Mind activity in teaching and mentoring

Patricia J. Norman\textsuperscript{a,},* \text{, Sharon Feiman-Nemser\textsuperscript{b}}

\textsuperscript{a}Trinity University, One Trinity Place, San Antonio, TX 78212-7200, USA
\textsuperscript{b}Brandeis University, MS 037, P.O. Box 549110, Waltham, MA 02454-9110, USA

Abstract

Increasingly educators and policy makers recognize that new teachers need help making the transition to independent teaching. One particularly important role mentor teachers can play is to help beginning teachers to focus on students’ “mind activity” in order to build on their prior knowledge, experience, and interests, and to promote understanding and meaningful learning. Drawing on interview and observational data collected over two years, this article presents two detailed cases that portray educative mentoring and illustrate how new teachers’ personal history and professional school culture influence what they can learn even from serious mentoring. The authors also offer several directions for strengthening induction programs.

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1. Introduction

New teachers have two jobs to do—they have to teach and they have to learn to teach in a particular context (Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, \text{& McLaughlin, 1989}). Teacher education can equip new teachers with critical knowledge and skills and foster the habit of learning in and from teaching. Still, some of the most important things new teachers need to know can only be learned once they actually begin teaching. Only then it is possible to get to know one’s students, assess their knowledge and skills, discover what they are supposed to learn, and begin developing or adapting a curriculum to enable their learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Increasingly educators and policy makers recognize that new teachers need help making the transition to independent teaching.\textsuperscript{1} Many states and districts have formal induction programs and

\textsuperscript{*}Corresponding author. Tel.: +12109997597.
E-mail addresses: pnorman@trinity.edu (P.J. Norman), snemser@brandeis.edu (S. Feiman-Nemser).

\textsuperscript{1}In the 1990–91 school year less than half of the beginning teachers responding to the NCES nationally representative Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) said that they participated in an induction program or worked with a mentor. In the 2000–2001 school year, nearly 80% of beginning teachers said that they participated in an induction program or worked closely with a mentor (Smith and Ingersoll, 2003).
most of these programs rely on mentoring as the primary induction strategy (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999); however, numerous studies have documented large variations in the purposes, length, structure, and intensity of these programs and in the selection, terms, training, and expectations of mentor teachers (see, for example, Huling-Austin, 1990; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The spread of induction and mentoring programs creates a pressing need to understand what kind of mentoring makes what sort of difference for new teachers and their students and under what circumstances such differences are most likely to occur.

Studies show that the benefits of formal mentoring and induction are possible but not automatic (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993; Gold, 1996; Johnson et al., 2004). Analyzing data from the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found that participating in an induction program and working with a mentor teacher reduces the likelihood that new teachers will transfer to a different school or leave the profession altogether. Not surprisingly, these benefits are most likely to occur when new teachers have mentors in their same subject or grade level with time to mentor. Evertson and Smithey (2000) found that new teachers who worked with mentors in a formal induction program were better able to manage instruction, establish routines, and keep students engaged in academic tasks than new teachers paired with mentors who had no formal opportunity to develop their skills as mentors. The researchers concluded that the mere presence of a mentor is not enough. Knowledge and skill in mentoring is also necessary.

The impact of mentoring not only depends on appropriate matches, time, and training, but also on the expectations that mentors and novices hold for one another and what they actually do together. Prevailing images and expectations of mentoring often prevent mentor teachers from playing a significant role in new teacher learning. Reviewing research on the role of mentoring in helping novices learn standards based teaching, Wang and Odell (2002) conclude that, overall, mentors expect to provide and novices expect to receive psychological support, technical assistance, and guidance about local customs and policies. Neither sees mentoring as a substantial and meaningful influence on novice’s learning to teach.

A narrow view of mentoring focuses on easing the new teacher’s entry into teaching and helping with the immediate questions and uncertainties that inevitably arise when a teacher enters the classroom for the first time. A robust view of mentoring promises more. Linked to a vision of good teaching and a developmental view of learning to teach, such mentoring still responds to new teachers’ present needs while helping them interpret what their students say and do and figure out how to move their learning forward. We call this “educative” mentoring to distinguish it from technical advice and emotional support and to suggest that mentoring can be a form of individualized professional development.

Mentors who see their work in educational terms have a clear idea of the kind of teaching they want to foster. They regard new teachers as learners and think about how to help them develop a principled teaching practice. Like good teachers, they have a kind of bifocal vision, keeping one eye on the immediate needs of the novice teacher and one eye on the ultimate goal of meaningful and effective learning for all students. Discerning observers of teaching, such mentors use their teaching and the teaching of others as a site for new teacher learning. Their mentoring practice blends showing and telling, asking and listening (Schon, 1987) in ways that promote new teacher learning.

Our title comes from a classic essay by Dewey (1904/1965) in which he argues that what (student) teachers need most of all is the capacity to see what is going on in the minds of their students. When observing an experienced teacher, for example, novices should not focus on the teacher’s behavior in order to “accumulate a store of methods.” Rather they should pay close attention to the way students make sense of what they are studying. In Dewey’s words, they should focus on “the interaction of mind on mind, how teacher and pupils react upon each other” (p. 324). The currently popular phrase “teaching for understanding” signals a similar concern for a kind of
content-rich teaching that builds on students’ ideas and experiences, honors their questions, and aims for meaning and understanding (Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993).

Popular models of teacher development suggest that new teachers are too preoccupied with their own adequacy and performance to focus on student thinking and learning (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975; Kagan, 1992). Such a focus will “naturally” emerge once beginning teachers resolve their initial concerns. In principle, however, having a mentor should enable new teachers to go beyond what they could do on their own (Wells, 2002). Some even suggest that serious (educative) mentoring could make the early years of teaching harder rather than easier by holding out higher standards than beginning teachers are likely to work toward on their own (Little, 1990a).

If we want to promote mentoring as a significant influence on new teacher learning, we need to know more about the kind of mentoring that makes such a difference. Survey research can provide general support for induction and mentoring, but we also need nuanced descriptions of interactions between thoughtful mentors and beginning teachers in order to understand how formal mentoring can be a strategy to promote effective teaching and learning. How do thoughtful mentors help new teachers focus on students’ “mind activity”? What learning opportunities does serious mentoring afford beginning teachers? Under what conditions are the benefits of such mentoring most likely to occur? We explore these questions by presenting two extended cases of mentored learning to teach.

We developed these cases because they offer rich portraits of serious mentors at work and because they presented us with an interesting puzzle. In their first year of teaching, the two new teachers struck us and their mentors as unusually confident and capable, and we expected to learn a lot about how serious mentoring contributes to the development of well-started beginning teachers. By the end of the second year of teaching, one of the beginning teachers had made considerable progress in learning to teach for understanding while the other had not. In fact, in the words of her mentor, she had actually “worked backwards.” How could we account for these different trajectories? What could we learn from these cases of mentored learning to teach about the needs of beginning teachers, the content and pedagogy of educative mentoring, and the factors that enable or constrain its influence?

