

Good Work in Teacher Mentoring:  
Affirming, Celebrating and Strengthening the Work

Xuehui Arlene Pang  
HUID: 10865476

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**Abstract**

Mentoring programs are common features in many school systems today. Such programs are seen as a means of promoting teacher retention and improving teacher quality. Mentoring programs serve to induct new teachers into the school environment, and to support their professional growth and development under the guidance of an assumedly more experienced and skillful one. In this study, I sought to examine the motivations of teacher mentors and how they navigate through challenges to do good work. I argue that teacher mentors are guided by a set of values that help them navigate the challenges of mentoring, and this source of strength allows them to do work that is excellent, engaging and ethical. Teacher mentors face ethical dilemmas when they must weigh the sanctity of their relationships to mentees against the need to monitor the failure of mentees to improve and the pressures to report them to educational authorities. I conclude that the work of mentoring can be strengthened if mentors seek to inspire other teachers to mentor, as well as to pass on the values and attitudes that are central to the teaching profession.

I advocate for changes to be made in teacher mentor training programs. Administrators need to gain a deeper understanding into the workings of mentoring relationships. In that way they will be able to accommodate the needs of mentoring programs and to create a school-wide culture of learning that strengthens the work of teacher mentoring.

## Introduction

Mentoring has gained ubiquity in the teacher training programs of the world's best performing school systems like those found in Alberta, Australia, Belgium, Finland, Japan and Singapore today. Recognized as a valuable means of improving teacher quality, mentoring programs tend to have a focus on the impartation of skills and knowledge to pre-service and beginning teachers. Apart from the honing of skills and knowledge, mentoring is a means by which the values of the profession can be passed on and instilled in new teachers.

We prize the good work of classroom teachers and actively seek to improve the conditions so that good work in teaching may continue in our schools. It is equally important for the field to recognize that the good work of teacher mentors is crucial to sustaining the longevity of the profession, and hence to develop ways to support good mentoring.

In 'Good Mentoring', Nakamura, Shernoff & Hooker (2009, p. 227) bring to the attention of their readers that the work of mentoring is not spared from the forces that threaten good work. The writers also note that, in spite of the rewards that are tied to being a mentor, mentorship often yields lesser rewards and recognition than other work-related activities – for example, one's involvement and contribution to a department or the institution to which one belongs. If these observations are true, then, on what grounds would one willfully choose to mentor and to continue in the work of mentorship?

In consideration of their observations, Nakamura et.al. (2009, p. 251) suggest that accomplished individuals take an interest in mentoring and promote the work of mentoring in their respective fields. They also make an appeal to researcher and educators to “[continue to

refine] the understanding of how to mentor well”. In response to this, I chose to examine the work of teacher mentors, to understand their motivations and how they navigate the challenges that stand in the way of good mentoring. With my findings, I argue that teacher mentors are guided by a set of values when they navigate the challenges of mentoring, and these values allow them to do work that is excellent, engaging and ethical. I advocate for changes to be made in teacher mentor training programs. Administrators need to gain a deeper understanding into the workings of mentoring relationships. In that way they will be better able to accommodate the needs of mentoring programs and to create a school-wide culture of learning that supports the mentoring process.

## **Literature**

### **The purposes of mentoring**

Existing school level mentoring programs function to support new teachers in the beginning stages of their career. Such support usually takes the forms of:

- (i) inducting new teachers to the school environment - this includes introductions to colleagues and other staff of the school, familiarization with physical settings, as well as integration into the working culture, norms and practices within the community of teachers (Tedder & Lawy, 2009).
- (ii) equipping them with the skills and resources that are necessary for instruction, especially in the subject area, and for the carrying out of other job functions. A mentor may model good practices, techniques and strategy, and scaffold mastery of these features. He / she also makes known to the new teacher the types of materials, references and resource persons that are available to assist him/her in the work (Alleman, 1986).

Mentoring also serves as a form of professional development, both for the teacher mentor and the new teacher, leading to better teacher effectiveness and an overall increase in the standards of the teaching profession (The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1999). Lastly, these programs facilitate the process of helping new teachers identify with the profession not just cognitively through the acquisition of knowledge and skills sets that are shared in the profession, but also by internalizing the values that are modeled (Tedder & Lawy, 2009).

