each meeting could provide
an opportunity for the new educators to share their personal stories and anxieties, while
gaining a better understanding of how to work with colleagues. In essence, the group
would serve as added motivation for each new teacher. Clark (1999) stated, “A
motivational intervention is a way to establish or increase the level of commitment,
enthusiasm, and active pursuit of work goals” (p. 228).

Recommendations for Further Research

Results of this study provided insights into the thoughts and perceptions of
beginning teachers about their experiences with new educator support activities at a
secondary school in south Florida. This study can be strengthened with additional
research. It would prove useful to analyze a larger sample of beginning teachers who
have participated in the NESS program. Data should be collected from participants at
other high schools in the district as well as elementary and middle schools. This would
provide deeper insight regarding the overall effectiveness of NESS activities across the
district. These results could be compared with district goals for the NESS program.

In addition, analyzing additional stakeholders in the mentoring process would be
beneficial. The mentor’s role in new educator support activities is instrumental to the
beginning teacher’s success. Mentors could be evaluated based on their training, time
commitment, and perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of NESS activities.
It may also be useful to evaluate the impact of new educator support activities from the
perspective of the schools’ administrators and NESS liaisons.
Conclusions

High attrition rates among beginning teachers have forced school districts to establish varying forms of induction programs, which consistently include a mentoring component. Mentors assist beginning teachers develop more competence in areas such as classroom management and lesson-plan development. As the beginning teachers become more effective, ultimately student learning, motivation, and critical-thinking skills increase (Boreen et al., 2000). This study analyzed the impact of new educator support activities in an attempt to offer conclusions and recommendations regarding their impact on improving effective instructional skills and possibly assist with ideas for further improvements.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative research questions in this study, NESS activities appeared to be perceived as potentially positive and helpful if applied effectively. Overall, the results were not overwhelming; rather, they were split with mixed feelings reported by the participants. NESS activities were perceived to have helped somewhat with classroom management and lesson-plan development. Improving instructional skills was impacted the most by NESS activities.

All participants consistently emphasized working with a mentor provided for the most positive experience during their first year teaching. The mentors proved invaluable when planning lessons, sharing and discussing ideas for classroom improvements, and asking questions without fear of humiliation. Even with the strength of mentors, there was still room for improvement. The participants’ recommendations for improvements addressed many of the weaknesses they perceived in the NESS activities. Recommendations included mandating observations of veteran teachers, allowing more discussion and input from beginning teachers during monthly meetings and providing
new teachers with a manual or handbook with monthly activities and advice, new teacher orientation at least 2 weeks prior to the school year beginning, and an opportunity for more professional development.

Successful mentoring and support activities should not be envisioned to end after the first year of teaching. A system of ongoing processes should focus on the development of teachers to connect their professional growth to the challenging goals for student learning effectively. According to Glasgow and Hicks (2003), school districts must allow time for “new teachers to attend seminars, conferences, and observations of exemplary teachers to assist these emerging teachers in building a repertoire that is responsive to the students they serve” (p. 80). Based on the input and responses from the beginning teachers in this study, it is apparent there is too much information to learn, digest, and become comfortable with in a short period of time. Continued evaluation and modifications are necessary to provide a commitment to helping beginning teachers become more effective and, in turn, remain in the profession.
References

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Appendix A

New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument
New Educator Effective Teacher Practice Instrument

Demographic Information

<table>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>M or F</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Subject Area Taught</th>
<th>Subject Level Taught</th>
</tr>
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</table>

1 – did not help  2 – helped a little  3 – helped somewhat  4 – helped a lot

The New Educator Support System (NESS) (choose 1, 2, 3, or 4 above) regarding…

Section I – Classroom Management

1. Developing class rules and defining desired behaviors and class expectations. 1 2 3 4
2. Specify, clarify, and practice class rules, while reprimanding rule infractions. 1 2 3 4
3. Desist students causing class disruptions and suggest alternative behavior. 1 2 3 4
4. Control class reaction to misconduct. 1 2 3 4
5. Identifying and correcting potential behavioral problems before they develop. 1 2 3 4
6. Praise students individually or as a group using specific conduct. 1 2 3 4
7. Praise students who are on-task. 1 2 3 4
8. Discipline students in private and remain on task during class time. 1 2 3 4

Section II – Lesson Plan Development

9. Identifying State Standards and developing learner objectives, both general and specific. 1 2 3 4
10. Identifying a student’s level and selecting lessons based upon the student’s needs. 1 2 3 4
11. Evaluating whether students have mastered the set objective(s). 1 2 3 4
12. Judging appropriateness of content based on student’s level. 1 2 3 4
13. Separating content into district elements or parts and specifying amount of time needed for each component. 1 2 3 4
14. Selecting activities and judging appropriateness of the activities. 1 2 3 4
15. Separating learning activities into components while pacing the activities appropriately. 1 2 3 4
16. Organizing the class effectively for instructional activity. 1 2 3 4
17. Listing the necessary materials and preparing materials in advance. 1 2 3 4
18. Judging appropriateness of materials based on student’s level and the content to be learned. 1 2 3 4

Section III – Effective Instructional Skills

19. Begin class promptly with a clear purpose. 1 2 3 4
20. Provide students with relevant activities and attend to students’ needs. 1 2 3 4
21. Conduct a lesson initiating review, summary of the lesson, and review at the end of the lesson. 1 2 3 4
22. Orient students to classwork and specify purpose of activities. 1 2 3 4
23. Questions students’ comprehension using high and low order questions. 1 2 3 4
24. Provide corrective feedback for incorrect responses. 1 2 3 4
25. Evaluate students’ learning in order to appropriately adapt teaching to increase likelihood of student understanding. 1 2 3 4
26. Use positive rather than negative reinforcements. 1 2 3 4
27. Utilizing various instructional techniques to promote higher student achievement. 1 2 3 4
28. Circulate and assist students. 1 2 3 4
Appendix B

Interview Guide
Your time and participation in answering questions related to your experiences as beginning teachers and participants in the NESS program is much appreciated. Please be assured that any information you share during this interview will remain completely confidential. Information will only be shared as part of my research study in summarized form. Responses from all participants will be compiled so that no one person’s responses can be identified.

