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# Professional Development Center School: A Tool for Improving School Context and Achievement?

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## Abstract

The newly restructured teacher educator preparation program resulting from partnerships between Sam Houston State University and area public schools is studied through the "lens" of mentoring, a form of teacher leadership. [An earlier quantitative study revealed that mentors tended to rate 7 dimensions of school teacher leadership developmental focus, recognition, autonomy, collegiality, participation, open communication, and positive environment--significantly higher than non-mentors.](#) The first part of the current study reveals the qualitative side of this earlier study through findings garnered in teacher interviews and teacher focus groups. The last part of the study compares the schools who had higher numbers of teacher mentor responders with those who had lesser numbers of mentor responders. Mastery levels on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) were compared with t-tests to indicate that the schools with greater than 60% mentor responders scored significantly higher than those with less than 60% mentor responders at grades 3 and 4.

Mentoring has been linked with benefits in multiple settings (Burruss, 1988; Daresh & Playco, 1994; Fortino, 1996; Krupp, 1985; Weinstein, 1998; Welch, 1993) for mentors, mentees and associated organizations. The value of mentoring in a person's development has been touted in the business world (Levinson, 1978; Wilbur, 1987) and in the educational world (Bova & Phillips, 1984; Lambert, 1985). Weinstein (1998) cites benefits for the business world as (1) creating a healthy work environment, (2) increasing productivity, (3) developing leadership, (4) retaining and/or gaining diversity, and (5) facilitating training. Traditionally, in education the process of mentoring has been primarily associated with professional growth and development in beginning teacher programs (Ackley & Gall, 1992; Ganser, 1994; Kamii & Harris-Sharples, 1988; Koki, 1997) and in preparing university students to be teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1992).

This research was conducted to (a) review some of the traditional foci for mentor studies--mentor characteristics, benefits to mentors and benefits to schools--in the newly

restructured educator preparation program resulting from partnerships between Sam Houston State University and public schools to prepare future educators from the fall of 1995 to the spring of 1998 and (b) to examine the context or climate of individual schools as it relates to student achievement. The context for the mentoring was defined in terms of 7 school teacher leadership dimensions developed by Katzenmeyer and Moller (1996)-- professional development, recognition, autonomy, collegiality, participation, open communication, and positive environment. All teachers in 24 schools, both elementary and secondary, were asked to rate their individual campus on each of the seven dimensions (Czaja, Lowe & Prouty, 1998). Six hundred and eighty-four teachers responded. Results indicated that teacher mentors (leaders) rated most of the factors significantly more positively than non-mentors and those not trained in mentoring. Results from step-wise multiple regression analyses also indicated that one or two or three different types of mentoring produced virtually the same results. The main effect resulting in significant differences in teachers' views of context developed from the experience of some kind of mentoring of university students or training in mentoring.

## **Literature Review**

The process of mentoring has been variously defined. Daresh and Playco (1994) define mentoring as "...a continuing process wherein individuals within an organization provide support and guidance to others (mentees or proteges) to help them become effective contributors." Other definitions are nurturing (Anderson & Shannon, 1988), providing collegial support (Playco, 1990), guiding and overseeing activities (Zey, 1991), and stretching a mentee to perform beyond what s/he thinks s/he can do (Bennis, 1994). Homer's *Odyssey* focuses on a mentor as a "trusted guide", Schein (1978) speaks of a mentor as a teacher, a coach, a positive role model; Daloz (1983) speaks of a mentor as a "challenger"; Gehrke and Kay (1984) write of a mentor as a "confidant". Thus a mentor may assist another in multiple ways. A mentor may also be active at many points in a teacher's career. DeBolt (1992) notes that "...becoming a teacher is a continuum of experience over a span of time, rather than one point in time.