### **The nature of mentoring**

Mentoring focuses on the professional growth and development of the one being mentored; it is not meant to judge performance, or to penalize shortcomings. Hopper (2001) underscores the importance of a mentor in being highly involved in developing the new teacher by working collaboratively and cooperatively with him/her. A mentor establishes a relationship based on trust and offers advice, instruction, direction, guidance and support (Koki, 1997) to the new teacher. The goal of mentoring is to assist the growth of a less experienced teacher—his / her growth in the competencies required to do the work well and with the right mindset, and eventually become an independent worker, responsible and able to answer for what has been entrusted to him/her in the work (Kay, 1990).

### **Role perceptions of teacher mentors**

In a series of free response questions with a group of 30 teachers, Wright and Bottery (1997) concluded that teacher mentors think of themselves as playing a main role in coaching and giving advice to new teachers so that they can strengthen their classroom and instructional practices. In confirmation of this, through questionnaire responses from teacher mentors, Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005) noted that mentors are inclined to construe their role as that of a provider

of feedback, followed by that of a counselor, observer and role model, equal partner, critical friend, and instructor. Teacher mentors saw themselves least as playing the role of quality controllers, assessors and managers. Those who were interviewed spoke of the importance of helping new teachers to gain pedagogical mastery in their respective content areas.

### **Motivations to mentor**

In their book entitled 'Good Mentoring', Nakamura et al. (2009) observe that in general, professionals are inclined to mentor when they are concerned either about the domain or the field to which they belong, to the wider community, or to a mixture of these areas. Specific to teacher mentoring, Schulze (1995) reveals that the motivation to mentor arises when a teacher feels a strong sense of responsibility for helping another teacher to grow, develop and eventually succeed. The motivation to mentor may also arise either out of obligation, or from a teacher's previous experience of a positive and fulfilling mentoring relationship in the early stages of his/her career (Garza, Ramirez, Ovando, 2009). Additionally, the tangible and intangible personal benefits that can be reaped from mentoring also drive the work of teacher mentors. Teacher mentors associated mentoring with privileges of being granted flexible time arrangements, being exempt from other activities, as well as being appreciated and recognized. They also embrace the opportunity to display pedagogical leadership, to share their expertise (Scheetz, Waters, Smeaton & Lare, 2005, and to learn from the new teachers they mentored (Garza et al. (2009).

### **Challenges in mentoring**

Mentoring is usually taken on as an additional responsibility. Apart from the daily administrative duties, marking, lesson planning and class schedules, teacher mentors have to set aside time to observe a new teacher's lesson and to engage in face-to-face mentoring sessions for

feedback and coaching (Flores & Ferreira, 2009). Setting aside time for mentoring on a consistent basis is thus one of the challenges teacher mentors face. In their study, Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005) found that teachers found it challenging to mentor during their initial years of mentoring. Mentors faced feelings of unpreparedness, despite having received three weeks of training prior to their undertaking of the role. This tentativeness was attributed to the large amount of information that was given to them within a short time. In the same study, when asked about their challenges, mentors also made reference to dilemmas that they faced when interacting with new teachers. One example of a dilemma: choosing to address the areas of weaknesses in a new teacher by giving constructive criticism, versus choosing to remain silent in fear of hurting the new teacher's feelings. Interviews with student teachers hint that mentors may be familiar or proficient with the new pedagogical approaches in the field (Ballantyne, Hansford & Packer, 1995). Anecdotal evidence of mentors imposing traditional teaching methods on beginning teachers was noted. Mentors may face challenges in keeping abreast with the new approaches and developments that occur in the field.

### **Moving Forward**

Existing findings focus mainly on the roles of teacher mentors and their work in mentoring new teachers in the areas of skill and content mastery. While what makes good teaching has been extensively described and studied, less work has been done to uncover what it means for mentors teachers to do good mentoring.

The challenges that have been identified with the work of mentoring teachers often stem from the nature of work and systemic constraints, as well as from the teachers themselves. It is unclear if there are other challenges within or outside the field that impede the work of

mentoring in schools. We do not fully understand why, in the face of these challenges, teachers continue to mentor other teachers.

In the light of what is currently known, armed with the GoodWork Framework, I embarked on a study of the perceptions of teacher mentors with respect to their work in mentoring and their motivations behind accepting formal mentoring appointments, as well as their perseverance through the challenges that they face in their work.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

I carried out an empirical study and interviewed 8 educators (Male: 4, Female: 4) who have held, or who are currently holding positions in teacher mentorship. My interviewees consisted of 2 teachers who had teaching and mentoring experience in the public schools in Singapore, and 6 teachers who had teaching and mentoring experience in both the public and private schools in the school setting of the United States. The interviewees had between them 3-40 years of classroom teaching experience, and mentoring experience ranging from less than a year to 22 years. Five of the interviewees engaged in mentoring while holding on to their daily teaching responsibilities. Two were mentoring teachers while pursuing their post-graduate degrees, and 1 had served as a full time teacher developer. All 8 educators were personal contacts that I had established through the Harvard Graduate School of Education, or through my previous working experience. The interviews were carried out face to face, each lasting 30-60 minutes. A breakdown of the teaching experience and characteristics of my interviewees is presented in [Appendix A](#).

