DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my entire family—my parents, my husband, and my children—who have always believed that I could reach this goal and who have supported me in so many ways throughout the entire process.

It is also dedicated to the teachers in our district who give so unselfishly of themselves to their students and to their colleagues. Their commitment and dedication have spurred me on to complete this study and to recognize their hard work in this dissertation.

Last of all, this dissertation is dedicated to those on my dissertation committee: Dr. Sharon Kruse, Dr. Ruth Oswald, Dr. Lisa Lenhart, Dr. Nancy Padak, and especially to Dr. Evangeline Newton. These five individuals have greatly influenced me in my work as a building and district administrator. A very special thank you to Dr. Evangeline Newton, who has most faithfully guided me through the doctoral process and truly remains a trusted and treasured mentor.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine a district literacy mentoring program through the lens of those participating as literacy mentors, teachers, and principals. A secondary purpose was to understand the perceived impact the program had on classroom practice and literacy achievement in the district. The site was one suburban school district in northeast Ohio which is comprised of five elementary schools. The mentor program was developed in response to a district need to increase professional development and awareness of literacy issues.

The study was guided by two research questions:

1. In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their experiences of participation in a literacy mentor program?

2. What is the perceived impact of the literacy mentor program?

Data were collected through two focus groups of mentors, followed by in-depth interviews with five mentors. Additionally data were collected from a focus group of 15 teachers and two focus groups involving 5 principals. Additional data were obtained from staff bulletins, schedules, field notes, newsletters, etc. in order to validate information gained in the interviews. Data analysis was an ongoing process of identifying categories. As categories were refined, a deeper, conceptual understanding of the mentor program emerged.
Data analysis confirmed that this program followed many of the qualities of effective professional development as determined by previous research. It valued teacher expertise; it offered opportunities for peer collaboration and reflection. It was content-oriented. It was embedded in the school day and it was on-going. These are just a few of the qualities in this program.

Overall, participants characterized their experiences in the program as highly positive. Two particular findings emerged as central to the program’s success. First, the development of collaborative relationships at all levels was critical. Inherent in the development of those relationships was frequent communication over time that nurtured the emergence of a common vocabulary within buildings and among buildings. Second, the importance of sustained opportunities for rigorous academic learning that occurred throughout the program, mostly through research-based “book studies.” A third finding of significance was that each group, teachers, principals and mentors, perceived the mentors' primary role differently. In fact, perception of the mentors’ role appeared to be closely related to each group’s role in the building. Teachers saw the literacy mentor's role from the perspective of what the mentor could do for them. Teachers noted the instructional role as prime. They talked a lot about the instruction that mentors offered through book studies, modeled lessons, discussions, etc. Teachers all seemed to feel supported instructionally by their mentors. Principals also talked about the instructional role mentors played in the buildings. They saw it as prime importance, but coupled it with many comments regarding the leadership role. Principals saw mentors helping to set goals for the building, helping to plan meetings and professional development opportunities. They
talked about mentors helping to set a vision for the building. Mentors also noted instructional and leadership roles most frequently. They seemed to place an even heavier role on leadership opportunities than principals or teachers. In conclusion, all three groups mentioned instructional and leadership roles at the top of their lists, but there were differences in the frequency with which they mentioned them. There were many similarities within groups and mild differences between groups.

Finally, the study found that there were definite changes in increased student academic achievement, attitudes and motivation due to the program. Moreover, there was a stronger school/home connection as a result of an increase in school/home communication about reading and writing stemming from the program.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In today’s educational world, there is tremendous pressure to increase the academic achievement level of all students. Although there are many ways in which to impact those levels of achievement, there is a substantial body of research to document the fact that teacher quality is very highly related to student academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997b, 2000; Darling Hammond & Sykes, 1999). That research is so strong, in fact, that federal, state, and local educational entities have incorporated highly qualified teacher (HQT) recommendations and requirements in their programs and legislation (Education Commission of the States, 2003-2004). Indeed, much time, energy, and money has been spent on trying to improve teacher quality across our nation. Preservice educational programs at the university level, licensure and licensure renewal programs at the state level, and professional development programs at the state and local levels have all raised their expectations in order to positively impact teacher quality across our nation.

Most mentoring programs which have previously been studied focus on matching a new teacher with a more experienced, veteran teacher (Daresh, 2003; Lipton & Wellman, 2001). In their one-on-one relationship, mentors and protégés have
time to discuss a myriad of issues, all with the goal of helping to make the protégés successful in their early years of teaching. Unfortunately, there are so many areas to discuss and reflect upon that literacy becomes a very small part of their interactions and reflections. An average elementary teacher will need to cover behavior issues, motivational issues, parent issues; communication issues, all content issues, building-based issues, and district-based issues: literacy becomes a very small part of their focus. This particular study investigated a mentoring program devoted entirely to literacy.

Most coaching programs which have appeared in recent research studies seem to fall into the categories of urban programs and/or very expansive and expensive programs (Guiney, 2001; Steckel, 2003). One example is the Literacy Collaborative, sponsored by Ohio State University, which releases one teacher for a half-day each and every day of the school year to perform literacy coaching duties. Research suggests there has been a good deal of success with this model (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001); however, it is very expensive to implement throughout an entire district. Another example is from the Boston City School District where outside coaches are hired to come into the district to coach one or two days per week or on some type of weekly or monthly rotational basis. Once again, the research has been fairly positive about this type of coaching program; however, once again it is a very expensive option for most school districts (Neufeld & Roper, 2002, 2003; Neufeld, Roper, & Baldassari, 2003; Steckel, 2003). Additionally, the National Coaching Initiative in Reading First is an example of the national commitment to coaching. Ohio’s Reading First initiatives require one literacy specialist per school, often with coaching/mentoring aspects
attached to their position. Funding through Reading First grants helped support the cost of that program for those schools who obtained Reading First grants.

In this age of extreme financial crisis in many schools, it is critical that every program be investigated for its cost effectiveness. Many districts are faced with cuts across the board in all programs, impacting even the numbers of teachers and other employees who must be let go. When spending money on professional development activities, many school districts simply do not have enough money to cover some of the more extensive options. What is missing in the current research are studies that seek to investigate some of the more cost-effective methods of embedded professional development in literacy. This study sought to offer a close-up investigation into one such cost-effective program.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to investigate one northeastern Ohio school district’s attempt to provide an embedded, on-going professional development opportunity for its teachers through a cost-effective form of a literacy mentoring program with coaching opportunities. The mentoring program has as its goal to improve the literacy instruction and teacher quality in the district. This program adheres to many of the goals and objectives of other mentoring and coaching programs. It differs, however, in the amount of resources (i.e., time and money) that are available to it. The program has been in place for 3-1/2 years at the elementary level and for 1-1/2 years at the secondary level. Because of the short amount of time it has been in place at the secondary level, this study focused only on the elementary implementation.
This particular study provides an intensive, in-depth understanding of the work of the literacy mentors in this scaled-down mentoring program with coaching overtones. It fills a need raised by other coaching programs, including those mentioned earlier, which have recommended that studies be made of the work of other literacy coaches in other geographical areas and in other types of programs in order to broaden the base of the work of literacy mentors and coaches (Steckel, 2003). The intent of this study was to gain a deep understanding of the work of a mentor/coach from the perspective of those involved in the program: the mentors themselves, the administrators, and other teachers in the building where each mentor works. The goal of this research was to thoroughly understand how those involved in the program perceive the mentoring program and what they feel may be its impact upon their instructional practices and student achievement. It is hoped that the insights and understandings gained will be helpful to other mentors/coaches both within and without this district, and that the analysis and conclusions drawn will give illuminating guidance to this particular district as they seek to continue the program in the future. It is also hoped that this illuminating guidance will contribute to the field of research on teacher leadership and literacy mentor programs.

Research Questions

In order to limit the focus of this study, two research questions were formulated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These questions will analyze the perception of teachers, mentors, and principals in the five elementary schools. The focus of this study was guided by the following two questions:
1. In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?

2. What is the perceived impact of the literacy mentor program?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this topic emerges from the urgent need to increase literacy achievement for all students (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). It also arises from the urgency for districts to develop new forms of professional development which are better aligned to current research on effective programs. Mentoring and coaching programs hold great promise as effective venues for professional growth. Various mentoring and coaching programs have been studied in the past; however, a “relatively small amount of information is presently available...about what is required of individuals who assume these complex new roles” (Wilson & Ball, cited in Steckel, 2003). This particular study offers a look at individual participation in a cost-effective, lower-scale, embedded literacy mentoring program in a suburban area.

This study, then, sought to understand the literacy mentoring/coaching program in one school district from the perspectives of those involved in it. It also sought to investigate the impact that program has had on teacher practice, student work, and classroom achievement. Part of the significance of this study may lay in its rich, meaningful descriptions of the program and of the experiences and perceptions of those participating in it which emerged from focus groups and in-depth interviews.

As districts seek to strengthen their literacy programs as well as their professional development programs, it is hoped that this study provides new insights
into the processes of personal and district change, teacher growth, and teacher reflection.

Assumptions

This study is based on the assumption that there is value in examining an experience as it is understood through the reflection of those who have it. Moreover, it assumes that the responses to both focus group questions and interview questions are true reflections of each teacher’s, mentor’s or principal’s beliefs and perceptions. It is based upon the assumption that all participants feel safe enough to give forthright responses. The study assumes that the secretarial staff accurately transcribed all focus group and interview audio-tapes and correctly identified each participant by the appropriate code. It is also assumed that those selected to participate in the study provided an accurate representative sample of their collegial group. Additionally, it is assumed that the research questions driving this study address the perceptions and experiences of individuals as they participate in a natural setting. Because of this a qualitative research design will be used to collect and analyze data.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of terms and phrases will be used:

*Andragogy*. Adult learning theory which differentiates between the learning of adults and the learning of children (Knowles, 1990). The rationale is that adults have increased maturity, reduced dependency, and advanced mental states. Knowles (1980) lists four premises upon which to base adult learning. These are: 1) Adults need to be self-directing. 2) Adults have extensive experience to tap into. 3) Adult readiness
to learn is influenced by real-life problems. 4) Adults want to make immediate application of what they learn.

Case study. Merriam’s (1998) definition of a qualitative case study describes it as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii).

Coach. Steckel (2003) draws from the work of Joyce and Showers to define a coach in education as a person who “provides technical feedback to teachers, guiding them in adopting new practices to the needs of their students, and helping them to analyze the effects of the new practice upon student performance” (p. 10).

Cognitive coaching. A form of coaching which seeks to impact the cognitive thought processes of another person. Cognitive Coaching\textsuperscript{SM} stems from the work of Costa and Garmston (Costa & Garmston, 2002) and can be defined as a process which utilizes a set of communication tools that “help others think for themselves, make good decisions, and solve their own problems…” (Ellison & Hayes, 2003, p. 71). They cite the following five areas as impact areas when Cognitive Coaching\textsuperscript{SM} is utilized: (a) validation of thought processes, (b) focus on thought processes, not just behaviors, (c) more effective listening, (d) more effective use of data and questioning, and (e) capacity-building.

Literacy. For purposes of this study, a curricular field which includes reading, writing, listening, speaking, understanding, and thinking, and involves instruction in discrete skills along with instruction in how to interpret, evaluate, analyze, and apply knowledge (Routman, 1996, p. 6). The literate individual efficiently selects and applies a range of strategies while simultaneously monitoring for meaning.
Mentor. Daresh (2003) takes a traditional definition of a mentor as “anyone who is able to demonstrate craft knowledge to a beginner” (p. 13) and expands it to include veteran teachers. He goes on to say that mentoring is “a demanding form of teaching” (p. 13). Evertson and Smithey (1999) cited Zimpher and Grossman’s (1992) work when they define a mentor as a master of the craft of teaching who is also personable in dealing with other teachers and is an empathetic individual who understands the needs of the mentorship role.

Professional development. Professional development is defined as those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students (Guskey, 2000, p. 16).

Qualitative research. Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials--case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts--that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3).

Summary

In today’s educational world where all children must reach high levels of literacy achievement, classroom teachers are facing the challenge to transform themselves into experts in reading instruction. Literacy mentor and coaching programs may offer the support teachers so desperately need. Yet, research in this area is still
somewhat limited. This research study provides an in-depth, intensive, holistic
descriptive look at the work of literacy mentors in this particular program. It is hoped
that this study will highlight the complexity of this work as it is performed in
naturalistic school settings. It is also hoped that the conclusions and insights gleaned
from the study will be used to help inform the work of future mentors and coaches, and
that those same insights and conclusions would illuminate the steps ahead as this
particular district continues with this program in future years.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is devoted to a review of literature on professional development and mentoring/coaching. The review is divided into four sections. The first section describes the need for strong professional development for teachers and the rationale behind it. The second section describes what contributes to the effectiveness of professional development. The third section elaborates on the critical issues in designing effective professional development. And finally, the fourth section delves deeper into mentoring and coaching as specific types of professional development activities. Culminating this chapter is a summary.

The Educational Challenge: Rationale for Strong Professional Development

There is no doubt that current research supports the fact that professional development plays a critical role in successful education reform. Legislators who recently drafted the ESEA (No Child Left Behind) legislation in 2001 believed so strongly in this research that they included a large amount of money in this Act tied to professional development mandates [ESEA, Section 9101(23) and Section 1119, subsections (a) and (b)]. They did so, in part, because there is a growing body of research to support the intensely strong connection between teacher knowledge, teaching skills and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997a, 2000; Guskey &
Sparks, 1996; Haycock, 1998; Sanders, 1997; Sparks & Hirsh, 2004). Research studies show that students who have better teachers seem to learn more (Armour-Thomas, Clay, Domanico, Bruno & Allen, 1989; Ferguson, 1991; Sparks & Hirsh, 2004). In fact, in the study of New York City schools by one group of researchers (Armour-Thomas et al., 1989), teacher qualifications accounted for 90% of the differences in the reading and mathematics achievement of students. In a 1998 study by Cohen and Hill (Cohen & Hill, 1998, cited in Sparks & Hirsh, 2004), scores on California’s state assessments were higher for students whose teachers attended more curriculum workshops and participated in sustained professional development. Darling-Hammond’s (2000) research clearly reveals that teacher quality and student achievement in reading and math were highly related. The body of research is strong and has commanded the attention of educators and legislators alike.


1. If we are to educate our students so that they are well prepared to enter a world upon graduation which is increasingly complex, rapidly changing, and based on a technology economy, and

2. If we are to educate a student body which is increasingly more diverse each and every year, and

3. If we are to educate those students to a higher than ever level of achievement based on extremely high standards, then…

teachers must become masters of skillful teaching and schools must be organized to support the continuous, on-going learning of each and every teacher. Teachers need deeper knowledge of their subject matter and they must master new, improved
instructional practices to meet the needs of all students (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). They must gain deeper understandings of the teaching and learning processes as well as of the students they teach (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2000).

If we are to have a public educational system which is capable of educating all citizens for our contemporary society, then our schools must be prepared to do something that U.S. schools have not been asked to do in the past. Our schools must be prepared:

1. To teach for understanding, in other words, to teach all students, not just some students, to understand ideas deeply and to perform proficiently, and
2. To teach for diversity, or in other words, to teach in a myriad of ways to meet the multiple learning paths of our increasingly diverse student body, so that all students can attain a high level of achievement and live constructively together (Darling-Hammond, 1997a, 1998).

Some researchers go on to say that professional development is no longer just for teachers, but must be made available to all who work with our student body and have an effect on student learning (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). These same researchers state that the changes that must take place to support such learning for all staff members will require deep organizational change as well (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Others make the case for making pedagogical improvements public and required (Elmore, 2000). Volunteerism—having the choice to make changes or not—must be considered unacceptable (Elmore, 2000). Instead all teachers must make improvements.

The type of changes which will be required for us to meet the challenges ahead in what our schools must be able to do are deep changes. They are no longer the superficial changes where teachers learn a new strategy or two at a one-shot workshop
and return to their classroom to try, or not, that strategy with their own students.

Indeed, the kinds of changes that are required today are changes that lie at the very heart of what school employees believe about teaching and learning. They lie at the core of one’s belief system. Unfortunately, there is a very strong tendency for teachers to model their current practice on the methods that were used to teach them when they were young (Fosnot, cited in Gulla, 2003). “Most current professional development reflects the same deep-seated schemas of knowledge as facts and skills, teaching as telling, and learning as remembering that govern traditional K-12 teaching practice” (Thompson & Zeuli, 1999, p. 353). Sparks and Hirsh (2004) cited a 1998 study done by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1998). In that study, only 56% of the teachers surveyed said they used instructional strategies based on high standards, and only 52% reported they were assisting all students to achieve. The changes that are now necessary will mandate deeper knowledge and skills, but more importantly they will also mandate a change in our beliefs and assumptions, or an actual transformative learning (Sparks & Hirsch, 2004). The types of changes required are very deep ones. Deep changes are different than incremental changes in that they are wide in scope, discontinuous with the past, and generally irreversible once started (Quinn, 1998). These are, however, the types of changes that must take place in order for us to meet the high expectations of teaching for understanding and for diversity.

The research base is strong: improving teacher quality is highly related to improving student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997a, 1997b, 2000; Haycock, 1998; Sparks & Hirsch, 2004). If public education is to continue playing a central role in our educational system, then it is critical that schools make these deep changes and
make them soon. Without a doubt, colleges and universities have the ability to make changes now that will impact upcoming generations of teachers who are currently still in school; if they act now!

Unfortunately, however, we still have millions of teachers out in classrooms every day across the nation who have little to no access to learning new ways of working in the educational system. And, many of these teachers have many years of teaching still before them. In those years, they will impact millions of American students. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future report, issued in 1997 (Darling-Hammond, 1997a), stated that the link between teacher quality and student achievement was intense. However, that report added that there is currently no system in place in the United States which can support the learning and professional development of current teachers. That support remains a huge and fundamental need in the American educational system. Those who work in schools must do whatever possible to impact local, county, and statewide educational entities and to convince them to attack this issue of quality professional development, to ensure that it becomes a reality for all teachers and other staff members in schools.

In today’s educational world, there is enormous pressure on everyone everywhere. That pressure comes from a myriad of sources. Student educational needs have increased dramatically due to the complexity of the world they will face when they exit our schools. The world is increasingly complex, rapidly changing, and is now based on a technology economy (Darling-Hammond, 1997a, 1997b). The educational needs of our students have changed and will continue to change at a rapid pace. Parents have become increasingly concerned about their children’s education.
Where once they were appreciative, respectful, and supportive of the educational system, parents are now often critical and evaluative. Private education, on-line education, and home schooling have given them viable educational options. The public has become increasingly concerned about how schools spend their hard earned tax dollars. They are often cynical and suspicious of educational systems. Business and industry are also vocal about the low quality of students that emerge each year from our educational institutions.

That cynicism and concern has been well fueled. Over the past 20 years, there have been a number of reports and legislative enactments which have criticized and sought to “fix” American public education. Starting with the Nation at Risk Report in the early 1980’s, this criticism has continued through the 1989 National Education Summit which was called Goals 2000 where the movement for standards gained attention. The Goals 2000: Education in America Act enacted in 1994 and the TIMSS (Third International Math and Science Study, 1997) report in the late 90’s continued highlighting the shortcomings of the American educational system and highly publicized them throughout the world.

The increasing demands for higher and higher academic achievement coupled with increasingly diverse populations have produced a huge challenge (Steckel, 2003). In an effort to confront these shortcomings, the federal government enacted a system of standards and assessments which many states, including Ohio, have adopted. In 2001, with the passage of the ESEA (No Child Left Behind Act), the federal government increased its efforts to ensure all schools were meeting increasingly high levels of performance. Now, standards, assessments, accountability systems, scientifically-
based reading research, building/district/state report cards, disaggregated scores, annual yearly progress, and heavy sanctions are all part of our educational landscape.

The newly adopted standards and the assessment-based system have done one thing very well. They have localized accountability in a very powerful way. What was once worried about only at central offices is now worried about in every building and every classroom. Teachers themselves are feeling the immense pressure of this accountability system. The standards-based philosophy basically says that if all students were taught a uniform base of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a highly skilled and individualized way, then all students would learn and would succeed at high levels. This one concept alone has enormous appeal to all our publics. (Elmore, 2000).

At the same time that our expectations for all students have been raised so high, the diversity of our student body has grown (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Steckel, 2003; Swafford, 1998) Minority populations have increased in most schools (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Socio-economic gaps have become larger and many more of our students come from low socio-economic living conditions. Special education students have become more fully included in our classrooms. The number of students whose native language is not English has increased. The list is endless. Yet our need to meet all needs and to assure high achievement for all students is mandated.

School reformers all seem to agree that in order to raise the learning outcomes for this increasingly diverse population, there must be a radical shift in what teachers must know and must be able to do (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Since, as the research seems to state,
there is a high correlation between improving teacher quality and improving student achievement, educational and district administrators must critically look at the area of professional development and seek to offer the most effective professional development possible for all teachers and educational support personnel.

Effective Professional Development

Fortunately, there has been much research already done in the area of professional development. In an on-going effort to improve student achievement, legislators and school administrators began to pay serious attention to teacher professional development in the 1980s (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). Since then much has been written about effective professional development. Probably the single most important concept discussed over the past few years has been the concept of a paradigm shift in professional development. This paradigm shift changed what we believed about effective professional development in the 70s and 80s, and what we currently believe about effective professional development. Researchers attribute this paradigm shift to three very powerful new ideas: results-driven education which centers on standards, assessments and accountability systems, constructivism where “learners create their own knowledge structures rather than…receive them from others” (Sparks & Hirsh, 1979, p. 9), and systems thinking which has been described by Senge as a “discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots” (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997, p. 5). As a result of this paradigm shift, staff development/professional development has seen a shift:
1. From a *deficit-based model* to a *competency-based model*. The deficit-based model focused on what teachers did not know how to do. The thought was *if only* teachers could learn this one strategy or technique, then students would learn more and perform more proficiently. The competency-based model assumes and honors the expertise of the teacher and utilizes that expertise to analyze and seek out what one needs to learn.

2. From a *focus on replication* to a *focus on reflection*. A replication focus placed importance on learning a new strategy or technique and on the teacher seeking above all else to duplicate or replicate that strategy back in their own classroom. A focus on reflection allows teachers to try out new things, to process them, to reflect on them, to analyze them, and to make decisions themselves on what to do next in order to help a student learn (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 1983).

3. From *learning separately* to *learning together*. Learning separately applies to teachers working on their own professional development by themselves, not sharing the information gained. Learning together changes the context. Teachers work together to discover new truths, to analyze, to evaluate, to learn and grow. They collaborate (Leinhardt, 1992; Lieberman & Miller, 1992).

4. From *centralization* to *decentralization*. Centralization refers to a central office doing all the choosing and planning for all teachers working under it. Little attention was paid to what individual groups of teachers or individuals themselves needed. It was believed that what was good for one was good for all. Now, however, the shift has led us to a decentralization approach where each building takes a look at
what its own teachers need and what training they need. Plans are made at the building level with support from the district level.

Sparks and Hirsh (1997) took this paradigm change a little further and listed the changes in professional development which resulted from the paradigm shift. The changes they identified as resulting from this shift were from:

• a focus on the individual to a focus on the organization and the individual;
• a fragmented system of development to a coherent, strategically planned system of development where goals and aspirations for all segments of the system fit together;
• a focus on the district to a focus on individual buildings;
• a focus on the needs of the adults coupled with their satisfaction levels to a focus on student needs and student learning outcomes;
• a focus on professional development where teachers must travel away to some distant location to a focus on professional development that is embedded in the job site itself;
• a focus on transmission of new knowledge to teachers by “experts” to a focus on the power of reflective analysis by teachers themselves with a follow-up search for new knowledge through study by teachers of teaching and learning processes;
• a focus on generic professional development to a focus on content-oriented plus generic professional development;
• a focus on trainers coming in for a day of training to a focus on staff developers who collaborate, facilitate, plan, consult, as well as train;
• a focus on teachers only to a focus on all adults who interact and work with students;
• a focus on one or two departments planning all professional development to a focus on all departments working on professional development;
• a focus on providing professional development only for teachers to a focus on providing it for anyone who impacts student learning;
• a focus on professional development as a “frill” to a focus on professional development as an integrated, necessity of doing business in today’s educational world. These changes have definitely changed what we believe about effective professional development.

Separately, Sparks and Hirsh (2004) listed five conditions for effective staff development. They list the following:

1. Results-driven & job-embedded

2. Focused on helping teachers to become deeply immersed in their subject matter and in teaching methods

3. Curriculum-centered and standards-based

4. Sustained, rigorous, and cumulative

5. Directly linked to what teachers do in their classrooms.

Knowles (1990) studied adults as learners, realizing that they learn differently than children. His adult learning theory pointed out that adults learn best when they are self-directing, their extensive experience is utilized, real-life problems are utilized in order to increase their readiness to learn, and there is opportunity for immediate application of what they have learned.
Another way to examine effective professional development is to look at what teachers need to gain from it and to see if it meets those needs. Spillane and Thompson (1997) write about the newest wave of standards-based reform which they state involves deeper knowledge of subject matter and rigorous changes in instructional practices for teachers. Other researchers have reached the same conclusions (Guskey, 2000).

Teachers do need deeper knowledge of their content areas. They need to learn many more varied instructional approaches and techniques. They need time to process this new learning. They need time to collaborate with others (Darling-Hammond, 1997a, 1997b; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Sparks (2000) reminded the educational world that we cannot expect teachers to teach what they do not know. Additionally, he reminds educators that you cannot teach today’s students to be prepared for tomorrow’s future with outdated training. Effective professional development can help teachers acquire the knowledge base they need, the time to process it, and the collaboration they need to solidify the new learning.

Teachers also need to unlearn beliefs and practices of the past and relearn new educational practices (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). They need to teach in ways they have never taught before and most likely never experienced as students either (Hammerman & Nelson, 1996). There is an exploding knowledge base about brain development, learning styles, multiple intelligences, developmental differences and cultural patterns that teachers need to know. Teachers need to understand the cognitive, social, physical, and emotional domains of students and how to support growth in all domains (Darling-Hammond, 1998). This need to unlearn and relearn is
not an easy task. Indeed, it is very difficult (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). It takes time (Hammerman, 1999). As long as the professional development itself does not reflect traditional deep-seated schemas of education (Thompson & Szuli, 1999), effective professional development can help teachers to unlearn and then to learn.

Teachers need to learn about the needs of a much more diverse group of students than they have had in past years. They need to learn more about meeting the needs of each and every diverse individual. They need to better individualize their instruction. Effective professional development can and must build the capacity of schools to meet the needs of our 21st century students. This takes time and interaction with other colleagues. Effective professional development should make that happen (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Teachers need time to try out new things, to reflect, to analyze, to share what they are discovering through this new learning curve, and to receive feedback from others (Lieberman, 1995). They need to “engage actively in cooperative experiences that are sustained over time and to reflect on the process as well as on the content of what they are learning” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 599). Effective professional development can make that happen.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) have listed the following traits for effective professional development. They state it is:

- Experiential and concrete in nature as opposed to totally philosophical in nature;

- Grounded in a teacher’s own inquiry, questions, wonderings as well as research and well-documented theory;
Collaborative with colleagues;

Connected to the realities of one’s own classroom—learners, instruction, assessments, interactions, etc.;

Sustained, intensive, and on-going, definitely not a “one-shot deal”;

Supported by modeling, coaching, and problem solving around specific problems of practice;

Connected to other parts of the reform effort, in other words, connected to the big, systemic picture.

Yet another group, Ball and Cohen (1999), list three key features of rich professional development settings. They expound on a pedagogy of professional development which focuses on real-life, critical activities and materials of teaching and learning rather than on simply abstractions and generalities; grows from investigations of practice through cases, questions, analysis, and criticism, and is built on substantial professional discourse that fosters analysis and communication about practices and values in ways that build colleagueship and standards of practice.

From her literacy perspective, Routman (2002) argues for on-going professional development:

When teachers are well informed--by learning theory and relevant research, as well as by careful reflection on their own experiences--they can make confident decisions about teaching practices. And one of the most powerful approaches to developing this kind of confidence is ongoing professional conversation among colleagues, built into a school’s professional development expectations for staff. (p. 32)
Rosenholtz (1989) contrasts learning-impoverished schools where teachers rarely talked about student achievement with each other with learning-enriched schools where teacher collaboration on student achievement is a daily activity.

All of these various visions give us a fairly consistent overview of effective professional development. One thing is very certain: Although we may have new visions of effective professional development; in reality, many educators would agree that we are a long way from seeing that vision fully implemented in all school districts.

Critical Issues in Designing Effective Professional Development

In order to bring these visions of effective professional development to reality, it is important to focus on the research regarding the issues involved in designing and implementing it. The National Staff Development Council, after many years of research, issued a new framework of essential elements in 2001 (NSDC, 2001). The framework involved the input of many organizations as well as people working in the field. That framework gives a very defined structure for looking at the critical issues surrounding professional development. It considers professional development from the following three perspectives: context issues, content issues, and process issues.

Context Issues

Learning communities. Are teachers, staff members, and administrators arranged in learning teams or communities? What structures are in place to support their learning together? What structures are in place that inhibit their learning together? What else can or should be done to strengthen the necessary support?

Leadership. Are both administrators and teachers assuming leadership roles in professional development? What can be done to nurture the development of people
into leadership roles either at the district or building level? What can be done to nurture those people already in a leadership role? Are there ways to more fully utilize this leadership to advance student learning?

Resources. What time, money, personnel, and other resources are currently available for professional development? Where can we access more? In what new and creative ways can we structure our workdays, or our year, to provide more time for professional development work? How do we create enough time during the workday to embed professional development? How do we create enough time to ensure that quality professional development is on-going?

Critical Content

Equity. How do we meet the needs of all students? What do we need to do differently to raise the achievement levels of our various racial groups? ESL learners? Low socio-economic students? Special education students? Gifted students? How can we differentiate instruction to better meet the needs of all? What do we need to know in order to help us structure better learning environments and experiences for all these diverse individuals?

Quality teaching. What do we need to know to improve the quality of our teaching? Is there new knowledge we need? What is it? What deeper understandings of content do we need? Are there new research-based teaching skills, strategies and differentiation techniques we need to know? What are they?

Family involvement. How can we better involve families in the education of their children? What are the needs of our families? How can we better involve them in decisions that are being made about their child’s school and about their child’s
personal education? How can we better support families in their efforts to support the learning and achievement of their children? How can we establish better partnerships with those families?

Critical Process

Data-driven. What data would best guide us in making appropriate decisions about professional development? How can we better display data so that it can be understood by all? Exactly what data do we need? How can we better analyze that data on all students? How can we better manipulate and process the large quantity of data that we currently have?

Evaluation. How can we best evaluate professional development formatively as well as summatively? Is the evaluation being shared with all stakeholders?

Research-based. Is the professional development program research-based or is it business-as-usual? Are we using research to improve the structure as well as the content of the professional development program? Are we using research to make instructional as well as professional development decisions? Are we utilizing action research? Pilot studies?

Design. Are we using and embedding what we know about effective teaching and learning in all our professional development? If we expect teachers to offer students effective teaching and learning, do teachers deserve anything less?

Learning. Do we utilize what we currently know about learning (i.e., adult learning, brain research, etc.) in planning professional development activities?
**Collaborative.** Does the professional development provide on-going, collaborative time for teachers? Is the time provided sufficient? Are structures in place that make collaboration easy? What hurdles are there?

The questions posed under each category of this framework give great reflective reference points when planning or evaluating professional development programming. These are the critical issues. The answers to these questions can give districts good guidance and insight as they seek to design effective professional development. Without a doubt, the paradigm has shifted. But unfortunately, in reality, practices have often not changed at all. Most districts have a long way to go in order to provide a high quality professional development experience for all and most teachers continue to teach as they have in the past (Guskey, 2000; Little, 1999; Sparks & Hirsh, 2004).

The research is fairly strong about who should be involved in designing professional development. All stakeholders must be involved in designing professional development in order to ensure its effectiveness. The National Staff Development Council (2001) is very clear that support for effective professional development must begin at the top, with the Superintendent and the Board of Education. Without their direct buy-in and support, the necessary resources will not be available to the rest of the stakeholders.

Killion’s (1998) work with the State of Georgia concluded that in order for professional development to be effective administrators needed to get involved. They need to act upon their words, not just talk about effective professional development practices. Her research showed that teachers were far more engaged, far more
committed to personal growth and learning through professional development when they saw the administrator of the building (as well as district officials as well) actively engaged in professional development themselves. Based on her research, the first thing administrators can do to ensure that professional development is successfully implemented is to get involved with it and stay involved with it. They need to participate not only in the planning of it, but also in the actual implementation of it as well.

When interviewed by Sparks (2001), Peter Senge, Director of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT’s Sloan School of Management and author of *The Fifth Discipline*, stated that in order for educators to really get a true look at what’s working and what’s not, it was critically important that we ask our “customers” what they think and get their insights. He goes on to state that the closest thing we have to “customers” in education are our students. According to Senge, students are the only people who see our educational system from all sides. No other stakeholder can give us the same kind of input that we can get from students. He suggests the implementation of dialogue circles in which students are free to give input about how they perceive the teaching and learning in the organization. Once that input is given, one is ready to move on to other stakeholders.

The next logical group to be involved is a representative group of administrators, teachers, staff members, parents and community members, both at the district level and later at the building level. These groups process input from students along with data from multiple streams: attendance records, achievement and proficiency scores, building report cards, graduation rates, disaggregated data,
perception data, demographic data, etc. Once they have a deep grasp of this data, they are ready to engage in conversation. What are the things they really care about for their students? What are their aspirations and goals for learning? This focus enables the group to concentrate on shared beliefs and aspirations, rather than beginning with a deficit look at data. It also allows them to rediscover and recommit to a sense of purpose and shared core values.

Once they have established those goals, they need to process the data from the viewpoint of a series of questions: “Cumulative research, including Hirsh, 2001a, 2001b, on this topic suggests the need to consider the following questions:

1. What are the expectations and standards that we hold for our students?
2. What is it that we expect them to be able to do?
3. What are they expected to learn and know? Where do they miss the mark?
4. If teachers (and other staff members) in this district/building are to be able to teach students so that all students will be able to meet those district standards and expectations, what body of knowledge, what instructional skills do our teachers (and staff members) need to know and be able to do?
5. In order for our teachers to know and be able to do those things, what specific learning processes, knowledge, experiences, support do they need?

Probably one of the other most important things an administrator can do is to concentrate efforts on conducting an evaluation of a professional development program from its conception to its impact. Guskey (2000) has researched and investigated many ways of looking at evaluation. He states that it is important to evaluate from a formative mindset as well as from a summative mindset. His research concludes that
we must look at professional development from the impact it has on five areas. He lists these as:

1. Participants’ reactions
2. Participants’ learning
3. Participants’ use of new knowledge and skills in the classroom
4. Organizational change and support
5. Change in student learning outcomes

One of the research questions for this study examines the impact of the district’s professional development through literacy mentor/coaches. While analysis will be open-ended and seek to identify any patterns that emerge form the data collected, the researcher will also look for evidence of Guskey’s five areas of impact.

Although professional development activities and programs have a longstanding presence in the American educational landscape, traditionally little attention has been paid to investigating the lasting impact of those activities and programs. When researchers started looking at the impact on teacher change and subsequent student learning, they found that often there was no impact at all (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Thompson & Zeuli, 1999). The professional development activities and programs might as well not even have taken place. In today’s world, we cannot justify the expense of any program without seeing results. And, those results cannot be just teacher change. We must see change in student learning and achievement. Guskey’s (2000) evaluation format provides great insights into conducting the type of evaluation we need in the world of professional development.
Mentoring and Coaching

The type of professional development which is needed in the 21st century is the type which empowers teachers to make effective decisions (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Sparks and Loucks-Horsely (1989) listed seven types of professional development which has been utilized throughout the past decade: individually directed study, study groups, participation in reform initiatives/change efforts, observation and assessment (includes clinical observation and coaching), trainings, mentoring, inquiry and action research.

Joyce and Showers (1983), who are responsible for bringing coaching to the attention of the educational field in the 80s, report that any type of professional development is most effective when a teacher reflects on his or her practice with a more experienced, more trained colleague. According to Joyce and Showers, only a few people will, once they have mastered a new teaching skill, transfer that skill back into their active repertoire in the classroom. Actually they state that few will use it at all. In order to enable even the most highly motivated person to bring the new addition to their daily repertoire with effective control, continuous practice, feedback, the companionship of coaches is essential (Joyce & Showers, 1983). Steckel (2003) also found that there is no way to assume that exposure to new ideas translates into usage in classrooms. Elmore (1997) states that actual changes in instructional practice does involve working through problems of actual practice with peers and with experts, combined with observation of practice and steady accumulation over a period of time of new practices anchored in one’s own classroom setting (Elmore, 1997). Steckel (2003) notes that coaches can provide those experiences. They can give demonstration
lessons, follow up with debriefing sessions which engage teachers in inquiry, problem solving and reflection. As a reference point, Joyce (Brandt, 87) says that it takes up to 30 trials for a new teaching strategy to come under “executive control.” Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) found that it took 10-15 coaching sessions before teachers can use what they’ve learned in their own classrooms. In fact, Joyce and Showers (1983) report that lecture, demonstration, and readings only have a .50 effect size on classroom practice. With the addition of guided practice and feedback to the lecture, demonstration, and readings, the effect size grows to 1.33. And, with the addition of coaching, that effect size grows again to 1.42.