1. Were you assigned an identified mentor coach?

2. Was this mentor coach in the same subject area you teach?

3. Approximately how many times did you meet with your mentor coach during your first year teaching? On average, how long was each meeting?

4. What specific NESS activities do you feel had the greatest impact on improving your classroom management?

5. What specific NESS activities do you feel had the greatest impact on improving your ability to create and plan lessons?

6. What specific NESS activities do you feel had the greatest impact on improving your instructional skills?

7. What was most satisfying about your experiences in the NESS program?

8. What was least satisfying about your experiences in the NESS program?

9. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the NESS activities and your experiences in the program?

10. Describe any changes or improvements you would make to the NESS program if given the opportunity.
Appendix C

Invitation E-Mail
Dear Teachers,

My name is Danielle Bradley, and I am a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University engaged in research for the purpose of satisfying a requirement for a Doctor of Education degree. I am also an English teacher and writing coach at ____________. The purpose of my study is to investigate the impact of the New Educator Support System (NESS) activities on the beginning teachers’ knowledge of effective teaching practices and their perceptions of the quality of the NESS activities. The NESS program is intended to serve as a support group and bank of resources for new educators in order to perform at an optimal level during the first year of teaching, but many beginning teachers continue to feel overwhelmed and frustrated.

I am inviting all teachers in their 1st, 2nd, or 3rd year of teaching in __________ County currently completing the NESS program, or those who previously completed NESS, to participate in my research study. If you are receiving this e-mail, you have been identified as matching the above criteria. If this is incorrect, simply disregard this e-mail. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey that should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. The survey will help the researcher identify the strengths and weaknesses of NESS activities, specifically in relation to classroom management, lesson plan development, and effective teaching skills, in order to better meet the needs of beginning teachers. This data will also be used to make recommendations for future improvement and possible changes regarding NESS activities. The survey instrument will be placed in your mailbox, along with a participation letter and completion instructions. You will have one week to complete the survey. Participation is voluntary and anonymous.

Following completion of the survey, you will also be invited to participate in a 30-minute interview to gain further insights regarding your perceptions of NESS activities, including their strengths and weaknesses. You must be willing to have your interview responses tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Your name will not be used or identifiable in the research study. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience, and you will be required to sign a consent form prior to interviews beginning.

Please feel free to contact me via e-mail or at ext. 2027 with any questions or concerns. You should expect to receive the survey in your mailbox in approximately one week.

Sincerely,
Danielle Bradley
Appendix D

Participants’ Demographic Data
## Participants’ Demographic Data

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Appendix E

Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Impact of New Educator Support System Activities in Relation to Classroom Management Skills
Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Impact of NESS Activities in Relation to Classroom Management Skills

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<td>1. Developing class rules and defining desired behaviors and class expectations</td>
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<td>2. Specify, clarify, and practice class rules, while reprimanding rule infractions</td>
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<td>3. Desist students causing class disruptions and suggest alternative behavior</td>
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<td>4. Control class reaction to misconduct</td>
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<td>5. Identifying and correcting potential behavioral problems before they develop</td>
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<td>6. Praise students individually or as a group using specific conduct</td>
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<td>7. Praise students who are on-task</td>
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<td>8. Discipline students in private and remain on task during class time</td>
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Appendix F

Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Impact of New Educator Support System Activities in Relation to Lesson-Plan Development
## Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Impact of NESS Activities in Relation to Lesson-Plan Development

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<td>9. Identifying State Standards and developing learner objectives, both general and specific</td>
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<td>10. Identifying a student’s level and selecting lessons based upon student’s needs</td>
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<td>12. Judging appropriateness of content based on student’s level</td>
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<td>13. Separating content into distinct elements or parts and specifying amount of time needed for each component</td>
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<td>14. Selecting activities and judging appropriateness of the activities</td>
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<td>15. Separating learning activities into components while pacing the activities appropriately</td>
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<td>16. Organizing the class effectively for instructional activity</td>
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<td>17. Listing the necessary materials and preparing materials in advance</td>
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<td>18. Judging the appropriateness of materials based on student’s level and content to be learned.</td>
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Appendix G

Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Impact of New Educator Support System Activities in Relation to Effective Instructional Skills
## Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Impact of NESS Activities in Relation to Effective Instructional Skills

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<td>20. Provide students with relevant activities and attend to students’ needs</td>
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<td>21. Conduct a lesson initiating review, summary of the lesson, and review at the end of the lesson</td>
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<td>22. Orient students to classwork and specify purpose of activities</td>
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<td>23. Questions students’ comprehension using high and low order questions</td>
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<td>24. Provide corrective feedback for incorrect responses</td>
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<td>25. Evaluate students’ learning in order to appropriately adapt teaching to increase likelihood of student understanding</td>
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<td>26. Use positive rather than negative reinforcements</td>
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<td>27. Utilizing various instructional techniques to promote higher student achievement</td>
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28. Circulate and assist students

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