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

I crafted a set of open-ended interview questions ([Appendix B](#)) that would allow me to gain insight into the motivations, challenges and the values / principles that guide the work of teacher mentors. To understand how teacher mentors operationalize their values and guiding principles, I included in the set three questions regarding dilemmas teacher mentors might face in the course of their work were included in the question set. In an effort to use both the emic and etic perspectives to analyze my data, I transcribed all the interviews and coded the transcriptions according to themes discussed in the GoodWork class e.g. motivations / interests, skills, responsibility, dilemmas / challenges etc. Each of these themes were broken down into more specific descriptors. Finally, I used the lens of the GoodWork Framework to group these themes into the broader categories of excellence, engagement and ethics. A list of codes and their categorizations can be found in [Appendix C](#).

### **Findings**

I present my findings using the broad categories of excellence, engagement and ethics. In instances where a theme spanned two or all of the categories, I represented them in each category and made explicit mention of the connection.

#### **Excellence**

In the perspective of the GoodWork Framework, excellence refers to having the technical skills and expertise that are required for the work. I found that the concept of excellence in teacher mentoring could be interpreted on two levels: (1) the pedagogical and classroom management skills required for good teaching and learning to occur and (2) the skills required for good mentoring to occur.

#### ***Excellence in pedagogical and classroom management skills***

All the mentors I interviewed recognized the need to have expertise in the craft of teaching. During the interviews, the mentors spontaneously surfaced the areas of classroom-related expertise that an effective teacher should have to qualify as a mentor. These included skills in classroom management, teaching methods, strategies for supporting learning, collecting and analyzing data (quantitative and qualitative) and the ability to be a reflective practitioner. They also suggested that such expertise came about only through having adequate exposure and experience in the classroom. One mentor, Shaun, reflected:

I don't think it would be appropriate to be a mentor after one or two year of teaching. There's something to be said about having a big toolbox and a broad skill set and to be very knowledgeable about your craft.

Consistent with the view that skill and expertise are required for one to be a good mentor, all the interviewees noted that it was important for them to constantly learn new skills and techniques. They acknowledged that they did not necessarily have to know all the answers, and that it was possible to learn from and learn alongside their mentees. On this note, the interviewees identified humility as a value they needed to have in order for them to learn from and learn with the new teacher. Julia's response neatly summarizes this thought:

I am not the sage on the stage. We need to be humble to be able to say, "I don't know, let's learn together."

### ***Excellence in the skills for good mentoring***

While my interviewees were able to give a comprehensive list of the skills that were related to teaching, and felt confident of their mastery of these skills, significantly less reference was made to the specific skills that one needed to mentor well. These were spoken of briefly in 3 of the 8 interviews. The two most experienced mentors, Julia and Erika, identified relational skills that were necessary in building and sustaining the mentor-mentee relationships –knowing

how to build trust and rapport, as well as how to be tactful in counseling and debriefing a mentee. Shaun, who had less than a year of mentoring experience, felt the need to develop his skills in helping new teachers to understand the pedagogy that they used, as well as the need to be more precise and more fluent in describing his classroom observations to the mentee during a debriefing session.

*Challenges associated with the need for excellence*

In recognizing the need for excellence in their craft, mentors faced challenges of feeling inadequate as mentors when they saw themselves as lacking in the skills and expertise on one or both levels.

When mentors assumed their appointments during the early years of teaching, they had a tendency to feel unqualified in terms of their expertise in the classroom. Grace and Jeremy, who started mentoring third and fifth years as teachers, shared respectively:

I really didn't feel that I was qualified to do it. I just really didn't feel like I was prepared.

I was thinking, "Five years (of experience) is not much time, what makes me more of an expert than these teachers?"

Later in the interview, Grace also went on to reveal that some of these self-doubts tended to remain even later on in the course of the mentoring process:

I was frustrated that I couldn't help her with a lot of things. When I was helping her with something, in the back of my head, I was thinking, "What do I know, I'm only a third year teacher. I should not be a mentor".