2. Methodological choices

The two cases come from a larger study of mentoring in three well-regarded induction programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2000). We chose our study sites because of their reputation as strong induction efforts supported by state and district policies. While the literature contains numerous descriptions of “sink or swim” induction, we wanted to know what it was like to be a new teacher in places purported to take induction and mentoring seriously. As part of the research, we documented the interactions of a sample of mentors and new teachers in each program and traced the impact of mentoring on new teachers’ practice and their students’ learning. The two cases presented below come from one of the research sites, an induction project in California known for its developmental stance toward new teacher learning and its serious approach to the selection, preparation and ongoing support of mentor teachers.

2.1. The induction program

A local project of California’s Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment initiative (BTSA), the program relies on fulltime mentors released from classroom teaching for 2–3 years to work with a group of beginning teachers during their first two years. The program selects mentors carefully and provides both initial training and ongoing substantive support and development through weekly staff meetings. In keeping with state policy, mentors combine individualized assistance with formative assessment. The program supplies mentors with various tools, including assessment rubrics and state teaching standards.

The California Standards for the Teaching Profession frame the mentors’ work. Adopted in
1997, the standards are designed “to facilitate the induction of beginning teachers into their professional roles and responsibilities by providing a common language and new vision of the scope and complexity of teaching” (CDE, 1997, p. 1). The first teaching standard, “engaging and supporting all students in learning,” focuses on the central work of interactive teaching—eliciting, assessing, and deepening children’s subject matter understanding. The standard calls for teachers to build on students’ ideas and experiences in order to extend their understanding and to adjust their teaching in response to students’ comments and questions. In short, the standard uses contemporary reform language to describe what Dewey (1904/1965) seems to have in mind when he urges teachers to focus on “mind activity” in teaching.

2.2. The mentors

Although we studied eight mentors in this program, we focus here on two—Rachel and Eileen. Rachel worked with a dozen new teachers in several school sites; Eileen worked with a handful of new teachers at a professional development school where she also served as the PDS coordinator. The two mentors, both experienced elementary teachers, shared the program’s underlying vision of teaching for conceptual understanding. Rachel viewed teaching as “getting in there with the kids and really hearing from them and getting a grip on what they do and do not understand.” Eileen described teaching as “scaffolding students’ learning,” finding ways to provide individualized support in their “zone of proximal development.” Both mentors acknowledged their desire to help new teachers attend to and interpret students’ questions and ideas and use them in planning and teaching. This goal became a common thread across their work with their new teachers Vanessa and Anna.

2.3. The new teachers

The two beginning teachers—Vanessa and Anna—had similar teaching assignments. Both taught a 4th grade class of second language learners in a Title 1 elementary school with a strong reputation in their respective districts. Although their initial teaching assignments were similar, their preparation was not. Vanessa entered teaching through an alternative certification program while Anna completed a highly regarded preservice program. We wondered how these different paths to teaching would influence their work with mentors.

Most significant for our purposes, both novices initially struck their mentors as quite capable and confident for beginning teachers. Rachel said of Vanessa at the end of her first year:

She was feisty and thoughtful and decisive and really went after her own learning. She started out strong not because of her preparation but because of who she is...She's so smart that we've really been able to construct a program that's working. She has done incredible work.

Likewise Eileen said of Anna at the end of her first year of teaching:

Her instructional practice is so congruent with current research and theory and her philosophy of education. You don't see that kind of development in one year. She has a real keen sense of what she needs to learn, and she has extraordinarily high expectations of herself...She's really brilliant.

When we asked Eileen near the end of the second year to describe Anna’s learning, she responded that Anna was an “exceptional teacher” whose students had made “phenomenal progress” as readers and writers. In contrast, Rachel’s view of Vanessa had radically changed. After two years of intensive work together, Rachel had a very different assessment of Vanessa’s seeming confidence and her ability to look at teaching through the eyes of her students. Rachel had come to realize that Vanessa’s understanding of teaching was much more elemental. She was simply “not in students’ heads.” In retrospect, it seemed to Rachel that they had been “working backwards.” Trying to account for the different learning trajectories of the two beginning teachers—despite the fact that their mentors consistently emphasized the need to attend to students’ “mind activity” in planning and teaching—led us
to consider their background and teaching contexts, and to think more about the mentoring they received.

2.4. Data sources and analysis

In developing these cases, we drew on interview and observational data gathered over a two-year period and supplemental written records generated by the two pairs. Preliminary data analysis informed subsequent data collection. We analyzed the data independently and then worked through differences in interpretation. In addition, we shared draft cases with the mentor teachers.

2.4.1. Data collection

At the beginning and end of each school year, we individually interviewed both mentors and novices. Initially we sought information about their background and preparation, views of teaching and learning, goals and expectations for their work together, and anticipated challenges. Over time, we elicited perspectives on the work of teaching, information about the school context, and specific examples of changes in the new teachers’ practice that could be directly linked to mentoring. Twice a year we videotaped the new teachers teaching a literacy lesson. Then we videotaped subsequent post-observation conferences and interviewed the mentors and novices about the lessons and the conferences. To supplement these data, we asked mentors to audiotape twice yearly sessions where they analyzed student work with beginning teachers. Finally we collected all the written records produced by each pair which included collaborative logs filled in after each meeting, professional development plans created at the beginning of the school year, and lesson plans.

2.4.2. Data analysis

Guided by our research questions, data analysis occurred on multiple levels. Moving back and forth between the interview and observational data, we tried to construct a picture of the novices’ first two years of teaching, paying particular attention to what they had learned, how that learning was manifest in their teaching and their students’ learning, and what role mentoring had played in their development.

Working with the interview data, we developed descriptive codes to help us identify dimensions of learning on the part of the new teachers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The codes covered aspects of curriculum, planning, and instruction as well as aspects of professional socialization. We looked for evidence of changes in new teachers’ attitudes, ideas, and practices, and their stance toward teaching, mentoring, and learning to teach. We also noted statements about salient influences on these changes. Moving from new teacher data to mentor data, we sought confirming and disconfirming evidence, especially about the effects of mentoring on new teachers’ learning. We extended the analysis of new teacher learning to the observational record of lessons and conferences, testing claims, searching for corroborating evidence, developing our own independent assessments using the teaching standards to frame our analysis.

To construct a picture of mentors’ practice and deepen our understanding of mentors’ influence on novices’ learning, we wrote summaries of each language arts lesson, then coded the post-observation conference transcripts. Using “inductive analysis,” we segmented the conferences and analyzed the dynamics and content of each segment (Erickson, 1986). Looking across the conferences and lessons, we identified patterns of mentoring and evidence of influence which we further explored through the interview transcripts and written records.

To understand how mentors and new teachers interpreted their work together and to develop our own account of their actions and interactions, we drew on information about goals and aspirations, background and preparation, school and program contexts gleaned from transcripts and summaries.