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) found that it helps teachers to share their goals and their strategies for reaching those goals with another colleague or supervisor. In addition, the impact of that reflection is most effective when the observation and the reflection occur both during and after the classroom experience (Schon, 1983). Joyce and Showers (1988) report that coaching has a positive impact on changing school culture through the promotion of collaborative interaction patterns. The research is fairly consistent that both coaching and mentoring do have a positive impact upon the professional development of educators.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) state that professional growth and learning must be supported through modeling, coaching, and reflective analysis in order for it to have lasting impact. Steckel’s research (2003) found the following three components to be essential for any school reform movement:

1. The school culture must reinforce and support adult-learning, risk-taking and professional development.
2. Organizational systems must build collaboration time into the workday and must utilize lead teachers, observations and peer coaching in order to disseminate both knowledge and skills.

3. Coaching processes, like demonstrating student outcomes and modeling reflective practice, successfully captured interest and commitment of teachers in the schools.

Teachers report that when districts embrace coaching and mentoring programs, they really make a statement and send a message in support of learning and professional growth. The State of Ohio has, within recent years, adopted entry-year program guidelines which include mentoring components (Ohio Department of Education, 2001; Ohio Department of Education, available at http://www.ode.state.oh.us/teaching-profession/teacher/certification_licensure/standards/standards.asp). Most new teachers in Ohio will enter the profession with some type of mentoring program as support. Coaching programs are increasingly being utilized with school reform requirements, school-wide improvement initiatives, and literacy initiatives throughout the state. Additionally, the Literacy Specialist Project, a partnership between the Ohio Department of Education, 10 universities, and numerous schools throughout Ohio, supports and encourages coaching as part of this program (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reading-improvement/). In addition, Ohio’s Regional School Improvement Teams are also utilizing coaches in their reform work. The message of support is clearly evident through these programs.

Coaching and mentoring are related processes. Both are in current vogue in the business world. Both have made serious inroads into the educational world within the
past decade. Both show great promise as ways to impact teacher quality in our nation. Before we can look at the similarities and differences between the two, it is important to establish a definition of both.

*Mentoring*

Mentoring has been defined as non-judgmental help through which one person, usually more experienced and trained, seeks to assist a newer colleague in making a strong transition in work, knowledge or thinking. Mentors are viewed as a more knowledgeable, more experienced, wiser person who will transmit knowledge, insights and gained wisdom onto the newer person. Daresh (2003) takes a slightly different approach to mentoring. He takes the traditional definition of a mentor ("anyone who is able to demonstrate craft knowledge to a beginner” [p. 13]) and expands it to include not only beginners, but veteran teachers too. He defines it as an on-going system of guidance and support for a person in an organization by another person in the organization. Daresh feels that a mentor does not necessarily need to be more experienced, more fully trained, or older. He simply feels that those participating in this role must be great supporters, as well as listeners and learners. He defines mentoring as a “demanding form of teaching” (Daresh, 2003, p. 13).

In his research, Daresh identified four things that mentors gain from participating in a mentoring situation. He reports that mentors:

1. develop increased job satisfaction in their current job positions;
2. gain increased respect from colleagues;
3. expand their personal career advancement path;
4. experience a renewed sense of enthusiasm for one’s work.
Daresh further found that mentors reported their mentoring experience to be highly positive. Most reported they would want to do it again. When asked what their six most important jobs were as a mentor, they reported the following (Daresh, 2003):

1. Offer support and encouragement;
2. Meet with the protégé once per week;
3. Pass on knowledge regarding policies and procedures of the organization;
4. Pass on knowledge regarding culture and climate of the organization;
5. Support the protégé in their development of teaching strategies;
6. Offer support to the protégé in their development of classroom management and behavior.

These six jobs fall into what some have categorized as the domains of mentoring: affective (support), knowledge of the overt (policies and procedures), knowledge of the covert (culture and climate), support for teaching skills and behavior management skills. One of the most important aspects from the mentor’s view is the opportunity to make an impact on the profession itself, to pass on parts of oneself to the next generation of educators. Evertson and Smithey (1999) listed a range of mentor functions from connector to guide/navigator, to positive role model, to co-planner, to sponsor of professional opportunities, to colleague/teacher skills developer, and to counselor/problem solver.

Evertson and Smithey (1999) obtained similar results and listed the following as “payoffs” for mentoring: personal rejuvenation, expanded career role, visibility, heightened prestige, strengthening the profession, professional sharing, cutting edge training, and helping the novice grow.
Daresh (2003) also reported from his research what those being mentored (proteges) gained. Those things gained included: a sense of belonging to the group, a better ability to communicate, a stronger confidence in their teaching, the ability to see theory put into practice, and the ability to learn “tricks of the trade.”

Mentors are seen as teachers, models, and cheerleaders. They have wisdom and insights that they pass on through the mentoring process. They care about their proteges and seek to assist the newcomer in becoming successful in their new position. They have the ability to pass on knowledge and wisdom as well as to open doors to the newcomer that would not normally be open to them so early in a career. The mentor can be a great asset in one’s career path. The mentoring program itself provides a circle of support, a life-line, for new members of an organization.

Evertson and Smithey (1999) state that mentors give both direct assistance and indirect assistance to teachers. Indirect assistance occurs when a teacher is supported or aided without working collaboratively with the mentor and includes role modeling and informal contact. Direct assistance occurs when mentors and teachers actively collaborate and includes demonstrations, observations and feedback, and collegial reflection. It is this later form (collegial reflection) that moves mentoring into a coaching format.

Coaching

Coaching has been said to have several purposes. Evertson and Smithey (1999) listed the following purposes for coaching.
1. “To build communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft…” (p. 15).

2. “To develop the shared language and set of understanding necessary for the study of new knowledge and skills” (p. 15).

3. To provide “a structure for the follow up to training that is essential for acquiring new teaching skills” (p. 15).

Skilled mentors move in a continuum of interaction patterns, from consultation to collaboration to coaching, depending upon the situation (Lipton, Wellman, & Humbard, 2001).

Coaching has been defined as a process of interactions through which one learns, develops, and improves one’s performance. Others define it as “nonjudgmental mediation of thinking and decision making” (Lipton et al., 2001, p. 20). A coach’s job is to help a teacher amplify his or her knowledge and skills. A coach will ask questions, dialogue, reflect, observe, make suggestions, model, discuss, analyze, and problem-solve with the teacher. The vision of a coach running alongside a top athlete as they prepare for the race gives a great image of a coach. The main objective of the coach is to help the athlete be successful and win. They work to develop skills and provide support through difficult periods. Coaches offer suggestions and training techniques, they “run alongside” during the race, they celebrate success, analyze losses, and work for success the next time. Coaches in the job place can do much the same for teachers.

The business world has long used coaches. There are executive coaches, skill coaches, personal coaches, performance coaches, life coaches, etc. Swafford (1998), in
her work with literacy coaching initiatives through The Ohio State University, identified multiple forms of coaches in the world of education:

Technical coaches who tend to focus on perfecting the technical aspects of incorporating a new technique, strategy into the classroom. Their goal is to assist in the translation from training to implementation.

Expert coaches whose expertise gives them a great base upon which to draw insights and suggestions for others. Their goal is to assist others in the perfection of whatever teaching skills surround their expertise.

Reciprocal coaches who enter into reciprocal conversations with another teacher. The goal is for both people to grow and develop through the process. Peer coaching often takes this form.

Reflective coaches who serve to lead others in a deeper, introspective analysis of their work in the classroom and into critical and analytical searches for areas for improvement. Their goal is to push a person into deeper analytical thought processes regarding their practice of teaching.

Cognitive coaches seek to push a person into a deeper understanding of their work. Cognitive coaching seeks analysis and understanding or meaning. The goal is to make the person much more aware of what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what things they might need to change.

Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston (cited in Lipton et al., 2001) developed the Cognitive Coaching model which directs coaching attention to the thinking behind the observable behaviors in teaching. Cognitive coaching is a form of coaching specifically designed to facilitate cognitive changes in teachers and is largely based on
conversations and verbal feedback exchanged between an expert coach and a teacher. The coach in this model assists a colleague in “accessing internal resources and capacities for self-directed learning…(and) mediates thinking and supports construction of new understandings” (Lipton et al., 2001, p. 24). Garmstom (1993) states that the interactions are actually designed to foster teachers’ ability to make changes in his or her thinking and teaching. In order to do so, the coach may ask open-ended questions, may provide data, may facilitate acquisition of information, may strengthen cause-effect relationships and may move colleagues toward greater confidence and self-reliance (p. 24). The mentor can utilize a stimulus like a demonstration, a model lesson, samples of student work, or observational data to facilitate the interaction between the mentor, the mentee, and the stimulus itself. This process is called cognitive mediation. This type of non-judgmental interaction is said to enhance learning, deepen the meaning-making process, develop generalizations beyond that specific interaction and increase the likelihood of transfer (p. 25). The coach is learning-focused, guides experiences, and creates opportunities for construction of understanding. Evertson and Smithey (1999) remind people that “successful coaching…can only be built on a foundation of trust and mutual respect” (p. 15).

Some districts have concentrated their efforts on developing one of two types of coaching projects. One centers around content coaches who work more on technical skills necessary for a particular content area. Another centers around a more global change coach. The global change coach might function in a number of areas from helping people get adjusted to the process of change to helping them utilize new
teaching strategies across domains. Their work is broader than a content coach. Boston City schools have utilized both types of coaches in their reform efforts (Guiney, 2001). Additionally, some coaches are external, consultant-type coaches; other are peer, in-house coaches. Both have had success. No matter what type of coach is involved, the primary function of a coach is to help those they coach gain knowledge and insight, to develop deeper understandings, to perfect practice, and to assist in reaching their ultimate human capacity. Coaches often coach first for shifts in behavior and later for changes in beliefs and understandings. No matter what type of coaching is involved, it is a complicated, time-consuming, and involved process.

Mentoring and coaching are related processes. Both are increasingly utilized in the business and educational worlds (The Coaching & Mentoring Network, 2004). While there are similarities between coaches and mentors, there are differences as well. Some researchers say that mentoring is actually a form of coaching. Others say that good mentors coach and good coaches mentor. Regardless, these two processes are very closely related.

The list of similarities is much greater than the list of differences. Both have as their goal in education to improve teaching so that increased learning takes place. Both are based on one-to-one interactions, although some small-group work may be involved at times. Both are intensive, focused, and purposeful in nature. Both are collaborative. Both require good communication skills, caring and empathy for others, a desire to make a difference, and non-judgmental approaches. Both have greater success when the coach or mentor is enthusiastic, supportive of the organization, anxious to assist and help, knowledgeable, thoughtful, and reflective in nature. Both
processes take place mostly at the job site. They are sustained, on-going, embedded. They are built on the “little and often” philosophy of professional development.

One major difference separates these two forms of professional development. In the mentoring relationship, knowledge, and insight is transmitted, passed on, to another person. This transmission may involve very little deep reflection. It is based primarily on surface level concepts and understandings. In contrast, the coaching relationship is based on pushing one’s knowledge deeper, analyzing more, reflecting on success and struggles. This involves a deeper thought process. It seeks to change your understanding and your practice in a thoughtful, reflective way. It helps you to access your own “internal resources and capacities for self-directed learning. The coach mediates thinking and supports construction of new understandings.” (Lipton & Wellman, 2001, p. 24) There is research to support the idea that “coaching teachers in their practice is the most powerful means to increase their knowledge and improve their practice (Costa & Garmston cited in Lyons & Pinnell, 2001, p. 106, Garmston & Wellman, cited in Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

An additional difference is found in the assignment of coaches and mentors. In a formal mentoring situation, the mentor must be a member of the same organization. In order to pass on policies and procedures, climate and culture of an organization, it is critical that the person be an “insider.” Informal mentoring situations may exist outside of the work environment and may involve others outside the organization. Depending upon the type of coaching involved, the coach may or may not be a member of the same organization. In fact, it will often be someone who is an “outsider.” Change coaches such as those involved in major reform efforts are often outside the
organization. The research on outside coaches seems to yield mixed reviews. Limitations of outside coaches have been listed as: (McLaughlin, 1991, Steckel, 2003):

1. Their time is too limited to influence teacher change.

2. They were viewed by teachers as being too abstract to be useful.

3. They are not always available to provide necessary follow-up support.

4. Often they intervened too quickly (probably due to time constraints), thus lessening teacher’s opportunity to learn problem solving techniques when facing difficulty.

Outside coaching seems to work when:

1. Expertise is needed in a particular content area possessed by the coach.

2. The coach possesses qualities that teachers value.

3. The coach possesses wide experience gained through years of classroom practice.

4. The coach had credibility as an educator.

5. The coach had the ability to interact well with individuals within the local setting (Crandall, 1982; Steckel, 2003).

Inside coaches have the advantage of knowing the teachers and understanding the needs of the school better. Steckel (2003) reports, however, that inside coaches who were perceived as being the “vehicle” to move teachers or who were perceived as supervisors had difficulty gaining the trust of the other teachers and were thus less effective in helping teachers to improve classroom instruction. Content coaches involved in programs such as the Literacy Collaborative or the Literacy Specialist Project in Ohio are “insiders”; however, some content coaches such as those involved
in the Boston City Schools project or Ohio’s Regional School Improvement Team’s Projects are “outsiders.” The internal/external aspect of coaching has been investigated and alone it did not seem to make a difference on their ability to effect change. What seemed to make the difference was the ability of the coach to interact well with teachers at the site (Crandall, 1982).

Coaching and mentoring are synergistic and complementary processes. They are without a doubt part of the array of professional development opportunities that must be offered to teachers in the 21st century. As in all areas of education, there are critical issues surrounding effective coaching and mentoring. They might best be grouped under several main concerns. Those are: goals, leadership, resources, selection of mentors/coaches and matches of people, support and evaluation.

**Goals.** One of the most critical areas is that of goals, purpose, and direction. In order to gain the maximum benefit from a coaching/mentoring program, it is critical that those involved in it know why the program is in place and what it hopes to accomplish. Without that clear direction/vision, coaching/mentoring programs can flounder and produce few results. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) talk about the importance of understanding the goals of the district/school in order to produce maximum results. It is obviously important that those participating in the program understand those goals and collaboratively work together to reach them. Critical issue #1 is to understand the vision and set goals for the program prior to its implementation (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

**Leadership.** As in all aspects of professional development, it is critical that there is “buy-in” at all levels of leadership. Coaching or mentoring in a building where
the building principal feels the program is a waste of time can be devastating. Additionally, if the building principal has complete “buy-in,” but the district superintendent/board of education feels that it’s just another passing fancy, the necessary resources may not be available to support success. Furthermore, if building teacher leadership feels this is just another “thing they are making us do”, then lack of support in the building will undermine all constructive efforts. Steckel (2003) found that initiatives for reform must be bottom up as well as top down. Therefore, critical issue #2 is to ensure leadership across the board is invested in the project.

*Resources.* Obviously, both coaching and mentoring programs take a strong investment in time, money, and personnel. However, in order for there to be success in any type of program such as these, the provision of adequate resources is mandatory. If true mentoring and coaching is to take place, teachers need time—blocks of time—to participate in the observations, modeling, reflective conversations, study groups, dialogue, analysis, etc. These things cannot happen in a few minutes here and a few minutes there. Blocks of time must be a priority! Money too is an issue. Teachers deserve to be compensated for being mentors and coaches; outside coaches often have high fees, depending upon their expertise. Financial support assists with materials, dinner meetings, substitutes, etc. Failure to support such programs with adequate financial support will lessen their effectiveness, if not doom them to failure. Critical issue #3 is to provide adequate resources in the form of money, personnel, and most importantly, time!

*Selection of mentors/coaches and matches of people.* Since both the mentoring and coaching programs are people-oriented programs, their success or failure depends
upon the quality of people involved in the program. Selection of coaches and mentors is a critical issue, as well as the matching process involved in pairing them with other individuals. Multiple viewpoints can help in this regard. No one person can hold the knowledge base necessary to make all highly successful matches. Selection and matching processes should not be hurried. They must be reflective and careful. Critical issue #4 encourages that selection criteria is applied diligently and matches are made thoughtfully.

Support. Once the matches are made, it is important to provide all types of support in order to facilitate a successful program. This type of support goes beyond mere resources. It deals with verbal and emotional support for those involved in the program. It has to do with providing meeting space, reflectively selecting content for meetings, planting seeds about the importance of the professional growth process, etc. Critical issue #5 seeks to ensure that all forms of support necessary are available to those in the program.

Evaluation. It is critical that some form of evaluation be undertaken so that corrections can be made mid-stream if necessary and improvements can be incorporated for next year’s program. This evaluation should actually be part of the original planning process and should be an inherent part of the entire program. Critical issue #6 requires that evaluation be planned for and undertaken throughout the coaching/mentoring process. These six critical issues will hopefully help focus attention in order to address major issues in planning coaching and mentoring programs.
Steckel’s (2003) research on literacy mentors in the Boston City Schools highlighted the following:

1. Restricting the coach’s work to a specific grade level or group of teachers proved more effective.

2. Coaching one day a week throughout the year or one day a month over 3 years produced more favorable results than did more sporadic arrangements that disrupted the school’s schedule.

3. Successful coaches were especially adept at modeling instruction.

4. Successful coaches believed they needed to show teachers what could be done and how well children could achieve.

5. The most powerful lessons were demonstration lessons using students from the teachers being coached.

6. In order to build capacity, sustain changes and continue development over time, there needs to be “a layered or pyramidal system” for spreading information throughout the school (p. 256). Steckel (2003) highlights the need for time to be built into the school day for collaborative learning for adults.

7. Showing rather than telling was more effective.

8. Focus on capacity was more effective than focusing on daily concerns.

9. Coaches who were able to manage time were more effective.

10. Coaches who had the greatest positive impact on teachers’ instructional practices were those who were considered to be “master teachers” by principals and other adults in the building (Steckel, 2003, pp. 248-249).
For many years, the education system was built on a factory-model. Students were brought into schools, pigeonholed into classrooms by age, handed a one-size fits all curriculum and were expected to learn (at least to some degree). Teachers were often minimally trained, expected to be handed a textbook, and taught whatever was in the book exactly the way it said to teach it. The philosophy was “just tell them what to do.” Unfortunately, there are still some teachers in today’s schools who feel the same way. They just want to be told what to do.

However, today’s demands to produce high levels of learning for all students (no exceptions!) have created an entirely different scene. Teachers must be able to work with students, to evaluate their learning styles, levels of achievement, motivational factors, language command, depth of thought processes, family support systems, and any other factor which affects learning, and then to select just the right materials, instructional strategies, and interactions that will lead the child on the best learning path possible. However, having to analyze all of that for the diversified mix of students in one’s classroom can seem overwhelming. In reality we are asking teachers to design unwritten individual education plans for each and every student. In order to do this, teachers must be equipped with the necessary knowledge to make effective decisions (Darling Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Mentoring and coaching (especially coaching) seek to prepare teachers to participate in this heavy-duty analytical and critical thinking process. Coaching and mentoring are powerful forms of professional development. Through coaching and mentoring, teachers can become critical problem solvers, analytical experts, and masterful designers of individually appropriate curriculum. They no longer have to depend upon someone
else making decisions; they are empowered to make them themselves. They have reached a new, invigorating, and challenging level of professionalism.

Recently the International Reading Association issued a position statement on literacy coaches--roles and qualification (IRA, 2004). The statement strongly supports the need for coaches and gives the following five qualifications. The IRA states that literacy coaches must:

1. Be excellent classroom teachers themselves.
2. Have a deep knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment and instruction.
3. Have experience in working with teachers to improve their practice.
4. Be experienced presenters and familiar with presenting to teacher groups in schools and at professional conferences.
5. Have training that will enable them to master the complexities of observing in classrooms and providing feedback to teachers.

Although abundant research has been written on professional development, the research on mentoring and coaching is somewhat more limited. Following is a summary of research to date: Careful selection of mentors and coaches is critical. Mentor/protégé matches must be made with great care.

1. Peer coaching should be voluntary. There must be a mutual respect established between the two parties in order for peer coaching to work.
2. Teachers need time (enough time) to participate in either program.
3. Involvement of the stakeholders in the development of mentoring/coaching programs will yield greater “buy-in” later.
4. Participants must understand the vision/purpose of the mentoring or coaching program.

5. A great deal of empathy and support is necessary for all involved in mentoring and coaching programs. Support is emotion as well as resource-based.

6. A trust level must be established between participants in order for the coaching/mentoring relationship to produce results.

This list could be extended; however, these six items form the basis of important issues to consider in order to ensure success for all involved in coaching and mentoring experiences.

Summary

Professional development is playing an increasingly important role in the lives of educators. Because of the demands placed upon schools to produce high levels of learning for all students, business as usual is no longer an option. What was once just a hope that all children would achieve at a high level has now become national policy through the passage of the ESEA (No Child Left Behind) legislation which was passed in 2001. Standards and accountability assessments will not be sufficient to raise the levels of achievement throughout our nation. Donahue (1999) argues that in spite of the reform efforts concentrating on standards, assessments and accountability, literacy performance by students has been relatively static. Steckel (2003) states that in order to get improvement in student learning, changes in policy must somehow result in the way teachers teach in their classrooms. Many believe that teachers must develop deeper understandings of their content areas, increase their teaching strategies, and gain
a greater understanding of the diverse student learning paths and motivation in order to meet the needs of all students (Darling-Hammond, 1997a, Sparks & Hirsh, 2004). In order for teachers to gain these understandings and strategies, traditional professional development is no longer sufficient. Research shows us that teachers need professional development which is more embedded, more sustained, more on-going, more intense, and more collaborative (Sparks & Hirsh, 2004). Educators must work together to develop a system which has the capacity to analyze problems, develop solutions, evaluate itself and teach itself (Rogers & Pinnell, 2002). Hargreaves (1992) argues that schools need to become “ecological systems” which support the continuous growth and development of the adults who work there.

The research on professional development, coaching and mentoring provided salient background for this study. This body of research provided a basis upon which to analyze the focus group and interview transcriptions of principals, teachers, and literacy mentors produced in this research project. It is important to see where their insights and perceptions intersect with current research and where they become unique.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to investigate one northeastern Ohio school district’s attempt to provide an embedded, on-going professional development opportunity for its teachers through a literacy mentoring program. The focus of the study was to take a look at the ways in which mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in this literacy mentor program and to take a look at their perceptions of the impact of that literacy program on teachers’ practices and attitudes, as well as on student achievement, behavior and attitudes. It was an attempt to understand the perceptions that all three groups—literacy mentors, building principals, and teachers—have of the literacy mentor program.

In this chapter the research design is presented. The study began by engaging literacy mentors, building principals and other teachers from five elementary buildings in a series of five focus groups, at least one for each subgroup. Following the focus groups, in-depth interviews were held with five literacy mentors. A final follow-up, mixed group was convened at the end of the study to process the findings and to seek future recommendations. This group served as a theory confirmation group. It also allowed for member checks and was part of the triangulation of data. Throughout this chapter, an up-close look at the research sites, the participants, the data collection and
the data analysis are presented. Additionally the research paradigm, research questions, limitations of the study, validity, and reliability are discussed.

Rationale of Research Paradigm

Qualitative research seeks to create meaning, to provide an in-depth look at the world and our experiences in it (Merriam, 1998). It seeks to examine the multiple realities of people and the complexity of life (Firestone, 1987; Peshkin, 1993) and to provide a rich description of a particular situation. The strength of qualitative research resides in the “concrete, depiction of detail, portrayal of process in an active mode, and attention to the perspectives of those studied” (Firestone, 1987, p. 20, quoting Patton’s 1980 work). Additional strengths of this qualitative study lie in the fact that it focused on “naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings,...local groundedness,…richness and holism,”…had inherent flexibility and produced qualitative data with emphasis on people’s “lived experience” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). This type of research is “fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: their perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, presuppositions, and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). The case study format was selected for the study because it is considered to be the best way to provide the structure needed to create an intensive, in-depth, holistic look at one bounded unit of study, in this case, the literacy mentor program in one suburban school district (Merriam, 1998). The emphasis of this study was on a specific case, “a focused and bounded phenomenon embedded in its context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). To examine the work of the teachers serving as mentors and the impact of that work on the practices of other
teachers and on student achievement mandated that the research be conducted in a naturalistic setting; i.e., in the school district itself. Examining people in a complex, naturalistic setting is best handled through the qualitative research paradigm. For these reasons, the qualitative case study was selected for this study. The goal was to create a rich, meaningful description of the program and of the perceptions of those participating in it. Additionally, a goal was established at the outset to describe this program as accurately as possible.

Research Questions

In order to limit the focus of this study, two research questions were formulated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The focus of this study will revolve around the following questions:

1. In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?

2. What is the perceived impact of the literacy mentor program?

The study was based upon perceptions. These perceptions are realities for real people. Included in this study was a comparison of various perceptions with a focus on finding patterns in those perceptions.

Research Design

Site (District)

This study investigated the literacy mentor program in one northeastern Ohio suburban school district. The city school district encompasses portions of five townships and one suburban city. The community is a residential community situated 15-25 miles from two major urban areas. Growth in mushrooming housing
developments surrounds this city, causing stress on all county infrastructures and agencies, including the school district. District enrollment is over 7,500 students. These students are distributed into one kindergarten center, five elementary buildings, two middle schools, and one high school. The elementary schools range in enrollment from approximately 500 students to over 800 students. One principal leads each elementary school. There are no assistant principals in these elementary buildings. The graduation rate for the district is 97.9%. The student population is 94.5% White, 2.3% Black, 1.6% Multi-Racial, .9% Asian, and .6% Hispanic.

The literacy mentor program has been implemented in all five of the elementary buildings. Four of the buildings are K-5 buildings; one building is a 1-5 building. For the purposes of this study, the buildings have been identified as Site A, Site B, Site C, Site D, and Site E. Information on each site is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Site Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Building Literacy Committee</th>
<th>Age of School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site A</td>
<td>1st-5th</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site B</td>
<td>K-5th</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site C</td>
<td>K-5th</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>42 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site D</td>
<td>K-5th</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>95 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site E</td>
<td>K-5th</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The district failed to pass its last three fiscal levy attempts prior to February 2005. The last time a levy for operating funds was passed prior to that was over 10 years ago. Following the failure of the previous three levies, deep financial cuts were instituted throughout the district, including teacher lay-offs, administrative lay-offs, support staff lay-offs, pay-to-play, elimination of busing, consolidation of offices, etc.

The literacy mentor stipends of $600 per year and the half-day release time each month for each mentor were eliminated. Even with the recent passage of the February 2005 levy, monies will only be sufficient to maintain the “new” status quo. In other words, the cuts that have been made as a result of the three previous levy failures will be maintained. Those positions which were lost will not be reinstated. The literacy mentor program reductions (stipends and release time) will not be reinstated in the near future. Mentors, however, volunteered to continue the program without pay and without release time. Busing was the only service which was reinstated. With incredible annual growth, increased state and federal mandates, and no additional operating monies coming into the district, the issue of cost-effectiveness has become a huge concern for the district.

Literacy Mentor Program

History of the Literacy Mentor Program

For purposes of this study, it is important to describe this literacy mentor program in detail because it is a unique, cost-effective program which differs from those mentor programs which pay for half-day or full-day literacy mentors.
This literacy mentor program had its roots in a building-level program that was begun during the school year 1998-1999. At that time the building principal and the reading intervention teacher collaborated frequently, sharing thoughts about what was missing in the reading instruction program. Scores were stagnant and the school was caught in a total large group lesson approach to teaching reading. The reading instructor and the building principal realized that there were necessary changes to be made. They also understood that in order to be effective, decisions for change would need to be made by building level personnel. They also understood the changes would come once teachers were involved in an inquiry process about the stagnation combined with some research-based readings/learnings. They understood it would need to be a sustained collaborative study, an intensive study, an on-going study. They understood it would need to be connected to teachers’ classrooms and the actual work they do daily. What was missing at that point in time was the importance of data analysis as well as the importance of modeling and coaching. Those facets of the program developed as the program was taken district-wide and the research studies were completed.

The building principal utilized the Ohio Literacy Initiative’s (2005) A Basic Framework for Literacy Development guidebook to prompt reflection, study, evaluation and analysis of the reading program. She utilized grant money (OhioREADS) to offer a small stipend to teachers to become literacy mentors in their building. One teacher at each grade level (first through fifth) was selected, along with the reading intervention teacher and the building principal and assistant principal. Additionally, one parent joined the committee as the OhioREADS volunteer.
coordinator. During the second half of the 1998-1999 school year, the committee met every 2 weeks for one and a half hours. The committee completed the needs assessment from the Ohio Literacy Initiative, analyzed the results, read various research articles, and brainstormed some changes the committee wanted to make in the building. During that semester, the building implemented a nightly reading program, sending books home nightly with each child and sponsored a summer reading program during the 1999 summer with an incentive reward program in the fall for those who completed the summer program.

During the second year, 1999-2000, the building literacy committee met monthly throughout the entire year. The group read and studied Allington's (2001) *What Really Matters to Struggling Readers*. Each month the group would read a chapter, select five of the most potent quotations, share those quotations with the group, and discuss the chapter. The quotations were then typed one per page, enlarged, and posted in all elementary schools. In subsequent years the literacy mentors continued to read and increase their knowledge base through a study of the work of Routman (2002), Fountas and Pinnell (1996, 1998, 2001), Keene and Zimmermann (1997), Miller (2002), Calkins (2000), Harvey and Goudvis (2000), Rasinski and Padak (1996, 2000), Rasinski (2003), and other researchers through resource journal articles. At the end of the 1999-2000 school year, the building principal left the building to take a district-wide early literacy position. The building literacy committee format had been so successful in her building that this former building principal took it and applied it at the district level. During her second year of being the early literacy coordinator (2001-2002), funding was received so that a small
stipend could be offered and applications were taken for two literacy mentors at each of the five elementary buildings. The group was formed and met monthly, reading and studying the Allington (2001) book, followed by other books from Appendix E. During that year the committee also mapped the reading interventions being used in each building to support struggling readers. They also selected at least five quotations from each chapter, made them into posters, and posted them in their buildings.

Research articles were shared and discussed and taken back to respective buildings.

The literacy mentor group continued working, reading, sharing, collaborating during the 2001-2004 school years. Meetings were held monthly. Other buildings began building-level literacy committees. Literacy mentors participated in a variety of activities as enumerated in Chapter IV. During the first 3 years, efforts focused on study groups, leveling books, ordering and creating book rooms in buildings, performing Developmental Reading Assessments. During the last year, efforts focused on Dibels assessments and fluency study and instruction. Stipends of $600/person were paid for 2 years (2001-2003). During those 2 years, literacy mentors were also given one-half day of release time each month to model in classrooms and to coach teachers. Due to the levy failures, both stipends and release time were eliminated during the past 2 years (2003-2005). Fortunately, literacy mentors were dedicated to the literacy mentor work that when asked about continuing, they agreed to continue without stipends and without release time. Individual principals have, on occasion, created release time for their literacy mentors through their creative brainstorming, but that has been infrequent.
At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, goals were set for the 2005-2006 year. Decisions were made to concentrate on analyzing student data, strengthening intervention programs, including classroom intervention as a first-line defense. The decisions were made by literacy mentors, building principals, and district level personnel. However, the initial impetus to concentrate on strengthening classroom interventions was made by literacy personnel. That input was taken to the district level and shared with building principals. At that level, the decision to concentrate on analyzing student data was added. Literacy mentors will spend the year preparing handy reference guides for classroom teachers which include intervention strategies for various weak areas such as vocabulary, main idea, and so forth. Individual buildings will set their own goals for their own buildings, but the district mentor group will focus on these interventions for struggling readers.

Over the past 4 years, the literacy mentor program has grown and developed. Its impact has been strong. An extension was made into the middle schools and high schools in 2003-2004. At first this group was very, very small (two to three people). It has, however, grown to 10 mentors for the 2005-2006 school year. The elementary literacy mentor program continues into the 2005-2006 school year with 11 mentors.

**Building Literacy Committees/Councils**

Currently, all buildings have some sort of building-level literacy meetings; however, these meetings range from very structured and organized to informal discussion and sharing groups.

Four of the schools have monthly building-wide literacy meetings with many other teachers participating in either formal grade-level literacy mentor roles or in
informal committee member roles. One of those four buildings has had a very formalized literacy committee (comprised of one representative from each grade level plus one special education representative, one remedial reading instructor, and one principal) which meets monthly. The meeting is convened and run by the building principal. Another building has a moderately structured committee comprised of one representative from each grade level. Their meetings are less structured. The building principal attends some of the meetings, but leaves the direction of the committee to the literacy mentors. A third building has a monthly meeting which is held under the direction of the building’s literacy mentors. The principal is always in attendance and all teachers are invited and welcome. A fourth building has a much more informal meeting structure. All teachers are invited to attend. The principal and literacy mentors convene the meeting, but the agenda is one of sharing what is happening in classrooms. The fifth building has a few meetings throughout the year to plan literacy events in the building, but there is no standing committee to study and discuss literacy issues. Additional information regarding these committees follows in Chapter IV.

Participants

Mentors/coaches. There are three levels or groups of participants: mentors/coaches, teachers and building principals. The first group is comprised of the literacy mentors/coaches. Each building has at least two mentors, one for primary and one for intermediate. In two buildings a third person has volunteered to come forward and to be part of the literacy mentor program this year. The district gladly accepted this additional person during this particular year because literacy mentors are receiving no pay this year due to levy cuts. In previous years, this would have presented a problem
because mentors were paid a stipend and due to the limitation of funds, only two mentor stipends could be approved per building. Because of budget cuts, literacy mentors during the 2004-2005 school year received no stipends, thus opening the door for additional volunteers to join the group. The program remained the same with the exception of no release time and no stipends. In some cases, the same mentors have been in place during the entire 4-year program. In some buildings, however, there have been several mentors over the 4-year period. Mentors currently serving in this capacity were selected for this study.

The two mentors from Site A range from 3 years to 11 years of teaching experience. Both are in their second year as literacy mentors in this building. One has a Master’s degree and is a National Board Certified teacher. The other is three-fourths through a master’s program in literacy and has already obtained her Reading Endorsement. Currently they are both teaching in multi-age second/third grade classrooms.

The two mentors from Site B range from 10 years to 12 years of teaching experience. Both have their master’s degrees and their Reading Endorsements. One has been engaged in a doctoral program in literacy and is a National Board Certified teacher as well as certified in gifted education. Both are in their second year of being a district literacy mentor. One is a first grade teacher; the other is a fourth grade teacher.

The two mentors from Site C have been teaching from 27 years to 28 years. Both have their master’s degrees and Reading Endorsements. One of them has special education certification. Both are in their fourth years of being a district literacy mentor. One teaches first grade; the other teaches third grade.
Three mentors from Site D range in experience from 12 to 14 years. All have master’s degrees and two have Reading Endorsements. One is also a National Board Certified teacher. One is in her second year of being a literacy mentor; one is in her fourth year; and one is in her first year. One teaches in a first/second grade looping classroom, one in a Title I classroom, and one in a special education classroom.

The three mentors from Site E range in experience from 5 to 15 years. All three have master’s degrees in reading and Reading Endorsements. Two are in their first year as district literacy mentor and one is in her fourth year. Two of these teachers teach in second grade classrooms; the third teaches in a fifth grade classroom.

*Literacy Mentors: A Brief Background*

Ten literacy mentors participated in the focus groups and/or interviews. Two mentors were out on maternity leave and unavailable for our focus groups. All mentors were assigned to one of the five elementary schools. As stated before, all five buildings have at least two literacy mentors who attend monthly district-wide meetings and are part of the district’s literacy mentor team which is the object of this study. One mentor in each building is considered to be the primary literacy mentor and the other mentor is considered to be the intermediate literacy mentor. Several buildings had three mentors this past year, the third was a primary mentor in both cases.

**Identification of Participants**

The following is a complete list of literacy mentors and their credentials.

TG has been teaching for 11 years, 4 of which have been in her current building. She is certified in Elementary, 1-8, and has a Middle Childhood Generalist License. She has a Master’s degree in elementary education, obtained her National
Board Certification, and has completed over 30 hours in additional workshops past her master’s degree. Additionally she has attended two SIRI workshops, the First R and the Diagnostic SIRI. She has been a district literacy mentor for 2 years. Her teaching assignments have included 2/3 multiage, third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade.

YP is a relatively new teacher who has been teaching for 3 years, the past two in a 2/3 multiage classroom in her current building. She obtained her bachelor’s degree in early and middle school education and is currently working to complete her Master’s degree in Literacy. She is certified in Early Childhood, Middle Childhood Science & Language Arts, and has her Reading Endorsement. She did attend SIRI the First R. YP has been a literacy mentor for 2 years. Y.P. is without a doubt the newest literacy mentor.

GP is currently a first grade teacher who has been teaching full-time for 8 years all in this same assignment. Prior to this assignment she taught for 2 years part-time as an art teacher at the middle school level. She has her Master’s Degree and has attended summer professional development workshops sponsored by the state department of education to update teachers in early literacy instruction and diagnostic assessment techniques. Currently she is completing her fourth year as a literacy mentor. She has certification in Elementary Education K-8 and her Reading Endorsement.

AC has taught for 12 years. Nine of those years have been at her current school teaching fourth grade. Prior to that, she taught Title I for 1 year and first grade for 2 years in other schools. She has her Master’s Degree in Gifted Education and has begun her doctoral work in Literacy. Currently she holds certifications in Grades 1-8, gifted, reading endorsement, and her National Board Certification. She has been a district
literacy mentor for 2 years and has served as a reading consultant in various area
districts.

AR has been teaching for 28 years in the same school, 14 of the most recent
have been in first grade. Prior to that she held teaching positions in learning
disabilities and remedial primary reading. She has her Master’s Degree in elementary
education and teaching certifications in Grades 1-8, DH/LD/SBH. Additionally she
has taken SIRI classes, Pathwise Training and various reading workshops. She has
served as a literacy mentor for 4 years.