In terms of proficiency and training in the skills required for good mentoring, descriptions offered by the interviewees gave no indication that these skills had been addressed during their own training sessions. Participants who were given training reported that they were either required to attend a briefing, or a workshop. Sometimes, they received printed material on mentoring. The content of these training packages focused primarily on the frameworks and

guidelines they were expected to follow. On two occasions, no training was provided at all. Though they did not articulate explicitly that they felt that they lacked the skills to mentor well, this conclusion could be inferred from their responses. Jeremy and Shaun, who had attended the same briefing session for teacher mentors earlier this year, gave the following respective descriptions of their experiences as they started out as first-time mentors:

It was like putting a child on a bike without training wheels. I just wish we were initially trained more—we would have felt more prepared when we stepped in.

I feel like I am learning as I am mentoring. A lot of what I am doing now, I'm basing it on gut, on empathy, and on putting myself in the shoes of the mentee.

In navigating the challenges associated with the lack of mentoring skills, Jeremy and Shaun shared that they made use of the regular meetings they had with their own advisors to ask for advice on the difficulties they had encountered in the mentoring process. Two other mentors, Julia and Marcus, mentioned that they could turn to their other colleagues for advice if they were uncertain of what they should do in any given situation. Apart from that, Shaun also shared that he had consulted a number of books on mentoring so that he could learn more about the process on his own.

## **Engagement**

In our discussion of engagement in GoodWork, we refer to the flow and the sense of fulfillment that is experienced through work. In seeking to understand how mentors found engagement in their work, I looked to their motivations to mentor, and tried to find the sources from which they derived the most satisfaction in their work.

### ***The beginning of engagement—motivations that led to the decision to mentor***

The initial responses of all my interviewees on what motivated them to mentor were mainly altruistic and intrinsic in nature. One commonality amongst them was that they were

eager to make contributions that had the potential to positively impact students across the boundaries of their own classrooms, and saw that it could be done if they were able to help a new teacher in his/her craft. One of the interviewees, Bryan, described this phenomenon as the 'amplification of one's effect'. Marcus and Erika echo one another in their explanations:

I actually see mentoring a teacher as more fulfilling (than just teaching) because the impact is even greater. If you are a teacher in the classroom, you impact 40 students. But when you mentor teachers, the impact is even greater.

I wanted to influence things beyond my classroom. You get a great deal of satisfaction from teaching but at some point in your career, you want to make a difference beyond your own classroom.

Recognizing the need for new teachers to be mentored was also a motivating factor. 5 of the interviewees reported that they did not have a mentor when they began their teaching careers, and remarked that they would have appreciated having a more experienced teacher to guide and support them in their early years in the profession. Hence, they were moved to do for others something that they did not earlier receive, but felt would be beneficial to have.

Mentors were also motivated by their personal experiences of being mentored. One participant spoke of the learning that had taken place with his own mentor and hence wanted to do the same to benefit other teachers. Another recounted her experience with a 'tor-mentor' and was motivated to be a better mentor than the mentor that she had been saddled with.

Consistent with existing literature, just as teachers were driven by altruistic reasons of wanting to help new teachers and to positively impact and to benefit students, personal interests involving remuneration and opportunities for career advancement were also mentioned as reasons why one would readily assume a mentoring position. I noted however, that these were not strongly associated with feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment, as compared to when they

spoke of making an impact outside of their classrooms, or helping another teacher to grow and flourish in the profession.

***Sustaining the engagement—finding fulfillment in the mentoring process***

I found that for teacher mentors, flow and engagement during the mentoring process came from having a positive relationship with their mentees, as well as from seeing the new teacher succeed. Mentors derived satisfaction from and expressed their delight in witnessing the continual growth of the new teacher and in celebrating his/her success and learning. During her interview, Grace shared:

We became really friendly and it was nice to see how she got better as the year progressed. Things really turned around in her classroom. It was good to see, and she felt successful.

The continued personal growth that teacher mentors could experience as they worked with new teachers also contributed to the feelings of fulfillment that they experienced. This could be due to the fact that skill and expertise were highly valued by the mentors, as noted previously under the theme of Excellence. Julia shares:

In the process of mentoring, we can share ideas, and I actually learned quite a lot of things from my mentee as well.

***Challenges associated with engagement***

Because mentors derived satisfaction from the building of relationships with their mentees and from helping them to develop professionally, the sources of their frustrations came from arrangements in schedules that hindered these from taking place. All 8 participants cited challenges that were related to relating to scheduling / planning. 4 interviewees cited the availability of time as a challenge, either because they had to mentor up to a total of 6 new teachers at any one time, or because the hectic schedule of the school timetable made it difficult

for them to find a common time with their mentees to discuss their lessons and classroom observations. Katie lamented:

Our teaching day is so packed, so busy. I wished I had more time with them to help them develop their craft.