2.5. Framing the cases

Each case is organized chronologically and focuses on a central goal that unified the work of novice and mentor across the two years. After briefly summarizing what the novice learned in her first year of mentored teaching, we turn to the
second year, describing in some detail two teaching episodes and the subsequent post-observation conferences. We follow each case with an analysis, highlighting critical dimensions of educative mentoring and showing how personal history and professional culture influence what new teachers can learn even from serious mentoring. In a closing discussion, we consider broad implications for mentors, educational leaders, and policy makers.

3. Vanessa and Rachel: A case of “working backwards”

After earning her teaching credential through a state university’s alternative certification program, Vanessa was hired to teach in a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) classroom in a Title I elementary school serving low-income Hispanic children. SEI is a one-year program designed to help students fluent in their first language make a transition into an English-only classroom. Having grown up speaking French until she entered kindergarten in the United States, Vanessa empathized with her students as fellow second language learners. Vanessa’s mentor, Rachel, had just left classroom teaching in order to begin working with beginning teachers and she looked forward to working with Vanessa. A central goal across their two years of work together was strengthening Vanessa’s commitment and capacity to help students comprehend what they were reading.

3.1. Vanessa’s first year of mentored learning to teach

Initially uncertain how to teach reading and writing, Vanessa asked Rachel for help in setting up her language arts program. Rachel described Vanessa’s early efforts to teach reading as “putting the whole class in one book” then “giving them an assignment and letting students work in groups to finish it.” To strengthen the reading program, Rachel helped Vanessa replace whole class instruction with reading centers so that she could work with small groups of children, helping them make sense of what they were reading. Besides modeling small group reading lessons, Rachel took Vanessa to observe other teachers who taught reading in small groups.

As Vanessa grew more adept at managing transitions between centers, Rachel focused on strengthening the quality of Vanessa’s instruction at the teacher-led center. Instead of spending so much time listening to children read, Rachel wanted Vanessa to work on comprehension. Vanessa acknowledged that her desire to “get through the story” and develop students’ fluency often meant that she “never got to the comprehension strategies and other planned activities.”

Based on Rachel’s suggestions, Vanessa began using a pre-reading strategy with students before they read on their own or in pairs while she monitored the other centers. When students finished reading, Vanessa returned to the teacher-led center to discuss the story. By the end of the first year, Rachel believed that Vanessa had “used her teacher time more and more effectively to actually teach skills rather than let them [the students] just read to her.” Rachel looked forward to continued work with Vanessa on strengthening children’s reading comprehension.

3.2. Vanessa’s second year of mentored learning to teach

Rachel was not available at the start of Vanessa’s second year of teaching. Returning to her mentoring responsibilities in November, she was shocked to discover that Vanessa had dismantled the reading centers they had worked so hard to set up the previous year, replacing them with fast-paced, whole-class reading lessons. Vanessa explained that she had gotten the idea while observing a Reading Recovery teacher tutor a

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2The case titles are taken from the mentors’ language as they reflected on their two years of work with the beginning teacher.

3Rachel was not the only person to express concern that Vanessa was not attending sufficiently to students’ comprehension. After attending a workshop on reading instruction, Vanessa invited the workshop facilitator to observe her teach during reading centers. Like Rachel, the facilitator told Vanessa that she needed to give greater attention to how her students understood their reading.
bilingual student. Impressed with the “quick transitions” and numerous “teaching strategies” that the Reading Recovery teacher had used, Vanessa decided that she wanted to try using “as many teaching strategies as possible” with all of her students. She hoped that Rachel would help her explore how to teach the whole group since, she “already knew how to teach small groups.”

3.2.1. Whole class reading lesson
In November, we sat with Rachel as she observed Vanessa teach a whole class reading lesson. Before the lesson, Vanessa asked Rachel to focus on whether whole group instruction “was working”, since she noticed that during such lessons, “six or seven kids are just completely fazed out.” Vanessa asked: “Do I change my whole program around because of these seven kids or do I just let those kids fall through the cracks?” Rachel was deeply troubled that Vanessa would even consider “letting seven kids fall through the cracks.” “That hurt my heart,” she later told us.

From the standpoint of using multiple strategies in a single lesson and keeping up a snappy pace, Vanessa’s lesson was a masterful performance. First she corrected students’ spelling homework (7 min), then explained the new homework assignment which involved the use of editing symbols to proofread a passage (12 min). Holding up a book about Buddy, the first seeing eye dog, Vanessa next invited students to predict what the book was about and when the story took place by looking at the illustrations (12 min). Students’ guesses, which Vanessa did not probe, ranged from 7 to 1000 years ago. The story actually took place in the 1950s. The final instructional segment of this 50-min lesson involved a lively interaction around word endings (13 min). Students were asked to stand if they heard “nt” at the end of a word or remain seated if they heard “nd.” For the final 5 min, they worked independently on a workbook page focusing on these word endings.

3.2.2. Post observation conference
Rachel worried that whole class instruction gave Vanessa “a false sense of control” and kept her from hearing how students made sense of their reading. Rachel entered the post-observation conference hoping to move Vanessa away from her “whole Versus small group stance” to consider the place of whole and small group instruction depending on the teacher’s purposes. When the two met over lunch to discuss the lesson, Rachel opened their conversation by asking Vanessa how things were going in general. Vanessa spent nearly 10 min describing a recent field trip to a haunted house, her stress about students’ standardized test scores, and a child who was coping with a very difficult home situation. When she mentioned how pleased she was with her reading instruction, Rachel shifted the conversation back to the question Vanessa had raised before the lesson—how well is whole group instruction working? Rachel asked Vanessa why this format appealed to her:

It feels so good to feel like I’m actually on time and on the ball. I don’t think the centers that I did were as effective as what I’m doing now. I’m really pushing the kids a lot and they are learning a lot faster than they were last year… They are reading fast. We’re zipping through these books quickly.

When Rachel asked, “How about [their] comprehension?” Vanessa acknowledged, “That’s something I need to work on. Right now that’s on the back burner because there are so many other aspects I want to teach… I’m assuming that comprehension is going well but that’s not necessarily true.”

Knowing that Vanessa was wedded to whole group instruction, Rachel suggested that she still needed “to look at what she was doing” and “modify” her instruction in light of her purposes for students’ learning. After suggesting that Vanessa should also attend to comprehension, Rachel continued to move back and forth between accentuating the positive and naming potentially difficult issues in Vanessa’s teaching. For example, Rachel agreed that while Vanessa could certainly accelerate the students’ English reading, she worried that their increased fluency actually masked comprehension difficulties. To make the case, Sarah drew on evidence from her own work with Vanessa’s children:
Rachel: They’re becoming more fluent readers because of what you’re doing, but I’m worried about the phenomenon of fluency rising without comprehension.

Vanessa: Right.

Rachel: The other day I read with several kids. When they came to parts they didn’t know, they weren’t concerned. They looked over them. The story had enough pictures and context that it didn’t matter, but as they move into fourth grade literature that’s going to hang them up a lot.