LH has been teaching for 27 years. She’s currently teaching third grade. Prior
to that she taught Title One reading and math (reading in Grades 4-6, math in Grades 2-
6), kindergarten, Title One in another district (Grades 1-12). Her master’s degree is in
elementary education with a focus in reading. She is certified to teach K-12 and,
additionally, holds a reading endorsement and a reading supervisor’s certificate. This
is her fourth year as a literacy mentor. She has attended SIRI the First R and SIRI
Diagnostic, and has attended Pathwise training.

YB has been teaching for 12 years in her building, most recently in a grade 1/2
looping classroom assignment. She has received her Master’s Degree in Education and
her National Board Certification. She currently holds teaching certification/ licensing
in Early Childhood and a Reading Endorsement. Additionally, she has attended state
professional development workshops in early reading instruction and diagnostic
assessment, the National Fall Study Group in Denver, Colorado with the Public
Education Business Coalition which was focused on teaching reading strategies and
various literacy workshops and inservice programs. She has completed 4 years as a
district literacy mentor.

AL has been teaching 14 years, only 3 of which have been in her current
building. She is currently teaching Title I Reading, but previously taught first grade
and third grade. A.L. received her Master’s Degree in Reading and has spent 2 years
as a literacy mentor. Additionally, she has taken SIRI classes and multiple literacy
workshops.

EW has taught 5 years in second grade in her current building. She received
her Master’s Degree in Reading and is certified in Elementary 1-8 and has her Reading
Endorsement. Additionally, she has taken SIRI the First R and Pathwise Training. She
has completed her first year as a literacy mentor.

LP has been teaching for 15 years in her current building. She also has
received her Master's Degree in Reading and her Reading Endorsement. She has
attended SIRI classes. She is in her first year as a literacy mentor.

To summarize, 9 out of the 10 literacy mentors have their master’s degrees.
Eight out of 10 have their Reading Endorsement; one additional mentor has nearly
completed her reading endorsement and Master’s in Education programs. Eight
mentors have attended one or more professional development workshops sponsored by
the Ohio Department of Education. Three have obtained their National Board
Certification. Teaching experience ranges from 3 years to 28 years (one fifth have
under 3-5 years; three fifths have 10-15 years; one fifth have over 25 years). Years
serving as a mentor range from 1 to 4 (one fifth have 1 year; two fifths have 2 years,
two fifths have 4 years).
Teachers

The second group of participants were teachers who have participated in at least three literacy events supervised/led by the literacy mentors in their building and who received continuing support provided by the literacy mentors. Participants in this group were purposefully selected because they had taken advantage of multiple opportunities offered by the literacy mentors in their building. (Merriam, 1998). Invitations were extended to 17 teachers, 14 of whom responded and came to one of the focus groups. Teachers ranged in years of experience from 5 to 32 years. They represented primary and intermediate teachers. Those teachers selected are described by site in Table 2.

Principals

The third group of participants were the building principals from the five elementary buildings. The principals ranged in experience from 14 years to 33 years in education and from 6 of those years to 21 of those years in administration. Three of the principals began their administrative service in this district in the school where they are currently working. These three came to the district either as the building principal or as an assistant principal (intern). The other two principals worked in the district as coordinators (either special education or gifted) prior to assuming the position of building principal. None have Reading Endorsements or graduate work in literacy. During the past year, however, four of them have participated in a 15-hour workshop class on leadership and literacy held in district. Four principals have participated in the Ohio Association for Elementary School Administrators’ (OAESA) Literacy for Leadership program. Table 3 gives more information regarding these principals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Workshops</th>
<th># of Teachers Participating</th>
<th>Range of Years of Experience</th>
<th>Grade Levels Represented</th>
<th>Exposure--Voluntary or Required</th>
<th>Graduate Work Range</th>
<th>SIRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Masters in Administration</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5-32 years</td>
<td>1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, Intervention</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Bachelor's only to Master's in Education to Master’s in Gifted to Master’s in Administration</td>
<td>4 = Yes 1 = No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Master's in Education Bachelor's only to Master's in Art of Teaching</td>
<td>No 3 = Yes 1 = No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12-28 years</td>
<td>1st, 2nd, 3rd, 3rd</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Master's in Education Bachelor's only to Master's in Art of Teaching</td>
<td>3 = Yes 1 = No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3-15 years</td>
<td>1st, 3rd</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Bachelor's only to Master's in Reading</td>
<td>3 = Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>Years in Educ.</td>
<td>Years as Prnc. in this Building</td>
<td>Degrees</td>
<td>Previously Taught</td>
<td>Leadership for Literacy</td>
<td>Rigby - OAESA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site B</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B.S. in Educ. M.S. in Educ. Admin.</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site C</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>B.S. in Educ, M.S. in Educ. Admin.</td>
<td>M.S. Lang. Arts 6th Grade</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site D</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B.S. in Educ. M.S. in Educ. Admin. History</td>
<td>Grades 2, 4, 5, 6 (Science, Reading, Math)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All participants were informed that they, as well as the names of the schools, would be protected through the use of masked names. Additionally, all participants were free to withdraw their permission at any time without fear of any form of reprisals. Approval from the University’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) was required because of the use of human subjects (Appendix A). A copy of the informed consent document is included in Appendix C. Each participant read and signed this document prior to participating in a focus group or interview. The IRB required confidentiality of the participants and the school site, thus pseudonyms were used for both people and places.

Data Collection

Initially, a background survey was given to all participants, literacy mentors, teachers, and principals. They were asked to list their years in teaching, their teaching certifications, their degrees, and their years of involvement with the literacy mentor program.

The majority of data was collected through focus groups and follow-up active interviews. The focus group has been defined as "a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research" (Powell, 1996, p. 499). An interview protocol, or interview guide (Patton, 1987), was developed and utilized to begin all focus groups and all interviews. The protocol was utilized to begin each focus group and interview; however, an open-ended format allowed all focus groups and interviews to go where they needed to go. Protocols began with focused open-ended questions (Yin, 1984)
such as, “Tell us about your work as a literacy mentor,” or “Tell us about the work of the literacy mentor in your building.” Protocols were utilized to open all groups and interviews. Additional questions emerged during the focus group and interview conversations and were later coded in relationship to the main research questions listed.
above. Following each focus group/interview, field notes (Merriam, 1998) were taken and all exchanges transcribed. The researcher used field notes to capture particular comments made off tape, physical reactions to questions, interaction styles between participants in the group, any problems with recording, any suggestions made by participants that were not caught on tape, and so on. Focus groups allowed and encouraged flow of information among and between participants. It was actually anticipated that one person’s comments might trigger thoughts for others. It was the synergy that was created in such a conversation that contributed to the anticipated richness of dialogue. Truly, it was the insight and data produced by the interaction between participants that gave richness to each focus group.

However, it was also important to allow some of the participants to share their thoughts in a small one-on-one situation. Five informal interviews (Holloway, 1997) were conducted with teachers. It was anticipated that these interview activities would allow the interviewees to share information more confidentially and to give more depth to answers. It also allowed the interviewer the possibility to drill deeper into the perceptions expressed by the interviewee. Originally the researcher began with a brief protocol, but it was quickly determined that mentors had much else to talk about and the protocols quickly gave way to more a more informal exchange.

Data collection from focus groups and interviews occurred in three stages:

1. Convened the literacy mentors into a focus group, followed by interviews with five mentors. The decision of which mentors participated in the interviews was made based on the researcher’s perception of availability of additional data, along with an attempt to select a variety of experience levels. Years in teaching ranged from 11
years to 27 years. Years as literacy mentors ranged from 2-4 years. Two primary mentors and two intermediate mentors and one intervention teacher were interviewed. The selection of these mentors for interviews was thought to provide a wide variety of insights into the program.

2. Convened the building principals from the five elementary buildings into two focus groups because of building principal schedules. Because these focus groups were small, it was determined that there would be no further need for additional interviews. The purpose of these groups was to gain an administrative perspective of the literacy mentor program. Administrators are in a unique position to observe building-wide reception of the program and implementation of ideas.

3. Convened two small focus groups of selected teachers who have participated in at least three literacy events led or been sponsored by the literacy mentors. The focus groups were formed by inviting between two and six teachers from each building. Names of those to be invited to the focus groups were obtained from the literacy mentors and all were invited. Those who came and participated ranged from 3 years to 32 years of experience and spanned first through fifth grades. The focus groups were divided into two sessions due to teachers' schedules and availability.

4. Gathered data from staff bulletins, building and district newsletters, staff meeting agendas, notes from district-wide literacy mentor meetings, displays in buildings, anecdotal notes from meetings, and other similar types of data. Use of the information from this data set was primarily utilized for triangulation of data. Where possible, this data corroborated what focus groups and interviews revealed. Additionally it also provided insights into literacy activities that failed to be disclosed.
through focus group conversations and personal interviews. Hopefully it contributed to a holistic understanding of the literacy mentor program.

The timeline in Table 4 was followed for collection of data.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June-August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August-October</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data were collected from several difference sources (see Table 5).
Table 5
Sources of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Data Collection</th>
<th>Second Data Collection</th>
<th>Internal Validity/ Triangulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1: In what ways do mentors, teachers, and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?

- Mentor focus group
- Teacher focus groups
- Principal focus groups

Research Question 2: In what ways is the impact of the literacy mentor program evident in teachers’ practices, student work products, and classroom achievement?

- Mentor focus group
- Teacher focus groups
- Principal focus groups

The researcher transcribed all of the audio tapes herself and carefully checked all transcriptions for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously within a constant comparative framework (Lancy, 1993). The interactive nature of this process supports the emergence of trustworthy findings (Merriam, 1998). Because these types of interviews and focus groups yielded large amounts of data, it was important to have a procedure in place for the reduction of this data. As data was collected, it was organized by case. Each group (mentors, teachers, principals) became one case.
These cases were selected in order to understand the breadth of ideas and concepts in each group and to avoid cross-school comparisons. Specific data selected for analysis was entered into a computer file in order to expedite analysis. A combined coding procedure (Goetz & LeCompte, 1987) was used to make meaning of the transcriptions. Goetz and LeCompte describe a system of sorting data that involves deductive and inductive reasoning. In some cases, the researcher began with known categories (closed system) and separated and sorted data into those categories. Additionally, the researcher determined other categories (open system) as a result of the data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1987).

_data Organization_

The data analysis actually took place in four phases. Those phases included:
1. Data collection, preparation, and reduction during which data was coded and early categories were pre-determined and also developed using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) for each case.

2. Identification of behavioral, belief and perceptual patterns within and among subjects at each site/case in order to reduce the number of categories (Creswell, 1998).

3. Identification of behavioral, belief and perceptual patterns between sites/cases (Creswell, 1998).

4. Confirming the validity of results.

Formal analysis was guided by the two research questions, using Guskey’s (2000) five critical levels of professional development evaluation as a guide for potential themes. An inductive analytical process was utilized. The researcher identified behavioral, belief and perception patterns within and among cases. Careful analytical processes were involved in the initial selection of questions for the interview and focus group protocols so that some structure for categorization occurred during the interview/focus group. The researcher then looked at the data generated from these interview questions and focus group protocols.

The data was studied independently for each case and the researcher created a case record for each group in relationship to the research questions. Units of data were isolated by the researcher. These units were selected because they were heuristic, small, and able to stand by themselves. These units of data were then compared with other units. The goal was to find “recurring regularities in the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 180). Data reduction took place through a series of codings and classifications. The
first series of codings were open codings. Subsequent codings were axial/pattern codings, in order to reduce the data through categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The research questions continued to guide this constant comparative reduction phase of analysis. Tentative categories were created and then compared to other categories and recreated. Eventually an organizational framework emerged which provided the researcher a structure for seeking broad domains, belief, and behavioral patterns and theories.

Following the creation of individual case records, a cross-case analysis was conducted which compared findings across the three cases. Patterns, if any, that were common to the cases were sought. During this part of the process, the researcher constantly compared information such as respondents’ remarks, perceptions, and incidents, etc. from all sites/cases. The researcher sought to identify patterns which were common to multiple cases (Merriam, 1998).

The goal of data analysis was to generate grounded theory or theory that emerged (i.e., is “grounded” in) from the data. The grounded theory consisted of “categories, properties, and hypotheses that are the conceptual links between and among the categories and properties” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159) The ultimate goal was to present an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 193) in order to form a clear picture of the individuals and groups from within the context of their setting (Holloway, 1997). Moreover, an audit trail was maintained throughout these processes so that the entire process of analysis was a public process. Through the process of coding, categorizing, and data displays, conclusions and insights were gained.
Validity and Reliability

In order to give credence to the results of this study, the following methods were utilized:

Internal validity (credibility) was based on triangulation which involved “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). This study used multiple data sources, including interviews, focus groups, researcher field notes and relevant documents to confirm incipient findings (Slavin 1992). Additionally, the researcher included a statement of biases in order to clarify “the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Member checks were scheduled throughout the data analysis period (Creswell, 1998). This involved “taking the data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). These member checks offered clarification on several points and gave absolute agreement to the plausibility of results. Peer review, which involved “asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Peers selected to comment on the findings involved district administrators and teachers as well as two former employees who just recently have taken positions in new districts. Their insights helped to clarify the findings. Additionally, prolonged engagement in the field by the researcher provided the final contributions to the validity of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).
Reliability (dependability) was based on triangulation, member checks, coding and recoding, an audit trail, peer review, and a statement of the investigator’s position (Merriam, 1998).

External validity (transferability) was not an issue in this study because the purpose of the research was not to make it generalizable to the larger public, but to simply provide a rich, thick, holistic description of one literacy mentoring situation. It was hoped for was that this research might find some individual user or reader transferability.

Objectivity (confirmability) was obtained through triangulation (Merriam, 1998, Slavin, 1992).

Limitations of the Study

Because this was a case study of one district’s experience, the conclusions are not easily generalizable to other locations. If the same study were conducted in another school district with other participants, findings may have been different. The reader (consumer) will need to decide what, if any aspects of this case study can apply to any other situations (Peshkin, 1993).

Secondly, it must be noted that the researcher was employed as an administrator in this district. This may have some unintended effect on the phenomenon and the participants involved in the study. Great care was taken to establish reliability. Since the data was interpreted through the investigator, it is understood that personal bias might have influenced the findings, and thus peer review, member checks, and triangulation were used to minimize that bias.
A third limitation stemmed from the fact that not all mentors/teachers participated in the focus groups or interviews. Participation was by researcher selection based on purposeful sampling criteria and was voluntary. Without all participants possible, data may potentially have been skewed and/or incomplete.

In spite of these limitations, it was felt that this study was indeed able to provide a rich, holistic and in-depth look at the this literacy mentor program based upon the perceptions of those involved in the program.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents results of the study. The data presented emerged from five transcribed audiotaped focus groups, five transcribed audiotaped one-on-one interviews, summaries of field notes taken during the focus groups, and one final transcribed audiotaped mixed focus group. The focus groups and all interviews (literacy mentors, teachers, and principals) were conducted through the willingness of the participants. Focus groups were all approximately 90 minutes in duration. Interviews were approximately 45 minutes long. In addition to these taped sessions, I was able to observe literacy mentors in their school environments and in their group district-wide literacy mentor sessions. Anecdotal notes were recorded during these site-based observations.

The data will be grouped into three cases: literacy mentors, teachers, and principals. In examining both research questions, a number of categories emerged during the analysis of data. Data are presented in this chapter based on those categories.

Research Question 1: In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?
Categories that emerged were: activities, roles, supports and obstacles, strategies, and affective considerations.

Research Question 2: What is the perceived impact of the literacy mentor program?

Categories that emerged were: changes in mentor teaching practices, changes in mentor attitudes, changes in teacher practices, changes in teacher attitudes, changes in student work and achievement, changes in student behavior and attitudes, and changes in the building as a whole.

The Findings: Literacy Mentors

Research Question 1: In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?

Mentor Activities

Literacy mentors listed over 39 different types of activities that they have engaged in as a literacy mentor. The activities most often identified during focus groups are listed in order of frequency: (a) planning and presenting professional development for other staff members; (b) collaborating with staff members; (c) modeling lessons; (d) gathering and organizing materials; (e) organizing and leading book study groups; (f) goal setting for the building; (g) organizing and leading literacy-focused discussions; (h) coaching and mentoring other teachers. Also mentioned frequently were: assisting/organizing building-level Literacy Councils/Committees; hosting various other (not related to book study) study groups; organizing various activities like Literacy Nights, Proficiency Nights, Right-to-Read Weeks, and Read-a-Thons. Following is a brief discussion of each category.
Planning and presenting professional development. This was mentioned by all literacy mentors. The variety of that professional development is reflected in their comments. AL shared that she had “brought in speakers to come in and work with our teachers…(university) professors and so forth.” Those speakers worked with small groups and individuals on several occasions and gave district-wide presentations on other occasions. She continued to say that she had been involved in sharing “about working with struggling readers (with her staff) and we’ve also been part of presenting the fluency (presentations) during staff meetings.” EW talked about a more informal type of professional development when she shared that she had just “shared some information gained from (the district literacy mentor meetings) at our staff meeting.” GP talked about her struggle (along with other literacy mentors) to figure out how to take some particular literacy issue and figure out “how to get it across to the rest of the building.” Her building utilizes building literacy mentors at each grade level to assist in promoting this type of grade-specific professional development. AR talked about utilizing videotapes…showing them and hosting discussions afterwards. All schools agreed that literacy mentors had shown videotapes at some point during their time.

AC talked about helping to “plan building-wide professional development… and I’ve been involved in presenting building-wide professional development.” In AC’s building there is a building level literacy committee with representatives from each grade level. In planning professional development, AC works with those representatives. “When we plan professional development for our staff (curriculum hours), the primary people plan the primary part and the intermediate people plan the
intermediate part. So, we (building and district literacy mentors) are all invested.” She goes on to say that

…what I feel my strength is…has not been with one person, but with one piece of being a literacy mentor, that piece of professional development…I do a lot of the presenting on inservice days. Or, I’ll do the presenting at curriculum hours. (Sometimes) I help plan the curriculum hours and let someone else present them.

AC talked about a more embedded professional development she organized that took place around reading strategies. She stated that

…I kind of organized a strategy of the month kind of club…program…. where we would focus on one strategy,…and not that we would only do one strategy a month, but it was more of the building process…We would go further and further and further with it. We’d do making connections in September, but then we didn’t forget about making connections in October. It was kind of like we just added a strategy (each month). I think that helped because when everybody is doing the same strategies, you can say, “Here, I tried this; do you want to do this? Here I used this book (in your own grade level).”

AC has been so active in professional development that other schools have called her to make presentations in their schools. She spent a week in Columbus with her building principal participating in the Principals’ Literacy Leadership Academy sponsored by the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators. Here is a look at what happened upon returning from the Academy.

…because of that week we spent in Columbus…, they expected us to do an inservice for area principals. So that was part of my commitment to them…I would take this week of inservice (in Columbus), then I would go out and do an inservice. So, when we went out and did the inservice, people came up to me afterwards and said, “Wow, that was great! Could you come and talk to my teachers?” And ever since then,…like I have had districts calling me pretty much continually…there has never been a time when I haven’t had somewhere to go…the next month….I think they like it because, like I feel like I know what teachers want to see because I’m a teacher and I think like (the teachers)…for awhile…I kept doing the same things over and over and I finally said to her (one of the other district’s
administrators), “You know what would be more meaningful? If they (the teachers) came and saw me…and then we had meetings (to discuss what they saw). Rather than me talking at them, talking at them, talking at them…And so they paid for them to come and see me (teach in my classroom). And, then they paid me to go back and talk to them.”

LH talked about an informal type of professional development when she shared about disseminating information regarding good literacy practice.

Some of that comes from our monthly literacy mentor meetings at the district level and then it filters down to the building level and then we bring it back to all the teachers. I guess it’s sort of a pyramid type way to send good information out to a lot of people.

Mentors reported using a variety of communication venues, including e-mail, flyers, newsletters, announcements, quick staff meeting presentations, longer curriculum hour presentations, and simply informal “word-of-mouth” to get information out to their colleagues.

Literacy mentors have been active in all buildings in planning and presenting professional development opportunities for staff members. Many of the opportunities were scheduled during embedded events like staff meetings (required one-hour meetings held before or after school), curriculum hours (required one monthly meeting after school), literacy lunches, during school hour-long observations and visitations. Some opportunities were scheduled before and after school during one’s own personal time, and a few were even scheduled on weekends, again during personal time. A portion of professional development was conducted through e-mail and newsletter inserts.

Collaborating with staff members. Collaboration seems to take many forms, from informal conversations, to specific requests to brainstorm and solve problems, to
requests for information or materials, to sitting and planning together to structured meetings. Literacy mentors shared the many ways in which they collaborate with other staff members (paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, district-level personnel) and reported that collaboration was a daily part of a mentor’s life.

AL talked about the conversations that take place between literacy mentors and teachers in the building, about the questions that teachers have and the struggles that they face. In discussing how safe teachers feel to approach literacy mentors, she stated that “they can share without feeling as if (they will be ridiculed)...they (all) have the same issues and situations.” Teachers feel safe that their conversations with literacy mentors will have no impact on their evaluations by administrators because no literacy mentor has an evaluative, supervisory role.

According to EW, whose building sent three mentors (Grades 2, 3, and 5) to the district meetings this year, literacy mentors share a lot with all teachers in their buildings, but especially with their own grade-level team teachers. Because the program offers little to no release time during the school day, proximity to the literacy mentor (same team or same grade level) seemed to provide greater interaction and collaboration.

YB talked about the pressure of having teachers come to her with questions and then feeling inhibited about being able to share her true thoughts with them. She used the following example of trying to help collaborate with teachers, trying to help them manage change.

I think too that the last 3 years our district has had so many things change that a lot of people roll their eyes (when they hear about a new strategy or technique) because it’s just one more new thing...at least that’s how they see it, as...
something else that’s…I think they’re a little worn down and it’s hard to make it seem easy. It’s hard, too, when they come to you and say, ‘how do you fit it all in?’ And you know that the answer is ‘You need to quit doing that thing that didn’t work 10 years ago and you’re still doing it’…That’s pretty harsh, but you know what I mean…’The thing that you’ve always been doing because you’ve always been doing it, and it really hasn’t worked, but you’re still doing it (simply) because you’ve always been doing it.’…How do you come around and say that (to your colleagues)?

She admitted that it is very difficult for her to share all her thoughts with them.

AR talked about the same type of experience in trying to collaborate with her colleagues on new instructional strategies and techniques.

The people that are hesitant to try something will try it. And if they were the people who were probably the eye rollers, they take it (the new idea) back and they try it, but they try it with their old style (of teaching) and it doesn’t work and then they are like, ‘Well, this just doesn’t work!’ and (you’re) biting your tongue to be able to somehow diplomatically guide them through. ‘Well, maybe if you tried this or changed this’… trying to be diplomatic about it and not be the know-it-all because that will certainly turn them off very quickly and they won’t want to try anything again…

When GP talked about collaboration, she shared about the collaborative experience among district mentors themselves, how their conversations plant seeds and how she herself was encouraged to try a new writing program through just such a conversation. She shared about how she was motivated to try the Lucy Calkins writing program after participating in a discussion with other district mentors.

I really feel that I may have heard about it (the Lucy Calkins writing program) in the building, but then I heard about it at the mentor meeting. I think that someone (LS) brought it in at one time at the meeting and shared it at the meeting and I think the power of hearing all the oohs and aahs from the group really kind of forced me to say,…’Maybe this is very important and I need to do it.’ And I think that I really got my feet wet and did do it and I’m really glad. And I’m thinking that maybe if I hadn’t gotten the push from the group, I might not have…that little extra support pushed me to do it.
Mentors became scaffolders for each other and for teachers in their buildings. By providing this scaffolded support for others, they made it possible for educators to try new things.

AC and LH talked a lot about collaborating with their building principals on specific literacy projects, from organizing incentive programs, parent nights, after-school and summer reading programs to visitations and speaker schedules. In short, literacy mentors collaborate extensively with their building principals and, in reality, with district central office personnel.

Whether it is collaboration with grade or team members, with other teachers or paraprofessionals in their buildings, with administrators, or among themselves, collaboration seemed to play a big role in the life of each literacy mentor.

**Modeling, coaching and mentoring.** Aspects of these activities were mentioned over and over again by the literacy mentors. All literacy mentors talked at some point about modeling lessons and engaging in mentoring activities. Only six of the mentors talked about engaging in coaching activities. The six who talked about those coaching activities are those mentors who have the longest tenures as mentors.

YB shared that she has done coaching in classrooms, as well as coaching and modeling in her own room where other teachers could come in and observe. TG admits that she and YP have done only a small amount of one-on-one mentoring. They did however do “a few lessons in the classrooms where we modeled the Better Answers book to the fourth grade teachers and students last year before their proficiency tests so that they used that information to help the kids prepare answers on the tests.” GP talked about “doing a lot of coaching in the classrooms.” AC also stated that she had
“modeled lessons in my classroom and in other peoples’ classrooms.” AR shared that she and LH had

done a lot of modeling in classrooms, planned lessons, gone in and taught them. Also, we have allowed other teachers, by going into their rooms, to go to a teacher that had an expertise to observe or to teach a lesson that they might have been very good at and got other people involved that way.

AC shared about how she had to beg to go into classrooms when she first started modeling and coaching.

I had teachers just angry with me…in the summer school and then back here (in the building)…I had time to go into classrooms…(But,) I had no one sign up to (have me) come in…I had to beg people I knew and say, “Please let me in!” even though they probably weren’t the ones who needed it,…I picked people that I kind of thought that other people would think… “Oh if she’s doing it, then I can let her in”…By the end of the year my sheet was always full! I want you to come in! I want you to come in! They got used to the idea. I think they thought that I was going to go in there and, you know, show them….I’ll show them kind of a thing…and, it was more like “Here’s a strategy that I read about. You can try it if you want to try it” kind of a thing…It was low key.

LH talked a lot about the coaching and mentoring that had occurred in her building. In her building her role as coach/mentor was embraced more quickly than in other buildings. She shared that the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers were all “wonderful and welcoming.” Every month she would take a grade level, meet personally with each of the teachers at that grade level, and ask them, “What could I do for your students to help them?” Based on their responses, she would tailor lessons to model in each classroom. She reported that the farther up in the grade she went, the diversity of what she did became more diverse. One particularly insightful finding for her was her own personal reaction to the changes she noticed in thinking between third graders and fifth graders. This increased understanding of the vertical development of thinking proved important for this mentor.
Another teacher at 5th grade wanted me to come in and do an inferring lesson, so I used *The Lotus Seed* to do that and I used *The Lotus Seed* for a questioning and inferring lesson in 3rd and 4th grade, but at 5th grade, it was interesting to take the same book and use it across grade levels and you really see how children’s thinking develops and changes because at 3rd grade the kids were maybe more concerned with obvious things like, “Why are they all wearing white coats and white hats?” But, at 5th grade, seeing those pictures, the 5th graders’ concern was, “Is this a democracy? Is this a dictatorship?” Because everybody was wearing the same thing. So, for me, I think I got as much out of it as the kids did and the other teachers did. Because I got to see how children’s thinking changes over the grades and how the same images are perceived differently as students get older.

Those teachers who had engaged in quite a bit of modeling, mentoring, or coaching in classrooms lamented the loss of release time during the school day which occurred this past year due to budgetary cuts. They seemed to feel more successful in their work with that release time which was provided in previous years.

_Gathering and organizing material._ This was mentioned by all mentors. Many indicated surprise at how many hours had been spent on their own personal time taking care of these needs in their buildings.

YP talked about her work in this area.

TG and I have organized a book room which is a school-wide book room where all leveled books are put in so that all classroom teachers can use them. They’re readily accessible to everyone. We started that book room. We had to do book purchases. We have continued to grow in our collection and we have purchased various leveled books and instructional materials for our teachers.

YP continued to share that one of our biggest accomplishments was coming up with that book room for the entire school to use because everybody had everything in cupboards from money deposited here and money deposited there and now it’s all together. As a building for a teacher that is coming in, they (new teachers) are able to walk into that bookroom and they know what’s there and to be able to utilize it because before it was, well, I don’t have this so how can I execute this type of teaching style because I don’t have the materials. And now the materials are available to them.
AR shared that the two literacy mentors in her building had developed a leveled library and to do that they actually wrote grants, got money, purchased books, and then established how they were going to organize it. They had to find the space for it, and get all of that up and going with the idea that it would be used a lot for small group guided reading programming. Activities like writing grants, writing purchase orders, checking orders, leveling books, and organizing storage were very time-consuming.

AC talked about helping to purchase teacher resources along with student books. She was able to help buy all the picture books that go with the strategies (in *Strategies That Work*) so that teachers can pull the picture books and use them depending upon the strategies…The whole staff got copies of the book (*Strategies That Work*) and our principal put together state indicators and those strategies….and like the strategies that would go with those state indicators…If we know that we are low in this area of our state standards, we could do those strategies to help boost it up. So, you had strategies right there from the book, and then we had the books right there in the library…so it kind of all came together.

*Organizing and leading book study groups.* This was mentioned by all literacy mentors. Most of them felt that book study groups were definitely among the most successful things they had accomplished because they appeared to have a significant impact on teachers.

YB talked about coordinating and leading study groups “using professional books that we’ve read and then met over a series of weeks…to discuss children’s work and how to apply what we’ve learned (from our book study) in our classrooms.” AC actually stated that she thought professional reading has been a huge thing in our building…made a huge difference….It helped us set goals. If we knew where we were, like once people started trying things, we knew what we needed help in so we knew where we needed to go after that.
She shared about starting the very first book study “club” in her school.

I started the reading club because I was…well, the literacy program kind of got me thinking about it and realizing how much I needed to beef up my reading instruction. And so I thought maybe other people might need that too, and then, we got funding from somewhere (for the books) and so I just asked for volunteers. I said, “Would anybody like to do this with me?” And I was surprised at the number of people actually that wanted to go ahead and do it with me. It was like 20 people who religiously came once a month. And, they put all of us in the framework of…we’re all in this together; we’re all working to improve together and we’re all trying to improve our scores and our instruction….And it also helps because it (a study group) gives everybody common vocabulary to use with the kids, so right now that’s not even an issue anymore…

In the same building, GP said I think it really required us…one year, I know the book was Strategies that Work and we got it over the summer and the whole building was reading it. Then every month we focused on a strategy and that common language really helped us. And wow! The impact of it in the lunchroom…you were talking about how you’re doing it, and that’s when we invited some of the teachers to model lessons linked to that strategy…Things started really clicking because now we had a common language. We had a little background knowledge, and then we were seeing it. And, I think personally that really impacted me the most. I felt we got more people on board that way. And then in the literacy mentor meetings that drove our goals for what we were going to do next.

YB shared that she would

…agree that it (book study groups) was really a springboard. It helped a lot of people get their feet wet because they could do it low risk with the study group and really ask questions of each other. And there were already people falling in the pitholes or having success that they could attach to. Then it was easy for them to try things out and then come back to the group and say: Here’s what I did. Here are my successes. Here are my challenges. What suggestions does everybody else have?…I really think the study groups were the springboard…It also makes the…it seemed for people…to make the new not so scary because you could chew on it, and read about it, and talk about it with your peers, and then try it out. You know, instead of always having that new thing come and not having any support in trying it. You had the full support of your study group.

EW agreed that
…one of the main things that has sparked the literacy conversation in our building is the book clubs. Because I was amazed at how many people came and were doing it, across grade levels. And it really helped open up the communications about what was happening in the primary and what was happening in the upper grades and what needed to be done. You know, what the kids needed to have to get to the older grades. So, it was just a nice way to communicate and share ideas.

(See Appendix F for a list of the books and authors mentioned by the literacy mentors as having been part of their study groups.)

Mentors mentioned a number of benefits from belonging to a book study group.

EW shared “I think it (being part of a book study group) helps to be…forced to read it, but then to be able to talk about it and then…implement it.” AR shared that she thought

the discussion, knowing that you are reading it, looking for things that you want to share…you are thinking about it in a different way than if you are just reading it for your own purpose. So, I think that by reading it and coming and discussing it, sometimes even what somebody thought was important, maybe I had not looked at in the same way, so it just broadened my understanding…Maybe to go deeper in some areas on what the topic was for that chapter….how much I would have used the information and what I would have done with the information is different based on reading (the book) for/with the group in mind.

YB has also noticed that some

of the best conversations come out of the study group. Sometimes they have nothing to do with the book you are reading because you trail off onto a tangent about literacy instruction and you just get to the meat of people’s frustrations. Then you work through those and their successes and everybody gleans something from it….When I started the first study group, they (paraprofessionals) came to me and said, ‘Is there room for us?’ and of course we said, “Absolutely!” I feel bad that it didn’t occur to me (earlier) that they might like to be there and then we ended up with about as many paraprofessionals as we had staff. I think in the first one we had like 22 or 24 people…there were easily 8 or 10 paraprofessionals.
Goal setting for the building. This was mentioned by four of the five buildings.

AC was the strongest voice to be heard regarding goal setting activities.

Where I feel I make the biggest difference is in the school-wide policy changes. Like I feel like my ideas help drive school-wide policy changes. And I help get ideas out there. And we help people get used to new ideas and new ways of thinking about things.

LH talked about goal setting in their building. The Literacy Mentors work with the building Literacy Committee to make their impact.

This spring in May, we’ll be meeting to determine what our focus will be for next year and it has really brought us all on one ship instead of all of us floating around out there in some separate lifeboats. I think that the Literacy Committee has brought us all on the big ship of literacy and I think we’re full steam ahead and moving in the direction to have an excellent school here.

Organizing and leading literacy-focused discussions. This category, independent of book studies, was mentioned by some of the mentors. The following topics were mentioned by those mentors hosting such discussions: developmental spelling, guided reading, how to use leveled books for guided reading, leveling books, phonics, strategies, writing, DRA interpretation, diagnostic assessments, Dibels assessments for phonemic awareness and fluency.

GP’s building established Literacy Lunches for each grade level. The literacy mentor at the grade level invited teachers that they normally eat lunch with, selected a literacy topic and lead the discussion. The building principal worked diligently to find central office personnel to cover the lunch playground duty assignments so that all teachers could attend the Literacy Lunches if they wanted to do so. Each teacher could then have lunch and duty time (50 minutes in total) to engage in the Literacy Lunch. Most teachers took advantage of the opportunity, although some contractual issues did
arise, specifically about using duty-free 30-minute lunchtime as part of the conversation time. The majority of teachers chose to participate. A few did not, stating that their lunchtime needed to be free of work-related matters.

In addition, one of the aspects of the literacy mentor program that seems to have made a difference in many of the buildings is the creation of a Literacy Council or Committee. AR and LH shared that

We started a Literacy Council in our building which meets monthly and sets various goals for the month or the year, depending upon what we are talking about… it’s pretty fluid as to who comes. This year we…have a parent involved in it. We don’t really have a membership list per se. It’s open to anyone who wants to come. So, some meetings there may be more people. We try to have the agenda as open. There’s a topic question that we know we’re going to focus on and anyone who wants to talk about that…some of the times our questions come from our principal, sometimes there’s something else. Some of it is teacher driven. We don’t have a chair person per se. Generally one of (the literacy mentors)…we tend to take the leadership role just to get things started, just to get the conversation going because everyone is sitting there wanting to see…But we purposefully didn’t want it to be OUR committee, so it was set up with the idea that this is the building committee and anyone can come.

When asked about the attendance of their principal, they responded that their principal is always there.

EW shared that their literacy committee

meets periodically, it’s more of just an open discussion where a group of us teachers meet together. Our principal also comes and meets and we just share things we’re doing in our classroom and it’s more of an idea sharing time…Sometimes we have a purpose where we need to order books or organize something, but usually it’s just more of an open discussion format.

When asked about the attendance of the principal, EW said she always attends.

TG and YP shared that they really don’t have a Literacy Committee in the building. Instead they convene a larger literacy group when they need to plan their
Right-to-Read Weeks and that’s when they open it up to anyone who wants to be involved. They, however, take the lead on it. Teachers come and they delegate, pick the theme and go from there. They shared that when beginning the planning of the Right-to-Read Week, the building principal attends or when they order books she attends. In follow-up planning meetings, she does not attend.

GP and AC shared that their building has a very involved Literacy Committee. The focus of the committee according to AC is mostly on building and goals….I feel like we set, we’re trying to figure out our next direction during our literacy meetings, and then how do we get there…..how to get it across to the rest (of the building). Our committee has one person per grade level. We added a special education person this year because of changing in testing and then also the principal,” and the reading specialist. They meet about once a month, sometimes more. The principal calls the meetings and sets the agenda, but does so with the input of the literacy mentors.

AC shared that, (our building principal) feels like she can’t know everything. That’s her strength. She says, ‘I can’t know everything! And I can’t be in charge of everything!’ And, so she lets it go and she says, ‘What should we do? Where should we go?’ And then I kind of help, you know, with that, and then we open it up to the group, but she’s strong in that she wants to be in charge of it and I think that’s a good thing. But I think it’s more impactful because she’s there. It wouldn’t be a good thing if she said, ‘I’ll just let her (AC) do it.’ But she does ask for opinions…

When asked about the attendance of their principal they said she is always there.

YB and AL said that there was a Literacy Committee (Table 6) in their building. When asked if the principal attended the meetings, their response was yes, he comes regularly. They also have another committee organized and focused on the building reading incentive program. There seems to be some splintering of efforts between the building GRIP (reading incentive committee) and the Literacy Committee.
The GRIP Committee plans incentives to encourage students to read, including a huge year-end finale event. The Literacy Committee focuses on reading assessments, strategies, instructional focus, best practices, and current research.