Individual characteristics come into play. Zey (1984) indicates that recognition as a master teacher and excellence in interpersonal skills seem to be primary considerations to use in selection of mentors. Vonk (1996) separates the characteristics into 3 categories?technical qualities, professional knowledge and interpersonal qualities and elaborates by saying that,

Apart from being a qualified teacher with excellent classroom management skills, an expert in the subject (s)he teaches and in the subject methodology concerned, a good mentor has to have the following personal qualities: open-mindedness, reflectiveness, flexibility, listening skills, empathy, creativity and a helping attitude (Vonk, 1996, p.4).

In this study the term mentor is associated with inservice teachers--those who are fully employed as teachers in the public schools and who are working with pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers are students (mentees) who are in a teacher (educator) preparation program and are actively present in a public school site in several ways prior to graduation. How and when the pre-service teachers interacted with the inservice teachers changed dramatically when the educator preparation program at Sam Houston State University was restructured during 1995-1998. Under a grant from the State of Texas to become more field-based, one goal was to "Implement mentoring and other learning activities that enable pre-service teachers, public school staff, and university faculty to better understand, respect,

and meet the learning and social needs of a diverse population of students...."(Sam Houston State University, 1995).

Although four levels of field-based experiences were initially designed, revisions led to three levels of field experience --(1) Career Exploration and Personal Development and (2) Field-Based Methods in secondary and/or elementary schools in both the junior and senior years and (3) Student teaching as the capstone field experience for senior level pre-service teachers.

The restructured teacher/educator preparation program allowed more pre-service teacher-teacher interactions, more teacher-professor interactions and more pre-service teacher-professor interactions in the field. Mentoring as guiding or nurturing could occur in several circumstances. Inservice teachers might have mentored pre-service teachers in a methods block, in a reading/language arts block, or in student teaching or in combinations of these experiences. Training in mentoring occurred both formally and informally in various times and places (Owens, personal communication, February 9, 1999).

Two earlier studies (Czaja & Prouty, 1999; Czaja, Lowe & Prouty, 1998) examined responses of mentor teachers who participated in one or more of the above-described interactions. The initial study involved 116 mentor teachers at 6 elementary schools and one junior high school. All mentors were asked to rate seven dimensions of school teacher leadership on a five-point scale. Findings indicated that the type of mentoring experience did not significantly alter the response of the participant. No significant differences were found between or among the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions when examining the rating of teachers from varying mentoring experiences. The second study (Czaja, Lowe & Prouty, 1998) involved 684 teachers at both the elementary and secondary school levels. Twenty-four campuses participated in rating the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions (Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer, 1997). Ratings from teachers who mentored in varying ways were compared with the ratings of non-mentors and ratings from teachers trained in mentoring were compared with those not trained in mentoring.

Findings in the study (Czaja, Lowe & Prouty, 1998) showed that mentors generally rated most of the 7 dimensions significantly more positively than non-mentors. All 7 factors were rated significantly more positively by teachers with mentor training as compared to teachers without mentor training.

Two terms are frequently referenced when the context of a school is mentioned--culture and climate. Both provide an understanding of school context (environment) but the terms cannot be used interchangeably. Hoy and Tarter (1997) differentiate between culture and climate.

A useful distinction is that culture consists of shared assumptions and ideologies, whereas climate is defined by shared perceptions of behavior (Ashforth, 1985). To be sure, the conceptual leap from shared assumptions (culture) to shared perceptions (climate) is not large, but the difference is real and meaningful (p.6).

Climate of an organization is analogous to the personality of an individual. Perceptions of participants are critical (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). Halpin and Croft (1963) in their research develop the point that perception is reality. Owens (1998) adds "... climate is the study of the perceptions of participants of factors in the organizational environment that are likely to reflect the culture of the organization."