On some occasions, it was difficult for the teacher mentors to carry out the required, and very necessary classroom observations due to clashes in the school timetable that required them to be in their own classrooms at the same time their mentees were teaching in another classroom.

Bryan shares his experience on this:

I couldn't go into their classes, which made it hard, because they needed help. That's a really technical issue but it made a big difference because I could not help those teachers.

## **Ethical**

What mentors deem to be ethical work in mentoring rests on their understanding of the nature of their work and its boundaries. There were tensions in deciding to whom they felt most responsible; they often weighed the impact that their actions would have on the parties involved when there were conflicting interests.

In describing ethical work, we refer to work that does not cause harm or detriment to others in the course of the work. Mentors perceived this situation as not causing harm to both the new teacher and to the students. The dilemma was brought out when mentors astutely pointed out that on some occasions, not causing 'harm' to a new teacher who had a bad attitude and who was unwilling to learn (e.g. by giving a report on the new teacher to the school administrators) would eventually cause harm to the students that may pass through the hands of this teacher. This particular tension was felt mainly by the mentors who stated that they felt primarily responsible to the new teacher, but who at the same time realized that on a larger scale, they had

a responsibility to the students, and the negative effects that could result from allowing this new teacher to carry on would ultimately be felt by both his/her current and future students.

***The main dilemma: to tell or not to tell?***

Half the interviewees gave accounts of similar variations of the hypothetical dilemma I had posed in the interview (question 15) when they spoke of the challenges they faced in mentoring. Accordingly, I have chosen to expound on this dilemma more comprehensively in this section of the paper. They described how their principals had attempted to solicit from them appraisals and evaluations of the mentee's performance, and that these reports would have affected the new teacher's employment opportunities, grading / ranking for the year (which would have implications on remuneration), for better or worse.

***Why the dilemma arises***

Mentors experienced a dissonance between what they understood their role as a mentor to be and the requests or demands of school administrators. All my interviewees expressed the view that the role of a mentor was primarily a developmental rather than an evaluative one. This was true even for two of the mentors whose official scope of work as mentors involved making evaluations on their mentees on specific points in the semester. The interviewees commented that feedback should be used to help the new teacher grow and develop, rather than to penalize them on their shortcomings. One mentor, Bryan, pointed out that if a mentor had to evaluate his/her mentee, the assessment should lead to actions that help the mentee to improve, rather than used to justify the imposing of any form of penalty upon the new teacher:

The goal is to diagnose problems so you can fix the problem, not so you can fire the person. The goal here is to help this person improve.

The dissonance as described above was more strongly felt by mentors who were bound by agreements they had been asked to sign when they were first appointed as mentors. In such an agreement, the mentors had promised that they would not to disclose any kind of evaluations of the new teacher to the school administrators. While mentors may have felt a large sense of responsibility towards the students and viewed themselves as being answerable to the school administrators, they felt obliged to honor the agreement they had signed. Grace gives us an insight into the tension that she experienced:

If it looked like her instructional practices were detrimental to the students and I hadn't signed something saying that I wouldn't evaluate them, I'd be honest and I would tell the principal.

### *Navigating the dilemma*

The 4 mentors who had not signed any agreements that prohibited them from giving evaluations / appraisals were certain and unhesitant about giving a fair and honest evaluation to the school administrators if they were asked to do so. This resolution was rationalized on the fact that they felt that they owed it to the students, or to the school to tell the truth. Consistent with their valuing of their relationship with their mentees, participants qualified that they would give an honest evaluation only after they had 'warned' their mentees that they have been asked to give an evaluation, and only if they felt that they had done their due diligence in counseling and guiding the mentee. Jeremy and Julia share respectively:

If the kids suffer and the teacher doesn't improve, then everybody loses. But I'll make sure that I let my mentee know what is happening first, because my supervisor is fundamentally an outsider in this mentoring process.

If I have done enough to counsel and guide that person, then I have the responsibility to tell the truth. I may feel that I shouldn't be squealing on my mentee, but I have a bigger responsibility to the school and to the students.

The two mentors who felt strong obligations to honor their signed agreements navigated the dilemma by voicing their discomfort towards the principal's requests, or by inviting the principal to the classroom to observe a lesson so that he/she could form her own opinion and make his/her own evaluation of the new teacher instead.