Table 6

List of Activities Performed by Literacy Mentors in Their Buildings (Based on All Focus Groups & Interviews)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
<th>School E</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After School Book Clubs/Students</td>
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<td>Assess Students</td>
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<td>Best Practice, Risk-Try New Things</td>
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<td>Book Study Groups for Educators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Books - Order, log in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bucket Brigade - Organize</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
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<td>Discussion Group - Host</td>
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<td>Disseminate Info, Newsletter, Email</td>
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<td>Get all on Board</td>
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<td>Goal-Setting for Building</td>
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<td>Leveled Libraries - Level books</td>
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<td>Literacy Lunches - Host</td>
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<td>Speakers, Arrange</td>
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<td>Summer Program, Design/Organize</td>
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<td>Teach Adults</td>
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<td>Videos, Show</td>
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<td>Visit Other Districts</td>
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<td>Volunteers, Organize</td>
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Mentor Roles

Based upon the frequency of activities mentioned by the literacy mentors in their focus groups, 38% of their comments fell in the leadership role category, 35% fell into an instructional role category, 15% fell into a managerial role category, and 12% fell into a supportive role category.

Those comments in the leadership category (38%) included the following activities. Literacy mentors became involved in a lot of other things in their building (more than they usually would if they were not literacy mentors). They work at keeping the positive going in their building. They work hard to keep their own practice current. They spend time looking for what people are good at so that they can direct others to those exemplary practices. They lead discussions on application of a literacy strategy or approach. They give advice, trying to effect change in small groups. They help to set literacy goals in their buildings and then they work to pass those literacy goals across to others. Additionally, they spend time getting others involved in goal setting, guiding others diplomatically, and giving input to building principals. They are leading curriculum hours, leading discussion groups, and starting or leading a building literacy committee. For those committees, they call meetings, lead the meeting, plan or help plan the agenda. They see themselves as “risk-takers,” trying new ideas and being willing to learn and change. They saw themselves truly as helping to guide and build their building’s literacy program.

In the instructional role (35%), they listed the following activities among others. They led many book study groups. They presented various building-wide professional development sessions. They coached other teachers in their classrooms.
Literacy mentors coordinated and led study groups. They guided conversations about diagnostic testing and other topics related to literacy. They worked to involve other teachers and paraprofessionals in a variety of discussion groups. They sought to learn new things and pass them on to others. They led discussions at literacy lunches by sharing information to “kick them off.” They mentored others. They modeled lessons in other classrooms and modeled lessons in their own classrooms for others to view. They presented literacy issues and updates at staff meetings. They promoted new ideas and served as resource persons in their buildings. They frequently shared information at staff meetings and/or shared information with team members. They initiated small groups for professional development. They taught others how to level books, taught them how to use leveled books to meet the needs of students, and then worked with teachers on how to do guided reading.

After analyzing their responses for managerial role responsibilities (15%), literacy mentors were found to have listed the following activities. They brought in and scheduled literacy speakers for their building. They coordinated their “bucket brigade” reading programs. They covered classrooms so teachers could observe other teachers. They coordinated and developed the leveled libraries for their building. Mentors talked about organizing and starting a book room. They coordinated volunteer schedules. They gathered leveled books, purchased student books and leveled them. They purchased and organized teacher resources. They coordinated the Read-a-Thons and Right-To-Read weeks. They helped write grants. They talked about working on making materials available to all.
Finally, in the supportive role (12%), the following activities were mentioned. They adjusted and helped others to adjust. They became public relations people. They did not give up as quickly as others around them. Examples of where they did not give up were switching from whole group instruction to small group instruction, managing the classroom in order to handle small group instruction, completing and analyzing DRA assessments, handling the new state diagnostic assessments, leveling books, establishing reading and writing workshops, etc. They established rapport with their colleagues. They held give-aways in order to draw people to literacy activities. They supported others. They provided suggestions. They were willing to learn and change. They worked through frustrations and successes and helped others to do so too. Some of those frustrations stemmed from finding time to give individual reading assessments, keeping other students productively engaged while completing assessments, teaching multiple flexible reading groups rather than one whole group lesson, learning how to interpret assessment data and selecting appropriate reading material for each child, etc. They conversed formally and informally with others.

Additionally, literacy mentor comments were categorized as to the people or things on which each activity was focused. According to that process, activities focused on material things 9% of the time (such as purchasing books and leveling them), on parents 2% of the time (such as coordinating literacy nights and hosting proficiency/achievement nights for parents), on students 4% of the time (such as helping to run after-school book clubs and coordinating reading incentive programs and summer reading programs), on themselves (literacy mentors) 9% of the time (such as keeping themselves current with the research, getting excited and feeding on
change), and on other teachers and staff members 76% of the time (leading book studies and other professional development opportunities for colleagues, modeling and coaching others, and helping to establish new reading programs like the “bucket brigade.” It was quite evident from that analysis that literacy mentors viewed the majority of their work as being centered around teachers and paraprofessionals and their needs.

All literacy mentors repeatedly talked about what YB called their role as “pathfinder.” Most mentioned they felt it was part of their responsibility “to go out there and read,” “to stay current with research,” “to stay up on literacy issues.” They felt a need to keep current because just “having the title of mentor says that you are the people I go to when I need to know or you can help me find out what I need to know” (YB). Additionally YB added that she always feels that she “needs to choose the best lesson, just in case someone asks me about, you know, teaching digraphs or mini lessons for writing…” Talking about new writing or phonics programs, she states that “I really felt like I had to purely dig into it and do those lessons so that when I spoke, I knew from where I spoke.” AR added that she feels forced

…to try some things that maybe you would have put off before and try them a little later…or you don’t give up as quickly because you want to be able to give all the ins and outs of what has happened…(being a literacy mentor) gives you that push to put some things in place that maybe you would have put off doing, but the questions are there…people are asking, so you do feel an obligation to try it so you can speak from experience.

YB talked about the fact that

…they know you’ll try it out, and have scaled some of the pitfalls….made your way through so that you can give them advice so they can start on sure footing if they want to try something new or have really been pondering a change. You’re there to support them because you have the background knowledge.
TG talked about being “willing to learn and that’s why you are out there, so then when new things do come along you do take that risk and you try it…”

Mentor Supports and Obstacles

Literacy mentors mentioned a number of supports that have been in place to help them. They mentioned monetary supports, time supports, leadership support, camaraderie support, and miscellaneous supports. Some of the supports have been in place for the entire four years; others were in place earlier in the program and then removed due to the district’s financial constraints.

Financial supports included money to purchase student books, money spent to purchase books and videos to assist with mentor and teacher professional development, money spent to support attendance at workshops or to host speakers. Additionally, mentor stipends were mentioned, although less frequently than other financial supports.

TG shared that from her perspective the biggest support that they had received was

…the financial money that we’ve gotten as a building to be able to purchase the books for our building…and I think that a lot more people are doing more guided reading and the discussion that revolves around, well, I did this book…and we ordered a lot of the paired books now (the fiction and the non-fiction) and that seems to be taking off. A lot of people…everybody wants them…so the support of the money to be able to buy the things for the people in the building

has been greatly helpful. AR talked about the Department of Instruction being a huge support and specifically mentioned the money to buy materials that had been provided by the Department. AC also mentioned the money they had received from Ohio READS grants. (Two of the five buildings received OhioREADS grants.) She stated
that the OhioREADS money “helped us with our Book Room. And we couldn’t have had as big a success if we hadn’t have had those books. Because you can’t do a program like this without books.” YB also mentioned monetary support, but focused her attention on time supports.

*Time supports* included release time for coaching and mentoring activities, along with time for professional development activities. YB talked about the “flexibility to have the release time…to go into classrooms. A lot of teachers came into our classrooms and…(we went) into teachers’ classrooms to release them to go where they needed to go to observe…” She goes on to state that it was incredibly valuable for everyone involved. She stated that the release time was “invaluable.”

*Leadership support* centered mostly around district Department of Instruction support as well as building-level principal support. AR stated that she thought the Department of Instruction had been the biggest support. “They’ve provided…money to buy materials…called these meetings so that you can hear…what’s happening in other buildings and getting that context…” AC talked about the biggest support from her perspective was her building principal. She mentioned

…first our (former) principal who started our (literacy) committee and really, really…our former principal…(who) brought it (literacy) to the forefront so that it was what people were focusing on. And, then, our current principal who really makes it a priority in our building and drives it, because I don’t think people would take it as seriously if it was just us.

GP added that the school psychologist backs up the literacy mentors too and provides additional support.
Camaraderie support centered around the district literacy mentor meeting and the knowledge that there are literacy mentors in every building. YP talked about the district level Literacy Mentor meeting which is held monthly. She said that

I think it’s helpful…the structure of this to hear what is going on across the district with respect to literacy and what different buildings are doing to promote literacy in their building. We’re obviously (working) on different visions, but it’s nice to know at the same time what’s going on in other buildings,…taking ideas, and sharing the same trials and tribulations with each other. AR shared that it was most helpful to have the district Literacy Mentor group because it provided her with “a contact person if you just have a question…you know I can contact GP and ask what’s going on or what are you doing. And, I think it helps just to know there’s someone out there in another building who’s doing something similar or different, but who has heard the same kind of information.”

AL added that the literacy mentors are supports for each other. She stated that “conversation that takes place between a number of us and the questions that people have and the struggles that people have….they can share without feeling as if, you know, they are (behind the times), that they have the same issues and…situations.” LH added that the “literacy mentor program does bring people together from every building and it’s kind of like you start these little fires in all these other buildings and it gets to burning…”

Obstacles and struggles fell into two categories: management (time and format) and peer response (especially from veteran teachers). TG shared her thoughts about the time and energy necessary to be a literacy mentor. She stated that

The times and…that you are doing these new things or you come and you learn and then trying to find the time to go out and show the other people or…release time is really nice, but then you still have to cover your classroom or make sure
it’s taken care of, and you feel guilty (being gone from your own students). You are leaving your kids and you are going to do something else and you know, you are learning these wonderful things and you are trying to show people how wonderful they are, even though you are running around like a chicken…you know…trying to keep your head above water and trying to do these new things that you know are important and trying to do some things and trying to convince people that this is the thing to do, that it’s the right thing for the kids, even though it may take a little more time.

AC also talked about the time problem. At the most, literacy mentors were given one half day of release time per month during years 2 and 3 of the program. During the past year (year number four), that half-day release time was rescinded due to financial constraints. AC lamented the lack of time. “It would be different if I had a half day every day where I could go into a classroom with a teacher and create a difference, I think….I don’t have time. I don’t have time to go into classrooms and really work with teachers.” She and her principal have been creative about finding time by having people come into her classroom.

actually the principal is actually asking people to come into my classroom…and they sit and they watch me. And I prefer that…I think that’s more helpful than me going in and teaching their class because they can see what a classroom setup is like. They can see how I go from thing to thing, how I organize my classroom, how the kids are organized on their own. I think that helps.

Her goal however would be to have a half day every day to do her literacy mentor work. As she put it,

Because then (if I had a half day every day) I could go in and get to know the kids and I could say, ‘OK, this is where we need to fix it.’ Or ‘If I were you, let’s try it this way.’ But I can’t do that in a half an hour a month because I don’t know the kids and I don’t know anything about the teachers…about their schedules, I just don’t know. To make meaningful change that way is not as easy as to do it this way….there’s a lot of information that I don’t know, but if I were in there every day for…like my dream job would be to work in my class, teaching reading, in the morning or in the afternoon and have a half day as literacy coach.
YP talked about the difficulties of a new building which opened only 4 years ago embracing the literacy mentor program. She very pointedly talked about the necessity of having time to grow together as a building staff before being able to undertake any leadership roles or particular change efforts. In effect the establishment of a new building mandates that staff members focus first on basic “survival” type issues. Growing professionally as a staff comes later after the survival issues are solved.

YP, the newest teacher to serve as a literacy mentor, talked about her difficulties understanding the viewpoints of her more experienced colleagues. She also expressed her insecurity when presenting before veteran staff members, admitting that even though she knew she had the “book knowledge,” she realized her lack of classroom experience influenced her acceptance as a mentor.

Many of the mentors talked about the difficult of working with veteran teachers. They talked about the teachers who only have two or three years of experience as being the easiest ones to buy in (AC). They stated that they’ll (the newest teachers) buy in much faster than people who have been there years and years and years. They attributed this to the fact that these new teachers never knew how people did things 10 years ago or 15 years ago….new teachers are just “trying to keep it together so they are looking for any help they can get…they have to reinvent the wheel all of the time, so they are actually looking for” (AC) people to help. They have a naiveté that there isn’t an option to do it any other way; “the longer you’re there, the more you see options” (YP) from the past rather than just moving on with new things.

AC talked a lot about the difficulties involved in moving from voluntary small group book studies to whole staff book studies. Some teachers even though they were
interested in perhaps making some of the changes associated with the book study put up a difficult front for the literacy mentor when they were required to participate in a book study. “So I think those first couple of years were fantastic with book study because they were fun book studies. Everybody (participating) wanted to do it, but then we started getting into whole staff book studies and then it all went down hill.” When asked what the difference was between voluntary book studies and whole staff book studies, she said,

Well, because then (with mandated book studies) you get the people who don’t want to do it…And,…you know…I’m like a person who takes things personally, you know like when people roll their eyes, I’m like, oh my gosh, they are mad at me. So, that made everything not as much fun because there are some people who have not bought in, or (at least) who say they are not bought in, but then turn around and do those things…you know what I mean? Like they fight it tooth and nail, but then they turn around and do it (anyway) because they know that it’s for the best. But, it’s hard for them to change, so I think sometimes…it’s always the same group of people who want to change and want to grow, but the other people will change and grow too, but it’s just hard to get…

AR talked about her struggles with her colleagues.

The people that are hesitant to try something will try it and if they were the people who were probably the eye rollers, they take it back and they try it, but they try it with their old style and it doesn’t work and then they are like, ‘Well, this just doesn’t work’…’ and biting your tongue to be able to somehow diplomatically guide them through, ‘well, maybe if you tried this or change this…’ trying to be diplomatic about it and not being the know-it-all because that will certainly turn them off very quickly and they won’t want to try anything again…

AC shared very frankly about her first attempts to go into classrooms as a literacy coach. Her first “real literacy mentor role” was tackled when she became the summer school literacy coach.

Um, that was very difficult because they (the summer school teachers) were very willing to sit with me in the mornings and talk about, over coffee, about
things that we could do in our classrooms and what we all need to improve, but when asking to go into their classrooms, it was completely different. I had teachers just angry with me…in the summer school….I had to beg people I knew and say, ‘Please let me in!’ even though they probably weren’t the ones who needed it, because I picked people that I kind of thought that other people would think….Oh if she’s doing it, then I can let her in…

She attributes the change to the fact that teachers eventually got used to the idea of having a mentor come into their room.

YP talked about the internal struggles she faced. “I think a frustrating point of being a literacy mentor is knowing that this stuff is out here and the reluctance that there is in the classrooms to use it.” GP talked about the same type of thing. She said, You’re not going to change everyone and…it’s not your job to do so. Hopefully, you still keep the positive going and that’s the biggest thing the literacy mentor can do…still keep the positive going. You have a few who will take something very good and make it appear that it won’t work. And, it’s really frustrating.

AC talked about the fact that teachers just want easy recipes.

They want to know how do I do it…Give me a book. Give me steps. First you do A, then you do B, and then you do C. And, it isn’t like that.

YP also talked about the struggle she feels interacting with others in her building.

And I think you walk a fine line between mentor and know-it-all. I think there is a fine line that you walk there and sometimes it’s hard to know when you are crossing that line because you have good intentions and I’ve walked away from conversations, you know….just thinking, ‘Did I sound like I knew-it-all or did I genuinely sound like I was trying to help someone else?’

AC agreed.

That’s been my hardest thing. I think because of the eye rolling at the meetings and here she goes again! That I sometimes feel like I should just shut up! But, you know, it’s always like that every time we try something new. Like there’s the “OH”, like the whole dissension with that small group of people. And, then my principal has to remind me of that though, because that’s what I
focus on. I focus on those three people who are rolling their eyes at me at the back of the room, you know what I mean? And then she (my principal) kept saying, ‘no, you know, look at everybody else who is trying it…like you can’t focus on (those three).’ So, but that’s hard for me and I don’t like that. And, I always feel self conscious.

*Mentor Strategies*

Literacy mentors talked about a number of strategies that they utilized to overcome some of their obstacles and to enhance their work as a literacy mentors. Those strategies fell into several categories:

*Getting others involved.* AR talked about how she used her release time when she had it. Sometimes, instead of her going into other classrooms, she went into a teacher’s room to teach a lesson while allowing that teacher to visit in another teacher’s classroom who had an expertise and was willing to model a lesson. She seemed genuinely excited about getting other people involved in that way.

AC said she and the principal invite other teachers to come into AC’s classroom to visit. Having teachers into her classroom provides an easy, low-risk opportunity for getting other involved. It often provides an easy first step for teachers. They have been so successful in arranging these visits that not only do people come from the same building, but they come from many (other buildings as well). AC observed that through this activity teachers can

…see what a classroom setup is like…They can see how I go from thing to thing, how I organize my classroom, how the kids are organized on their own. I think that helps. And they wouldn’t see it if I went to their classroom. They could see me do strategies, but they couldn’t see the rest of it, the important parts of it…the other parts are just as important…like they don’t need to do worksheets at their seats when I’m in small group. They are all meaningfully engaged. You know, they don’t need to do that. They don’t see that if I’m coming into their classroom.
EW shared about the impact of the book study groups and how they got others involved by opening up the communication between grade levels. “It (the book study club) really helped open up the communications about what was happening in the primary and what was happening in the upper grades and what needed to be done…it was just a nice way to communicate and share ideas.” Several of the mentors also talked about the book study groups as a way to get others involved not just superficially with literacy issues, but involved deeply enough to understand and implement various best practices.

LH talked about the study groups held one year in her building. “One year we were the leaders…we had a whole building-wide focus on Strategies That Work and literacy mentors were leaders of those groups and helping our principal go ahead and set that up to, I guess, educate the entire staff on all the reading strategies in that book. I think it’s made a huge difference.” She also shared the strength involved in getting others involved in setting goals and focus areas for the upcoming year.

it has really brought us all on one ship instead of all of us floating around out there in some separate lifeboats. I think that the literacy committee has brought us all on the big ship of literacy, and I think we’re full steam ahead and moving in the direction to have an excellent school here.

The power of that focus chosen by a dedicated group of teachers more easily captivates a staff than a focus determined only by the building principal. Lastly she discussed how she involved teachers even in her classroom visitations. “Every month I took a grade level and met personally with each one of the teachers and asked them, What could I do for your students?’ and they were always willing and open to have me come into their room.” Rather than just taking a “canned” lesson into the classroom, she
involved others in planning the lesson for their room, taking advantage of their knowledge of their students and knowledge of that grade level’s curriculum. As she put it, “I think the one thing that made it easy is I couched getting in with ‘What can I do to help your students?’” Involving others made those visitations more powerful and more welcome.

AC also shared how she worked to get others involved in trying something.

You try to have them see the value in doing it. I think I’ve been better at that too. I was more of a “Let’s all do this!” you know kind of a thing. And, now, I’m more of “Let’s all do this, but then let’s listen to what other people think about us all doing this.” You know, like I’m better at hearing other people’s opinions than I was at the beginning…Like I’m understanding that people have to buy in…it’s not like a “do this” kind of a thing. At the very, very beginning, I think that was my mindset. Like when we started the writing portfolio and everybody had to do this. And, I think that wasn’t so successful…so we stopped doing it. I think that was because that was me saying, “Do this.” And that wasn’t popular. …But, if you get more people to buy in first, then you say, “Do this!”

Encouraging others to take the lead. YB talked about the Literacy Committee in her building. She stated that she and the other building literacy mentor usually lead that meeting, “but we like to share the wealth a little bit as people have literacy issues and they want the meeting to be about that issue, so we allow them to do that.”

AR also talked about the Literacy Committee and the need to have it meet the needs of others, not just of themselves.

Generally one of either (of the literacy mentors)…tend to take the leadership role just to get things started, just to get the conversation going because everyone is sitting there wanting to see…but we purposefully didn’t want it to be OUR committee, so it was set up with the idea that this is the building committee and anyone can come…

and bring ideas to share and discuss.
“Making it “safe.”” YB sees the book study groups as a way of meeting the needs of others and encouraging others to step forward in discussions. As she put it,

I’m sure everybody could probably agree that some of the best conversations come out of the study group. Sometime they have nothing to do with the book you are reading because you trail off onto a tangent about literacy instruction and you just get to the meat of people’s frustrations. Then you work through those and their successes and everybody gleans something from it.

YB talked about the impact of the book study groups and the “safe” network they established in the building. Those study groups helped a lot of people get their feet wet because they could do it low risk with the study group and really ask questions of each other and there were already people falling in the pitholes and having successes that they could attach to…it was easy for them to try things out and then come back to the group and say, ‘Here’s what I did. Here are my successes. Here are my challenges. What suggestions does everybody else have?’…I really think the study groups were the springboard…

She went on to say that,

…it (the book study groups) seemed for people…to make the new not so scary because you could chew on it and read about it and talk about it with your peers and then try it out…instead of always having that new thing come and not having any support in trying it. You had the full support of your study group.

AC utilized her closer colleagues to gain entrance into other classrooms when she talked about going into classrooms to model, mentor or coach. She shared…

It was hard at first to even get them at first to have me in their classrooms. The first year that I did literacy mentoring, I put a sign-up sheet in the workroom and no one signed up. I had to go around and say, ‘Please, let me in your classroom!’ But you know the people that I knew and then…GP was like the first one to let me in…and then her buddy, and then from there, more people started letting me come in,…

She admits that picking people that she thought other people would think….‘Oh, if she’s doing it, then I (too) can let her in…” seemed to work as a strategy.”
inside classrooms, she used a low-key approach, “I think they thought that I was going to go in there and, you know, show them…and it was more like, ‘Here’s a strategy that I read about. You can try it if you want to try it kind of a thing…It was low key.” It was safe.

Several of the mentors talked about trying to be diplomatic in all conversations. AR shared that she often had to bite her tongue to be able to somehow diplomatically guide them through, ‘Well, maybe if you tried this or changed this…’ trying to be diplomatic about it and not being the know-it-all because that will certainly turn them off very quickly and they won’t want to try anything again…

And one of the mentors, EW, talked about the how much easier it is to start to get change when working in a small group, like your teaching team, than with an entire staff. Teachers feel safer in their smaller groups and find that support is very close at hand.

LH talked about taking little steps with teachers, rather than overwhelming them with intimidating big steps.

one of the persons who was very reluctant in the beginning, I was in his room and we worked with reading a non-fiction text…looking at topic and facts on that topic, using the science text. And his kids loved it and he’s doing that now, with reading science texts that he has. I think you take little steps…I see that it’s made a big difference….I just go in to help kids.

*The back door.* A number of the literacy mentors talked about presenting material to staff members and doing it through “the back door” approach. AC shared that she had “learned a lot about how to introduce ideas to people, too…Like you have to…it’s the way you have to present material that’s important as well, as…in through the back door…”
What I found myself doing a lot is like throwing my ideas out there, getting them heard, then backing up. So, like other people take ownership for things...So...if I think something should happen because I really feel strongly about it, like I think it will really make a difference in our building, then I’ll push it and push it and push it until it starts to go, then I’ll back down and kind of try to take a back seat.

YP talked about the difference between suggesting something and mandating something. “I think there’s a huge difference when something is suggested and when something is mandated.” Suggesting seems to create a more positive environment, but still allows an open door for people to escape and to avoid trying something new. And she admits that it is often those who need to try it the most who opt out through the open door.

Tried it themselves. AR indicated that being a literacy mentor “does push you to try something, to walk the talk…” She added that “People are asking, so you do feel an obligation to try it so you can speak from experience. YB agreed and said that she felt

...people start to look at you as the pathfinder...they know that you’ll try it out...and have scaled some of the pitfalls...made your way through so that you can give them advice so that can start on sure footing if they want to try something new or ... have really been pondering a change. You’re there to support them because you have the background knowledge.

Another mentor, AR stated that she felt that being a literacy mentor did indeed...

Push you to try something, to walk the talk. You can’t just say it and then, well I don’t have time to do that....so it forces you to try some things that maybe you would have put off before or try them a little longer...you don’t give up as quickly because you want to be able to give all the ins and outs of what has happened.

Building trust. Most of the mentors would admit that it is important to build trust with the staff members in their buildings. Be it administrative staff, teaching staff
or paraprofessional staff, the literacy mentor who has established a high level of trust as a mentor will be able to more effectively mentor. It seemed that trust was built in one of two ways according to the mentors. The first way was trust gained through years of teaching and/or further education. The second way was just time spent as a literacy mentor; the longer in the position the easier it became.

AR talked about the first way…that of experience and education. She said,

I think it’s a combination of…the years of experience, but also the variety. We both have worked in reading programs. We have a master’s in reading; we’ve had it for awhile. We’ve done other committees, just the rapport we already had with people partly through the number of years we’ve been there, but also the variety they’ve seen…I’ve been involved in a lot of things, not just being literacy mentor, but being many other things. So, they’ve seen me work on other things, on other committees, on other roles, and there is a level of trust that I don’t run over anybody, that I try not to just bulldoze things through…

AC shared about the importance of time in the role of literacy mentor.

I agree…I think that people get used to you…you know like when you said that people know you from…like I think once people got used to me being around, it wasn’t as bad. It was the initial…here I am, ready to come into your classroom that, uh, …people were like ‘Heck no, she’s not coming in here!’ And then as people got used to it, you know what I’m saying….It was a brand new thing for them and it was brand new for me too, but, um, because we’ve worked so long at it I think we’re getting better at it…

Additionally AC talked her experience in primary classrooms, “but once I got into a couple of primary classrooms and they found out that it wasn’t so bad and I wasn’t judging them, you know, I was just giving them a neat idea…”

Mentors admit some strategies work better than others and that they continue to seek out more effective strategies.
The Findings: Teachers

Research Question #1: In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?)

Mentor Activities

Teachers listed 24 different types of activities that they have attributed to literacy mentors. The most frequently listed activities based on the frequency in which they were mentioned during focus groups were (listed in order): planning and presenting professional development, followed by modeling instructional techniques, organizing and leading literacy-focused discussions, gathering and organizing materials, organizing and leading book study groups. Also mentioned were giving book talks, disseminating information, planning for reading incentives and rewards, serving as a resource person, planning Right-to-Read Weeks and Read-a-Thons, organizing summer reading packets, maintaining a book room, and helping to establish a common vocabulary among other activities.

Planning and presenting professional development. Professional development appeared in multiple forms according to teachers. UK talked about “little mini meetings before school or after school…so they (the literacy mentors) can talk us through them (the new strategies).” On another series of occasions, UK related that the literacy mentors in her building showed some

…writing conference videos that we could watch, so that we could know how to do a writing conference in a more effective way than maybe what we were doing. …you could sit and watch the video…They did those before school and, I think, after school…which helped…me!

Later she talked about a more formal inservice time when…
…our literacy mentors worked with our principal and we’ve had…a couple of inservice times where we were working in our building and we broke into grade levels or just into groups and we did some research on literacy and…talked about how we were doing things and what we could do to make it better…our reading and writing…by grade level…and that was really beneficial to take the time to do that…and I know our literacy mentors set that up with the principal.

NI shared that the literacy mentors in her building along with her principal “usually have some sort of presentation” at the faculty meetings, such as strategies of the month, fluency, or …some sort of a presentation.” Additionally she shared about several specific examples of embedded professional development opportunities offered by the literacy mentors. “When we received the Intermediate DRA kits, the literacy mentors trained people…and tried to get them actively using it a couple of years ago.” Then she shared about the “café latte thing” which was a breakfast or a Lunch Bunch conversation at grade levels, run by literacy mentors, all focused on literacy and best practices or new research. She reported that the building principal found central office personnel to cover playground duty for the teachers on several occasions and that allowed teachers to have a literacy-focused conversation with the literacy mentors. New research, new strategies, best practices were shared and discussed during those Café Latte and Lunch Bunch hours.

YL shared how their professional development has moved into the study of data.

…this year there has been a lot of focus on our curriculum hours with literacy mentors discussing how we are using the data that we are collecting from DRA and from Dibels and how you are managing your time and sharing ideas. And, that’s been real helpful with all the added bonuses of the diagnostic assessment and things like that…that’s really helped us organize ourselves in the classroom whereas if we hadn’t had that time to
discuss with other teachers what they are doing, some people might not have handled it so well.

NS was impacted by the April inservice day. In her building the last half hour or 45 minutes was devoted to the literacy mentors and sharing the new books and talking about the different types and collections, “but that’s one of the few times this year that we’ve had a building-wide discussion.” She obviously found it to be quite helpful.

Although most literacy mentors in most buildings talked about utilizing curriculum hours (required one-hour sessions after school each month) for literacy conversations with literacy mentors helping to plan or lead them, one particular literacy mentor (YC) lamented that “during the curriculum hours we haven’t had any input from our literacy mentors.” YC did say that she was aware of the literacy mentor’s work more during staff meetings.

CB shared that in her building, the district literacy mentors are part of the building literacy committee and that when the district group gets going, that group gets other groups (in the building) going, and then the whole school gets going. So, it’s been very effective. Like for inservices, they (the district mentors) get together and talk to the group. It is good to do things grade-wise where we can really talk with our peers and role play and try to get it down. It really has been very beneficial. The key is having time though. I know the mentors are busy and teachers are busy, and it’s very hard to get time together. We try to be creative with getting together and the (half-day) inservices are wonderful because that is a specific time when we can meet and discuss with our peers.

One of the methods utilized by literacy mentors to get out new information was a series of power points prepared by the district’s literacy coordinator (LS) focusing on fluency. Each building was given the power point plus related hand-outs and readings.
It was up to the building principal and literacy mentors to decide how and when to share the information.

NS shared that her building’s staff meetings had a definite literacy focus at the beginning of the year, based on the power points. She talked about the power points that came through with a focus each month. Following the theme of the month, she said her staff would discuss those and “then at the next staff meeting (would) come back and talk about what we had done or what children we had targeted....”

UK noted that her literacy mentors e-mail web sites that they feel are helpful to their staff members.

Some teachers talked about more informal professional development that occurs in one-on-one situations. RP shared her experiences.

And, I also do feel, I don’t know if you feel this way, but if I do go to the literacy mentors and ask for some help in a certain area…like ‘What can I do with this?’, they are there and they offer great ideas for that. Like the one mentor I’m thinking of, she has great books that, you know we talk about putting a newspaper together and she will pull out this book on creating a newspaper or whatever we’re talking about she has that resource at her fingertips. She has a lot of knowledge and she can really help that way.

She went on to share another example.

I remember doing a unit on fractured fairy tales and seeing this person in the hall and mentioning it…she walked out of her room with 5-6 different books of fractured fairy tales. It was just wonderful! Very definitely a resource that way. And, very willing to help you!

NW agreed on the importance of the literacy mentor as a resource.

I would agree with that. I think one of the things I really appreciate or value about the literacy mentors in our building is that they are always available. It’s not always like a formal get-together or session. A lot of times it’s just in passing and sometimes those are the best...those are the best things because that’s the daily…the daily things that she uses everyday in interacting with her kids that make you a better literacy teacher.
All teachers seemed to mention how they have grown from the work of their literacy mentors. Professional development has occurred both formally and informally. *Modeling instructional techniques, as well as coaching and mentoring.*

Teachers talked at length about the fact that literacy mentors had modeled a lesson or a particular instructional technique. Often mentioned was the fact that the literacy mentor sought to tailor the lesson for the particular class and grade level. Teachers acknowledged the fact that modeling did have an impact upon their teaching.

YC shared one of her experiences with a modeled lesson.

One of the things our literacy mentors did was to come in and model a lesson. It was interesting for me to sit back within my class and watch her take over, sitting in my chair, doing a lesson that was simple enough for me to watch and see what she did. She did choose materials that were in the room and it fit right into our curriculum and (she) took over the class while I had the opportunity just to watch what she did and watch what the kids were doing and to see it through to the end and so her modeling is what probably stands out in my mind as something that was really a practical way to improve my teaching.

At another point in the focus group, YC lamented the district’s loss of funds due to levy losses and subsequent budget cuts to hire substitute teachers to facilitate modeling or coaching activities by literacy mentors.

NS also talked about the value of time for modeling/coaching activities. “…the flextime…whether it comes from their contracted time or the district…to have those opportunities to go into classrooms and help out and share ideas (has been valuable)...without having time somewhere to do that, it (the program) wouldn’t be as good…”

NS also shared about one of her experiences with modeling.
We also had the opportunity to have our literacy mentor come in and model in our classroom. Last year before the proficiency tests, she did a great lesson on providing better answers and using answers from the texts and just to see…a different teacher take a strategy in a different way than you might use it and bring in some resources that were available that I was not aware of in our building.

She returned to this experience several times throughout the focus group; it obviously left a great impact on her.

UK talked about learning how to balance everything with her literacy mentor. “The literacy mentors…showed you a lot of times how you can incorporate it all to make it work in your classroom for your students. She also referenced the modeling that occurred by a literacy mentor in summer school and how beneficial that was for her.

…that summer that she came in and modeled several strategies. And I thought, well, I can do this! This I can do! Maybe not as well right away, but hopefully after practicing so, I thought that part was…I think that’s a key thing to get people in modeling things for you because just like children, when we model for them, then they can do it and when someone models for us then we can do it too, even if we are old!

AN also talked about the critical influence of literacy mentors modeling. “the fact that someone was enthusiastic and came in and was doing the different activities and (you could see) that it does work, a lot of people did change their mind and decided to give it a try too.”

YK remembered the modeling that literacy mentors had done in her building. They set up times and modeled lessons for the other teachers. I thought that was a really neat experience because sometimes as a classroom teacher, you don’t get to go out and see other teachers teach. And, so to have somebody be able to come into your room and model for you, just is a fresh idea.
Modeling didn’t occur just within each building. There were several instances of sharing across the district. NS commented on the following experience….

…Three of us at the 4th grade level went and visited (another school in the district)…to observe one of their 4th grade teachers (their intermediate literacy mentor) teaching and to get some strategies…because we did want to see it in practice and have the conversation at our grade level. You know, ‘How do you do all this and gather those grades…when you need to put a letter grade on the report card?…How do you incorporate all that and the Dibels and the DRA?’

It obviously made quite an impact. Modeling had made even more of an impact when it was shared across the district.

YC talked about a different form of informal, ongoing modeling.

I can…remember walking through our primary literacy mentor’s classroom and stopping and seeing something and asking her more about it and really liking it, and so I think sometimes it’s just, it might not be direct instruction from the literacy mentor, but having somebody who models and is using some things that catches your eyes and being able to have a conversation and knowing that they are sharing the same types of students and being in the same building and watching what they are doing and knowing that it is do-able, had an influence on us from the literacy mentor.

Later she shared that the literacy mentor was the one who gave “perhaps an explanation or a modeling of the change that was happening…” In other words, it was an ongoing, embedded modeling resource.

Organizing and leading literacy-focused discussions. Teachers reported that hosting literacy-focused discussions was indeed a valuable and frequent activity of literacy mentors. One of the most unique programs for encouraging these discussions was the program one principal put in place. YK explained that her building had Literacy Lunches…

Where, I think it was once a month, and …the principal would get people to cover everyone’s duties, and…everyone could stay for the whole time at
lunch and discuss different topics related to literacy. That was very well received! Except there were those contractual things!

A few teachers refused to participate because the Literacy Lunch interrupted their guaranteed 30-minute duty/work-free lunch. Most teachers, however, did choose to engage in the professional dialogue with their literacy mentors. It was an embedded opportunity to have those collegial dialogues. YK added her thoughts on Literacy Lunches. She said that the mentors would provide dessert or whatever, and it was an incentive for teachers to come during their lunch time and “we would converse about what we were working on in literacy. Strictly voluntary, of course.”

NS shared that she thought the literacy discussions had a major impact upon the staff.

Just the conversations about teaching reading and writing, I think have really developed and changed. Talking about what strategies and what level texts you are using and what ways can we combine classes to bring our levels together…I think all of that has increased our professional dialogue and enhanced the teaching of the staff as a whole.

NR called attention to the importance of one-on-one discussions between teacher and literacy mentor. Such discussions often cross the line into actual coaching conversations.

I know that I have spent time one-on-one with the literacy mentor and we’ve gone and sat down together and compared the first and second grade and how we can do the same lesson together and have the kids grow. And, taking that same group next year and…we tried to work more on that this year and we sat down and talked and I’ve grown from that,…

UK also shared about informal one-on-one discussions. She said that literacy mentors…

introduce things to help us put it into use in our classroom and you know, sometimes you think, this isn’t working, but you go to them and they say,
“You know why don’t you try this because that’s what I did and it really helped this little group of kids”…so you have a place to go. Sometimes you’ll go to a fellow teacher, but sometimes they don’t know either, so if you have a literacy mentor, you can all get on board and I think that’s been helpful. I mean, just to know that there is someone that you can go to and they don’t make you feel too bad…they say, “Oh no, I’ve had that problem…” and it’s …a nice thing.

NI shared how discussions sprang from quotations from a book.

One of the best things, I think, was that Richard Allington book I think it just seemed to start everything. The quotes…putting those all over…we had them in the restrooms, the teachers’ lounge, above the copy machine, that kind of thing…with really remarkable research about how children do better in reading and, starting these conversations and making everyone aware that there are new things and new ways to teach reading.

Gathering and organizing materials. NS shared that their mentors had

“organized our collection, a core group of books and shared those with our staff and as new ones come in, do a book talk about them so that we know that they are available and how to use them in the classroom and that’s been very helpful!” YL shared that the mentors in her building have been very instrumental in selecting, purchasing and organizing new books. She shared,

I think our literacy mentors have done a lot as far as purchasing materials too. With all the money that’s come into the school from Ohio Reads money, the literacy mentors have sat with teachers to figure out what we need as far as science…books that go along with the curriculum. I know that they help keep the leveled library organized…

ED shared that her mentors involved the entire building literacy committee in book selection. According to ED,

We’ve been doing the same thing in our building, with respect to intervention money. Our literacy committee has gotten together and kind of represented…each person represents a grade level in deciding what to order and also we’re trying to figure out how to organize them best in a central location so that everyone has access to the books and we all know what’s available.
UK shared how important it was in her opinion to have one or two people who really “know” what books they have in the building and who can order new books appropriately. She shared her thoughts by stating that

Our literacy mentors helped with our leveled library. Also, in ordering books, it’s invaluable to have someone who knows what they’re trying to order to keep track of all the grade levels and what they need so that’s been very beneficial also…the leveled library…that was really big! It’s working…there’s always room for improvement, but it’s been a bonus round for doing guided reading…having access to a variety of books and levels of books.