Vanessa: Mmm hmm. And this book [about Buddy] that we’re reading right now... There’s less pictures. There’s more information, so that’s a worry that I just don’t know how to teach comprehension.

After Rachel framed the problem of promoting fluency at the expense of comprehension, Vanessa expressed uncertainty about how to teach comprehension. Moving back into a supportive mode, Rachel countered that Vanessa does know how to teach it and proceeded to point out several examples. Vanessa seemed to appreciate hearing the “beautiful” things she accomplished during her lesson:

Rachel: You do actually know quite a bit about it. Let me go over all the things that you know how to do because I think it’s awesome how much you put into it.

Vanessa: This is good to hear.

Rachel: So the first seven minutes, you reviewed spelling words... Then you went on to proofreading... You went beyond the [teacher’s guide] which was beautiful to see... What you’re teaching them is how to make predictions about context... This is all about teaching comprehension.

After using her detailed observation notes to summarize the different parts of the lesson, Rachel suggested that they consider the issue of comprehension in relation to Vanessa’s question about whether whole group was working.

It’s possible to move a large group forward in reading comprehension, but what you’re sacrificing with the large group on reading comprehension is you’re not getting back how they’re processing it. You’re not getting back the sweet things they say, their insights, the questions that they’re afraid to ask...

Rachel then explained that while Vanessa’s “management is outstanding” and it appears that the students are with her, she is “missing the dangerous shortcuts that they take” when her students read. Rachel wrapped up the conversation by suggesting that Vanessa consider bringing back small groups for part of the day or week so that she could hear how students talked about their reading. Rachel also said that she would like to work with a small group of Vanessa’s students so that she could explore comprehension strategies with second language learners herself.

3.2.3. Revisiting the conference

Later that week, we talked with Vanessa about her conversation with Rachel. She maintained her initial assessment that the lesson had gone well, stating that while she would consider returning to “small groups half a day a week to incorporate more reading comprehension,” the conversation with Rachel had helped her realize that she “want[ed] things to stay whole class.” When we asked Vanessa what her reading lesson had been like the day after her conversation with Rachel, she described a whole class lesson that sounded a lot like the lesson that we and Rachel had observed where skills development and fluency took precedence over comprehension.

When we returned in the spring, Rachel explained to us that “it took quite a while to transition Vanessa into being willing to work with groups.” Even though Rachel worked with a small group of students every week in order to figure out for herself and model for Vanessa how to teach comprehension strategies to second language learners, several months passed before Vanessa began working with her own small group. As we observed Vanessa’s teaching and Rachel’s mentoring that spring, we saw that Rachel had extended her concerns about comprehension to the teaching of social studies.
3.2.4. Social studies lesson
In the 25-min small group lesson that we observed with Rachel, the students read and took notes on a section of a chapter in their social studies textbook dealing with the history of California. Once they finished the task, Vanessa planned to use the notes to teach students how to write a five-paragraph essay. The section of text called “Changes Come to California” discussed what happened to California when Mexico gained its independence from Spain. Vanessa suggested that the students use the section titles as the major headings in their note-taking outline. The students then read a paragraph at a time, stating the main idea of each paragraph in their own words. Finally, they recorded their agreed-upon ideas in their individual outlines.

One paragraph proved particularly difficult for students to understand and summarize. It stated that once Mexico gained control of the region, the rules they put in place were different from the ones Spain had enforced. The textbook stated, “Under Spanish law, the colonies were not allowed to trade with other countries, but Spain had trouble enforcing it [the law].” When students were unable to state the main idea of the passage, Rachel stepped in and asked, “I wonder if everyone knows what it means to trade with another country?” Vanessa replied, “Trading means when one country has something another country wants and vice versa. If Rachel has something I want and I have something Rachel wants, we can trade.” She then pointed out that because Mexico was no longer under Spain’s control, they were now free to trade with other countries. At the end of the lesson, Vanessa complimented students for doing “a great job.”

3.2.5. Post observation conference
Before the lesson, Vanessa had asked Rachel to pay attention to whether or not the students were “getting it,” saying, “I know the lower kids won’t get it, but what about the medium and the medium highs? I don’t know if I need to scaffold more.” Their conversation followed a similar pattern to the one we observed in November. Rachel began by asking Vanessa what was going well. For the next 14 min, Vanessa shared recent frustrations including a “lack of connection” she felt to her students, a recent field trip that had gone awry, and a difficult conversation with a child’s parent.

Once Vanessa finished venting, Rachel posed Vanessa’s initial question back to her, namely how she felt the “medium and medium high students” had done during the lesson. Vanessa brightened, saying she was “pleasantly pleased and surprised” that they were “able to vocalize” their confusions about the social studies passage. Vanessa then admitted, “it was kind of nice that you were there to point out the trading thing because I wasn’t focused enough to have been able to pick that out.” After explaining her decision to step into Vanessa’s lesson, Rachel provided her own answer to Vanessa’s focal question:

You asked me are they getting what you want. They definitely get the idea that they are forming an outline, that they’re using the headings, the text features, that they’re finding the main idea. So that in and of itself is a big step forward. Then there’s building concepts. It’s this hugely complex thing you have to do as an SEI teacher. They can read the word but do they have a clue of what trading means?

Rachel explained that the task Vanessa gave the children—reading and taking notes on the social studies textbook—required more than showing them how the textbook is organized or how to take notes. Vanessa also needed to build children’s understanding of the underlying concepts in the text. Vanessa agreed when Rachel claimed, “They

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Several days prior to Vanessa’s lesson, Rachel had illustrated this point while teaching a demonstration lesson about a social studies passage that dealt with Mexico gaining its independence. Rachel had identified the concept of “independence” as particularly important to understanding the section of text the students would read, so she first conducted a 10-min mini-lesson on the term. After stating that independent means “being able to be on your own,” Rachel asked the students if they were independent. Would their parents ever leave them? Are they independent as students? What about teachers and adults? Are they ever independent? Rachel then made an explicit tie to the text when she asked them what they thought it meant for a country to be independent. After some initial confusion about Rachel’s opening, Vanessa later realized that Rachel had taken an “abstract concept” and made it accessible to kids, something Vanessa had “never thought about.”
can pick out the words, but they don’t understand the concept.”

Rachel then provided descriptive data about student involvement, stating, “You had seven out of eight students really engaged with what you were trying to do. That in and of itself is a huge developmental step in their reading.” The rest of their conversation followed the familiar pattern. Rachel continued to raise concerns and offer praise and encouragement. She ended the conversation by outlining what Vanessa should do to help students read and understand the social studies textbook: “…move back and forth” between “analyzing the text, breaking down vocabulary, building meaning, and picking out main idea” as well as to constantly “check for student understanding.”