Despite differences in their methods of navigating the dilemma, there was a common feature in the responses of all the mentors. They were strongly guided by the need to sustain the mentoring relationship they had with their mentees, which was, as mentioned earlier, highly valued, and also a source of fulfillment in their work as mentors. Interviewees noted that a breach of trust and the lack of honesty would undermine the mentoring relationship and compromise the effectiveness that the mentor had in helping the new teacher grow and develop. Shaun shared his thoughts on submitting a performance review of his mentee:

I owe them the transparency and openness to tell them what is going on and what would happen. If I didn't do that, I don't think they would trust me.

Erika reflected:

If they don't trust you, they won't share with you. And if they don't share with you, they are not going to learn and grow as much as they will.

### ***Tor-mentors: An example of unethical work***

My interviewees were in agreement that mentoring relationships should be grounded in mutual respect between the mentor and the mentee. Two of them expressed a deep disapproval over the actions of the 'tor-mentors' they had encountered in their teaching experience, either as a mentee or in witnessing the work of a colleague who was a "tor-mentor". Fault finding, public humiliation of the mentee in the staffroom, giving criticism and no encouragement and lording it over the new teacher to use specific teaching approaches constituted as "tor-mentoring". They

recognized such behavior as destructive to the professional development and emotional well-being of the mentee. Grace notes, from a personal experience:

My first year was miserable and having my mentor yell at me all the time made it a thousand times worse. I left that school because I couldn't work there.

While watching a colleague engage in “tor-mentoring”, Julia saw the need to address the issue and brought the matter to the attention of a superior. In taking such action, she encountered difficulties in convincing her superior to believe her, as the “tor-mentor” was a highly regarded colleague in the school. She shares:

It was difficult because the subject head had a lot of faith in her. If the administrators do not actually know what is going on, it makes dealing with this a bit tough.

### **Discussion**

In presenting my findings on Excellence, I observed that the teacher mentors I interviewed had seldom listed mentoring-specific skills, and that even when these were listed, the list paled in comparison to that which were associated with pedagogy and classroom management practices. Thus, despite having experience and expertise, mentors often felt unprepared for their work. An examination of the briefing / workshop content and information materials that were given to teacher mentors hints on why this is so: these materials were focused mainly on the administrative procedures, guidelines and frameworks of the mentoring program. There seemed to be an assumption that teachers with good teaching practices would naturally be able to guide and help a new teacher in his/her professional growth. I propose that institutions and organizations that oversee mentoring programs identify the skills that are needed for good mentoring. They should design workshops for mentors to help them develop these skills and to know how and when to apply them. This procedure would better prepare teacher mentors in the initial phases to do excellent work in mentoring.

In their study of good mentoring in the field of genetic research, Nakamura et al. (2009, p.246) found that “in strong mentoring relationships, students felt respected and supported, and they were given the freedom to grow and thrive as professionals.” It is encouraging that all the participants in this study reported having positive relationships with their mentees. It should be of interest to the field that mentors and mentees have strong relationships, as the quality of the relationship has been found to be a determinant of the extent to which a mentee learns the values and practices of his/her mentor (Nakamura et al., 2009). Because mentors derived fulfillment and satisfaction in the mentoring relationship, I propose that schools provide mentors and mentees with a protected space and time for quality dialogue and mutual exchange of learning to occur.

The discussion on ethics in teacher mentoring centered on how to meet the demands or needs of administrators without compromising or betraying the trust of the new teacher and the fundamental purpose of mentoring. To alleviate this tension, clear boundaries of the work of mentoring should be clarified with both the mentors and the administrators. When mentors are required to sign an agreement of confidentiality, a disclaimer describing circumstances where the rule of confidentiality could be broken could be added to the agreement. Having such boundaries, as well as exceptions to the rule, could protect mentors from feeling that they have to fall short on what they had agreed upon, or on their responsibility to the school and to the students.

In response to the question ‘to whom or to what do you feel most responsible to, I noticed a distinct difference between the teachers from Singapore and those from the United States. The two who had taught and mentored in Singapore felt primarily responsible to the students, while those who had taught in the United States felt a primary responsibility to their supervisors or to the new teacher. One hypothesis for this is that the teacher mentors in Singapore had more

opportunities to engage previously in direct instruction and interaction with the students of the new teacher—arrangements are usually made such that the new teacher takes over one or more classes from the mentor teacher. In contrast, the teachers in America had less of such contact with the new teacher’s students as they were in charge of their own classes; they had interacted more with the new teacher than with the students in the new teacher’s class. Hence the responses of the two nations reflected their respective contacts with the two constituencies.