One teacher (NW) talked not only about the organization that her literacy mentors had done in the leveled library, but also in the professional library.

Along with the leveled book library for the students, there is also the professional library. I know a lot of the literacy mentor’s personal books are there. They are where they are easy to get and you can just take them and use them. You know, if you need it, just borrow it. You know, it’s there.

*Organizing and leading book study groups.* UK seemed sold on the benefits of the book study groups. Her testimony stated that such a study group was “invaluable.”

We’ve also had book study groups where they (the literacy mentors) have suggested titles and we’ve met on Saturdays to read books and to discuss them to do new strategies. The one Debbie Miller book was invaluable to me, so I really enjoyed doing that because it’s really hard to do it on your own sometimes and when you can discuss it, it’s so much better. So I really feel like it’s a very worthwhile program and I’m happy to have it in our building because there’s so much out there that it’s really hard to do it on your own.

AN explained why she found book study groups sponsored by her literacy mentors invaluable. She shared,

When we had our book study groups, I found it invaluable because when we focused on certain lessons every week and then we sat down and talked about them, everybody’s different insight was really profound when you don’t think about it in that way, or whatever, the sharing of the
conversations was very, very helpful for all of us who participated in the book study groups.

Later she continued.

The literature book groups where you meet every so often in the morning before school, it is a great way to get teachers to read books that they might not normally read. Also, it’s nice because they (the literacy mentors) pick out books that really are the good books…

NI added that she wished the literacy mentors would publish a summer reading list of good professional books for staff members, or a yearlong list of suggested professional reading.

ED shared about how the book study spurred discussion and collaboration.

…the books clubs have been invaluable and just getting other people on board in the building who wouldn’t normally go out and buy the book and then engaging in professional dialogue among all grade levels and just discussing what each grade level does, with respect to reading instruction so that we’re trying to bridge that gap and make sure that everybody’s on the same page.

NW talked about the book studies held in her building. She stated that there was currently one going on. She shared good thoughts about one group she participated in that focused on some of Lucy Calkins’ books and in her words, “we met over the summer at Panera’s and they pulled everybody in, even a lot of the aides were also there. It’s really wonderful because they (the aides) are working so closely with all our students.”

Mentor Roles

Based upon the frequency of literacy mentor activities mentioned by the teachers in their focus groups, 19% of their comments fell into the leadership role
category, 48% feel into the instructional role category, 15% fell into the managerial role category, and 17% fell into the supportive role category.

The comments in the leadership category (19.44%) included the following activities. Teachers reported that their literacy mentors did indeed become involved in a great number of programs, committees, meetings and conversations. They shared that literacy mentors helped set goals for the building; they “led the way.” They called the literacy mentors the guiding force who pushed people or pulled them along to try something new. They gave them credit for leading the change effort and for giving motivation to the rest of the staff. They were aware that literacy mentors gave input to their principals, thus leading in a more indirect way. They saw them as initiating discussions, study groups, conversations, summer reading programs, after-school student programs, workshop trips, book rooms, guided reading programs, along with a number of other activities. The teachers actually used the verb “lead” when they talked about their mentors. They lead conversations; they “lead the way”; they lead discussions; they lead.

In the instructional role (48.33%), the teachers listed the following activities among others. Literacy mentors hosted book study groups, presented at faculty meetings, curriculum hours, Literacy Lunches, and on professional development days. Literacy mentors met with teachers, taught/modelled lessons in many classrooms, gave out information, showed videos and led follow-up discussions, hosted literacy meetings, showed teachers how to make it work, and modeled, modeled, modeled. The teachers never used the word “coach,” in contrast to the mentors themselves who did utilize that verb. Teachers, however, used the word “model” over and over throughout
their focus groups. Additionally mentors were credited with conducting training on DRA assessments, leading discussions on diagnostics, modeling use of diagnostic information, discussing data, managing data, presenting and sharing common vocabulary, and communicating research. Teachers also mentioned that mentors did book talks, posted quotes around the building citing research on literacy, gathered research and gave out information including research, introduced things, and in general were simply a good source of information for teachers.

In analyzing their responses for managerial role responsibilities (15%), it was interesting to note that both teachers and literacy mentors credited the same percentage of their comments in this area. The teachers talked about literacy mentors organizing incentive programs for student reading, organizing summer reading programs and follow-up celebrations, organizing Read-a-thons and Right-to-Read Weeks. Additionally, they talked about mentors organizing book rooms, ordering books, leveling books, raising money for books, and keeping the leveled libraries organized.

In analyzing teacher responses about mentor activities in the supportive role (17.22%), it is apparent that teachers saw the support being offered for teachers, students, parents, and for literacy mentors themselves. The types of activities mentioned in this area include the following: teachers saw literacy mentors going into neighborhoods and working with families in low-income areas, working to get books into the hands of children who don’t have them at home, seeking donations of books, offering books to all students. Teachers mostly mentioned supportive activities that affected themselves. Some of those mentioned were offering books and resources, having resources at their fingertips, always being willing to help, always being
available. Other comments were: never making you feel you don’t know enough, showing passion, encouraging you, working with you, assisting us, giving us tips, helping with new things, giving support. They sincerely felt that literacy mentors were helping the “rest of us get there.”

Additionally, teacher comments were categorized as to the people or things on which each activity was focused. According to that process, activities focused on material things 6.11% of the time (such as raising money through grant writing and Read-a-Thons, purchasing books and leveling them), on parents 1.11% of the time (such as coordinating literacy nights and going into the neighborhood to work with families), on students 9.44% of the time (such as getting books into the hands of children, organizing summer reading programs, organizing reading incentive programs, organizing tutoring, putting together summer reading packets, and meeting students before and after school), on themselves (literacy mentors) 3.33% of the time (such as going to workshops, receiving books, thriving on change, reading the research), and on other teachers and staff members 80.00% of the time (leading book study groups, presenting at staff meetings, curriculum hours, and throughout the school year, offering to help, modeling lessons, facilitating conversations and discussions, giving suggestions, pushing and encouraging people, sharing research with staff members, organizing the guided reading “bucket brigade” program.

Without a doubt, teachers viewed the great majority of the work of literacy mentors as being centered around teachers and paraprofessionals and their needs. Because literacy mentors mentioned an additional role of “pathfinder” during their focus groups, the teacher comments were analyzed for comments that could possibly
fall in this category. There were comments such as keeping current with research and being willing to and thriving on change. Although the teachers sensed the passion felt by the literacy mentors for their work, the teachers did not seem to sense the extreme responsibility that mentors mentioned about staying current with research, keeping their practice current, and being risk-takers.

*Mentor Supports and Obstacles*

Teachers were well aware of the supports provided to support the work of literacy mentors.

NS shared her thoughts.

The support of the administration in terms of flexible time in terms to go and get materials ordered, organized…also the use of parent support and volunteers, I know that’s a big use in helping to organize our school collection….and the flextime whether it comes from their contracted time or the district, to have those opportunities to go into classrooms and help out and share ideas without having time somewhere to do that, it wouldn’t be as good…

YC noted the change that occurred when the district withdrew much of the financial support for this program. She noted that…

We’re being quiet over here because over the past year I would say that our literacy mentors don’t seem like they have gotten very much support and so we haven’t had as much this past year as we have had the first three years.

AN agreed. “It’s been less evident at (our school) as well. We’ve been meeting before school or after school, and not during the school day as much this year as in the past.” UK focused her thoughts on another type of district support. She talked about the role of the district literacy coordinator whom she said

…supports them (the literacy mentors) so that they can support us and I know I rely on the Teacher Talk and the things that (the Dept. of Instruction) publishes that goes out. I rely on reading those…that’s support for me…for
myself, my own information and to help parents, so that’s invaluable…I think it supports the mentors, but I think it also supports everyone and I appreciate it…I do!

NI talked about the support her building principal gives to the literacy mentors. She talked about the fact that her principal is “very supportive and flexible and will cover classes, cover duties or do whatever she needs to do for us to get information out to people…That’s my impression…that’s what happens.” She shared that the district mentors get ideas from the district meetings and then they bring those ideas to the building literacy mentor meetings and then the in-building grade level literacy mentors help disperse that information.

HR shared that her building was lucky that our principal, and I think most are, that our principal is really supportive so that the principal has been working really hard to create those opportunities. This year has been tougher because of the financial situation, but offering substitute teachers so that the literacy mentor can get out into the classroom, etc. (really helps). So, I think the big support has been through the district and then through the principal.

Several of the mentors talked about obstacles faced by literacy mentors. ED made the case for “more time...I think that we as a building could definitely use more time during curriculum hours and faculty meetings. That would be the best thing I would think as far as literacy mentors to have time.” Other teachers seemed to agree as lack of time was mentioned multiple times.

Mentor Strategies

Principal involvement. YK and HR talked about the importance of their principal being involved in the work with the literacy mentors. In their building the
literacy mentors and the building principal choose a focus for one year. One year the focus was on the “Read Aloud.” As HR put it:

One of the things that we focused on was the read aloud and how that’s a valuable time. It’s not just wasting some time after lunch. And, asking questions during the read aloud and getting the children involved. So we actually met with teachers at our grade level and it was very beneficial because everyone was then suggesting books to read, ones that worked and ones that didn’t, and it was wonderful…that sharing of ideas, sharing of the books, and then we also taught lessons and the principal came in and observed us, each teacher, whether or not you were to be observed this year or not, this was a focus for her as to your read aloud and how effective it was and it really helped. Then you sat down with her and discussed how the lesson went and again there was a lot of interchange between people about what worked and how you could make your read aloud better…We’ve met several times with our grades.

YK added that the principal “also came in and did a real aloud (modeled a read aloud). She brought a book in several times and read aloud and modeled ways to use it as instruction time.” Teachers noted that their literacy mentors worked extensively with the building principal on literacy issues, but they also noted that the strong involvement of the building principal became a most effective strategy.

Choice. Another strategy that some mentors seemed to utilize was that of choice. NW talked about the time when Dr. Nancy Padak, a nationally known literacy expert, came to her building in a program organized by her literacy mentors. Rather than mandate the same discussion/presentation for all, teachers at the grade levels were given choices on what they wanted…

Choices on what they wanted…on whether they wanted to sit down and talk with her and have questions, or whether they wanted her to come in and model. I chose to have her come in and do a read aloud and model some things with me and that was really beneficial and I guess that it was nice that you could personalize it and could choose what you thought would benefit us personally. And then we did a discussion time afterwards with her.
Pulling groups together. Another strategy that mentors seemed to utilize was that of involving groups of teachers as often as possible in looking at and learning new information. NW shared about a recent experience.

I know our literacy mentor just recently organized a day...a day when we were supposed to go to a workshop. It was supposed to be during a school day, but they found the same speakers, ...Debbie Miller and Tim Rasinski, and we went and saw them on a Saturday. It was for a phenomenal price. You know we didn’t really pay a lot and it was a wonderful Saturday. A lot of us went and so there was lots of conversation, buzzing...you know not only that day, but like the car ride there, the car ride back, the whole next week. It really got a good discussion going for all of us. That was fairly recent, but there’s been things like that all the way along.

The Findings: Principals

Research Question #1: In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?

Mentor Activities

Principals listed 37 different types of activities in which they have observed their literacy mentors engaged. The most frequently listed activities based on the frequency in which they were mentioned during focus groups were (listed in order): planning and presenting professional development for other staff members, organizing and leading literacy-focused discussions, followed by goal setting for the building, organizing and leading book study groups, modeling lessons and instructional strategies, and gathering and organizing materials. Additionally, sharing books/materials, staying current with personal reading and current research, helping to organize the Bucket Brigade guided reading program, and coordinating volunteers made the list.
Planning and presenting professional development for other staff members.

BG expressed her thoughts that it is important that we have knowledgeable people like literacy mentors who can help get the information (the information we receive from our literacy mentors) and spread it where it can be of the most benefit through formal and informal professional development opportunities.

NM was quite open about the huge role her literacy mentors play in keeping her on top of literacy issues through one-on-one, informal encounters which really become her own professional development.

It’s sort of like brain sharing. I don’t have the time all the time to go through and read all the professional journals or the wonderful books that my literacy mentors do, but I’ll go in and pick their brains….or I’ll say, O.K. tell me about this. I don’t understand this and they’ll explain it. Or sometimes, I’m going in a wrong direction and over the course of the years that we’ve been together, 5 or 6 years that these people have been working behind the scenes, they are confident enough to just come in and say, “…what are you…no, no, no…that’s not important. This is what’s important.

EH talked a lot about how the literacy mentors have worked to provide formal and informal professional development.

I think the first thing that I have seen with our literacy mentors has been…an awareness of the research that’s out there. And, what’s being used in other areas….what’s successful and what’s not successful. It’s been a goal in our building to move toward best practice and a lot of that has come from our literacy mentors, just from what they’ve brought back from other buildings, what they’re doing and what all the other literacy mentors are doing.

He also said that “the teachers have known who they can go to, who the experts are in the building, so that’s been very beneficial for staff and students and for me as well. I’ve been able to either answer things that I’ve learned from my literacy mentors or direct staff to our literacy mentors in the building.”
Organizing and leading literacy-focused discussions. EK shared about the importance the literacy-focused discussions in his building which are led by his literacy mentors.

Our literacy mentors…started the ball rolling by coordinating the monthly literacy committee that was open to “Come one, come all.” And literally we have anywhere from as few as 8 to as many as 16 staff members attend the monthly meeting. We’ll talk for an hour each month as far as what is going on with literacy…what could we be doing as a building to promote literacy. Many things have come out of (those discussions). From special activities that we do as a building to initiatives such as this year, trying to have children read outside of the regular school day, setting goals with a schoolwide goal of reading 2,000,000 minutes. They’ve helped coordinate special ed., gifted and everybody in between with a focus of literacy, so that the conversation that’s ongoing, that’s been ongoing now…I think this is the 3rd year that we’ve been meeting regularly every month, 3rd Thursday of the month, in the morning, has fostered a lot of literacy focus.

BG sensed that informal discussions actually often had the greatest impact in her building. She admitted that the lack of release time during the school day had forced literacy mentors to make greater use of more informal situations.

…and now most of it happens over lunchtime, at the end of the day…it’s more informal conversations. I mean they always have a spot on the faculty meeting agenda every month, but I think the most gets done, or the largest impact comes from those informal conversations after school or at lunch.

NM talked about how her building had continued the work started by a previous principal.

I think that’s one thing that LS (the principal who preceded me) has given me as a building principal…a sort of a model. I think when I first got started as a principal we would all get together (building and district-level literacy mentors) and we would go grade by grade and talk about what’s happening at your grade level.

The model of one representative per grade level plus the building principal, the reading specialist, a parent, and eventually a special education teacher coming together to focus
on your building’s literacy issues each month was a powerful model for this principal. She shared that the depth of conversation has grown over the years.

YW talked about the discussions that literacy mentors have led in helping to really make the standards and indicators in language arts more evident to teachers, helping them to understand them better and drive the building’s efforts to make those “just daily practice in our classrooms.” And the same could be said for having that common language and discussion across the district.

Goal setting for the building. NM shared her concerns about trying to endorse what’s important. She admitted relying on literacy mentors to help decipher important issues.

…I start to worry and stress out and I don’t want to be like whatever is new and innovative, I’m going to pile on top of them (my staff). How do you shift through the things that you know are important? I don’t know. That’s been the role of the literacy mentor…to endorse the things that come down the line. And in literacy, there’s still a lot happening, I think.

EH also talked about the literacy mentors in his building and how they work to share goals within the building.

We do have times during staff meetings when the literacy mentors will talk and they will go over goals for the year, or goals for the month, or whatever we’re doing in our reading incentive program…and we’ve also had our literacy mentors again at grade level meetings,…and during curriculum hours.

Organizing and leading book study groups. All principals mentioned the book studies that have been organized and led by literacy mentors. Almost all reported that the book studies had seen a decline in the past year due to the extreme budgetary constraints, the involvement of staff members in levy campaigns, the additional supervisory duties placed upon staff due to transportation cuts, and related factors. As
One principal (EH) put it, “Our literacy mentors have been involved in book studies with the staff that…well, it didn’t happen much this year.” Later he added how impressed he had been with the book study group.

I think one of the most impressive things to me was a book study group that worked last year and I think there were 23 teachers that got together and they met a couple of Saturdays a month to do a book study and that was wonderful. It was a powerful thing in our building and I know we’re looking to start that again next year. It did not happen this year for one reason or another.

*Modeling lessons and instructional strategies.* BG talked about the literacy mentors being the

…go-to people in the building when teachers have questions about the teaching of reading. They have been people who have modeled some lessons in the classrooms…I think too because our building is an open building and when you…the hallways are in the classrooms, so when you walk down the hall, you see what’s happening in the rooms of the literacy mentors and you see how the children are interacting with the instruction and it’s impressive…And so, folks want to see what that is and, um, pay attention to that.

One principal, EH, admitted that there might be more that he could do to assist in this area.

I think as an administrator I need to get the message out to teachers that the literacy mentors are not here to criticize or show you that you are doing something wrong. They are just going in and trying to model for you best practice or ways things can be done differently with better results. I think sometimes the literacy mentors feel uncomfortable doing that.

*Gathering and organizing materials.* EK indicated how important the work of the literacy mentors had been in his building in creating their guided reading program for grades one and two. Part of their work was organization and part was gathering and organizing materials.
As I look back they have been instrumental in creating our guided reading program…They’ve coordinated the staff, some of them (the staff) were very resistant on the implementation. They helped formulate a plan on how we could use building aides and bring resources to help that program at those grade levels. And, that’s been ongoing and we’re now starting to see results, I think, of kids in a guided reading program reading leveled books that they can read. They (the mentors) supported that by leveling all the books, having committees or groups of people within the building to level the books. They attended PTO meetings that included parents and shared the program with the parents. The PTO organization has raised thousands, I think it’s over $10,000 at this point that they have contributed to buy books for the building that are stored, organized, labeled, very user friendly for all teachers to go to our literacy room and find materials to utilize.

YW also talked about how her literacy mentors have made teachers aware of the new materials and how to use them.

Another thing that has happened (through the literacy mentor program) is that we have provided a lot of additional materials. The literacy mentors have kind of driven that and continued to again, in informal ways, try to make teachers aware of the materials that are available and how they could be used in classrooms. And, that has had an impact on classroom achievement because we do have a number of…We just have a lot. We are able to provide a volume of material for teachers to use and that means a larger volume of reading by the kids, so that definitely benefits them.

YW talked about the development of their ABC collection and the role that literacy mentors played in that development.

I think one of the most impressive things over the course of a couple of years is the development of our…ABC collection and that is…the collection of books, materials, literature (both fiction and nonfiction) that we have developed over four years that teachers can use for guided reading. They can target individual students or groups of students who might be reading on different levels within one classroom, and there is a wealth of material now that they can use to keep kids reading new material every day. They can use it for take-home material as well. We can get parents involved…I think that’s one of the main accomplishments of our literacy mentors and there have been a number of them who have continued that work from the beginning so it has been spread out some.
Credibility. EK talked about the importance of the credibility that the literacy mentors bring to their role as mentor and the relationships that are established in the building. In his own words…

I think those literacy mentors, they bring credibility to staff…that this is the right thing to do. So often as administrators, maybe it’s a new textbook adoption or a new way to instruct or test and sometimes staff just look at us as if…well, it’s just something new that we have to do. But our literacy mentors have always been the back-up guiding voice, supporting voice, or often times, the leading voice that this is the right thing to do for kids. And we should do this for kids. So I think the mentors at my building, and I’ve been fortunate to have the same two people who are probably the most dedicated, the most hard-working, superb teachers that just always bring that sense of reason…We should be doing this for kids if we want to help them read. This is a good thing to do…So, culturally they bring this aura with them that really supports me as a principal, I think.

NM shared that over the course of time, literacy mentors have really taken a true leadership role. It’s important for the teachers to know that I understand what I am talking about, so I really do rely on these people (the mentors) to help educate me. They are on the front lines, but I feel like my knowledge base really is drawn from this group of people (literacy mentors) who study it and practice it.

Principals gave no indication of being threatened by the literacy mentors

Principals instead shared how much they valued the roles played by literacy mentors in each of their buildings.

Mentor Roles

Based upon the frequency of literacy mentors’ activities mentioned by the building principals in their focus groups, 22.56% of their comments fell in the leadership role category, 51.13% fell into an instructional role category, 18.80% fell into a managerial role category, and 7.52% fell into a supportive role category.
Those comments in the leadership category (22.56%) included the following activities. Goal setting, presenting goals, talking about vision, leading direction and goal setting, focusing goals, helping to formulate a plan, changing the focus for my building were mentioned throughout the focus groups. Additionally, being leading voices, being back-up guiding voices, bringing a sense of reason, guided me (the principal) helping to change the building’s culture were shared. Other leadership role activities mentioned were taking on a leadership role, raising the bar, raising the bar for the principal, pulling me (the principal) in, driving our effort with standards and indicators. Additional leadership role activities included directing the literacy committee, creating the guided reading program for the school, leading discussions, and offering expertise to the building.

In the instructional role (51.13%), the principals listed the following activities among others. They held book studies, hosted literacy conversations, led grade level discussions, educated the principal, explained things, presented at staff meetings and curriculum hours, modeled lessons, and worked to maintain the awareness level of staff about current literacy issues. They provided advice, supplied information, showed teachers how to use materials in class, published teaching tips for teachers, explained things, gathered information, expanded our (the building’s) knowledge base, and in general disseminated information. Clearly principals saw literacy mentors concentrating their efforts in this instructional role.

After analyzing their responses for literacy mentor managerial role responsibilities (18.80%), principals listed the following activities. Literacy mentors purchased books, leveled books, organized books, labeled collections, increased take-
home libraries, professional libraries, and classroom libraries. They selected materials, started a book room, managed volunteers, organized and managed reading incentive programs, organized and managed reading intervention, and organized and managed the bucket brigade (guided reading program).

Finally, in the supportive role (7.52%), the principals mentioned the following activities. Literacy mentors attended PTO meetings and invited parents to various meetings and activities. They offered a supporting voice in literacy matters. They gathered resources and shared materials. They supported the principal as well as the staff.

Additionally, building principal comments were categorized as to the people or things on which each activity was focused. According to that process, activities focused on materials things 10.53% of the time (such as selecting materials, purchasing books and materials, organizing books, leveling books, increasing classroom libraries, take-home libraries, and professional development libraries). Activities focused on parents 3.01% of the time (attending PTO meetings, holding literacy nights for parents, managing volunteers, and inviting parents to various activities). Also activities focused on students 3.01% of the time (creating intervention folders for students, organizing reading incentive programs, and organizing reading intervention programs). Activities mentioned centered on self 4.51% of the time (studying the research, trying new things, and having classroom labs). Finally, the largest percentage of activities were attributed to other teachers and staff 78.95% of time (leading book studies, presenting at staff meetings, curriculum hours, and grade-level meetings, hosting information conversations, endorsing the things that come down the line, facilitating conversations,
guiding teachers, modeling, raising people’s level of understanding, sharing ideas, showing data, supplying information, working one-on-one with teachers). It was quite evident that principals (78.95%), teachers (80.00%) and literacy mentors themselves (76%) attributed the greatest portion of their activities to their work with teachers and paraprofessionals.

*Mentor Supports and Obstacles*

BG expressed the belief that the *supports* that are in place to help literacy mentors do their work have changed over time. “I mean when we had more funds available for the program…there was …time given to them during the day that they could use.” Unfortunately, that daytime support has evaporated with budget cuts.

EK echoed the same sentiment that the district no longer gives mentors much time to do their work.

I agree with BG that, I think…we identified our literacy mentors for their selfless, self-sacrificing, hard work…and then they received when finances were available, a stipend, not a large stipend, for a couple of years…and then money got tight and they lost that, but they continued their work, so at this point, they really aren’t receiving any support. They are just being driven by the fact that this is good for kids. And, again, I see them doing it outside of their school day, on top of their regular duties…just an open sharing…although it’s sometimes hit and miss. You know with one literacy meeting a month, or one staff meeting a month, it isn’t a lot of time when you think about it.

In reality, what mentors, teachers, and principals perceive as supports, may also really prove to be obstacles.

YW expressed her belief that literacy mentors “are very self sufficient.” As she reported unfortunately,

we haven’t really provided a lot of (support)…we’ve had some time available…to have them do some of their work, but it seems to me that a lot
of the time comes on their own, just because they are constantly working
together and talking together about what they are doing.

She did continue to share however that she does give them a certain level of support.

In terms of other supports, I certainly assist them in communication with the
staff. I think that my support of their work and the evidence of my support
is really critical to giving them more credibility in the building….we’ve also
given them financial support from various kinds of sources to help them
purchase materials for our building, so those are the main things I think we
have done…

Later she added, “We do have just sort of a standing agenda item on our staff meeting
agendas each month that is for the literacy mentors. It is time for them to bring up any
topics or issues that might be out there.”

EH shared that in his building he couldn’t think of many supports, except
Just for times to meet and discuss what’s going on and what they would like
to do differently. There’s been a reflection piece that we’ve had in place
that I think we’ve had (and it’s been) the biggest support in the building and
I think that needs to be increased next year.

NM shared the realities of what budgetary constraints, failed levies,
transportation cuts, etc., did to the focus of literacy mentors in her building. It is
important to note that she presides over the building that has a very active building-
level literacy committee with representatives from each grade level.

This has been a rough year for all of us, between the levy and the
transportation issues that we had over the winter, you know, before and after
school, there just hasn’t been a lot of time.

BG agreed with the negative impact of budgetary cuts and levy failures.

I would say that the initiatives surrounding the (failures and eventual)
passage of a levy and the transportation (issues) overshadowed probably all
of the direct contact I had with these committees this year. As building
principals we were involved so much in that, which is part of our job…I
mean, it’s the reality of…I mean you end up splintering your time and even
though all of this is good work, if you don’t have the funds to continue to manage your school district, it’s not going to help you that much

EH indicated that a big obstacle in asking literacy mentors do their work has been the budgetary cuts that took away the money for substitutes in order that literacy mentors could be released during the school day in order to mentor in classrooms.

One problem I’ve seen has been…it is difficult to get the literacy mentor into the classroom to help teachers out and in front of students….I would think this is the biggest problem…to go in and actually model lessons. They have been able to meet with staff before and after school, however, they have not had the opportunity to model as much as I think they’d like to.

He also lamented that in his building some of his staff was uncertain exactly who were the building mentors. In his building there had been a change of literacy mentors last year and there was some confusion about the role of those previously involved in literacy mentor positions and the role of the new people involved in the mentor positions. To add to the confusion, his building had a committee for literacy and some of those teachers were very verbal and active in literacy issues, often overshadowing the work of the district mentors. His building did a survey at the end of last year and found out that many staff members did not even know who the “official” literacy mentors were. There was confusion between the building committee and the district mentors. And in his words, “That posed an obvious problem.” He stated that in the coming year it was his intent to “define the roles of our building literacy mentors and our district literacy mentors…so…that they (the teachers) will know who our literacy mentors are and exactly what they are doing for the building and the district.”
EK shared that personal issues as well as district financial issues did provide obstacles to literacy mentor work when much of the work is done outside of the normal school day.

NM has a good point in that there are other factors besides love of literacy that come into play with the literacy mentors. One of my literacy mentors encountered a great illness in her family this year and wasn’t able to devote the amount of time that she has in past years. The other literacy mentor picked up the slack and did twice as much, but that literacy mentor didn’t have the outside family responsibilities that some other staff members might have. So, it’s really picking somebody that not only has the love of reading, but also the time to devote due to circumstances that allow that to happen.

EK did express his opinion about the need to have strong district support in starting up a literacy mentor program.

I bet (all principals) would …say that there would be a pitfall in a literacy mentor program, if a district wanted to start one, if they didn’t have somebody like an LS that would really give them resources, direction, gather them together as a group…if a district just thinks that oh, literacy mentor…I’ll pick my two top reading instructors and call them the literacy mentors, without getting them together and giving them more of that goal, support, resources…Here’s where we start…facilitate the discussion, etc.

Without that support in place at the district level, he felt that the concept of a literacy program would not happen. BG agreed about the importance of central office support.

I guess my final comment would be that if anyone were going to try to pattern a program after the program that we have here in our district, I think,…#1 you need a Central Office type person whose position would be to oversee and focus the literacy program like we’ve done. We have had someone in that position whom building administrators trust and respect for her knowledge base and therefore that focus is directed then toward each building and the literacy mentors in the buildings.…

**Mentor Strategies**

*Involving everyone.* NM shared her building’s strategy of involving everyone in book studies and how it inspired everyone to “get on board.”
I think that purchasing books for the whole staff…we purchased Better Answers for the whole staff. We made posters for the whole staff. We inserviced the whole staff last year on how to do that. We gave examples of what second graders did with that book and it blew everybody in 5th grade away. And, that led the way…OK, you’ve got to get on board.

*Providing time during the school day.* NM continued to share about the strategy of providing time during the school day in which teachers could meet and discuss literacy topics. She simultaneously talked about the strategy of making resources more readily accessible to her staff.

…Literacy lunches where when I had an assistant, we would cover all duties one day and then people from the Dept. of Instruction came over and helped me cover duties so that all teachers could meet at their lunch and have their lunch to discuss a literacy article, or discuss a topic in their classrooms that they were working on, and that was pretty effective.

*Shared PowerPoint presentations.* All principals seem to have appreciated the PowerPoint presentations on fluency that were inspired and supported by the literacy mentors this year. Each principal utilized the PowerPoint presentations in a different way, yet all buildings were exposed to that material. The strategy of allowing buildings to custom tailor their use of these presentations seems to have worked according to the building principals. When asked how they had utilized these programs, principals shared their stories. NM said she used them at staff meetings each month, but that she received some, very limited, negative reaction because a couple staff members felt that the staff meeting should be utilized to conduct staff business, not curricular issues. Even though that thought process is limited in numbers, it does impact her staff’s receptivity. BG said that she had used them during required curriculum hours. EK simply e-mailed them to his entire staff and told them to look at
the power point, that he would be referring to some of the slides at the upcoming staff meeting. He said,

…even if they don’t look at the power points, they at least know that they have received them, so when other people are talking about them, if they haven’t looked at them, then at least keep quiet and don’t hinder the discussion the other people are having about them.

EH has his literacy mentors present them during the staff meeting and YW has utilized them during staff meetings and curriculum hours.

Inviting themselves into classrooms. EH shared that his literacy mentors have been relentless in trying to get into classrooms. As he put it, “A lot of times I have the literacy mentors going to teachers and saying, ‘Can I come into your classroom?’ They have to keep inviting themselves in.” If literacy mentors were to wait for others to invite them in, that might not ever happen. He gave his literacy mentors a lot of credit for not giving up and for being persistent.

Cross Case Analysis: Research Question #1

An analysis of the responses from all three cases (mentors, teachers, and principals) provided some interesting comparisons. Probably the most notable resided in the importance that mentors placed upon their leadership role as compared to teachers and principals. Mentors seemed to have a different grasp on those activities that they perform that fall into the leadership category and it proved to be a much stronger role for them from their perspective. Additionally, it was notable that all groups placed planning and presenting professional development as the most frequently mentioned activity performed by literacy mentors.
It was obvious that all three case studies felt very strongly about the importance of that activity. When grouping strategies, it was noteworthy that all three cases studies mentioned different strategies. A few could be considered similar, but many were not. When it came to supports and obstacles, it became clear that many of the supports were also listed as obstacles, often because of a change in the district situation over time. There was much similarity in comments from each case group in this category.

Table 7 gives a quick view at the various case group responses when talking about Literacy Mentor activities.

The lists of the literacy mentors mirror those of the teachers in many respects. However, in addition to the items listed above teachers included book talks, creating and maintaining enthusiasm, posting of quotes for all to read, and creating summer packets for students. What was missing on the teachers’ list, but that appeared on the literacy mentors’ list was doing assessments, demonstrating daily best practices in literacy, organizing the Bucket Brigade (guided reading program), coaching and mentoring, collaborating, serving on various committees, facilitating speakers, goal setting, grant writing, literacy committees, creating a newsletter, staying current on their own personal reading, arranging school visitations, and organizing writing portfolios. In general, mentors identified more professional activities with policy and curriculum implications for the district. These issues reflect the leadership and professional growth (e.g., coaching and mentoring) activities literacy mentors saw as their primary role.
In comparing the principal and mentor lists, principals listed the following, although the mentors did not: giving advice, raising awareness, changing culture, giving credibility, assisting with the intervention programs, developing leadership, supporting the principal, working with standards and researching. On the other hand,

Table 7

Mentor Activities and Mentor, Teacher, and Principal Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Activities</th>
<th>Mentor Responses</th>
<th>Teacher Responses</th>
<th>Principal Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Activities Mentioned</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Presenting Professional Development</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with Staff Members</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling Lessons</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering &amp; Organizing Materials</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>#6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing &amp; Leading Book Study Groups</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting for the Building</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>#3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing &amp; Leading Literacy-Focused Discussions</td>
<td>#7</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching &amp; Mentoring Other Teachers</td>
<td>#8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting/Organizing Building-Level Committee/Council</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosting Other Study Groups (Not Book Related)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing Various Activities (Literacy Nights, Right-to-Read, Read-A-Thons)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving Books Talks</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating Information</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Incentive Program Planning</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Person</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare Summer Reading Packets</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Book Room</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish Common Vocabulary</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Books/Materials</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying Current With Personal Reading &amp; Research</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing Bucket Brigade Guided Reading Program</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating Volunteers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: x’s indicate that these items were mentioned enough times by that group to be noted in this discussion, but they were not mentioned as many times as those items that were given a ranking (#1). Items that were mentioned only a few times did not make this list at all.
literacy mentors mentioned many more activities like doing assessments, advertising workshops, collaborating with colleagues, serving on committees, disseminating information and grant writing. Curiously, the principals appear to view the mentors as leaders of change, implementing new programs or altering the school culture in some way.

When examining the roles played by mentors, the mentors characterized their role as being mostly a leadership role, one rooted in instructional practice. They listed collaborating with colleagues and modeling lessons as their second and third activities. Also prominent were classroom-focused activities such as coaching, study and discussion groups. Teachers characterized the mentor role as primarily an instructional role, with much lower distribution between leadership, managerial, and supportive roles. They identified modeling lessons and discussion as the second and third most important activities. While principals identified instructional activities, their perception of the mentors’ role was far more one of leadership. Leadership is a factor in the three activities identified most frequently, professional development, leading discussions and goal-setting. Principals put far less emphasis on classroom-based activities such as modeling lessons. Curiously, only the mentors themselves identified “collaboration” as a major activity. Also of significance is that the teachers did not identify “goal setting” as a mentor activity.

In all three cases managerial and supportive roles were cited the least. Mentors and principals cited activities in the supportive role least frequently. Teachers cited activities in the managerial role least frequently. Additionally, managerial and supportive roles were the least frequently mentioned in all three cases (mentors,
teachers, and principals). Finally, it can be noted that the principals and the mentors had a much firmer grasp on the variety of activities performed by the mentors, mentors mentioning 39 activities and principals mentioning 37 as compared to only 24 activities being mentioned by the teachers. This is probably due to the fact that mentors have a much better communication system regarding their mentor work with their building principal than with all the teachers. Table 8 gives a comparative glance at the role percentages.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Roles</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was quite noticeable in mentor comments how deeply they feel committed to their leadership role in the building. It was also quite evident in all conversations that they feel that they have not only moved into a leadership capacity, but that many of their activities are actually “leading” their building in a deeper understanding of literacy and in goal setting directions. It is interesting to note that teachers haven’t noticed or perceived the literacy mentors’ activities in quite the same leadership capacity. Principals seem to have noticed it to some further degree, but there is obviously room for growth in their perception in order to bring it into line with literacy
Mentor perceptions. Mentors may need to strengthen their leadership role in order that teachers and principals take more note of it.

Looking at strategies, there were many comments which paralleled each other between the three case groups. However, when the categories emerged, it was interesting to note that each case (literacy mentors, teachers, principals) highlighted different strategies. There were some instances of similar categories such as “Getting Others Involved” and “Involving Everyone,” although there is a slight difference between others and everyone, so the categories were listed as separate categories. In reality, there is obviously much similarity between the two.

It was also interesting to note that the teachers mentioned “Principal Involvement,” but the other two case groups (including principals) did not. A look at the Table 9 will give further insight into the categories that emerged.

Table 9

Strategies Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting Others Involved</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging Others to Take the Lead</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making It “Safe”</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Back Door</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying It Themselves</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Trust</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulling Groups Together</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing Time During School Day (Literacy Lunches)</td>
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<td>Involving Everyone</td>
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<td>Shared PowerPoint Presentations</td>
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<td>Inviting Selves Into Classrooms</td>
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Note: an x denotes the categories that emerged from the most prevalent responses.
It was quite apparent that the literacy mentors have a stronger or different understanding of the strategies that they utilize than any of the other case groups. They seem to understand that they have tried various strategies, have faced difficult situations and have readjusted their strategies. It has been a “study in process” to determine which strategies work best in each situation, each building, each encounter.”