3.2.6. Revisiting the post observation conference

When, several days later, we spoke with Rachel about her conference with Vanessa, she explained that she had three goals for the conversation: (1) to encourage Vanessa to keep working with the small group since Vanessa had the tendency to abandon instructional strategies when they proved difficult to implement; (2) to contradict Vanessa’s belief that her students “don’t get it” by helping Vanessa notice what her students were actually able to do; and (3) to provide Vanessa with several “concrete strategies” to use in future lessons. When asked how Vanessa might learn to act on the suggestions Rachel had offered (e.g. move back and forth between concept development, vocabulary development, and comprehension), Rachel seemed less certain:

This is not something that I have mastered. Nobody has mastered how you bring along English language learners at a high conceptual level while teaching them the skill of accessing the material independently… If I had more time to work with her, I think I would come in and ask her if I could work with a small group on that and we could compare our two groups, saying, ‘How is it going?’

Speaking to Vanessa about her conversation with Rachel after the small group social studies lesson, we got some indication that she was just beginning to embrace the agenda that Rachel had been trying to help her work on all along. Vanessa wondered aloud, “How can I get the kids to kind of question things and wonder? How do I get them to decipher what the text is telling us rather than me telling them? I don’t really know what the answer is.”

Rachel, too, was beginning to see Vanessa in a new light. After two years of intensive work together, she had reframed her assessment of Vanessa’s surface confidence and was beginning to see how far she was from being able to look at teaching through the eyes of her students. In an extended and open conversation with us, she acknowledged that Vanessa had “more bravado than I even admit to myself:”

Her understanding of what teaching reading is about is much more elemental than I even knew. It’s like we’re working backwards. She’s taken two years to reveal to me how much she actually doesn’t get for the amount that she appears to be confident in what she’s doing… She’s not thinking in terms of what can they tell me about what they know? She’s not in their heads and that hit me more strongly (italics added).

After two intensive years of work, Rachel saw that Vanessa was not sufficiently invested in understanding children’s thinking, something that Rachel believes is essential to good teaching. Perhaps, Rachel thought, Vanessa might now be “ready to dive into” that learning agenda. Unfortunately, her official stint as Vanessa’s mentor was over. Rachel worried that “without continued coaching, [Vanessa] will get stuck.”

3.3. Case analysis

How can we account for Rachel’s assessment that Vanessa seemed to move backwards in her development despite their two years of intensive work together? The more we thought about this question, the more we were led to consider the complex interplay of personal, contextual, and programmatic factors. Who Vanessa was as a student of teaching and what her school was like as a setting for teaching and learning to teach
affected the character and quality of mentoring that Rachel was able to provide. That mentoring, in turn, was shaped by the induction program that selected, trained, and supported her.

While Vanessa appreciated the practical orientation of her alternative certification program, overall she found her teacher preparation “pretty irrelevant.” Like most beginning teachers, Vanessa expected to learn teaching mostly through trial and error. As she said, “No one can prepare you for what your first year is like.” Eager to collect ideas and strategies, she often experimented with things she saw other teachers doing. She also tended to drop things quickly and move on to something else when they “didn’t work.” Rachel faced the dual challenge of keeping Vanessa from prematurely abandoning promising practices while weaning her from less effective strategies.

Vanessa saw learning to teach as a finite, technical process. She believed that her learning needs would diminish over time. While Rachel readily admitted that, as an experienced teacher, she was still trying to figure out how to teach reading comprehension to students like Vanessa’s, Vanessa stated: “I’m sure that the very first year you learn a lot and then every year that goes by you learn a little less.” As a learner, Vanessa often resisted Rachel’s agenda. In Rachel’s words, Vanessa sometimes acted like she already “understood everything.” For example, Vanessa was quick to declare that she had become bored with small group instruction because she “already knew how to do it,” so she “needed to do something new.”

Vanessa’s technical orientation to teaching led her to expect direct answers from her mentor. Initially Vanessa assumed that Rachel would answer all her questions, as she explained to us: “I thought she could do it all, answer it all.” Frustrated when answers to her “million and one questions” were not forthcoming, Vanessa concluded, “She wasn’t somebody that I could expect to answer my questions” so she “started to go to other master teachers to find those answers,” she explained. From Rachel she sought a sympathetic ear. “She’s kept me sane and been great to just vent when things are frustrating...You want to hear that someone understands, gives you support, someone makes you feel better.” Although the induction program explicitly encouraged mentors to go beyond “feel good support,” Vanessa held this expectation for Rachel.

Vanessa’s working conditions presented challenges. Despite its strong reputation, the school had experienced considerable turnover in administrators and teachers. The summer before Vanessa’s first year, the principal and assistant principal had left and their exodus led to widespread teacher turnover. Besides two new administrators, Vanessa was one of 12 new teachers at the school. Since all the fourth grade teachers were either new to the school or new to that grade level, Vanessa had no experienced grade-level colleagues to rely on.

In addition, as both Vanessa and Rachel explained, there were “strong personality conflicts” and tensions between the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) and English-only teachers on the 4th grade team. Team members rarely worked together or viewed one another as resources. Finally, Vanessa’s teaching assignment created additional challenges. While the SEI program was designed for students fluent in their first language, Rachel and Vanessa found that many of her students lacked fluency in both their primary language and in English. Often Rachel felt like Vanessa’s only support.

Sensitive to Vanessa’s tendency to become “easily overwhelmed,” Rachel tried to encourage and support her emotionally while also framing an agenda for her learning. At the end of Vanessa’s second year of teaching, Rachel talked about the tension she felt between trying to keep Vanessa in teaching and risking her withdrawal by pushing too hard:

To me it’s a real victory that she’s going to return next year to this fourth grade SEI class again. I put a lot of energy into keeping her coming back...If people make it too difficult for her, she’s not going to stick around. In a way you don’t want to coddle to that. On the other hand, I’ve never known how to come in and say, ‘You haven’t mastered it. There are a lot of gaps in your program.’

Rachel’s attempts to build Vanessa up, something she seemed to need, made it hard for Rachel to address her vulnerabilities as a teacher.
Rachel used reflective conversations to help Vanessa consider aspects of student learning such as reading comprehension which she otherwise might not have considered. The time spent meeting Vanessa’s emotional needs and pointing out what Vanessa needed to work on, however, left little time to actually work on it together. Vanessa may not have known how to identify the underlying concepts in the social studies text or how to help her students grasp the big ideas. Certainly her definition of trading indicated that she had a limited understanding of the term. Moreover Vanessa may have lacked concrete ways to check for student understanding or build students’ vocabulary, all suggested by Rachel.

Rachel explained to Vanessa and to us that she herself did not always know how to support second language learners. She worked at extending her knowledge by teaching regularly in Vanessa’s classroom. This provided Vanessa with a powerful model of a learning teacher attuned to students’ “mind activity.” Yet seeing this kind of teaching and learning how to do it oneself are very different activities. While Vanessa could observe Rachel teaching a small group of students, she did not have access to Rachel’s planning or to her interactive decision making. We wondered what would have happened if Rachel and Vanessa had co-planned the next social studies lesson together, identifying the big ideas and figuring out how to scaffold students’ learning. We saw this kind of “joint work” in Eileen’s work with Anna and it suggested further possibilities in the practice of educative mentoring.