Along the lines of feeling responsible to the new teacher, mentors also showed a sense of responsibility towards the mentees of their other colleagues when they observed that the mentees had been subject to poor treatment, and had attempted to set things right. Since administrators are often distanced from details of the mentoring relationships and are often not present to bear witness to the negative exchanges that occur, it is vital for mentors to keep one another’s practices in check, or even to put processes in place for both the mentee and other teachers / colleagues to file reports against these “tor-mentors” should they behave in unacceptable ways.

Nakamura et al. (2009) describe the Danish physicist Niels Bohr, whose protégés went on to impact the physicists who followed after them in the profession, extending his impact down to later generations of professionals. While teacher mentors recognized the amplified effect they would have on both current and future generations of students, there was no mention of the idea of their inspiring generations of teachers themselves becoming mentors in the future. The prospect of the mentee becoming a mentor in future, thereby influencing another new teacher to impact more students, was never mentioned in the interviews. Also, while mentors were able to articulate the values that they adhered to in their work as a mentor, there was little mention of the values embraced within the teaching profession and their role in ensuring that these values continued to be treasured and passed on. Could these observations be the basis of an assumption

that in general, teacher mentors feel a greater sense of responsibility to the community, rather than to the field or to the profession?

### *Limitations*

While I was able to capture the responses of educators with a range in the number of years of teaching and mentoring experience, I worked with a very small sample size. The ratio of male: female participants who were interviewed was 4:4, which is highly unlikely to be reflective of the ratio of male: female teacher mentors in most schools, districts, states or in the country. The 8 teacher mentors had also worked in schools and systems with different backgrounds and contexts. I caution against the generalization of my findings to the wider community of teacher mentors. More extensive interviews need to be done to ascertain if the values and principles embraced by the interviewees in this study are also embraced by other communities of teacher mentors in schools, districts, states or in countries in other parts of the world.

Because of the small sample size, only one striking difference between the teachers from Singapore and those from the United States was surfaced in regard to their feelings of responsibility. Again, a larger number of interviews are needed to confirm if this is indeed a significant difference, as well as to uncover the differences, or other similarities that are not yet found.

While I checked the transcribed responses of the participants for consistency of the values / principles that were expressed within each interview, more rigorous checking of this could have been supported with the use of an online response survey that could be done before/after the interview. Quantitative data could also have given a clearer indication of the

priorities that teacher mentors had in their roles and the extent to which they felt the values / principles mentioned were non-negotiable.

### **Future Research**

First of all, as mentioned in the section on limitations, additional interviews can paint a clearer picture of the motivations, challenges and values / guiding principles that are involved in teacher mentorship. They can also uncover similarities and differences that may exist amongst communities of teacher mentors from different schools, districts, states, and countries.

Considering the mobility of teachers across international borders, it would be of interest to make international comparisons. Such knowledge might be useful for those intending to implement mentoring programs that are from settings that are outside of one's country—being aware of similarities and differences could inform how to best adapt an existing program.

If a larger number of interviews were available, the data could be grouped and analyzed in a variety of sets e.g. according to a particular school type (charter, magnet, private etc.), the number of years of experience of the mentor, the nature of the work (full-time vs. teaching and mentoring) etc. This would enable us to identify specific challenges/needs that are unique to a particular group of mentors so that we are able to customize solutions to support their work.

### **Conclusion**

A quote from Nakamura et al. (2009) brings forth the lasting and far-reaching impact of good mentors: “By influencing the next generation of practitioners, mentors can also shape the future of their professions” (p. 1). The work of mentoring can be strengthened if mentors inspire other teachers to mentor the future generation of teachers, as well as pass on the values and attitudes that are central to the teaching profession.

With regards to mentor training, mentoring program should include comprehensive training for mentors, making explicit the skills that one should utilize in mentoring.

Administrators should also realize, that beyond the technical aspects of operationalizing a planned program, establishing a school-wide culture that supports and values learning and development will greatly support the work of teacher mentors. Success is most likely if the nature of mentoring, with its demands and boundaries, is clearly understood.