In listening to the comments provided by the three case groups, they all were acutely aware that the most important supports for literacy mentor work were time and money. In actuality these two supports also were frequently mentioned as obstacles because of the district’s cutbacks in budgetary matters due to the multiple levy failures. All three cases mentioned money although the mentors and the principals mentioned more frequently money for student books, videos, workshop attendance, host speakers, and stipends. Teachers were focused more on the money for substitutes and release time for mentors.

In looking at obstacles, time, time, time was mentioned over and over. Mentors focused on the loss of release time as well as the struggle of taking time away from their classes. Teachers lamented the loss of mentor release time, as well as lack of time for literacy work in staff meetings and curriculum hours. Principals concerned themselves with the loss of time for mentors to work with teachers as well as the lack of time for themselves to work with their literacy mentors.

Literacy mentors also cited various obstacles that fell into the peer response category. Very little mention, if any, was made by teachers and principals of obstacles that would fall into this category. Literacy mentors however were quite verbal about
their struggles working with the staff in a new building, veteran teachers across all buildings, lack of receptivity by staff at first. Additionally, they mentioned the differences between required and voluntary book studies and the resulting responses from teachers, how difficult it was to be frank with a colleague, and how much it hurt to work with those who “rolled their eyes” at every opportunity. Literacy mentors seemed quite aware and quite affected by the obstacles that fell into this category.

Collaboration with staff was identified as a significant role by literacy mentors. Their perception of resistance, and the teachers’ failure to identify collaboration as a mentor activity, underscore a significant difference between the two groups in their view of the mentors’ role.

Table 10 briefly summarizes some of the major findings in the obstacle and support category.

Although there were many other supports and obstacles mentioned throughout the interviews and focus groups, these were the major findings. The obstacle findings give some basis upon which this district might make improvements in their support system for the literacy mentor program.

Looking over each of the cases, it seems that literacy mentors have a significant different perception of their primary roles, activities, supports and obstacles, from the perception of teachers and principals. Based on their comments, their understanding of their work is deeply rooted in their professional readings and their interactions and reflections as a district group. Principal comments indicated a strong grasp of the work of the mentors, but those comments lacked depth of understanding that the mentors...
themselves demonstrated. Teacher comments indicated the weakest understanding of the literacy mentors’ work.

Table 10

Supports and Obstacles

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<th>Mentors</th>
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<td><strong>Supports</strong></td>
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<td>Workshop attendance</td>
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<td>Host speakers</td>
<td>Principal is flexible &amp; covers duties/classes</td>
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<td>District meetings</td>
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<td>Principal Involvement</td>
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<td>Comraderie:</td>
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<td>Mentor meetings</td>
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| **Obstacles** | **Lack of time:** | **Budgetary constraints** |
| Management: | Staff meetings | Impact time available |
| Time - Takes time away from classes | Curriculum hours | |
| Time - loss of release time | | |
| Format | | |
| Peer Response: | | |
| Veteran teachers | | |
| difficult | | |
| New building staff | | |
| Voluntary vs. required | | |
| Hard to be frank with staff | | |
| Eye rollers | | |
| Some didn’t want literacy | | |
| Mentor at first | | |
| | | |

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The Findings: Literacy Mentors

Research Question #2: What is the perceived impact of the literacy mentor program?

Mentor Teacher Practices

Literacy mentors identified practices that fell into five broad categories: (a) implementing new instructional strategies, (b) staying current on professional topics, (c) increased professional confidence, (d) increased peer communication, (e) personal fulfillment and growth.

Implementing new instructional strategies. YP shared that she had undergone many changes in the past 3 years.

I think that this (the literacy mentor program) has taken a lot of theory and practice that I had learned at the undergraduate level and linked names and specific details and books with that to then implement or support what I do in the classroom. Initially when I graduated I knew what guided reading was, but the nitty-gritty details, that I did not know.

AL shared how she rethought how she approached her reading groups. Using guided reading groups as opposed to one total whole class reading group along with using leveled books and all the resources characterize the change she has made in her thinking about teaching reading. She also reported adding word sorts to her repertoire of teaching strategies and she attributes it to one of the study groups she had been part of where they talked about word sorts and vocabulary and implementing different strategies for word study. Additionally, she reports using a lot of Reader’s Theater where she had not in the past as well as word/vocabulary webs. Most importantly, she reports a change in her approach toward student learning with a much more focused approach on each child’s needs rather than a class approach.
LH reported that she also had changed her reading instruction. She said that through the use of DRA assessments (which she was not doing prior to the mentor program), she is able to better design instruction, matching students to the right books, using a developmental spelling approach to match students to the right spelling words…”making steps on the road to really individualize and tailor literacy education for each of those kids.”

YP reported that she had begun a new phonics program, just so she could “purely dig into it and do those lessons so that when I spoke (with teachers), I knew from where I spoke.”

AC reported that she has “upped what I was doing in read aloud and I’ve changed,…pushed it a little bit to include more high level thinking.” Additionally she reports focusing more on fluency in her work with children.

LH also reported changing her Read Aloud program.

I don’t use pre-printed sheets, you know, 10 questions that go with the story in the reading program anymore. I don’t use the reading workbook anymore. We still read some of the stories, probably most of the stories in there (the basal), but I approach them differently by a strategy focus. And we use a lot of post-it notes; we have a lot of kids working in small groups, working with pairs. There’s a lot more talking about reading than earlier in my teaching career. I think that you read the story or you listened to it on tape and you had a whole class discussion and then kids went back to their seats and answered things individually and there was one right answer and we do it differently now. I’ve made that change.

GP reported that she changed her writing program, as well as trying some of the latest things in literacy. She attributes the fact that she tried new things to the literacy mentor program.

I guess I tried some of the latest things that were out there…(like) the Lucy Calkins writing program that I am now doing that I wasn’t doing three years
ago. …I’m thinking that maybe if I hadn’t gotten the push from the (literacy) group, I might not have (implemented the new program)…that little extra support pushed me to do it.

She shared that the “oohs and aahs from the group” about the Lucy Calkins program “forced me to say…” ‘Maybe this is very important and I need to do it.”

EW also talked about the changes she had made in her writing instruction. I remember the Craft Lesson book being shared and now I use mini lessons all the time, which I didn’t use before… I have also implemented writing conferences for the past two years which I wasn’t doing before. So, it’s just having the opportunity to hear different and see different sources and new information that’s available and then to be able to (listen to the) literacy mentors (who) share what they are doing and learning…

YP reports that she also has begun using the Lucy Calkins writing program within the past few years, a change from her previous practice.

Staying current on professional topics. Mentors were very vocal about how they had changed in regard to staying current in their professional reading and in their practice. Although all were excellent teachers before becoming mentors, it seems that the program has sharpened their knowledge base and sharpened their skills.

EW shared that she had stayed much more current on both reading and putting new things into practice after becoming a literacy mentor. In her words, “I think it helps to be kind of forced to read it, but then to be able to talk about it, and then you are going to implement it.” The one example she used was a book that had sat on her table for a year. After becoming a literacy mentor, she read it because the group was reading it. In a way, the mentor role “forced” her to implement part of a new literacy program in the classroom.
AR shared similar thoughts. She shared that prior to becoming a mentor, she might have read a book and gotten some new ideas, “but how much I would have used them and what I would have done with the information is different based on reading it for and with this group in mind.”

AC also reported feeling that it was part of her responsibility to “go out there and read…So, like when you read, then that’s what kind of changes go on in your classroom, I think, then you hear about things…”

YP also reported, …as a mentor it is your responsibility to not necessarily be a step ahead, but to be current, to keep your reading current and keep your practice current …just having the title of mentor says that you are the person I go to when I need to know or you can help me find out what I need to know. …I just always feel that I need to choose the best lesson, just in case someone asks me about, you know, teaching diagraphs or mini lessons for writing.

AR also stated that by being a literacy mentor, she felt pushed …to try something, to walk the talk. You can’t just say it and then, well I don’t have time to do that…so it forces you to try some things that maybe you would have put off before or try them a little longer, you don’t give up as quickly because you want to be able to give all the ins and outs of what happened…people are asking, so you do feel an obligation to try it so you can speak from experience.

TG stated much the same thing and reported why she felt it was important to stay current both in reading and practice and why she did. She said that people start to look at you as a pathfinder…they know that you’ll try it out…and have scaled some of the pitfalls…made your way through so that you can give them advice so they can start on sure footing if they want to try something new or have really been pondering a change. You’re there to support them because you have the background knowledge.

YB said much the same thing when she said,
...You know you read things that you probably would read, but you read them sooner, so that you have them in your bag of tricks and your background knowledge so that you can use them to mentor people with when they come to ask you. …

LH also reported that she has stayed current for many years through The Reading Teacher and the IRA website, Read, Write, Think, but that coming to the literacy mentor meetings has helped her stay current with a broader range of research:

I think in teaching you have to always be looking at the current research and finding out what works, because if the practices that we use in our classrooms aren’t getting achievement results, then I think it’s fluff or I think that we need to be looking for the better practice.

**Increased professional confidence.** Multiple mentors reported that through the process of mentoring over multiple years, they were gradually developing more confidence in their work. EW said it well when she said,

...I’m finally feeling comfortable that I feel knowledgeable...and I think the staff knows that and I think that helps...you know that you’ve had experience, that you have a really strong interest in reading, that it’s something that you really love and that you have experience with. It helps let them be open about changing.

Although many of the mentors had completed their advanced degrees in literacy prior to becoming a literacy mentor, several of them completed their master’s degrees during their tenure as literacy mentor. One of the mentors actually began a doctoral program in literacy. Literacy mentors stated that being a literacy mentor has inspired and encouraged them to move forward in their educational pursuits.

**Increased peer communication.** Multiple mentors also reported that since becoming mentors they were no longer shutting their doors and doing their own thing. They had become much more open and sharing. Additionally they reported that they had increased their communication with others, talking to people and listening to what
they were doing across multiple grade levels, not just within their own grade level team. They reported that in those times of communication, they were doing much more reflecting

*Personal fulfillment and growth.* Many of the mentors reported that this position was personally fulfilling for them, that they loved doing it. Some of them said it was the first leadership role that they had undertaken in their buildings. As AC said, “it brought things out in me that really I didn’t either use or wasn’t there before…I’m glad. I think it was a good thing for me.”

YB said basically the same thing when she said, “I would have to agree…that there is definitely personal fulfillment in (being a mentor)...”

AC shared a professional change that represents facets of each category generated by this question. AC shared that she had always been interested in reading. However, in her first teaching assignment in a different district, she had been placed in a school where reading instruction was only whole group and followed a scripted basal series. AC reported losing her interest in reading. Even when changing districts, she continued along the same teaching path, although that wasn’t a mandated path in this district. She just “fell back” to her previous schools’ teaching path. The mentor experience, however, resulted in a dramatic change in her attitude and practice.

…I don’t think I would be where I am now…I KNOW I wouldn’t be, if it had not been for the literacy program. You know, because it was the literacy program that got me hooked and excited again. And then once I was excited and hooked, then it’s like momentum…it’s like it builds and builds and builds. And then there’s like that feeling, like, there’s also the responsibility kind of, like ‘I’m a literacy mentor and I should be a step ahead of the game.’ I’m always thinking like…every spring I’m thinking like what should our building focus be next year or where do we still need to go? Like looking at the grand scheme of things, where have we been and
where do we still need to go or what do we still need to do?…that would not have happened had I not been a literacy mentor.

*Changes in Teacher Practices and Attitudes*

Mentors identified two broad categories of change in teacher practice and attitudes. Specifically, they saw (a) new instructional practices, particularly in Guided Reading and assessment; (b) better communication among staff, including use of a common vocabulary and goals, as well as a willingness to share resources and ideas.

New instructional practices

*Guided reading.* AR stated that she thought their guided reading program... has been our biggest change. It has made people start working in small groups. Prior to this they didn’t necessarily do that. With our guided reading program they are now using information from their DRA’s to put their groups together, finding books that are more appropriate for the different levels, working with small groups, getting to know the students’ abilities better that way…and then the dialogue about what we’re doing with the children…

LH reported much the same thing.

Reading looks differently today than it did 4-5 years ago. I think especially when you look at the first and second grades with the bucket brigade. Every student is met with every day for 30 minutes in a small guided reading group. And, that used to not happen. I see people now using small groups and groups of 6 kids reading a book that’s just right for those kids on their level. …So to meet the needs of all of them, I see that changed. I also see spelling and word work change, (taking on a more developmental approach).

She definitely feels that her teachers are “making steps on the road to really individualize and tailor literacy education for each of those kids.”

AR reported that her building had a study group with *Strategies That Work,* and that many teachers began using many of those strategies.
There was a tremendous change (on their reading scores) and it got that grade level really excited about...look! We tried this and look at the improvement in those scores! And so they felt there was a reason to do this, a payoff, and it came through the discussions that LH really facilitated and then they could go back and share and say, ‘Look what’s happened.’

AC reported that her building switched from using the basal as whole class instruction all the time into a different mentality.

…I think another one of our big things is that we (the teachers) switched from going basal all the time. We stopped the basal mentality in large parts, and we’re now all understanding guided reading and that kids are on different levels …It’s hard work to change what you’ve been doing for years and years and when you don’t know another way.

One byproduct of this shift to a more individualized focus may be a perceived reduction in the numbers of worksheets used in their literacy instruction. AC noted:

I notice that a lot of teachers are talking in the copy room…like…’Oh, you’re running off a worksheet? Oh, that’s not good!’ Like they are hounding each other a little bit, although I think we still get a lot of worksheets, but I do think it’s done down considerably in some classrooms. I think a lot of people have stopped.

Assessment. Almost all mentors mentioned that their buildings were using more assessments in literacy over the past four years. The DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) is required for all classes K-4 and just recently for any student in fifth grade who has not reached the fifth grade DRA level. Additionally, Dibels assessments are being used throughout the district to check on our beginning readers (K-1) and to follow struggling readers K-5. These assessments are not state mandated, but they have become part of the literacy landscape in this district through the literacy mentor program. Teachers have learned how to administer these assessments, how to interpret the data, and how to adjust instruction to meet the needs of the student through the support of their literacy mentors.
LH shared that all teachers are now actively using assessments to guide instruction and hopefully raise student achievement.

I think that we are all stopping and assessing…it’s not like once you are in a group, you’re there forever. I think there is this on-going assessment and evaluation of students that goes on and I think that’s helping us with (instruction) and student achievement.

Later she continued, “You know, you can give the test and chuck it away…but I think that more and more people are using that information to guide instruction and to match kids with books.”

EW reported that there is a lot more fluency instruction in classrooms. Many teachers have increased both their assessment on fluency and their focus on instructional techniques to promote fluency. As she reported,

A lot more fluency instruction and practice to help with…make sure kids are (progressing)…As a way of assessment, to kind of document and collect data and then just implementing fluency instruction in the classrooms. I know I’ve really seen that in many of the classrooms in our school. ....(LP also) made a comment that from Mosaic of Thought some of the strategies that were implemented a couple of years ago, she now sees students that … are coming to her in 4th and 5th grade knowing those (strategies), so it’s that common language again.”

Better communication. YB shared that teachers seem more tied into a common vocabulary and common goals whereas prior to the literacy mentor program, there had not been a common vocabulary throughout the school and there were very few common goals that everyone bought into. Now she stated that “with everybody speaking the same language,…they seem to be more headed in the same direction.”

GP also mentioned noticing the common language in her building and common goals.

YB shared that in her building teachers have raised their expectations of what their students can do and what their staff can do. In her words,
I think we see not only heightened expectation of our kids and what they can do, but I think that’s translated into a higher, heightened expectation of what we can do as a staff. I think that, you know, I don’t think there was a spoken low expectation of our kids, but with the population of kids that we have, there was this underlying rumble all the time and once we have a common notion that we could expect them to achieve more, and then they were and we knew that they could, then we felt that we could too. So, it was sort of a support each other kind of thing as far as expectations go.

*Increased sharing.* Most mentors reported that their buildings had seen a shift from teachers keeping resources in their own rooms and avoiding sharing them, to a more open storage of books in a common leveled book room. As YP said,

I think one of our biggest accomplishments is coming up with that book room for the entire school to use because everybody had everything in cupboards from money deposited here and money deposited there, and now it’s all together.

Multiple mentors shared that teachers have become much more open to having someone else come into their room to model a new strategy or to opening their classroom to others to come in to watch them teach. It seems that the literacy mentor program has cracked open otherwise closed doors. Mentors reported some tough times at the beginning of the mentor program, but through the past 4 years, the doors have become more open. LH gives one specific example of a person

…who was very reluctant in the beginning. I was in his room and we worked with reading a non-fiction text…looking at topic and facts on that topic, using the science text. And his kids loved it and he’s doing that now, with reading science texts that he has. I think you take little steps. Some people open arms and say, ‘Come on it.’ Others…it’s intimidating and they feel, I don’t know if they feel threatened by it…I see that it’s (the literacy mentor program) made a big difference. I’m very comfortable going into their rooms and I think they sit back and watch and I just go in to help kids.
Changes in Student Work and Achievement

Mentors identified four broad domains of student work and achievement attributed in part to the mentor program: (a) test scores, (b) volume of reading and writing, (c) increased motivation to read, and (d) metacognitive growth.

Test scores. AR reported great growth in reading scores from fall to spring on the third grade reaching achievement test. Her third grade teachers attribute the strong growth to their use of the Strategies That Work instructional concepts.

AC reported that the building’s fourth grade proficiency reading scores have gone up ever since they’ve started the literacy committee in their building. She reports that their scores were around 68% in prior years, but since the literacy mentor program has been in place, they’ve increased to the high 80s and low 90s. “So I think it’s (the Literacy Committee) made a huge difference just moving us along.”

YB shared that since the inception of the literacy mentor program, her building has gained a renewed expectation that their students could achieve more. In her words, “we had a common notion that we could expect them to achieve more, and then they were and we knew they could…”

LH reported that students have really changed how they answer short answer and long answer achievement/proficiency test questions. She attributes the growth in student ability to answer those types of questions to the staff’s study of Better Answers combined with a study of non-fiction reading strategies.

LH also reported about one special education classroom in her school where the teacher is getting wonderful results by using things that have come up through literacy mentoring, through a study group, through a workshop with Dr. Padak, and she’s getting great results by using all those practices. And
that’s with a group full of special education students. Sometimes I think we feel that well, they can make progress, but they won’t meet the bar, but in fact, some of these student are making the bar, they are hitting the bar and jumping over the bar.

*Volume of reading and writing.* Most of the literacy mentors shared that there is certainly a lot more reading and writing going on in classrooms. Many classes have adopted reading and writing workshops; many have adopted bucket brigade reading times to increase reading time. As LH put it: “Yes…more extended reading, more reading time.” Others would add more extended writing, more writing time.

*Increase in motivation to read.* EW shared that through the use of *The Fluent Reader* strategies such as the regular use of various Readers’ Theaters along with other instructional strategies listed in that book, her teachers (especially her intermediate teachers) are reporting a huge motivation increase in some of the struggling readers.

AC shared that she has noticed “a change in the way my kids read now. My kids will say…’Oh, reading’s over?’ Like they get upset.” She also reported that students are doing so

MUCH more reading! And voluntarily! I think… I have kids say to me, ‘I read an hour and a half over the weekend!’ “I read four hours over the weekend!” You know what I mean? They mark down on their reading log even though they don’t have to (on the weekend). A lot of them! And they are excited about it! Like even my low readers… “I read this whole part…I read to the part where the fire came.” …Like they get excited when they finish a book. I think a lot of kids have never finished a book before. …I think it’s made a big difference in the way kids feel about reading! And, our performance has gotten better because our scores have gone up.

*Metacognitive growth.* AC shared that her students now know where their own reading levels are; they know which books are just right for them. They’ve learned how to determine that.
Kids know like this is not a good book for me; this is a good book for me. What we are starting to work on now is that kids are setting goals for themselves. You know this is my reading test and that’s where I started this year and I’ve been working hard at…

She added that “the kids think more deeply now than they did…definitely more deeply. And, they are more involved in their reading. I mean it’s all about reading at (our) school! They are definitely more involved.”

LH shared that through the building’s study of Strategies That Work, teachers have helped change student attitudes about reading.

…that has really, really helped kids leave tracks of their thinking, so to speak, in learning logs, in post-it notes…to have kids really think that reading is not a rush through, pronounce all the words, get done, hurry up, and get done with it, but something that is to be thought about, reread, does it make you think of it in a different way, um, it’s to be enjoyed, but also try to really get to what that author’s message was in the writing of that book.

Changes in the Building as a Whole

Findings in terms of building generated six categories. First, data analysis found that all mentors believed text study through book clubs initiated dramatic changes in practice. Additional categories were (a) school-home literacy learning; (b) more intra-building communication; (c) more resource sharing; (d) development of common goals and vision and an (e) increased awareness of literacy in the curriculum.

Book studies as change-agents. AC attributed the beginning of changes in the teaching of reading and writing to book study.

I think what really changed our building was…the professional reading clubs that we started to do. Because as more people started reading, more people started trying new things and that word kind of spread, and I think…the guided reading program, …that really came when we started reading Fountas and Pinnell and I think that professional reading has been a huge thing in our building…made a huge difference.
YB agreed…

I would have to agree that it (book study) was really a springboard…it helped a lot of people get their feet wet because they could do it low risk with the study group and really ask questions of each other and there were already people falling in the pitholes and having successes that they could attach to. Then it was easy for them to try things out and then come back to the group and say, ‘Here’s what I did. Here are my successes. Here are my challenges. What suggestions does everybody else have?’ …I really think the study groups were the springboard.

YB added that “It seemed…to make the new not so scary because you could chew on it and read about it and talk about it with your peers and then try it out, you know, instead of always have that new thing come and not having any support in trying it. You had the full support of your study group.” Later she shared that some of the best conversations come out of the study group. Sometimes they have nothing to do with the book you are reading because you trail off onto a tangent about literacy instruction and you just get to the meat of people’s frustrations. Then you work through those and their successes and everybody gleans something from it.

AC shared too that study groups “helped us set goals. If we knew where we were, like once people started trying things, we knew what we needed help in so we knew where we need to go after that.”

GP also shared about the experience with one whole staff book study, that on *Strategies That Work*.

…the whole building was reading it and then every month we focused on a strategy and that common language really helped us, and wow, the impact of it in the lunchroom…you were talking about how you’re doing it and that’s when we invited some of the teachers in to model lessons linked to that strategy and things started really clicking because now we had a common language, we had a little background knowledge, and then we were seeing it. …I think personally that really impacted me the most.
One of the most impressive things that came out of the book clubs was the involvement of paraprofessionals in the books clubs. This involvement came at their request. YB shared how it first happened.

When I started the first study group, they (the paraprofessionals) came to me and said, ‘Is there room for us?’ And of course we said, ‘Absolutely!’ I feel bad that it didn’t occur to me that they might like to be there and then we ended up with about as many paraprofessionals as we had staff. I think in the first one we had like 22 or 24 people…there were easily 8 or 10 paraprofessionals…

AL added that “because of the conversations they had at the book studies when they heard about the Orton Gillingham training, they wanted to be a part of that (too) because they are very much involved with our first graders…” The building worked with the district to make sure that they were included in that training.

Although is has not happened in all buildings, the buildings that have purchased the book for the entire staff reported, according to AC, that it went a long way in getting everyone on the same page.

*School-home literacy learning.* Prior to the establishment of the Literacy Mentor program, only one building had a building-wide take-home books nightly program. Since the establishment of the literacy mentor program, all buildings are now sending books home with students, along with reading logs for parents to note the reading activity of their child. One building in particular was certain 5 years ago that they could not send home books because they would not be returned. New books were purchased, the teachers were assured that lost books could be replaced with a small fund set up to replace books. That building began sending home books and to their surprise found out that most students will return books on a regular basis when it is part
of their nightly/daily routine. All buildings now have full-fledged take-home book programs.

*More intra-building communication.* EW credited the opening up of communication in her building to the literacy book studies.

I think that one of the main things that has sparked the literacy conversation in our building is the book clubs. Because I was amazed at how many people came and were doing it (the book study), across grade levels, and it really helped open up the communications about what was happening in the primary and what was happening in the upper grades and what needed to be done….what the kids needed to have to get to the older grades. So, it was just a nice way to communicate and share ideas.

Most buildings reported that over the past four years, there has been a gradual opening up of communications and perhaps the development of trust. Whereas mentors reported great difficulty in going into rooms when they started, they now reported fairly open access to most classrooms. AC put it best when she said, “It was hard at first to even get them …to have me in their classrooms. The first year that I did literacy mentoring, I put a sign-up sheet in the workroom and no one signed up. I had to go around and say, ‘Please, let me in your classroom!…’” She now reports that they ask her when she is coming.

LH commented on the opening of communications between buildings which cross-pollinates ideas. In her words, “the literacy mentor program does bring people together from every building and it’s kind of like you start these little fires in all these other buildings, and it gets to burning…”

*Resource sharing.* YP shared that in her building one of the biggest accomplishments of the literacy mentor program was coming up with the book room for the entire school to use. Prior to the program, “everybody had everything in
cupboards from money deposited here and money deposited there, and now it’s all together…Now the materials are available to (all teachers).”

Additionally, all buildings mentioned not only the organization of book rooms, but the additional collections of books that have been added to buildings over the past four years. A lot of financial support has come from the district, from OhioREADS grants, and from other grant sources to increase take-home book collections in classrooms, and to increase the building collection in the book room. All mentors added that the increase in books has had a huge impact on the literacy program. The original purchases were made due to focused teacher requests for books at more levels to better meet the needs of all students.

*Developing common goals/vision.* Through the literacy mentor program GP has noticed that,

…everyone has bought into the pieces of the puzzle and how they fit together. We’re seeing 5th grade teachers realizing the importance of guided reading in the first grade and first grade teachers realizing how/what the kindergarten teachers are doing to get them prepared for first grade…and a lot of thank you’s and pats on the back…and that realization that we’re all in this together. That 4th grade proficiency is no longer just put on the 4th grade teachers, and I think that the shared reading and the common goals and (all of that learning) has put us all on the same (page)…we’re all on board.

AR reported that as a result of the literacy mentor program, many in her building have realized that you don’t go in and close your own door, but that you realize that you have a vested interest in what everyone in your building is doing. Because we all do need to work together…to get to that common goal, everyone has to work together and so I can’t, not only want people to know what I’m doing, but I need to be interested in what other people are doing. What’s working for them and what’s not working for them and together coming up with some ways that we can change and make things better. So, it’s not just that I’m sharing…but
looking at what other people are doing…You have to take their ideas and work with them to make change happen.

LH shared about one recent experience in her building that showed just how far they have come with this common vision.

We don’t allow people to come in and tread on our time like we used to. I think we were always worried about being nice and letting so and so come in and do their presentation to our class and what would it be like if we said no….Just last week we had someone wanting to come in and we’d already had some program about a like subject and it needed to be tied to the standards, it needed to be tied to literacy, it needed to be tied to social studies before we would let them come in. And we ended up not having this program in our school.

*Increased awareness of literacy in the curriculum.* AL shared that the literacy mentors “have been definitely leaving an impact in our building…I think that a lot of the teachers that I’ve been working with have seen (evidence of that impact upon others) and they’ve been doing more and more in their (own) classrooms.”

EW reported that LP said she has been sharing “a lot more with her team teachers. And more information and talks about the books she is reading. So, she feels like she is sharing more information than she ever has before that she’s learned and passing it on.” This is gradually changing building culture.

All buildings reported that they have some sort of Literacy Committee/Council. Four buildings developed these groups as an outgrowth of the district literacy mentor program. Only one building had developed their Committee prior to the Literacy Mentor program. The ability of these committees to communicate and reflect and plan in each building has not yet reached their full potential. It has, however, given an organized voice to literacy in the building.
LH shared that the things that have happened in her building would not have happened without the literacy mentor program…at least not on the scale that it has.

According to her,

I think that in a school you always have people that you call the pioneers or the movers and shakers, and they are always keeping up with what’s new and embracing new things. And that person may have been doing it. But, to get more people linked on in grade levels above and below you, I think that’s the value of the literacy mentor program…is that we don’t have little pockets of new good things going on; we have larger…it’s spreading larger and larger…like ripples in a pond when you throw that rock in. It’s reaching farther and farther. I think we still have a little way to go,…but it’s definitely made a difference.

LH shared that in her opinion the literacy mentor program has encouraged and increased participation in the summer SIRI sessions. Each year more and more teachers have become interested and have participated in these state-run, professional development sessions. She also shared that in her building,

I think you can see people embrace literacy. People are thinking when they buy books, oh, I need to fill this gap because I have so many students that are reading on this level and I don’t have enough reading material on that level. I think…another thing that I have noticed that I didn’t before is that teachers that really didn’t care about having a good classroom library in their own classrooms now have them and I think that’s very, very important. If we’re going to ask kids to be reading all the time, we need huge collections of books not only in our libraries, but also in the individual self-contained classrooms. And, I think that’s one visible, tangible thing that I can see as an outgrowth of the literacy mentor program.

When all mentors were asked if these changes in mentor and teacher practices and attitudes, changes in student work, achievement, behavior, and attitudes, or changes in the buildings as a whole would have occurred without the literacy mentor program, their answers were 100%….No, they would either not have occurred at all, or the change rate would have been much, much slower. They gave credit to the literacy mentor program for accomplishing as much as they have within the past 4 years.
The Findings: Teachers

Research Question #2: What is the perceived impact of the literacy mentor program?

Changes in Teacher Practices and Attitudes

Data analysis revealed two broad categories of change as a result of the literacy mentor program. Specifically they (a) implemented new instructional practices and (b) enjoyed better communication with colleagues. The most changes in instruction related to guided reading, but teachers also reported improved instruction in writing, and more efficient use of instructional resources.

New instructional practices: Guided reading. YL shared the following regarding the changes he has made in his teaching.

I think that 4 years ago when I first started teaching second grade, all the other second grade teachers...we were all following the reading series pretty much and then supplementing here and there with other materials. And now, we have the complete and total opposite. Most of the teachers are doing guided reading and rarely using the reading series at all... I also think there’s a bigger awareness of the amount of time people are using for reading, whereas you might just have met with your reading group for 10 minutes 4-5 years ago and thought that was your reading for the day, and now we’ve found all kinds of other ways to incorporate reading into the day because of the literacy mentors...you know, having other books to read, different reading related things that students can do while they are not in the reading group so that they are not doing just busy-work type worksheets kinds of activities. That’s kind of the biggest change.

ED shared that in her building, the writing of a Foundations Grant to get extra copies of books helped begin the change. As she said, “not having walls at (our school), other teachers were hearing what everyone else was doing and that kind of sparked an interest and you saw them go more to a shelf and grab those books for their instructionally leveled groups rather than doing whole group instruction.”
YC questioned whether it was the literacy mentor program or the introduction of the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) that inspired the shift from whole group instruction to better individualization of reading instruction through leveled guided reading groups. Whatever the impetus, she shared that at the primary level in her building,

You looked around to see what was working and...our literacy mentor was a good model for ways to individualize your instruction and try different things for large groups and small group instruction. But I really do think that the DRA did something with the literacy mentors also…I think it was just a combination of those two.

NI shared about her building’s shift in teaching reading. She credits the change to having read the Richard Allington book.

...even in 6th grade I taught reading groups everyday (back a number of years ago) and then it went to this whole group thing and we’ve brought it back under the focus of leveled readers because of the Richard Allington book. The time involved to teach reading, that the research says children do better reading leveled books and teaching at their instructional level....all that sort of thing...

NI shared the following thoughts about the reading program in her school.

I think some of our teachers were very reluctant, maybe not reluctant, but a little afraid to try guided reading and to use the leveled readers because they were used to having that textbook right there. I think it really caught on so well in first and second grade, and the children are moving so quickly that the people who were reluctant had to jump on the bandwagon ...

UK shared that she did change some of her teaching techniques because a literacy mentor did model things for her. During summer school the literacy mentor came into her room and modeled new strategies.

...that was very, very beneficial because I could use it there (in summer school) and then take it back to my classroom (in the fall)...that helped me a lot, that summer that she came in and modeled several strategies. And I thought, well, I can do this! This I can do!...I think that’s a key thing to get
people in modeling things for you because just like children, when we model for them, then they can do and when someone models for us, then we can do it too...!

CB shared that she has seen a big change occur in her reading instruction as a result of the changes led by the literacy mentors

A big change for …me was the guided reading lesson, especially since we have two aides for a half an hour do a small reading group, it was very important that they know exactly what to do. So, we have a map of what to cover in guided reading each day. Everyone was basically doing, covering the same thing…doing the predictions, taking the picture walk, and going over the vocabulary, and on another day, working with words and changing the ending or changing the beginning of the work, and that was extremely important and extremely helpful to have that as a base.

YL was very frank in his analysis of the change he has made in working with struggling readers. His growth in this area is probably reflective of many others throughout the district.

I think that when I first started teaching second grade (4 years ago), when I had those struggling readers, I had no idea what to do, and it was like a crap shoot of what I was going to do to see if I could help them, and now I feel, after having guided reading and using the DRA and doing Dibels, that at the beginning of the year, I can look at their information even before I meet them and I already know exactly what I am going to do for them when they come in, and after that initial small reading group, you know you just are picking up on all those things right away that four years ago I know that I would never have picked up on, and then just keeping notes for yourself and just making sure that those are the things that you are working on with them, and I look at that totally differently than I did four years ago. I think that’s the biggest thing! And I can see that it’s working too because when I look back at where my low readers were, they were continually low, continually low, continually low, and now I know that I can look and see the growth that they are making and I know that’s because of all the new things that we’ve put into place…(mostly through the literacy mentor program).

When asked about why the changes occurred, YL attributed it all to the work of his literacy mentors (both district and grade-level building) and the professional development opportunities that had been led by the mentors.
CB shared about her change in working with struggling readers, all through the growth she and her colleagues have made through the professional development work of the literacy mentors. Specifically much of this change in intervention work came through the book study on Richard Allington’s book.

Another change was when our kids had intervention four years ago, that was their small group reading time. And the rest of the time when they came back into the classroom, they had shared reading with the whole group. Now we do shared reading, they do the intervention or the extra help, and they get another guided reading in my class, so they are getting the triple and that’s what they need. I find that that has made a huge difference. Instead of substituting my time for the intervention teacher’s time, this child is getting the intervention teacher and getting me and getting the whole class reading. Very effective!

She also shared about the change she’s made from working in large group to working in small groups. “I see more, looking at how I was teaching reading 4 years ago and how I am now, working with the small groups and teaching making words…To meet in a small group, it’s very do-able, where with a whole class, it’s not. And so, working with words has been incredible for my students in small groups.”

RP reported on a fairly radical change in her building. Prior to the literacy mentor program, only a few intermediate teachers taught language arts. This system tended to limit and compartmentalize literacy. As she shared,

I think the major change in my building has been that people teach their own reading in their language arts. That was something that was not occurring…because of the direction of our principal and of our mentors (who used the Richard Allington study group as a springboard for this change, all teachers now teach their own reading in order to increase the amount of time spent with reading activities)...that’s what the major change in our building (was)...and we’re still changing and we’re still evolving into a literature rich school

NW shared that her instruction as well as her colleagues’ has changed.
…the Book Baggies went home, the importance of the read alouds. I see a lot less worksheets. You know, it used to be like tons of worksheets, and especially in the primary grades, and now really not. More quiet reading time, just right books being so important, and more books...just books, lots of books at their level in their hands. I think that those are really important things that I’m seeing a lot more of and doing a lot more of than I did years before.

RP reported that

We have talked more about genres and different types of books to get children more motivated into that and I think that that is something our mentors have helped to motivate our readers and also to have them at their level. That’s something that really wasn’t thought about until we started talking about DRA’s and the mentors came in through the district and how important that was.

CB shared about the changes she personally has made in her teaching.

I might have done guided reading before, but I didn’t focus much on strategies that have come to us through this program and that we’ve been made aware of. I just think that I have more at my fingertips than I had before. I feel much more comfortable with my reading program, plus I have so many people that I can go to ask and get wonderful suggestions and ideas, materials, and so forth. I think it’s a comfort level and I think the building...I’m really sure our building feels the same way.

RP shared about the change in her reading instruction.

I do a lot more with smaller groups. You know, getting them leveled books where they need to be reading. I still do maybe a whole group where there’s a skill involved and using the basal, but then having literature on their level where we can discuss about guided reading questions and, you know, response journals, and things of that nature.

NW continued,

…one thing that I’ve noticed is that my groups change a lot more now than they used to be. I used to have groups that pretty much stayed the same. On occasion you would move a child to a different group, but not like I do now. My groups are changing, depending upon the purpose of my lesson, so you might have certain groups that are the same reading level, and depending upon the lesson the groups just change, depending on what you are teaching...So I would say that my groups are forever changing. I think I know my students better...their individual reading level and what they can
and cannot do. I feel like I know that much better now than I did four years ago. I have better insights and I think it’s because of all that we now know about literacy, which has come down from the literacy mentor. I am a better teacher.

Teaching writing. UK shared that she had made changes in her teaching of writing. She shared that

how I teach writing in the classroom has changed and increased, so they are writing more about what they are reading and like I said there are writing conferences so that you are encouraging them to write about their own reading at their own levels…it just kind of all fits together.

AN also talked about the change in her writing instruction and the impact that a common vocabulary has played in this writing.

I found that incorporating the writing along with it (reading instruction) now more than we used to has made a big difference for the kids as well. I think that by the 3rd grade level, we’ve found that with the writing now they are talking about it, and they are writing about it in their journals, and they really actually understand and they can explain it to someone else and they can continue it on through that…so it’s made a big difference by the common vocabulary, being able to write and talk and share and present with each other. I mean they are thrilled to get up and show off to each other and read to each other and talk with each other and they’re all making all kinds of connections, and they’ve got the signs and the language, and they are…excited about it. It makes a big difference and it has changed.