4. Anna and Eileen: A case of “exceptional growth”

Anna was hired to teach second language learners in a 4th/5th grade multi-age classroom in a Title I elementary school that was also a professional development school (PDS) affiliated with the university coordinating the induction program. As a graduate of the teacher certification program at this university, Anna was already familiar with the school and its resources because she had completed a semester of student teaching there. Moreover, her student teaching supervisor, Eileen, who was the professional development coordinator at the school, was now Anna’s advisor. A central focus in their work together was determining how to scaffold students’ understanding in reading and writing.

4.1. Anna’s first year of mentored learning to teach

Eileen’s one-on-one mentoring of Anna took place against the backdrop of her ongoing work with Anna’s grade level team. In addition to teaching demonstration lessons and debriefing Anna’s teaching, Eileen focused her mentoring around what she and Anna called “curriculum development.” Eileen met monthly with the 4th and 5th grade teachers to work on literacy instruction. First, she helped the team examine and prioritize the state language arts standards based on the specific needs of their students. Next they talked about “best practices” for teaching to the standards and considered what would count as meaningful evidence of student learning. Eileen also helped Anna and her team members develop curricular units which integrated quality literature and expository texts to teach social studies content.

In her first year of teaching, Anna’s professional goals focused on increasing students’ comprehension and analysis of what they read. After helping Anna establish structures for literacy instruction, Eileen and Anna turned to the question of how to support students’ understanding. For example, Anna’s grade level team was exploring the use of literature circles for reading instruction, and Anna believed in the importance of having students talk about books in rich, substantive ways. Once Anna had literature circles in place, she turned her attention to helping students “ask questions and hear each others’ ideas”:

I could definitely lead the kids into talking, but it’s one thing to sit around and talk and another thing to keep the big ideas in mind when they’re talking. Eileen’s modeling has really been crucial, being able to watch her facilitate a discussion. She’s really helped me keep the big ideas in mind, to focus on what’s crucial to know.
By the end of her first year, Eileen described Anna’s instructional practice as “so congruent with current research and theory.” She relied on Anna’s “real keen sense of what she needs” to determine what they should work on together. In Anna’s second year of teaching, Eileen continued to help Anna’s grade level team develop curricular units, particularly writing units around different genres. This joint curricular work provided the foundation for their planning and refinement of individual lessons informed by ongoing analysis of student work.

4.2. Anna’s second year of mentored learning to teach

As a second year teacher, Anna had a new set of questions about how to scaffold students’ learning. What is an appropriate amount of scaffolding? When is it too much? How specific must you be? These questions often came up in relation to teaching writing. She, Eileen and the other 4–5th grade team designed a writing unit on personal narrative which they planned to use as a bridge to teaching expository writing (e.g. a five-paragraph essay). In their grade level teamwork, they clarified the function of each part of a personal narrative: the introduction; beginning, middle and end of the story; and the conclusion. They also wanted to help students learn how organization, purposes, and voice in personal narrative differ from the organization, purposes, and voice used in expository writing.

To help Anna figure out how to scaffold students’ learning to write personal narratives and expository essays, Eileen and Anna often planned new lessons based on learning needs that had surfaced in previous lessons. When Eileen observed and later discussed Anna’s teaching, they generally divided their sessions into two parts: debrief the lesson, then plan ahead. We observed this pattern in the fall of Anna’s second year when, with Eileen, we watched Anna work with students on developing introductions for their personal narratives.

4.2.1. Personal narrative lesson

In previous lessons, students had clarified the personal story they were going to write about through various prewriting exercises. In this lesson, Anna focused on drafting introductions. Trying to differentiate the introduction from the actual beginning of the story, Anna explained that the function of an introduction is to “let the reader in on what the story is about and why it’s important.” To help students get started, she offered two sentence starters—“I’ll never forget...” and “It’s important because...” Once students began working independently, Anna and Eileen circulated around the classroom, helping individual students with their introductions.

4.2.2. Post observation conference

When they got together to debrief the lesson, Eileen and Anna started by looking at students’ writing. They were excited to find that some students had taken their individual coaching to heart and transformed their introduction. For example, Anna explained that one student had initially written, “I will never forget going fishing with my dad. We went to Pinto Lake.” Anna told him that he was starting to tell the story before introducing it. She suggested that he revisit his pre-writing organizer where he had written why this story was important to him—his father had died shortly after the fishing trip. In response to their conversation, the student re-wrote his introduction:

I’ll never forget going fishing with my dad. It’s important to me because it was the last time my brothers and I got to go fishing with him.

Eileen told a similarly engaging story about her own success in eliciting a more compelling introduction. One student initially wrote:

I will never forget the time my hair was on fire. I was about one year old when my hair was on fire. My mom and dad and brother were there when my hair was on fire. It was important to me because I could have died and everybody paid more attention to me than my brothers. I will never forget that time.

Coaching this student, Eileen suggested that she consider how to write her introduction “without telling them anything about the hair because that’s dramatic and you don’t want to let them
in on that yet.” The student’s revised introduction began,

Sitting by the fire I often think about the time I almost died. My whole family was around me and it scares all of us just to remember it.

Eileen suggested that Anna use these examples to illustrate the power of a strong introduction in the next day’s lesson.

Looking through the other students’ writing, however, Anna noticed that not everyone had hit the mark in their initial attempt. This led Anna to ask Eileen, “Should I designate tomorrow as more to do with the introduction?” In other words, should she postpone her original plan of having the students begin to write their actual story the next day and do more work on introductions or should she wait until the students complete their entire narrative before revisiting the introduction? Eileen responded directly, “No. You have too many people ready to go on to the beginning of their story.” Anna then wondered what to do with those students who were not ready to move on. Eileen suggested that she first help students think about how to launch the beginning of their story, then pull the six or seven students aside who needed help with their introductions while the rest of the class began drafting their beginnings.

When we returned in the spring, we found that Eileen and Anna were engaged in the same kind of highly detailed, subject-specific work that included analyzing student writing, clarifying the content to be taught, figuring out what kind of support students needed, and refining specific lessons.

4.2.3. Writing assessment lesson

Along with Eileen, we observed another writing lesson that Anna taught in May. Anna, along with her grade level team, had developed a rubric for assessing students’ personal narratives. To help students determine progress in their own writing, she passed out three writing samples so that they could visualize more concretely what it would look like for a piece of writing to exceed, meet or approach the standards embedded in the rubric. After collectively analyzing these samples, students used the rubric to assess their own previously written pieces.