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### Teaching Experience and Characteristics of Interviewees

#### By Years of Teaching Experience

Years	No.
3-5 years	2
6-10 years	3
11- 15 years	0
16 – 20 years	1
20 – 25 years	0
26 – 30 years	1
31 – 35 years	0
36 – 40 years	1

#### By Years of Mentoring Experience

Years	No.
< 1 years	3
2 years	1
3 years	2
20 – 25 years	2

#### By Country, Gender and Type of School

Geographical Location	No.	Gender	No.	Type of School	
Singapore	2	Male	1	Public	1
		Female	1	Private	1
United States	6	Male	3	Public	5
		Female	3	Private	1

#### By State (for mentors based in the United States)

State	No.
Massachusetts (Boston)	1
California	2
Colorado	1
Texas	1
Virginia	1

#### By overall work scope

Scope	No.
Full Time	1
Mentoring while pursuing post-grad degree	2
Mentoring while teaching	5

## Interview Questions

### Section 1- Background of Participant

- 1) How long have you been (i) teaching (ii) involved in mentoring teachers?
- 2) How would you describe your role as a teacher mentor?
- 3) What do you like best about your work?

### Section 2 – Motivations to Mentor

- 4) What were some initial thoughts you had when you were first appointed as a teacher mentor?
- 5) What led to your decision to become a teacher mentor?
  - a) What were your expectations about the experience?
  - b) Has your time as a teacher mentor met those expectations? Why or why not?
- 6) Do you suggest to other teachers that they should mentor? Why or why not?

### Section 3—Perceptions of Roles

- 7) What are some things you do that benefit the teachers you mentor? What is the best thing you have done as a mentor?
- 8) In your opinion, what is the most important thing a mentor should do for a new teacher?
- 9) To whom or what do you feel most responsible in your work as a mentor?

### Section 4—Challenges in Mentoring

- 10) Do you face any challenges in your role as a mentor?
- 11) What are some things you wish you could do better when you mentor others? / Have you ever felt frustrated or inadequate in your role as a mentor? Under what circumstances?
- 12) Are there any gray areas you had to address with the teachers you mentor? How did you address them eventually?

### Section 5—Persisting through Challenges

- 13) What makes you continue to mentor others in the face of the difficulties you have mentioned earlier? / Knowing the difficulties mentors face, if you could now reverse your decision to mentor, would you do so and why?
- 14) If you were asked to encourage a mentor facing difficulties in mentoring, what would you say?

### Section 6—Dilemmas (on professionalism)

- 15) A head of department asks you for feedback on the new teacher you are mentoring. You know that what you say will be taken into account in the appraisal of the new teacher. You worry that this new teacher seems to have a negative attitude and he has been unreceptive to your feedback. In fact, after 10 weeks, you have seen no improvement. What would you do?
- 16) You overhear a new teacher in the lounge complaining about the school system, the students and the workload. What would you do?
- 17) A new teacher seeks your advice on a teaching approach he/she would like to use in class. This teaching approach is new to you – you have not used it, and in fact, know very little about it. What would you do?

### Section 7: End

- 18) Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that you feel we haven't covered?
- 19) May I contact you for clarification or to follow-up, as necessary?
- 20) Would you like to know the results of my study and receive a copy of my final report?

## List of Categories and Codes

Excellence (E)				
Skills (ES)		Learning (EL)		
Teaching Skills (EST)	Mentoring Skills (ESM)	Training (ELT)	On the Job (ELJ)	From Mentees (ELM)
E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom Management</li> <li>Pedagogy</li> <li>Reading IEPs</li> <li>Lesson Planning</li> <li>Creating the classroom environment</li> </ul>	E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building trust and rapport</li> <li>Being tactful</li> <li>Guiding a new teacher to understand pedagogy</li> </ul>	E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Briefings</li> <li>Workshops</li> <li>Training notes</li> </ul>	E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trial and error</li> </ul>	E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through discussion and interaction</li> </ul>

Engagement (N)			
Motivation (NM)		Fulfillment (NF)	
Intrinsic / Altruistic (MNI)	Extrinsic (NME)	Other's success (NFS)	Personal growth (NFG)
E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Filling a need</li> <li>To help others</li> <li>Impacting students</li> </ul>	E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remuneration</li> <li>Being excused from other workshops / meetings / committees etc.</li> <li>Build portfolio for future career prospects</li> <li>Gaining experience</li> </ul>	E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeing the new teacher succeed</li> <li>Seeing the new teacher improve</li> </ul>	E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning and improving one's craft</li> </ul>

Ethics (T)			
Dilemmas / Challenges	Tormentors	Guiding Principles / Values	Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time</li> <li>Administrators requesting for evaluations / appraisals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Humiliating new teachers</li> <li>Finding fault</li> <li>'Lording' it over others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Valuing the mentor-mentee relationship</li> <li>Trust</li> <li>Honesty</li> <li>Continual Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To mentee</li> <li>To supervisors / administrators</li> <li>To students</li> </ul>