HR shared about the change in her building in teaching students how to write short and extended answer responses.

I look at our writing, the Better Answers and the answer sandwich. Posters were made for all the rooms to put up and have them right there so the other teachers could see that. I was amazed how the children write no matter the grade level; they’re using the answer sandwich.

ED shared about the increase in her use of modeling. “I do a lot of modeling using the language and using the terminology with kids and just being in awe that they
can learn and remember those words and that they use those words more as I use them…thinking aloud and modeling are just invaluable.”

*Improved resource use.* Most teachers talked about the collection of leveled resources into book rooms. YC stated that the literacy mentors did “lead us and help us to organize everything.” UK also stated that her literacy mentors started the leveled library because you had to have books….we all had sets of books, but none of it was (organized)…and so by ordering books and knowing what books to order and building up your library, it makes it possible to do the program…and you can’t do the program without books. Once you know their DRA level, you still have to have the books to use to teach them, and I know classroom teachers have leveled books in their own rooms so that kids are always able to read at their level and it’s a fantastic thing to see.

The leveled book libraries enabled many teachers to get books to send home (“Baggy Books” going home at your independent reading level every night). As NW said,

…you need lots of books to be able to do that. So, the ordering, the organizing, helping us get organized…how do you go about distributing the books and leveling them…you know just teaching us how to really manage it and how to have children reading at the right levels for them…I feel like I’ve learned a lot from the literacy mentor, like how to do that…and then when I learn it, I pass it down and that makes my kids better readers because I’m a better teacher.

NW mentioned that along with the leveled book library for student books, “there is also the professional library. I know a lot of the literacy mentor’s personal books are there. They are where they are easy to get and you can just take them and use them. You know, if you need it, just borrow it. You know, it’s there.”
Changes in Student Work and Achievement

Teachers identified achievement indicators, such as test scores and growth on a range of grade-level assessments, and improved writing skills most frequently as evidence of student growth. Improvement in discussion skills and attitudes towards reading were also mentioned.

NI shared that she has seen “such a difference…I can’t even tell you from when in 1994 to now…the children just discuss everything. (LS) planted the seeds and got us started, reading the literature, bringing in the DRA and everyone seeing that it works and jumping on it.”

UK shared that she has seen a huge change in her students. “I think just starting this whole movement and having a book a night…I didn’t always do that, but since we’ve started that, I’ve seen a huge change in reading (achievement and volume of reading) with the children that I teach.

Achievement indicators. YK said, “I think also the fact that our test scores have increasingly moved up. I think that’s been a direct relation with the literacy mentors being put into our building.” NS shared about the growth in her students, evidenced through the Dibels assessments.

The Dibels growth…to actually see that charted. I know that perhaps some of the progress was there before, but to see that growth and have that explained through the program, I feel it’s evident of student achievement right there…I know in my classroom, every one of my students has made significant growth. HR shared that she also saw student achievement rising.

I see a change…I see a change in the children that are coming to me at the 5th grade level because this program has been in place and it has been each year that the children are more involved in reading at night…they’re supposed to have so many minutes at night during the week…and they know,
say making connections….they draw all their thoughts and they are thinking
more about their reading than they have ever done before and I think that is
attributed to the literacy mentor program because teachers are doing these
things in their rooms and so the children are doing it year after year.”

ED also talked about the student achievement in her students.

I would say definitely there’s been considerable student achievement as a
result of, I think, just making the students more accountable and having them
keep track of their reading growth using our bar graphs or line graphs or
whatever. I have kids that come in well below grade level and they come out
at grade level, so whatever we’re doing, it’s working...test scores that came
back in the spring were excellent, so…

YL shared,

I think that one of the biggest changes that I have noticed about the students
coming into second grade is where they are at in their reading abilities.
When you can look at your class list and see that your lowest readers are at
grade level for the end of first grade and that’s your lowest readers, that’s
very exciting. And then to see that they are leaving at above where we would
want them to be is wonderful too.

*Improved writing skills.* UK shared the changes she has noticed in writing

skills.

I think that’s true for writing skills too (increased in achievement), because
kids coming from first grade are coming with very good writing skills. They
get it. They know what a sentence is and they know the punctuation,
capitalization and…not all of them, but I’ve seen a degree of improvement in
that and it’s basically been within the past four years.

HR said that,

…I think we’re having the kids go much deeper into their reading than
before….they are thinking about their reading…I’ve seen a big change in the
writing because the students are writing, like I said earlier we talked about
*Better Answers* and the answer sandwich. And …so rather than just this one
short answer, they are giving us more…the writing has gotten much better.

RP agreed and shared that her students are now “able to put their thoughts
down on paper…They are now actually writing out their thoughts in complete
sentences and maybe it didn’t start that way, but through the editing process,…they can put together paragraphs wonderfully…”

Very few teachers talked about any change in student behavior or attitudes.

Comments that were made focused on more positive attitudes and high-quality discussion or conversation. HR commented:

I’m thinking of not only their work, but their attitudes…their attitudes towards reading. I’m just really amazed at the fact that they always have a book to read. It’s not an issue anymore. The independent reading book is part of the day. They always have a book and they have a good book. And the discussion….that’s the amazing part too. I sit back sometimes and I can’t believe the way the children are discussing a book…whether it be a literature study or just a read aloud. They’re talking about making predictions of what’s going to happen next, and so forth. They just…their thinking has just become so much more fine-tuned and I’m amazed.

NW continued,

I would say along those lines that it’s really interesting when they are helping each other and the conversations that you hear and you know that they truly have learned some of the things. And if you can teach and help someone else, then you have truly mastered it yourself…like reading strategies when they are helping a friend and they come to a word that they don’t know. And I’ll say, ‘Help them in a teacher way.’ And then it’s interesting…you know you hear it back and so you’re talking about have you seen changes…you can hear it in their conversations.

RP agreed, “I agree with you about that…the community of readers. You know they really want to be able to recommend books to each other. They organized it….they got it all up there and then they were really excited about it. They owned it.”

Changes in the Building as a Whole

In this area, teachers found that there were a number of changes in their buildings as a whole. Better communication in the building, the development of a
common vocabulary for students and parents, improved school-home communication, the acceleration of literacy instructional change were most frequently mentioned.

_Better communication._ YK talked about the gradual establishment of a professional camaraderie in her building.

…when I first started teaching, I almost felt that I was this little entity that it was me against everybody else. It was a very competitive situation and now I don’t have any problems sharing my materials, sharing ideas… I think we’ve just evolved into a real…I’m not threatened by telling somebody that I’m really having trouble with this here, I don’t know what to do with this kid…and then they can come up with an idea to fix that.

NS talked about the changes in the building’s conversations about teaching reading and writing. “I think (they) have really developed and changed. Talking about what strategies and what levels texts are you using and what ways can we combine classes to bring our levels together….I think all of that has increased our professional dialogue and enhanced the teaching of the staff as a whole.

YK shared that

we’ve become very data driven. But in that respect in a good sense because now we are able to analyze our students’ growth or lack of growth and then go back and redo what we need to do…The mentors have helped that (data) issue and they are continuing to help that issue where they just met this morning and worked out a plan for next year on how we’re going to approach the five lowest (readers) in every classroom.

_Common vocabulary._ ED shared that common vocabulary had become a very important issue in her building.

I would say …about terminology…whenever they come up the grade levels now, they’ve been introduced as early as kindergarten now and when they get up to us, they are familiar with it now and their vocabulary just keeps growing and growing.

NW also talked about the common vocabulary in her building.
Just the terminology, you know...the words *schema, background knowledge*...I’ve had first graders telling me schema and background knowledge...and you know to hear them say that, it’s just wonderful. But I think the language has been passed from the literacy mentors to us and then to the children and it’s consistent in the building and at grade levels.

HR commented on more open teacher communication:

I think in that way there is so much more of an exchange...a verbal exchange between teachers. It’s not so much of close your door and do your own thing...it’s a much more open, sharing experience as YK said....I think (I’d attribute it) to a multitude of things, but I think mostly to the literacy mentors because they have that information and they are your peers and they are giving that information out and you’re all thinking the same way, so you are using, like I said before, using the same ideas and focus...it really helps.

*School-home communication.* NI and YL shared about the changes that have occurred in parent thinking and response since the inception of the literacy mentor program. NI talked about the influence of the research and quotations in the Richard Allington book that were shared with parents. Based on his (Allington’s) statistics about the more a child reads, the faster they will move up, that (an) increase of 5 minutes a day sustained silent reading showed a month’s growth on a standardized test. I think all that made a big difference in our school. We started the book logs where the kids could read at night and in the summer, a lot of us send home things over break, over Christmas break and spring break...reading type things. I think that had a huge impact on our program.

YL continued with the impact that was eventually made upon parents.

And I think that along with that summer reading...I think when we first started doing that we would have parents say, ‘Oh, we don’t read over vacations!’ or ‘We didn’t think about doing that.’ And now I never hear that. I’d be shocked if I heard a parent say that they weren’t going to read over break or something like that. But at first when we started it, we would get things like that. Over the summer there are probably still kids who don’t read, but you don’t get that now like we first got it...That’s almost like a climate change...And it’s just become so engrained. You know one night I said, ‘O.K. it’s IOWA’s and CoGATS so you don’t need to do your reading logs tonight. You can have the night off.’ And I got like 4 or 5 notes...Billy said he doesn’t have to do his reading log, but I didn’t believe him so I made him read for 20 minutes.
UK continued sharing about parent changes. Prior to the literacy mentor program, parents would complain that their children needed harder books to read...there was a real push to have children move into harder and harder books. Backed by research coming through the literacy mentor program, teachers have shared with parents the great importance about reading just-right books, about enjoying reading because the book is on your independent level. Armed with the research, teachers throughout the school gave parents this important message. Now, as UK reports,

When you see their child go from a level 10 to a level 24 in a year, then you say, “Before they were reading just easy books, and now look at their reading level!” That’s because they’ve been reading books at just their right reading level. And, this really works! So...I think they (the parents) are starting to get it. It’s O.K. to be easy and to have it be fun and enjoyable and not torture for everyone.

NI added one additional point. Through the literacy mentor program, she has come to understand the importance of reading for pleasure. She continually tells students and parents now that “You should be reading a book that you love and that you want to find out what happens. If this is like homework, you’re not doing it right.”

In previous years, many students were reading at night because they had to for a grade. Now however, there’s much more reading for pure enjoyment.

*Accelerating literacy instructional change.* When asked about whether or not the changes would have happened without the literacy mentor program, all teachers said that they think the changes would not have happened without them. Only one teacher admitted the changes might have taken place, but in a different, slower way.
UK shared, “I don’t think it would have happened without them. You needed someone to lead the way and to get it organized and to get it started. And, I don’t think it would have happened at (our school) without our literacy mentor.”

AN stated that she thought the literacy mentor program has been very influential…And I know that unless you have someone model it (a new way) for you in a lot of cases, people would not have done it at all. They would have just chosen to go on doing what they’ve always done, but the fact that someone was enthusiastic and came in and was doing the different activities and that it does work, a lot of people did change their mind and decided to give it a try too.

NS shared that many of the changes she has made in her teaching of reading and writing…

have come from the literacy mentors, but I also think in our building in particular, that a lot of those ideas are clustered at the grade levels where those literacy mentors are…(where) there’s probably the most communication….I see it clustered more around areas where there is that continual dialogue…”

She also related how she and her colleagues took advantage of a visitation to another building’s literacy mentor’s classroom where they could watch and ask questions about some of the new strategies and the impact of that teaching style on the classroom. For example, they wished to know,

…how do you do all this and gather those grades and when you need to put a letter grade on the report card, you know, how do you incorporate all that and the Dibels and the DRA, and so that was very well received by us and luckily we had the literacy mentor there with…

NR talked about actually planning with the literacy mentor in her building. Although they are from different grade levels, they’ve found it important to sit and compare what happens in each grade level for the same focus area. They are most
concerned to look for growth between the two grade levels, to make sure they are not just duplicating lessons. She reports that

working together now…we have a goal and it’s…helped me to become more aware now of what they’re working for… We’ve done a lot of just teaming, I guess, to try to make sure that we instruct with the same terminology… We’ve just been working on that together so that we use it equally as well.

YC wanted to make note that the literacy mentor program was much more effective several years ago when there was funding available for a small stipend, but mostly for substitutes to provide release time. As she stated,

I think the literacy mentors were more effective earlier in the program than what they have been in the past year, because of the lack of funding, so it would be nice if they could get that funding back in. You can hear the difference in the kinds of changes that were made a few years ago and those that were made this past year.

UK was also quite clear about the need for mentors.

I think we should keep literacy mentors. I think we need them with all of the changes that are taking place. I think that buildings would not do as well. I don’t think teachers would do as well if they don’t have support. I think it’s invaluable. I’ve been there a long time. You need all the help you can get. There’s a lot. We’re getting more and more to do and sometimes you just need someone who’s at least got the knowledge and they can give you little tips so that you can do a lot of these things that are mandatory. The changes are mandatory. You don’t have an option. You can’t go in your room and close the door. You have to be out there learning the new techniques and doing the strategies.

CB added,

It (the literacy mentor program) is support and it is also motivation. When the mentor is excited about something, I think that’s going to be much easier to spread the word than if…they have …the motivation so that the other teachers can get motivated and want to hop on board.

UK also added,

I think (the mentors) introduce things to help us put it into use in our classroom and you know, sometimes you think, this isn’t working, but you
go to them, and they say, ‘You know, why don’t you try this because that’s what I did and it really helped this little groups of kids’…so you have a place to go. Sometimes you’ll go to a fellow teacher, but sometimes they don’t know either, so if you have a literacy mentor, you can all get on board, and I think that’s been helpful. I mean, just to know that there is someone that you can go to and they don’t make you feel too bad…you know what I mean, they say, ‘Oh no, I’ve had that problem’ and it’s nice…it’s a nice thing.

NW also shared that,

I think we would have seen some of the changes, but I don’t think as drastic…We’ve seen a lot of changes and I think a lot more happened than we would have seen if we did not have the literacy mentors. Our literacy mentor thrives on change and new things and I think a lot of people don’t. She kind of pushes people, encourages you, kind of pulls you along to try something new because I don’t think that’s been a lot of people’s nature. It is in hers and I see a lot of change.

YK stated that she couldn’t “imagine the changes occurring the way they did. I think that having the mentors were like our guiding force. They pulled us along.” Her colleague HR added, “I think that because the literacy mentors have worked at our district level and you have all the statistics and all the background that this works, and then that’s brought down to the building level…that’s very, very effective!

NW gave her own personal insights to her reaction to change.

I think some of the changes would have occurred, but at a much slower rate and I think in a less excited way. I’ve really had fun trying new things and I’m not afraid to try new things and that’s not really my personality, but I think because of the support of the literacy mentor and the encouragement, I think it has changed me and like I said, I’ll try new things now and I think it’s fun that I’m excited about it. I just don’t think I would have been that way without somebody that I personally knew…supporting me along the way.

YK continued, “I think it has changed from a teacher-driven instruction to what’s best for the student instruction and I think we’re all in it for the kids and improving student scores…not just our own, but to help for the better of the entire building.”
HR concluded her statements by saying, “I just think it’s been a beneficial program. It has added substance to the reading program. It’s added credibility to what we were doing. I think it’s monumental for (us) that we’ve gone in that direction! It’s the right direction!”

The Findings: Principals

Research Question #2: What is the perceived impact of the literacy mentor program?

Changes in Principal Literacy Knowledge and Awareness

Data analysis showed that the principals believed they had grown in their knowledge and awareness of literacy issues. They all claimed that the literacy mentor program had impacted them in very personal ways.

BG shared that,

…I would say it was such a huge initiative begun by the literacy mentors that it was…I needed to get on board. I was always a math person and interested in math and science, and… it’s made me change my focus of things in the building. It was kind of an either I join the group or…you just get left in the wayside. And so, it forced me to be paying attention to some things that maybe weren’t always my top priority.

EK shared a similar experience.

I was also forced to join the band wagon and just to feel like you were in the know. But, I think it even goes a step further in that it enables that instructional leadership concept of the principals, spread thin as we are, it is hard to always take that role. But, you can be an instructional leader by encouraging and enabling….and when you have literacy mentors there with the expertise, it’s almost like being a cheerleader and you’re endorsing what they are doing, they are in turn liking that…and so you kind of feed off of each other, which would be much harder to do if I had to be the literacy expert on top of just being the cheerleader.

NM added,
I would have to say some of the same things. It’s sort of like brain sharing. I don’t have the time all the time to go through and read all the professional journals or the wonderful books that my literacy mentors do, but I’ll go in and pick their brains...or I’ll say, O.K. tell me about this. I don’t understand this and they’ll explain it. Or sometimes, I’m going in a wrong direction and over the course of the years that we’ve been together...these people have been working behind the scenes, they are confident enough to just come in and say...’what are you....no, no, no...that’s not important. This is what’s important.’ So, that’s good...

Later she added,

How do you sift through the things that you know are important, I don’t know. That’s been the role of the literacy mentor...to endorse the things that come down the line. And in literacy, there’s still a lot happening, I think.

YW said that she believed the literacy mentor program “has been very valuable for the mentors...and for me personally to kind of raise my level of understanding and raise the bar a little bit in terms of my involvement with literacy instruction.”

NM commented on her appreciation of the information provided by the literacy mentor program and additionally that there has been a common focus in the district.

I really feel like that’s (the power point presentations on fluency) have been a really good focus...to know that everywhere in the district that conversation has been taking place and to have that information at our fingertips and there is something so powerful in commonality...to have that common language in a building.

She also commented about the “coffeeshop...called...Strategies that Perk” and the “Literacy Lunches” that she helped to organize with her literacy mentors. Those types of activities are direct results of the literacy mentor program and the increase in interest in literacy activities.

EH shared that he’s “been able to either answer things that I’ve learned from my literacy mentors or direct staff to our literacy mentors.” YW shared that
personally…my knowledge base has increased tremendously over the last few years. And, I think in large part due to the fact that having literacy mentors in the building has kind of raised the bar for all of us, even me…I think just being able to have an intelligent discussion with staff about one of the topical issues in literacy requires you to expand your knowledge base…and so I’m not where I would like to be, but I think that definitely, just having those conversations on a regular basis, whether it is with literacy mentors or with staff in general, has certainly required me and influenced me to read a lot more about literacy instruction, become a lot more knowledgeable about the research, and just kind of raise my level of expectations for myself, so I think it’s been a positive thing.

EH used a scale of 1 to 10 to categorize himself.

…three years ago, I was probably at a 4 and I would say I am currently at about an 8. I still have some work to do. How I got to an 8 is probably driven out of fear alone. And, that had to do with my literacy mentors who would always come back and have questions for me, tell me about things they had experienced or tried, and I did need to be able to respond to it. I tried to stay one step ahead of them or at least one step behind them…so I would say it has forced me to read more, call on our literacy coordinator more, and just having discussions…it did force me to learn.

Changes in Teacher Practices and Attitudes

Data analysis found that all principals believed their teachers were making more effective use of professional texts and resources. In addition, they had become more confident about developing intervention for specific student needs. More collegiality and better peer communication were also mentioned.

BG expressed her thoughts about changes she has observed in her teachers and her building.

I think at our building, those changes have been astronomical. I mean, we have made huge changes in the teaching of reading. Part of it is due to the information supplied by literacy mentors, part of it is due to the focus from Department of Instruction. I mean the fact that this school district has an Early Literacy Coordinator type person, makes it important. It’s putting it out front and saying that it’s important. …I think all of our changes have been HUGE, especially in the primary.
NM talked a lot about getting the whole staff focused in the same direction.

I think that purchasing books for the whole staff...we purchased Better Answers for the whole staff. We inserviced the whole staff last year on how to do that. We gave examples of what second graders did with that book and it blew everybody in 5th grade away. And, that led the way....OK, you’ve got to get on board. You didn’t ask for the poster, you got the poster. And you were told that I was coming in to see something that you were doing with the Strategies That Work. I think that purchasing Fountas and Pinnell books for the whole staff....there’s been a lot of commonality.

EK also felt that there were numerous changes in his building.

I see a lot of differences from the number of books available, resources, conversations that are occurring at grade level meetings, curriculum hours, inservice times....There is a, it’s hard to measure, but the staff as a whole buy into it much better. I don’t see the resistance when new ideas are brought up...greater congeniality among the staff, and when an initiative or activity comes up...it’s a bandwagon that most people have jumped on, rather than years ago (when just a few people tried things).

NM shared that her teachers are gradually taking more responsibility for intervention in their classrooms. “I think teachers are getting more creative with the interventions.” She added, however, that there is still much she would like to see accomplished in this area.

BG reported that when walking through her building, she often sees “some sort of research book that has something to do with literacy...I mean it’s more than just going through and seeing the...cutesy idea magazine open...” NM also talked about the teachers looking at their classrooms as labs (especially her literacy mentors)...”where they are talking about these high-brow things that they are reading about and then they go back to their classrooms where they try them out...”

EH said that another benefit of the program is that for those who were interested in learning more about best practice, the literacy mentor program had been
highly successful. The teachers “have known who they can go to, who the experts are in the building, so that’s been very beneficial for staff and students and for me as well.”

YW had two things that came to her mind when asked about the changes in her building.

One is that virtually everyone in...on our staff is doing some sort of guided reading and progress monitoring of their students’ reading levels, whether it’s DRA, but even at the upper levels, using Dibels to monitor fluency, and I think the other thing that I’ve seen is...a lot more emphasis on bringing non-fiction literature into the classroom and working on those information pieces to help students learn to read for information and also related to taking achievement tests. I think probably there is a lot more individualization going on with reading. I think teachers are able to talk more about individual students and how they are doing and I think the amount of time that teachers are devoting to teaching reading has increased at all levels.

EH talked about the changes he has seen in his building.

I think that the biggest change I’ve seen the past three years has been probably in the first grade and that would be with the Bucket Brigade program that we are doing. That has teacher aides, media specialists, speech teachers, gifted teachers working with small groups of students for reading and that’s part of their reading program. They are doing the guided reading...each teacher is assigned three to four other adults and they work with anywhere from 5-6 students 4 days a week and the fifth day is used for planning. I think it’s been successful just looking at how our first grade DRA levels have gone up...the growth that students have had from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. So, that’s success with that.

YW talked about the changes in teacher practices in her building.

I think one of the most significant things, in addition to continuing to expand the guided reading practice in our building...the other practice that I think has increased tremendously is the use of the Dibels monitoring for fluency and also, in the primary grades, for just checking progress on phonemic awareness and all of that. So, I think those two things probably...are the two big things that I see as changes in practice and with an impact on student achievement.

EH said,
…I think if you walked into any classroom, everyone is set up as a reading room now, and I don’t believe that was the case prior to the literacy mentor program. Teachers are having discussions with students about…All the teachers are having discussions with the students about what they’re reading. Again, we have all our students taking home a book every night with the expectation that they will read every night. That’s been happening for the last three years and that came out of our literacy mentors working with our building…

Changes in Student Work and Achievement

Data analysis identified two major areas: (a) achievement measures, as indicated by test scores and informal assessment and (b) metacognitive growth by the student. Also mentioned was that students were reading more and showing a new interest in reading.

Achievement measures. EK reported that his building’s reading achievement and proficiency scores are steadily climbing…intuitively when I go in and see these reading groups and when I hear what teachers are talking about and what I see the improvement in incorporation of new ideas in instruction, I’d say intuitively that this is all well and good…

NM shared about the students who are now tracking their own progress:

There was a little tutoring student and (the teacher) had him pull out his folder for intervention that she had created with him. And he was showing me his cold read on Monday and how he went up on his hot read by Friday. And then, the teacher went on to correlate that with…he’s gone up 4 levels since he came into her class….So, that’s powerful…if this is…like good examples…like I talked about these literacy mentors having an impact…

EK shared a story about a first grade student and that student’s increased awareness about characters in a play. EK reports that he would not have seen this type of response from a first grader in previous years.

A very average first grade student was waiting in the bus line and we had just seen two productions done by our drama club and the little person look up at me and said, ‘Those were neat. But, you know the main characters in both plays were girls.’ Now I was impressed that this little person in first grade,
who was just a very average student could say to me…’the main character in both of those plays…’ and to make that comparison…

BG reported that students are choosing to read more. “Are students choosing to read more? Yes! That’s for certain. They are reading more. And, so over time, we’ll expect achievement to grow.”

*Changes in the Building as a Whole*

Data analysis indicated that principals saw that changing the instructional “culture” of literacy was perceived as the greatest building impact of the literacy mentors.

BG talked about the impact of the literacy mentor program in her building. She shared her thoughts about the largest impact.

I think that the largest impact has been that first initial effort to label our collections of literature in the building. Not only in the media center, but in all classrooms and so it became important for students to be reading materials that was appropriate for them rather than everyone reading the same basal reader or even the same trade books. It was a culture change, for people to realize that students not only in school, but in their take-home books, their baggie books, that they were taking home books that were just right for them.

EK talked more about the credibility that the literacy mentor program brought to his building.

I think those literacy mentors, they bring credibility to staff…that this is the right thing to do. So often as administrators, maybe it’s a new textbook adoption or a new way to instruct or test and sometimes staff just look at us as if…well, it’s just something new that we have to do. But our literacy mentors have always been the back-up guiding voice, supporting voice, or often times, the leading voice that this is the right thing to do for kids. And we should do this for kids. So, I think the mentors at my building, and I’ve been fortunate to have the same two people who are probably the most dedicated, the most hard-working, superb teachers that just always bring that sense of reason…We should be doing this for kids if we want to help them read. This is a good thing to do…So, culturally they bring this aura with them that really supports me as a principal, I think.
NM talked about a total cultural change, “…I think there is really a total cultural change….there is this culture where we are utilizing every living, breathing human being in the building to accomplish what we need to do for kids. And, I think this is a huge change…”

EK talked about a change he has seen in the sharing of ideas in this building. His teachers now
don’t just want to share these techniques with my kids…I want to share them with the rest of the staff. And they feel they have an obligation to share them with the rest of the staff and they (many of the teachers) have really stepped out in a lot of areas….And I wouldn’t have seen that seven/eight years ago.

BG shared that “I think it’s important that we have knowledgeable people like literacy mentors who can help get that information where it can be of the most benefit.”

YW shared that she felt you need to look at the cumulative effect of having the literacy mentor program.

I think it’s the cumulative effect that has raised the expectation of all teachers that, ‘Hey! We should be doing this. We should be progress monitoring. We should be instructing kids even at the upper grade levels on some specific skills. We should be knowing what levels students are reading on and giving them material at their correct level. I think that is the cumulative effect of the literacy mentor program…slowly, but surely everyone is getting on board.

EH also shared about the gradual impact literacy mentors have had in his building.

I do believe that there have been changes in our building because of what the literacy mentors have done. Probably a lot of the changes come more indirectly than directly. I think a lot of it has to do with lunchroom conversations and general discussions about what they have heard and what they have tried. And, again, what they have read and what they have discussed in their groups, and I think that once you dangle that carrot in front of other people, people do get interested and start to ask a lot of questions and that’s been one really good thing that’s come out of our building that I’ve
seen on a daily basis, just the discussions that people have and the different things that people are willing to try.

Cross Case Analysis: Research Question #2

An analysis of the responses from all three cases (mentors, teachers, and principals) to research question #2 provided some very interesting insights. Most noticeable was the overwhelming sense that there had been drastic changes in the way teachers taught. New instructional practices were cited by both mentors and teachers. Principals mentioned those practices, but not as frequently as the mentors and teachers did. A second noticeable change mentioned by all three groups was the increase in achievement by students, the growth they noticed in student metacognitive thought processes, and the increased motivation to read. A third change mentioned by all three groups was the infusion of academic learning into their building culture. They cited the impact this rigorous academic learning had upon themselves as educators and on their buildings.

When mentors cited changes, they noted changes in their own practice, changes in other teachers’ practices, changes in student work and achievement, and changes in their buildings. In discussing their own changes in practices, the most frequently mentioned were the following changes. Mentors talked about staying current on professional topics and the impact that had on their own instructional practices. They talked about feeling a deep obligation to stay on top of new practices, trying new things in their classrooms. They also mentioned their increased professional confidence, their increased communication and collaboration with colleagues, and their own growing sense of personal fulfillment and growth. Teachers and principals rolled their
comments about changes in mentors’ teaching practices into their comments on teachers’ practices in general.

When literacy mentors discussed changes in other teachers’ practices, they concentrated their comments on the new instructional practices they had observed, such as a change in guided reading and a change in the formative assessments used by teachers. They also concentrated on the improvement in communication among teachers, including the development of a common vocabulary, the formation of shared goals, and the increased sharing of resources and ideas. When teachers talked about their own changes, they focused on the changes they had made to adopt guided reading as part of their literacy instruction, as well as the changes they had made in writing instruction. Additionally, they focused on an improved use of literacy resources, both for students and for teachers. When principals discussed teacher changes, they also focused on the increased and more effective use of professional texts and resources by their teachers. They also mentioned an increase in teacher confidence to develop interventions for struggling readers and writers. Principals were the only group to mention this growth in intervention development by teachers.

Because of the structure of questions, principals were the only ones to comment on their own personal changes. They all shared about the growth in their knowledge about literacy and their increased awareness of literacy issues. Literacy mentors, teachers, and principals all seemed to comment on their own personal growth and all talked about the same growth mentioned by principals.

When asked to discuss changes in student work and achievement, literacy mentors focused on improved test scores, increased volume of reading and writing,
increased motivation to read, and increased metacognitive growth. Teachers also cited improved achievement test score indicators, improved writing skills. They added the fact that students had developed skills to improve their literary discussions about their readings and that they felt students had developed better attitudes toward reading. Principals also mentioned achievement test indicators, metacognitive growth, and greater volume of reading. Literacy mentors, teachers, and principals all were very close in the changes they had noticed in student work and achievement.

When asked if there were other building changes, all three groups had thoughts. Literacy mentors probably had the most to share about their observations in building changes. Primary among their comments were the use of book studies as change-agents in their buildings, the increase of intra-building communication, the development of common literacy goals and vision, the increased awareness of literacy in the curriculum, the increase in resource sharing, and the strengthening of school-home literacy learning.

When teachers were asked about building changes, they also concentrated their thoughts on the strengthening of literacy communication in the building, including the establishment of a common vocabulary. Also, they talked about the strengthening of school-home communication regarding literacy, and the acceleration of literacy instructional changes. Principals’ comments focused mostly on the broad issue of changing the culture of literacy in their buildings. That broad issue encompassed many of the changes literacy mentors and teachers mentioned; principals just saw the entire change process from a broader perspective. Teachers in particular mentioned how
much faster the changes in the building happened with the literacy mentor program than if they had not had the literacy mentor program.

In conclusion, all three groups perceived the literacy mentor program had indeed produced changes in teacher practice, in student achievement and attitudes, in building changes, and in their own personal growth and development. All seemed to feel the changes were substantial and noticeable.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Although it has always been important for educators to participate in some form of professional development, there has been an increasing importance placed upon the focus and nature of that professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Research stemming from the 1980s and 1990s has clarified and defined what must govern professional development in order for it to be successful in producing changes in student learning and achievement (Armour-Thomas, Clay, Domanico, Brune, & Allen, 1989; Cohen & Hill, 1998; Ferguson, 1991; Sparks & Hirsh, 2004).

A substantive body of research stands behind what is now defined as effective professional development (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling & Hammond, 1997b; 1998; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; NSDC, 2001; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; 2004; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Current research says that we must teach all students to not only understand ideas deeply and to perform proficiently, but we must also teach for diversity, in a myriad of ways in order to meet the multiple learning paths of our increasingly diverse student body so that all can achieve at high levels and live constructively in our world (Darling-Hammond, 1997a; 1998). This requires a radical
shift in what teachers must know and must be able to do (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

In order to make those changes, we know that professional development must enable educators to make deep changes in their thinking and their instruction. Results-driven education centered on standards, assessments and accountability systems, constructivism, and systems thinking have all contributed to a paradigm shift in professional development which is thought to enable educators to make those deep changes (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). The paradigm shift has directed professional development into the following areas:

1. A competency-based model that assumes and honors the expertise of the teacher.
2. A reflection model which allows teachers to try out new things, to process, reflect and analyze them, and then to make decisions themselves on what to do next in order to help a student learn (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 1983). It is this reflective analysis which empowers teachers to follow-up with a search for new knowledge through study by teachers of teaching and learning processes.
3. A learning together model in which teachers work together to discover new truths, to analyze, to evaluate, to learn and grow. They collaborate. Learning together changes the context (Leinhardt, 1992; Lieberman & Miller, 1992).
4. A decentralization model where each building takes a look at what its own teachers need and what training they need.
5. A content-oriented professional development (focused strictly on literacy issues) added to what used to be only generic professional development (focused more on broader educational issues not related to content areas).

6. An inclusive model for all adults who interact and work with students, rather than just on teachers.

7. A focus on staff developers who collaborate, facilitate, plan, consult, as well as train in contrast to only trainers coming in for a day of training.

8. A focus on professional development which is embedded in the job site itself.

9. A focus on student needs and student learning outcomes.

Sparks and Hirsh (2004) included the following conditions for effective staff development: results-driven and job-embedded; focused on helping teachers to become deeply immersed in their subject matter and in teaching methods; curriculum-centered and standards-based; sustained, rigorous and cumulative; and, directly linked to what they do in their classrooms.

Adult learning theory (Knowles, 1990) points out that adults learn best when they are self-directing, their extensive experience is utilized, real-life problems are utilized in order to increase their readiness to learn, and there is opportunity for immediate application of what they have learned.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) add the following as traits for effective professional development:

Experiential and concrete in nature; grounded in a teacher's own inquiry, questions, wonderings, as well as research and well-documented theory; collaborative
with colleagues; connected to the realities of one's own classroom; sustained, intensive, and on-going; supported by modeling, coaching, and problem solving around specific problems of practice.

Most of the current research on literacy mentor/coaching programs has been done on either travel-in models of coaching/mentoring, where outside coaches spend varied amounts of time in assigned buildings (usually one day a week or several weeks at a time over the course of the year), or in models of half-day coaches/mentors who teach half-day and mentor/coach half-day and who obviously are part of the staff in that building. Very little research has been done on mentoring/coaching programs which are based on volunteer, small supplemental stipend bases. Specifically, this study endeavored to study the impact of a literacy mentoring program based on characteristics identified by current research as effective, but that was also low in cost. What effect, if any, would such a program have on teacher practice and student achievement and attitude/behavior?

This semester-long study was conducted at a large suburban school district in northeast Ohio. Literacy mentors, teachers, and principals from all five elementary schools in the district participated in the study. During the study, focus groups and interviews were conducted with literacy mentors, teachers and principals. Literacy mentors participated in one focus group which was followed by interviews with one literacy mentor from each building. Teachers participated in one of two focus groups. Principals also participated in one of two focus groups. An interview protocol was utilized to begin each focus group and interview; however, an open-ended format allowed all focus groups and interviews to go where they needed to go. Mentors,
teachers, and principals also completed background survey sheets that provided further information about their professional experiences and beliefs. Data were also obtained from documents (e.g., principal bulletins, staff meeting agendas, building newsletters), and researcher observation in the buildings to substantiate mentor activities as reported by teachers, mentors, and principals. The study was guided by two research questions:

1. In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?

2. What is the perceived impact of the literacy mentor program?

The data was organized by case. Each group (mentors, teachers, and principals) became one case. Data was coded and early categories were developed using the constant comparative (Merriam, 1998) method for each case. Patterns or themes emerged within and among subjects in each case. Eventually identification of behavioral, belief and perceptual patterns emerged between the cases. Confirmation of the validity of results came from member checks, peer examination and triangulation of data sources. This chapter will discuss results of the data analysis. First, the conclusions through which a grounded theory was constructed will be identified. Secondly, the implications of those conclusions for various educational stakeholders will be projected.

Conclusions

As noted earlier, there is prolific research that identifies characteristics of effective professional development for educators. In fact, the literacy mentor project was selected for study largely because it was designed according to research-based principles of effective professional development. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, this
study corroborates many of these research findings, providing further evidence of the validity of this body of research.

Moreover, data analysis of literacy mentor, teacher, and principal focus group/interview transcripts revealed an overwhelmingly positive response to this type of professional development program. It must be noted, however, that teachers participating in the focus groups had been part of the literacy mentor activities in their building. Teachers choosing not to participate were not part of the focus groups and their thoughts are not reflected in this research. Data analysis demonstrated that the following features of the literacy mentor program, identified as characteristic by the participants, were particularly aligned to current research about effective professional development.

*Valuing Teacher Expertise*

The literacy mentor program is grounded in teachers' own inquiry, questions, and wonderings as well as research and well-documented theory (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The program honored the expertise of the teacher and relied on that expertise to analyze and seek out what they needed to learn. Book studies, literacy lunch conversations, study groups of various kinds, collaborative conversations, as well as many other facets of the program were conceptualized in a way that recognized and valued that teacher expertise (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

Moreover, the literacy mentor program meets the components of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1990) in that the program gives adults self-direction both at the district literacy mentor level and at the building and classroom level. Additionally it takes advantage of teachers' extensive experience. It utilizes real-life problems from
their classrooms (learners, instruction, assessments, interactions) (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) in order to increase their readiness to learn; and there is opportunity for immediate application of what they have learned. It enhanced and encouraged growth in leadership skills for the literacy mentors.

*Opportunity for Reflection*

The literacy mentor program implemented a variety of activities that involved reflection. Teachers tried out new things from their book studies or the video presentations; they processed them; they reflected on them; they analyzed them as individuals and as groups; and then they made decisions on what to do next in order to help their own students learn (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). They actually formed small learning communities to enhance their learning (NSDC, 2001).