4.2.4. Post observation conference

In this debriefing session, Eileen and Anna spent relatively little time discussing what had happened in the lesson. Mostly they concentrated on planning the first lesson in an expository writing unit that Anna intended to teach the following week. The excerpted conversation below illustrates a pattern that we noticed in their discourse. Anna, understandably focused on the next day’s lesson, asks a specific logistical question. Eileen replies, often suggesting specific language that Anna might use in her teaching. This leads to refinement and revision, even to new ideas. Finally the interaction concludes with one of them summarizing what Anna will do. In this excerpt, they were trying to determine how Anna could launch the lesson. We use italics to indicate when Eileen adopts a “teacher voice,” giving Anna explicit language to use the following day:

Anna: During the overview, do I let them in on what an expository essay is?
Eileen: Oh, yes. That’s when you do the expository writing part. We’re going to be writing an essay as writers and historians. We’ve been collecting all this information. Now, how do historians write? Do they write the same way as we wrote in our personal narratives? No, they write in information. We’re going to be doing something very different from the personal narrative. So voice, organization, purpose.
Anna: Maybe I should do it in a T-chart form on the overhead.
Eileen: Yeah. The purpose is different. In narrative, we’re telling a story. In expository writing we’re giving information. The voice is also different. In narrative we’re talking about our personal selves. In expository writing we’re going to have an expert’s voice, and the organization is very different.
Anna: I see doing the T-chart. It’s just that my fifth graders are going to have the schema around the word ‘essay’ but my fourth graders will not.
Eileen: You could have your fifth graders talk to your fourth graders about what an essay is.
Anna: Yeah. Here’s a question. My students have read social studies books but they’ve not necessarily read a 5-paragraph essay. Would it
be helpful for them to read an essay before we even do any of this to get a sense of where we’re going? Or do they need to actually create one before they can understand what one is? What comes first?

Eileen: I’m tempted to use essays that the fifth graders wrote in here last year.

Anna: Cool. I like that. They’ll really see that it’s an expert voice giving information.

Eileen: So the 5th graders are going to share significant essays they wrote last year with the 4th graders. Then you’re going to talk about the purpose of an essay and how it’s different from the personal narrative.

Anna’s original question led Eileen to step into the teacher’s role and think aloud about what Anna might say to launch the lesson. This also gave Eileen a chance to clarify the big ideas in the lesson (e.g. differences in purpose, voice, and organization between personal narrative and expository writing). As she imagined acting on Eileen’s suggestions, Anna got an idea of how she could visually represent those differences using a T-chart. Anticipating what might be difficult for her students to understand, Anna then realized that the fifth graders would be familiar with the word ‘essay,’ but the fourth graders would not. This led Eileen to suggest that they show the fourth graders essays that the fifth graders had written the year before.

We were struck by Eileen’s use of the “first person” (e.g. I’m tempted to use), a reflection of how much she was inside the content, the students’ learning, and Anna’s learning and how much she felt jointly responsible for the teaching. Once Eileen reiterated what the two had agreed on, they continued working through the concrete details of the upcoming lesson in much the same way, with Anna asking questions and Eileen giving direct suggestions. Their exchanges often led to new ideas and insights.

When we asked Eileen to describe Anna’s learning near the end of her second year, Eileen encouraged us to examine the progress Anna had documented in her students’ writing in order to understand how much Anna had learned. Eileen considered Anna to be an “exceptional” teacher who “because of her brilliance and determination as well as shared support” helped her students “make phenomenal progress” as readers and writers. Eileen further stated that Anna scaffolded not only children’s learning but also her colleagues’ as well, explaining that every teacher at the PDS is considered “both a teacher and a leader.”

4.3. Case analysis

In making sense of this case, we examine the connections between Anna’s stance as a learner, the context in which she worked, and the character and quality of mentoring that Eileen provided her. As we found in the case of Rachel and Vanessa, the interaction of these factors seems to account for the exceptional growth that Anna made in her first two years of teaching.

Because Anna earned her Master’s degree and teaching credential from the state university that coordinated the induction program she now participated in, she experienced continuity between the orientation of her teacher preparation and her induction experience. She had deliberately chosen a preservice program with a strong theoretical orientation because she saw herself as “a critical thinker” who wanted “to be surrounded by people who thought passionately about education, who have a vision.” Previous work with Eileen who had supervised her student teaching created further continuity in Anna’s learning. Because they had focused a lot on planning, Anna anticipated continued support and guidance with “curriculum development.”

The questions Anna raised as a first and second year teacher while co-planning with Eileen indicate her sophisticated understanding of teaching and her openness to learning. She explained, “I decided to teach because I love to learn. I’m not scared of how much I need to learn.” Anna felt comfortable asking Eileen anything without fear of being

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5Anna’s teaching context reflects the concept of “clinical residency programs” described in a recent Carnegie Challenge Report (Hinds, 2002). Clinical residency programs provide novices with critical support, including college faculty mentors who can aid novices in developing pedagogical and content knowledge. College faculty also embed their research in novice and K-12 students’ learning, much the way Eileen does.
judged. She believed that learning from practice first required “figuring out what you know” and “thinking about what you’re doing,” then finding a way to teach in line with your “philosophy.”

At her school, Anna enjoyed what Eileen called a “broad system of support.” Besides her mentor, Anna viewed her grade level teammates as “comrades, great critical thinkers” whom she relied on for support and guidance. In this sense, Anna benefited from Eileen’s efforts to develop a school-wide professional culture. As a PDS, the school enjoyed many financial and human resources, a shared vision of teaching, and a shared focus on student achievement.

In terms of her mentoring practice, Eileen strove to ensure that whatever assistance she provided Anna directly benefited her students’ learning. She explained, “We are engaged in trying to figure this out so that it really works for kids, and we share our students. I’m very invested in how the students are doing…. We’re working together to advance the academic achievement of kids.” Eileen’s mentoring consisted of modeling lessons for Anna, observing and debriefing Anna’s own teaching, and co-planning curriculum with Anna. Anna identified Eileen’s demonstration lessons as an important resource in learning how to facilitate discussions and keep students focused on “big ideas” embedded in a text. Anna seemed to have both the schema needed to make sense of Eileen’s modeling and the intellectual capacity to transfer that knowledge into her own practice.

Eileen’s mentoring included not only helping Anna learn from her teaching but also preparing for future instruction. This entailed two kinds of planning: (1) “big picture” planning of curricular units where Eileen and Anna deepened and clarified their knowledge of writing; and (2) lesson planning where Eileen reinforced Anna’s content knowledge while helping her work through the particulars of enacting a lesson, including anticipating difficulties students might encounter and specific language she could use to introduce key definitions and give directions. Through their “joint work,” Eileen and Anna were able to generate ideas that neither would have come up with on her own. Working together to plan units and lessons, Eileen drew on her extensive pedagogical knowledge, her desire to consolidate the content and skills they wanted students to learn, and her interest in figuring out the best way to teach them. In this form of mentoring, the mentor is both co-learner and expert.