*Peer Collaboration*

The literacy mentor program encouraged teachers working together, collaborating, to discover new truths, to learn and grow together (Darling Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; NSDC, 2001). Book clubs, study groups, collaborative conversations, literacy councils/committees, literacy lunches, breakfast conversations, one-on-one meetings, coaching/mentoring conversations, and informal conversations that arise at any time of day all contributed to teachers working together (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). These collaborative conversations were built on substantial professional discourse gained through their book studies and other study groups (Ball & Cohen, 1999). According to teachers and mentors, these conversations focused on improving teaching, striving for quality teaching, and enhancing learning for all students (NSDC, 2001).
Modeling and Coaching

The literacy mentor program was supported by modeling and coaching (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Literacy mentors seized all opportunities available to work individually with teachers and to model or arrange for others to model specific strategies/techniques. According to the mentors, some of the most impactful situations arose from multiple opportunities to model or coach in classrooms. Mentors found opportunities to enhance their leadership skills and roles within their buildings.

Content-Oriented

The literacy mentor program concentrated on literacy; it was a content-oriented professional development program (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). It focused on helping teachers become deeply immersed in their subject matter and in teaching methods (Sparks & Hirsh, 2004). The use of book studies and article reviews made this a research-based program. Moreover, teachers studied fluency more deeply than they had before; they studied word work/vocabulary more deeply; they studied comprehension strategies more deeply; they studied writing more deeply; they studied intervention strategies more deeply; and the list could go on. Without a doubt, they became more deeply immersed in many aspects of literacy instruction.

Data-driven

The literacy mentor program was results-driven. The focus of the group each year tended to follow needs determined by the buildings, based upon their assessments results (both formal and informal assessment) (Sparks & Hirsh, 2004).
Building-Level Decision-Making

The literacy mentor program allowed each building to take a look at what their building needed and what training they needed. Plans were made at the building level for the next steps in literacy professional development, often through the building literacy committee and through interactions between literacy mentors and principals. Those plans were then supported at the district level (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

Staff Inclusive

The literacy mentor program included all adults who wanted to participate in various components of the program. Paraprofessionals often joined in book studies, collaborative conversations, study groups, and other opportunities provided through the program (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Paraprofessionals actually sought out these opportunities and participated because they wanted to, not because they had to.

Embedded and Ongoing

The literacy mentor program was mostly job-embedded and on-going (Sparks & Hirsh, 2004; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The literacy program has been in existence for four years since its district-wide inception. The program was sustained, academically rigorous and cumulative. Research was added into all group conversations. Moreover, each year the program built on the year before, with mentors using a variety of evidence and feedback to determine the direction for the following year (Sparks & Hirsh, 2004).

In summary, cumulative findings from this study support many of the research-based characteristics of effective professional development. In addition, findings of this study provide deeper insight into particular aspects of this embedded, on-going
professional development literacy program. The following is an overview of the study’s primary conclusions which contribute new insights about key factors in successful professional development. In this study, these factors were critical influences in the significant impact the literacy mentor program had on the district’s staff and students.

Mentors, Teachers and Principals Characterize Experience as Positive

The first finding of this study was that participants overwhelmingly characterized their participation in the literacy mentor program as highly positive. All seemed to feel that they had grown personally and that the program had a significant impact in their own practice and in their buildings. Although there were issues of concern, such as lack of time and money, their comments overwhelmingly indicated that the program had been successful. All supported continuation of the program; many encouraged expanding the program by adding more release time for mentors so that they could mentor and/or coach in classrooms. Furthermore, relational and academic aspects of the participant emerged as crucial to the program’s success.

Mentors, Teachers and Principals Highlight Importance of Relational Growth

The second finding from this study was that all groups focused much of their attention on the importance of relationships nurtured through the collaborative experience. There were many levels or layers of collaboration: district-wide collaboration between literacy mentors, collaboration between literacy mentors and their principals, collaboration between literacy mentors and the teachers in their buildings, collaboration between literacy mentors and their building literacy committees/councils, collaboration between teachers, collaboration between principals
and their teachers, collaboration with parents, and collaboration between literacy mentors and district central office personnel. Some collaboration was short-term, some was long term.

All three groups felt that time was necessary to build trust and respect in the literacy mentors. All three groups also felt that trust was gained through the strong research knowledge base of literacy mentors. Both the time spent together in working and learning situations, along with respect for the deep knowledge base of the literacy mentor fostered trust. Time spent working together, studying together, brainstorming together, coaching all contributed to a by-product called trust. Book study groups actually created relationships over text and resulting discussions.

Mentors who experienced the most success in coaching/mentoring activities were those who had been in their buildings for many years. They had earned respect and trust because of expertise gained from earning advanced degrees, from varied work experiences (including committee work) in the building, and from a deep and wide knowledge repertoire based on current research. Additionally, many participants mentioned that having a mentor at the same grade level led to a stronger relationship with that mentor. This is probably related to the fact that being in the same grade level as your mentor would provide you with more time together (common planning times, lunch times, proximity of classrooms) and discussions might be more focused on grade-level concerns, ideas, materials and resources, thus more relevant.

Relational issues were of prime importance for all participants. Relational issues were supported and nurtured through collaborative experiences. Additionally, time was necessary for those collaborative experiences to happen. Time was needed to
build trust and respect: time during the week and time over the years. Collaborating over book discussions produced relational issues over text.

The primacy of relationships was important to the participants. The relationships were multi-faceted and critical to the success of the program. Trust was at the heart of these relationships. Trust seemed to be built over time. Collaborative activities added the cross pollination of relationships across buildings and across grade levels. Nurturing of relationships came from collaborative activities. Collaboration was at the heart of these relationships. And at the heart of the collaboration was frequent communication. A common vocabulary developed as a result of this frequent communication, the common studies, and the collaborative conversations. This common vocabulary was an extremely important outgrowth of the program which was mentioned by mentors, teachers, and principals.

Mentors, Teachers and Principals Highlight Importance of Rigorous Academic Learning

The third finding provided a second area of highlighted importance, that of rigorous academic learning. All three groups noted perceived changes in academic learning. Book studies and other study groups were frequently mentioned by all groups. Everyone seemed impressed with the conspicuous increase in knowledge base, not only for literacy mentors themselves, but also for teachers and administrators. This academic learning dimension added depth to conversations, to discussions, to thought processes. There was increased emphasis on and awareness of the research behind teaching and learning to read and write.
This academic learning, mainly stemming from a number of book studies, touched not only those involved in the book studies, but also other members of the staff. By posting quotations in the buildings, for example, and by bringing research-based information into staff meetings, curriculum hours, and other one-on-one discussions, many staff members were impacted by the growing base of knowledge in the buildings. This increased academic learning dimension affected goal setting, instructional practices and strategies, personal confidence levels, and actually impacted trust levels between parents and teachers, between literacy mentors and teachers, and between mentors and principals. This academic learning dimension played a huge part in the growth of literacy in the district.

All three groups, literacy mentors, teachers, and principals, talked about the academic learning that resulted from the literacy mentor program. Reading research-based texts and journal articles together, studying them, discussing them provided rigorous academic learning to those study groups and building-wide studies.

Moreover, the reading through study groups brought research and theory into a contextualized situation in each building. The issues in the research and theory readings could all be related to issues in each school. This academic learning was ongoing (it expanded over four years in various ways); it was embedded (it took place both during school time and before/after school time). In addition, the academic learning provided choice (teachers and literacy mentors selected readings for their buildings). The choices were often based upon data (literacy mentors and teachers selected readings based on weak performances on achievement tests and other informal assessments in their own buildings).
An important result was that all groups were impacted by the academic research rigor of this program. All three groups identified professional and personal changes as a result of this academic learning dimension. For mentors the academic learning from this program not only impacted their classroom practices (new instructional strategies/practices), but also gave them a new sense of personal confidence and fulfillment. They attributed these affective byproducts to their academic learning. For teachers, the academic learning seemed mostly to provide them with new strategies and practices to use in their classrooms. They also indicated that they felt more equipped to individualize instruction for their students. Moreover, they expressed greater confidence in their conversations with parents. Principals related that the academic learning heightened their awareness of literacy issues and increased their knowledge base.

As a result of that learning, teachers expressed a perceived greater awareness and understanding of literacy issues and were trying new instructional practices/strategies in their rooms. Because of their deepening knowledge base and increase in the use of assessments to form instruction, teachers indicated more individualization of instruction. Moreover, this resulted in a deeper knowledge of each student as a developing reader, in large part because of increased use of individual reading assessments and a greater knowledge of current literacy research. As a result, teachers expressed more confidence with their interactions and conversations with parents.

Mentors also implemented new instructional practices/strategies in their classrooms. They, too, reported feeling greater personal confidence and professional
fulfillment as a result of their academic study, research, and leadership role. Their comments suggested the affective domain was central to their personal growth process. Principals indicated a greater awareness of literacy issues and a growth in their own knowledge base. Additionally, they admitted greater personal participation in literacy activities in the building.

Mentors, Teachers and Principals Perceive Mentors' Primary Role Differently

A fourth finding centered upon the differences in role perception between literacy mentors, teachers and principals. Curiously, each group perceived the mentors' primary role in strikingly significantly different ways.

Teachers perceived the role of the literacy mentor as being mostly supportive to them, chiefly providing instructional support for them. Whether it be through collaborative activities (discussion groups), instructional activities (book study groups), mentoring/coaching activities (modeling, one-on-one discussions), ordering and organizing books in book rooms, leveling books, disseminating information, or any other myriad of activities, the teachers focused mostly on those experiences which gave them direct curricular and instructional support. Additionally, they saw literacy mentors as a resource support in their contacts with parents, enabling the take-home book program and sponsoring other programs like “literacy nights” and “Read-a-Thons.”

Literacy mentors perceived their role through a somewhat broader lens. They focused on the instructional leadership role. They saw themselves as helping to set common goals and a vision for their buildings. They talked about helping lead teachers and principals in their knowledge growth. They felt a deep responsibility to stay on top
of current research, to try new things in order to be able to help the teachers in the buildings. They internalized this sense of leadership and it seemed to give them personal fulfillment and growth as well as increased professional confidence. Although they mentioned a number of other things, they placed much more focus on this leadership component of their role in the building.

It was interesting to note that building principals also noted the literacy mentor's role as being instrumental in changing the culture of their buildings. Principals noted that there was now a sturdy culture of literacy in each building and they attributed much of it to the work of the literacy mentors. Principals noted that literacy mentors had assumed many leadership roles in the building, including goal setting, heading committees, and setting the tone for change in instructional practices. They also provided research, knowledge, and support for their buildings to make those changes. Leading discussion groups and book studies put literacy mentors in natural leadership roles. Principals made note of this leadership role.

It would seem that each group noted the activities that most directly related to their work experiences. Teachers teach children and work with parents. Their focus was on the supportive work done by mentors to assist them in their instruction and their work with children and parents. Literacy mentors focused on their newly found sense of personal fulfillment and leadership opportunities. Although they noted other aspects of their work, the leadership component surfaced as prime. And, interestingly, principals also focused on the leadership role as well as the instructional role (indirectly a leadership role also) of the mentors. It seems that one's job position does color one's perception of the literacy mentor role.
Changes Noted in Communication

One of the findings, the fifth, of this research centered upon the increased communication between buildings, between staff members in buildings, between administrators and staff members, between central office and buildings, between staff members and parents. This communication increase came from the book studies, the study groups, the discussion groups, the mentoring and coaching opportunities, the professional development opportunities in staff meetings and curriculum hours.

These opportunities enhanced communication about teaching and learning and literacy among all participants. Through the enhanced communication, relationships were developed. Communication took on relational overlays, and from that enhanced communication among people, there gradually emerged a common vocabulary. Definitely based on the academic readings, this common vocabulary developed not only between adults, but also between students and adults and eventually parents. The power of having common vocabulary was highlighted by all groups. It was an important outgrowth of the literacy mentor program.

Changes Noted in Student Academic Growth, Attitudes, and Motivation

A sixth finding centered on student changes. There were numerous perceived changes noted in student academic growth, attitudes and motivation by all groups. Across the board, participants noted improvements in student academic achievement. The achievement increase was cited through improved scores on both formal and informal tests. Most groups cited a gradual increase in state proficiency and achievement test scores. In some buildings the increase was greater than in others, but all talked about the overall growth. Informal assessments also documented increases in
student achievement. Dibels assessments and DRA (Diagnostic Reading Assessment) assessments gave teachers formal documentation of student achievement growth. Specifically, mentors noted test scores and the increased volume of reading and writing. Teachers mentioned achievement indicators from formal and informal assessments and improved writing skills. Principals noted all these achievement indicators, and observation of more student reading.

Additionally teachers, mentors and principals all noted an increased metacognitive growth in students as was evidenced through their deeper levels of conversation, their depth of discussions, their improved writings. Additionally, all three groups talked about increases in the volume of reading done by students, both at home and at school. They believe that growth alone had had an impact on achievement growth.

Lastly, all three groups noted better attitudes toward reading and better motivation to read. Mentors and teachers alike commented on the increased interest in reading. That increase in interest translated to more reading and eventually contributed to measurable achievement gains. Changes in attitudes and motivation to read were deemed important, especially by mentors and teachers.

Changes Noted in School/Home Communication

Parents were gradually pulled into the literacy initiative through multiple communication avenues. Because of the nightly take-home book program and reading logs, parents were drawn into the efforts to increase each child's volume of reading. All three groups worked hard to bring parents on board, to involve them in getting their children to read and to read a lot! Teachers, mentors, and principals alike each did their
part in sharing their growing understanding of the importance of reading a "just right" book rather than a book that is too difficult along with the importance of simply increasing the volume of reading.

As teachers communicated with parents more about learning to read and write, parents gradually were exposed to some of that common vocabulary which was developing in the buildings. They became active participants in this district-wide effort to increase reading and improve reading achievement in the district. A stronger school/home connection was forged as a result of the increase in school/home communication about reading and writing.

Toward a Grounded Theory

The ultimate goal of data analysis is to answer the research questions by generating a theory about them that is "grounded" in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Grounded theory, then, is constructed through the researcher’s effort to find meaning through inductive and continual data analysis that describes and refines categories of meaning. Substantive grounded theory produces concepts and or hypotheses based on data oriented to one area of study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This study examined professional development through the lens of participants in a literacy mentor program deliberately designed to reflect research-based principles of effective professional development. Specifically, participants in this program were asked to examine the nature of their participatory experiences and to identify the impact of those experiences on their district’s literacy curriculum and instruction.

Overall, the literacy mentor program had a highly positive perceived impact on literacy growth and development in this suburban district. Many factors typical of
successful professional development programs were present in this program and also contributed to its success. These include a focus on teacher inquiry, reflection, collaboration, modeling and coaching. Similarly, this program emphasized content knowledge, data-driven goals, and inclusive staff participation in experiences that were ongoing and embedded in practice. The success of the program’s design confirms findings of a large body of prior research (Darling-Hammond, 1997a; 1997b; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Joyce & Showers, 1983; NSDC, 2001; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; 2004).

In addition, this study found that two features of the literacy mentor program were crucial to the successful professional development. First, the primacy of relationship, woven into the fabric of the project’s design through frequent and diverse collaborative experiences, emerged as a critical feature. Over time, teachers, mentors and principals worked together across grade levels and professional responsibilities.

Relationships developed over time. They were nurtured through multiple communication opportunities over a period of time. Many, but not all, of the opportunities were embedded in the working day. Additionally these relationships were nurtured through increases in depth of knowledge, gained through rigorous book studies, study groups, presentations during staff meetings and curriculum hours, video presentations, graduate classes, and focused discussions. The greater the knowledge base, the greater the length of time participants worked together…all contributed to the development of trust and the primacy of relationships.

Collaboration resulted in the development of relationships on many levels as well as an increase in communication on many levels. Mentors with mentors, mentors
with teachers, teachers with principals, mentors with principals, principals with central office personnel, mentors with central office personnel…the levels and layers of communication and collaboration were evident and critically important to the program.

Second, the unrelenting emphasis on rigorous academic learning became a vehicle for ongoing research-based discussions, in scheduled activities and impromptu conversation. These discussions provided opportunities for constructing deeper understandings on teaching and learning issues that were directly related to participants’ professional concerns. Student data (from both formal and informal assessments), coupled with research-based information gained mostly from book study groups, gave all participants a deeper understanding of the learning process and how to better individualize instruction for each student. Reading a broad range of research in groups and participating in strong discussion groups gave each person a sense of personal knowledge growth, a sense of unified knowledge and common vocabulary, and a sense of personal confidence. Reading and discussion were critically important to participants in this study. And, the increase in this knowledge base definitely made an impact in the teaching strategies and techniques utilized in classrooms and eventually upon the academic achievement of students.

By-products of these two crucial features were that all participants experienced better communication enhanced by a common professional vocabulary. Moreover, there was increased school/home communication through literacy–related activities. Additionally, students showed improved academic achievement and increased metacognitive growth, as well as better attitudes and increased motivation.
In summary, the literacy mentor program examined in this study was designed according to precepts of effective professional development. It supports the validity of those precepts and provides further insight into the crucial importance of providing multiple opportunities for nurturing a wide range of relationships. In addition, ongoing, rigorous academic experiences that invite study of research-based texts around issues of district and teachers’ perceived professional needs were a critical factor in the program’s success.

Implications

Introduction

The concept for this study came from the researcher's experiences working with teachers. It was obvious to the researcher that new, embedded ways of supporting professional development in the area of literacy needed to be tried and encouraged. Teachers generally want to improve their teaching skills and strategies. They want to enhance student achievement. A few teachers undertake graduate level classes in literacy; the majority of teachers do not. Because a survey performed by an administrative intern suggested that the literacy mentor program was proving to be a successful addition to the school district, the researcher wanted to further investigate the impact this program had on the adults participating in it and on the students that they had in their classes. Current research suggested that many components of effective professional development were part of this literacy mentor program. Would this program prove to be successful professional development for teachers and administrators? Would this program have an impact on teacher practices and resulting student achievement? This study demonstrated that there was a definite positive
impact on all participants with resulting changes in literacy practices. Moreover, it did impact student achievement and improved student attitudes and motivation. Therefore, the results of this study have implications for educators, district officials and future researchers.

Implications for School Districts

National and state policies impact school districts in significant ways. Their mandates help align instruction across the state and the nation around principles of best practice. They provide research-based directions in areas such as reading. School districts can refer to state and federal guidelines, thus saving time and money, instead of independently pursuing guidelines of “best practice.” These are positive results of national and state policy guidelines.

But it is difficult for districts to keep up with the rapid changes and extensive professional development needed to keep pace with federal and state policies. This research provides some direction for a type of professional development model that can effectively support these rapid changes. More importantly, this research suggests a model that empowers and supports individual teachers in their attempt to keep up with national/state policies and guidelines.

In order for national policy to take effect, teachers must make changes in their classroom practice. This research seems to indicate that teachers do respond and try to make changes in that practice when they are supported with solid research-based information and well-informed, supportive mentors in their building. For this reason, one of the implications of this research for school districts is that this teacher- and
research-centered model can provide a strong embedded professional development program which is well worth the time and modest expense invested in it.

This study offers the following guidance for any district seeking to duplicate this type of program. First, the district must know that the program is effective only when it is implemented over a long period of time. This program will not produce quick effects in a short period like a month or two. This program will produce optimum benefits over several years. Better yet, the district should look at the program as an embedded, on-going one that will last for many years. Secondly, districts must be willing to invest money and time in the program. This cost will be minimal when compared to total district budgets, but the time committed to it will be important. Time is critical for meetings, demonstrations, mentoring activities, coaching activities, collaborative conversation and study. The investment in time is critical: The more time invested, the greater the benefit.

Based on this research, the following precepts should be observed by any district attempting such a program:

Research based articles, books, and book excerpts must be included in this program. Designing such a program without new, updated research would be futile. Mentors and teachers would just continue to work within the confines of their past knowledge. It is critical instead that they be exposed and required to process deeply, and to reflect on the new research and its impact on their teaching practice. New updated knowledge is critical. Book studies at the district level and building level are critical.
Additionally, this research strongly suggests that literacy mentors undertake a large variety of activities. In this way, they have the opportunity to touch more people, as each person seeks to partake of different activities. The variety of the mentor's work helps them outreach to more people.

It is critical to have centralized leadership of such a program. Principals particularly noted this. Someone at the Central Office needs to take the initiative to organize and support the work of the mentors. That person needs to have a strong knowledge of literacy and be willing to keep up on current research. That centralized support also helps all mentors work in similar directions, rather than taking off into a myriad of directions. It can provide the structures necessary to bring mentors together for critical dialogue and growth.

Mentors and teachers both observed how critical it was to have building leadership support in addition to district leadership support. So, for districts seeking to undertake a similar program, it is critical that the building principals not only support the program verbally, but that they become closely involved in the literacy initiatives in their buildings. Depending upon their own knowledge base in literacy, it may be critical that they do some group study/book studies with other principals and/or with their own staff members.

This study raised questions about who makes a great literacy mentor. Since literacy mentors have both the primary responsibility for designing the academic experience regarding literacy for the staff members in their buildings and for nurturing critical relationships within the building, it is important for a district to explore differences in the literacy mentors themselves. Do mentors who serve for multiple
years have better experiences than those who serve only 1 year? This research would indicate that they do. Additionally research indicates teachers who have the time to devote to the effort are critical to the process.

What personality types or background experience and education make for the best literacy mentors? What supports can be put in place to enhance the credibility and effectiveness of literacy mentors? What structures at the building level facilitate the work of district literacy mentors? What texts are most effective for book studies in each building? While these are questions that can be addressed through other research venues, each district implementing a similar literacy mentor program will have to answer these questions for themselves.

The implications for school districts are great. With the push for substantive changes in classroom practice driven by national and state policy requirements, the need to establish an on-going, embedded professional development program in literacy for all teachers is critical. This literacy mentor program can help school districts meet those needs. A similar type of program with a focus on another curricular area (math, science, social studies, technology, etc.) may also help districts support professional development in other areas as well.

**Implications for All Educators**

Findings of this study indicate that the literacy mentor program is a successful and effective professional development program that can help teachers increase their literacy knowledge base, expand their repertoire of instructional strategies and techniques, and help students improve their cognitive reading skills. Findings further demonstrate that this type of program provides opportunities for educators to
participate in a rigorous academic learning process, to collaborate with their peers and colleagues on a regular basis, and to strengthen relational connections and communication with colleagues and parents. Additionally findings demonstrate that this type of program enhances the leadership attributes of teachers. Furthermore, this type of program can actually impact a change of culture in an elementary building. Because this type of literacy mentor program produces such a strongly positive impact, it is important that educators with a range of professional responsibilities take note of the program and seek ways to include ongoing embedded academic experiences that nurture trusting professional relationships. Such programs will result in teacher and student growth.

Classroom teachers need to recognize the supportive impact this type of program can have on their classroom instruction and on their building's literacy climate. Classroom teachers also need to recognize the possibilities this type of program offers them for professional growth, for leadership opportunities, for increased academic learning. Building principals need to recognize the supportive assistance this type of program can offer them in terms of academic knowledge, research support, literacy leadership in the building, and strengthening of instruction in the building.

District officials need to recognize the impact a literacy mentor program can have on supporting new and current instructional practices in their district, on helping educators stay current and aware of literacy topics, on increasing professional confidence of educators, and on strengthening peer communication and school/home communication based on literacy issues. Districts need to investigate creative ways to
increase the amount of time literacy mentors are provided with to do their work. District officials need to investigate ways to better support the work of literacy mentors. Are there things that district officials can do to enhance the literacy mentor’s work? Which of those things require the smallest investment of time or money?

In addition to the impact this program can have on educators, district officials need to recognize the impact such a program has on student achievement in literacy, on metacognitive growth of students, on improved writing skills, on improved attitudes and motivation toward reading, and on increased volume of reading and writing by students.

The positive benefits are great. The program is embedded. It is ongoing. It impacts both adult practices and attitudes, as well as student achievement and attitudes. In recent years there has been an increase in the pressure on educators to strengthen their teaching techniques in order to meet the needs of a more widely diverse group of students, to help all students reach deeper levels of understanding and higher levels of achievement. This program can increase teacher collaboration, teacher knowledge, and teacher capacity to meet those individual needs. The dramatic impact this study had on teachers, literacy mentors, principals, and students shows that it has great promise.

As an outgrowth of this study, teachers asked for suggested lists of books for study. They felt that literacy mentors were more well-read and could indeed establish a list of recommended books.
Implications for Research

Although the data from this study supports the fact that this type of program can impact the teaching and learning in a building, more information is needed to provide educators with more direct correlation between such programs and the increase in student achievement.

Additional research could also provide a deeper look at the work of literacy mentors and could compare the work accomplished by those who have half-day or full-day positional mentoring opportunities, as opposed to those participating in a voluntary, part-time program. A look at the cost-effectiveness of the half-day program compared to the full-day program, compared to the voluntary, part-time program could provide districts with important information.

This program was conducted in a suburban district located in a middle-class, largely Caucasian, community. More studies are required that examine similarly-designed literacy professional development programs. Specifically, studies must be conducted in demographically diverse settings, both urban and rural. In addition, successful professional development programs that are not literacy-based should also be examined through the lens of diversity.

A plethora of such studies would shed additional light on the grounded theory findings from this study. Are relationships and ongoing academic experiences equally relevant under different conditions and with different participants? Do identical or similar characteristics emerge as crucial in studies that explore educators working in a range of educational, socioeconomic and sociocultural settings? Does such a program
offer similar results in other content areas? What about science mentors? Math mentors? There is much to be gained from other studies.

Summary

The literacy mentor program examined in this study had a highly positive impact on the literacy growth and development of teachers in this suburban district. This program was based upon current research that identified characteristics of effective professional development for educators. Through regular participation in this program, literacy mentors, teachers, and principals all experienced growth in relationships, in trust, in academic learning, in communication, and in instructional strategies and techniques. Each group became more in tune with the processes of learning to read and write. The depth of their knowledge took great leaps, individually and corporately. Through this experience, all would say that reading instruction had become more individualized, more focused on specific strategies to help individual students. Ultimately, the program impacted this district in very positive ways and provides a model for a successful, embedded, on-going professional development program in the other school districts.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

January 11, 2005

Carol A. Starrick
842 Lawrence Street
Medina, Ohio 44256

Ms. Starrick:

The University of Akron's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) completed a review of the protocol entitled "A Literacy Mentoring Program: A Case Study of Mentor and Teacher Perceptions, Classroom Practice and Literacy Achievement". The IRB application number assigned to this project is 20041209.

The protocol was reviewed on January 11, 2005 and qualified for exemption from continuing IRB review. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

(1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices

Enclosed is a copy of the informed consent document, which the IRB has approved for your use in this research.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. However, you must immediately notify the IRB if any changes or modifications are made in the study's design or procedures that do not fall within one of the categories exempted from the regulations. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

Sharon McWhorter, Associate Director

Cc: Walter Yoder, Department Chair
    Evangeline Newton, Advisor
    Phil Allen, IRB Chair
APPENDIX B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE AND SHORT SUMMARY OF PROJECT

You are cordially invited to participate in a focus group being formed for the purpose of studying the district's literacy mentor program.

The study will result in a written dissertation entitled 
_A Literacy Mentoring Program: A Case Study of Mentor and Teacher Perceptions, Classroom Practice, and Literacy Achievement._

This study will hopefully provide an insight into the work of a literacy mentor--the successes as well as the challenges in assuming this role among building colleagues.

Your insights are critical to this study. 
(Note: A few participants from some of the focus groups will be invited to participate in a more in-depth interview after the focus group.)
Short Summary of the Project

This proposal seeks to study a literacy mentoring program involving literacy mentors and teachers. This mentor program was district-developed in response to a district need to increase professional development and awareness of literacy issues. An initial survey found that this program was a good program. The purpose of this study is to better understand this mentor program from the perspective of the mentors themselves, other teachers in the building, and building principals. The purpose is also to understand the perceived impact the program has had on classroom practice and literacy achievement in the district. The title of the proposed dissertation is as follows:

A Literacy Mentoring Program: A Case Study of Mentor and Teacher Perceptions, Classroom Practice, and Literacy Achievement

The questions to be answered are:

1. In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their experiences of participation in a literacy mentor program?

2. In what ways is the impact of the literacy mentor program evident in teachers' practices, student work products, and classroom achievement?

The study will involve a focus group of mentors (estimated to be 15), followed by up-close interviews with 5 mentors. Additionally a focus group of 10-15 teachers and focus groups of 5 principals will complete the study. The site is one-suburban school district in northeast Ohio comprised of five elementary schools.

All interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Additional data will be sought from staff bulletins, schedules, field notes, newsletters, etc. in
order to validate information gained in the interviews. These will comprise the case study data base. Once the data has been transcribed, an on-going process of data analysis will begin. It is hoped that through the process of naming categories and placing data into categories, a deeper, conceptual understanding of the mentor program will emerge. Through the development of matrices and other graphic aids, the researcher hopes to clarify the information as it is gleaned. The goal of this research will be to understand the perspectives of all those involved in the literacy mentor program, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in this contextual framework, and to produce a holistic interpretation of what is happening through this program.
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study -- A Literacy Mentoring Program: A Case Study of Mentor and Teacher Perceptions, Classroom Practice, and Literacy Achievement

Description of Study: As a doctoral candidate from the College of Education of the University of Akron, I am conducting a research study to describe the work of teachers taking on the role of literacy mentors within their own schools. This research is being conducted in five elementary schools within the same district. Successful initiatives to reform public education and raise student achievement in literacy may depend upon changing basic literacy instruction in the classroom. This project will investigate teacher and mentor perceptions of the influence that the literacy mentors have had on helping teachers to change classroom literacy practices and raise literacy achievement.

 Procedures: Three focus groups will be convened: a literacy mentor group (comprised of 2-3 literacy mentors from each school), a teacher group (comprised of 2-3 teachers in each building who have participated in at least 3 literacy events sponsored by the literacy mentor), and a principal group (comprised of the building principal from each building). Following these focus groups, 5 mentors and will be interviewed in depth about their perceptions of the literacy mentor program. All focus group participants and interviewees will be asked to characterize their experiences participating with the literacy mentor program and to describe the impact of that program in teacher practices, student work products, and classroom achievement.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks involved with participation in this study, just an investment of time. The benefits will arise from the insights gained into the perceived effectiveness of a literacy mentor program. These insights may lead to a better understanding of the potential of literacy mentors to affect the quality of educational literacy experiences for children in this school district as well as in others.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be maintained throughout all phases of this study. Identifiable information will be changed through the use of pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Rights: Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You have the right to have any questions answered regarding this research or your participation in it, either now or in the future. If at any time you wish to remove yourself from this study, you may do so. You will receive a copy of this form.

Consent: I, ______________________, have read and understood the description and purpose of this project and its procedures and do hereby agree to participate in this study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits associated with this study. I have been assured that any future questions I may have will be answered.

_____________________________________________________        ____________________
Signature                                    Date

If you have any questions, you may contact Carol Starrick at 330-723-3732 or Dr. Evangeline Newton at The University of Akron, College of Education at 330-972-6916. For information regarding your rights as a research participant you can contact Sharon McWhorter, Office of Research Services, at 330-972-7666. Thank you for your participation in this study.
APPENDIX D

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR MENTORS, TEACHERS,
AND PRINCIPALS AND LITERACY SURVEYS

Questions for Literacy Mentors
Focus Group
February 10, 2005

Research Questions:
1. In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?
2. In what ways is the impact of the literacy mentor program evident in teachers' practices, student work products, and classroom achievement?

Focus Group Questions:
1. Tell me about your work as a literacy mentor. (RQ1)
2. Give me some examples of the literacy mentor work you do in your building. (RQ1)
3. What supports help you in your work as a literacy mentor? (RQ1)
4. Can you tell me about any changes you have personally made during the past 3 years in the way you teach reading or writing? (RQ2)
5. Do you think being a literacy mentor has been influential in helping you make these changes? (RQ2)
6. Can you tell us about some occasions when you have worked with teachers to promote conversations about literacy instruction? (RQ2)
7. Have you seen changes in teacher practices, student work, student achievement in general? (RQ2)
8. What else can you tell me about your work as a mentor? (RQ1 & 2)
Literacy Mentor Survey

Name ________________________________ Literacy Mentor # ______

Current Teaching Assignment ________________________________
Building ________________________________
How long in this assignment? ________________________________
How long in this building (including all assignments)? ________________________________

Prior to this assignment, please list other teaching experiences (grades, bldgs., districts):

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Education:
Undergraduate degree, university, date ________________________________

Graduate degree, university, date ________________________________

Other graduate work (types of classes, workshops, dates, etc.)
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Total years teaching (counting this year) ________________________________
Total years as a literacy mentor ________________________________

Teaching certifications and endorsements:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Other ________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Questions for Principals
Focus Group
February, 2005

Research Questions:
1. what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?
2. In what ways is the impact of the literacy mentor program evident in teachers' practices, student work products, and classroom achievement?

Focus Group Questions:
1. Tell me about the work of your literacy mentors. (RQ1)
2. Give me some examples of the literacy mentors' work in your building. (RQ1)
3. What supports are in place to help your literacy mentor work as a literacy mentor? (RQ1)
4. When do they do their mentoring work? (RQ1)
5. Can you tell me about any changes you have personally seen made in your building during the past 3 years in the way your staff teaches reading or writing? (RQ2)
6. Do you think being a literacy mentor has been influential in helping mentors themselves make some of these changes? (RQ2)
7. Do you think having literacy mentors in the building has influenced others to make some of these changes? (RQ2)
8. Can you tell us about some occasions when literacy mentors have worked with teachers in your building to promote conversations about literacy instruction? (RQ2)
9. Have you seen changes in teacher practices, student work, student achievement in general as a result of the work of the literacy mentors? (RQ2)
10. What changes have you experienced yourself from the literacy mentor program? (RQ1)
11. What else can you tell me about the work of your literacy mentors? (RQ1 & 2)
Literacy Mentor Program Survey for Principals

Name ____________________________________________ Principal # ________

Building ______________________________________
How long in this assignment as building principal? ______________________
How long in this building (including all intern assignments)? ________________

Prior to this assignment, please list other teaching/administrative experiences (grades,
 bldgs., districts) ______________________________________________________

Education:
    Undergraduate degree, university, date _________________________________

    Graduate degree, university, date _________________________________

    Other graduate work (types of classes, workshops, dates, etc.) ______________

Total years teaching _________________________________
Total years in administration (counting this year) ________________________________

Teaching certifications and endorsements:
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________

What literacy classes have you taken? ________________________________

Other __________________________________________________
________________________________________________
Questions for Teachers  
Focus Group  
May, 2005

Research Questions:
1. In what ways do mentors, teachers and principals characterize their participatory experiences in a literacy mentor program?
2. In what ways is the impact of the literacy mentor program evident in teachers' practices, student work products, and classroom achievement?

Focus Group Questions:
1. Tell me about the work of your literacy mentor. (RQ1)
2. Give me some examples of the literacy mentor's work in your building. (RQ1)
3. What supports help them in their work as a literacy mentor? (RQ1)
4. Can you tell me about any changes you have personally made during the past 3 years in the way you teach reading or writing? (RQ2)
5. Do you think having a literacy mentor has been influential in helping you make these changes? (RQ2)
6. Can you tell us about some occasions when you have worked with your mentors to converse about literacy instruction? (RQ2)
7. Have you seen changes in teacher practices, student work, student achievement in general? (RQ2)
8. What else can you tell me about your connections with the mentors in your building? (RQ1 & 2)
Teacher Survey

Name _______________________________ Teacher # _____

Current Teaching Assignment ________________________________
Building ________________________________
How long in this assignment? ________________________________
How long in this building (including all assignments)? ______________

Prior to this assignment, please list other teaching experiences (grades, bldgs.,
districts):
________________________________________________________

Education:
Undergraduate degree, university, date _________________________

Graduate degree, university, date ______________________________

Other graduate work (types of classes, workshops, dates, etc.)
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Total years teaching (counting this year) ________________________

Teaching certifications and endorsements: _________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Other ________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
APPENDIX E

ORIGINAL SURVEY AND RESULTS

Medina City School Literacy Mentor Program Evaluation

District Results

1. I know who my building literacy mentors are.  Yes (137)  No (11)

2. The literacy mentors in my building regularly communicate with the staff about literacy related issues.  Strongly Agree (33)  Agree (89)  Disagree (15)  Strongly Disagree (4)

3. The literacy mentors have made a significant impact on the quality of literacy instruction in our building.  Strongly Agree (39)  Agree (79)  Disagree (19)  Strongly Disagree (4)

4. The literacy mentors have helped me to gain professional knowledge in the area of reading.  Strongly Agree (36)  Agree (79)  Disagree (22)  Strongly Disagree (0)

5. I have used the literacy mentors as a resources for improving reading instruction in my classroom.  Often (21)  Occasionally (73)  Rarely (24)  Never (23)

6. Overall, I feel the district has made significant growth in the area of literacy in the past three years.  Strongly Agree (40)  Agree (90)  Disagree (3)  Strongly Disagree (0)

7. Overall, my feelings toward the literacy mentor program are:  Excellent (38)  Good (66)  Fair (25)  Poor (5)  Not Sure (8)
APPENDIX F

BOOKS USED IN STUDY GROUPS

Books and authors mentioned by the literacy mentors as having been part of their study groups were the following:

Fountas & Pinnell. *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children; Word matters: Teaching phonics and spelling in the reading/writing classroom; Guiding readers and writers, grades 3-6.*

Miller. *Reading with meaning: Teaching comprehension in the primary grades.*


Dorn et al. *Apprenticeship in literacy.*

Harvey & Goudvas. *Strategies that Work: Teaching comprehension to enhance understanding.*


Culham. *6+1 traits of writing.*

Routman. *Conversations.*

Cole. *The better answers.*


Rasinski & Padak. *Effective reading strategies: Teaching children who find reading difficult; From phonics to fluency.*