5. Discussion

These cases of mentored learning to teach provide vivid images of thoughtful mentors at work. They also shed light on the diverse learning needs of beginning teachers and on the way school cultures and structures enable and constrain educative mentoring. If we want to realize the benefits of mentoring as a vehicle for improving teaching and learning, we need to base induction programs and policies on dependable ideas about new teachers as learners, the nature of educative mentoring, and the role of schools in new teacher induction.

Beginning teachers still have a lot to learn if they are going to become effective teachers, especially in Title 1 schools serving low-income minority students. This is true for an accomplished beginner like Anna who is ready to work on a sophisticated agenda—how to lead discussions that are rich in ideas and how to scaffold the development of writing skills in her ESL fourth graders. It is also true for Vanessa who is skilled in classroom management but does not know how to help her fourth/fifth graders read for meaning. It is surely true for the increasing numbers of teachers who enter classrooms with even less of a foundation to build on. The current generation of beginning teachers brings varied experiences and expectations to their work, but all need situated and sustained guidance and support as they tackle the challenge of learning to teach in a particular school context.

Little (1990b) introduced and defined the term “joint work” as “encounters among teachers that rest on shared responsi-

\footnote{Little (1990b) introduced and defined the term “joint work” as “encounters among teachers that rest on shared responsi-}
It is widely assumed that new teachers mostly need help with classroom management. Once that is addressed, they can learn the rest on their own. This represents a limited understanding of teaching and a limited view of learning to teach. Skill in classroom management is necessary but hardly sufficient for the kind of teaching that helps students learn to use their minds with power and pleasure. Independent, trial and error learning is no guarantee that new teachers will develop defensible teaching practices. We need induction and mentoring that respond to the varied and changing needs of beginning teachers and that increase the likelihood that what new teachers learn from experience reflects the best that we know. (Imagine the consequences for Vanessa's students if no mentor were around to point out the limits of whole class instruction and the dangers of sacrificing reading comprehension to fluency.) Until we face the fact that all beginning teachers are learning to teach, we will continue to define induction as short-term support rather than new teacher development.

The kind of mentoring that Rachel and Eileen practice does not fit the popular image of mentors as buddies or local guides. As teachers of teachers, both mentors expected to contribute to new teachers' learning and to influence the quality of their teaching. They demonstrated a sense of shared responsibility for student learning. They enabled new teachers to do with help what they were not ready to do on their own. While we noticed some differences in their mentoring practices, the similarities are more relevant to an understanding of educative mentoring.

If mentoring is to function as a form of individualized professional development, it must be guided by a vision of the kind of teaching to be developed. Both Eileen and Rachel worked from well-developed conceptions of good teaching. Besides the vision represented in the California teaching standards, they had subject-specific images of literate classrooms and balanced language arts programs. This enabled them to frame or recognize important issues in their conversations with new teachers, use observational data effectively, give sound advice, and assess new teachers' progress.

Equally important, both Eileen and Rachel were working at the edges of their own knowledge of teaching and the knowledge-base of the field, trying to figure out the best ways to develop powerful language skills in ESL students. Consequently, they were eager to work and learn alongside other teachers, including novices. This sent a powerful message about teachers as learners and teaching as an experimental practice.

Mentors need a flexible repertoire to help new teachers get inside the practical and intellectual demands of teaching. Rachel was more disposed to rely on "reflective conversations" to help Vanessa think about aspects of teaching that she may not have considered on her own. Eileen was more disposed to helping Anna learn what she wanted to know by actually doing the work together. Both Rachel and Eileen were skillful classroom observers and both used direct telling, asking, listening and modeling.

Research on the limits of one-on-one mentoring documents the following problems: mentors with no time to meet with new teachers; mentors in other schools, subjects, or grade levels than the new teacher assigned to them; mentors with little or no preparation for mentoring; or mentors with limited views of their roles and responsibilities (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993; Norman, 2001; Smith & Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson et al., 2004). Whenever we hear claims about the value or limits of mentoring, we need to ask: what kind of mentoring are we talking about and what sorts of outcomes do we seek? If we want mentoring to improve the quality of classroom teaching, then we need mentors who are teachers of teaching and organizations that enable mentors to do their work.

Still, as we saw in the case of Vanessa, even serious and sustained mentoring is no magic bullet. What mentoring can accomplish is affected not only by the expectations and skill of the mentor, but also by the stance and expectations of the new teacher. If a new teacher is resistant or emotionally needy or slow to take seriously the legitimate concerns of the mentor, no matter how diplomatically presented, then the mentor may not be able to move the novice as far or as quickly as she would like. Finding a workable balance of support...
and stretch is an endemic challenge in educative mentoring. Even two years may not be long enough to help some new teachers establish good teaching habits.

An equally important factor is the school context where teaching and mentoring take place. Recent studies show that the professional culture in schools, “the blend of values, norms and modes of professional practice that develop among teachers,” has a strong impact on new teachers and their work with mentors (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 140). Again the two cases are instructive. Anna worked in a school where she felt supported by her colleagues as well as her mentor. The formal mentoring that Eileen provided took place against the backdrop of a professional culture which valued collaboration among teachers at all experience levels. The following description of an “integrated professional culture” fits the Professional Development School (PDS) where Anna taught and Eileen mentored:

In integrated professional cultures, mentoring is organized to benefit both the novice and the experienced teachers, and structures are in place that further facilitate teacher interaction and reinforce interdependence. Schools with integrated professional cultures are organizations that explicitly value teachers’ professional growth and renewal (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 159).

On the other hand, Vanessa found herself in a school with a high proportion of inexperienced teachers (and new administrators). With no experienced teachers on the fourth grade team, she did not have regular and easy access to the “wisdom of practice.” Nor did anyone in the administration do anything about the dysfunctional relationships among the fourth grade teachers. No wonder Rachel felt like Vanessa’s sole source of support. One can only speculate about the trajectory of Vanessa’s learning if she had started teaching in a school where new teachers cooperated and communicated with each other and with their experienced colleagues in order to improve school-wide instruction. Perhaps Rachel would not have been the only voice of conscience trying to keep Vanessa from letting even a single student fall through the cracks.

Without a web of professional support in her school, Vanessa was fortunate to have the services of a strong induction program jointly funded by the state and district to provide her with serious, school-based mentoring during her first two years of teaching.7

The cases presented here illustrate two structural models of mentoring—mentoring as part of a school-wide program of professional development and mentoring as part of a formal induction program. Arguing whether “inside” or “outside” mentoring misses the point. Until schools are organized to enable serious collaboration, interdependence, and learning on the part of all teachers, we need induction programs that take new teacher learning seriously. No matter what organization formally initiates such programs, induction and mentoring inevitably happen in schools. The more policy makers and educational leaders understand the formal and informal conditions in schools that enable new teachers to thrive, including the kind of educative mentoring that nurtures effective teaching over time, the better able they will be to advocate and build school-based systems of support and development for all teachers.

References


7The program also provided monthly seminars for new teachers planned and led by mentor teachers.