Factors determining context in this study are more aligned to climate than culture as the 50 questions in the survey created by Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer (1997) reflect perceptions of behavior. Each question focuses on some behavior that reflects culture. A couple of examples follow from the dimension Professional Development "We share new ideas and strategies we have gained with each other; [and] Teachers at my school are supportive of each other personally and professionally." Two more examples from the dimension Positive Environment are: "Teachers are treated as professionals at my school [and] Teachers and administrators at my school are supportive of each other personally and professionally."

In some studies school climate has been linked with school leadership. Rutherford (1985) found that less effective principals did not establish and maintain a supportive school climate. Management tasks defined their role rather than a vision where all had a clear idea of goals and standards. Taylor and Tashakkori (1994) found that teachers and students identified the leadership of the school as a major factor impacting climate. The presence or lack of principal support was found to be a primary factor in determining school climate by Winter and Sweeney (1994).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current study is to gain a greater understanding of the impact of the restructured educator preparation program within the Sam Houston Center for Professional Development and Educator Partnerships (SHCPDEP): (a) by determining what value mentors place on their experiences both for themselves and their schools, (b) by enhancing through qualitative data, understanding of the initial survey results showing significant differences in mentor and non-mentor views of school context as revealed in the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions, (c) to determine if context for an individual school as defined by the 7 dimensions--developmental focus, recognition, collegiality, participation, open communication, positive environment and teacher autonomy--may be influenced by the presence of a high percentage of mentors, a form of teacher leadership, and related to organizational effectiveness as evidenced through student achievement on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), and (d) to determine if higher ratings by a campus in any or all of the seven dimensions are related to greater student mastery of the math and/or reading TAAS.

In addressing part "c" the percentage of teacher mentors on a campus will serve as an independent variable acting first on the 7 dependent variables which are the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions, and secondarily on the dependent variable of the percentages of TAAS mastery in both reading and math. In part "d" the rating of each of the 7 dimensions will serve as an independent variable acting on the dependent variables, percentages of mastery on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in reading and math.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What characteristics do mentor teachers deem most valuable for themselves in their role as mentors in the Sam Houston Center for Professional Development and Educator Partnerships (SHCPDEP)?
2. What benefits do mentors perceive they have gained from their experience as mentors in the SHCPDEP?

3. What benefits do mentors perceive that their schools have gained from being involved with the mentoring program in the SHCPDEP?
4. How do mentor teachers explain their significantly higher ratings for dimensions of school context through professional development, recognition, collegiality, and autonomy when compared to the ratings of non-mentors?
5. How do mentor teachers explain the lack of significant differences between mentors and non-mentors in rating the dimensions of participation, open communication, and positive environment?
6. How do mentor teachers explain that teachers trained in mentoring rated all 7 dimensions significantly higher than those not trained in mentoring?
7. Does a campus with a high percentage of mentor teachers have a more positive organizational context or climate as defined by the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions--developmental focus, recognition, autonomy, collegiality, participation, open communication, and positive environment--when compared to the context (climate) on a campus without the high percentage of mentors?
8. Is there a significant difference of Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) mastery on campuses with higher percentages of teacher mentors (above 60%) when compared to campuses with lower percentages of teacher mentors (below 60%)?

## **Methodology**

To answer research questions # 1-6 and particularly to better understand why those trained in mentoring rated the seven school teacher leadership dimensions higher than those not trained in mentoring and why mentors also rated most of the 7 factors higher than non-mentors, we conducted three focus groups and six structured interviews with mentor teachers. In addition 5 interviews were conducted with university faculty, student teacher supervisors and master teachers to explore their viewpoints about the interactions of university and public school people and the possible impact on the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions.

Focus groups are often "...used as a supplementary source of data in studies that rely on some other primary method such as a survey" (Morgan, 1997, p.2). A noted strength of focus groups is the interaction between participants that may bring forth opinions and insights not otherwise volunteered (Morgan, 1997, p. 15).

Semi-structured interviews with teachers were employed in a parallel way to gather information needed to answer research questions # 1 - 6. As explained by Borg and Gall (1989), a series of structured questions are first asked with probes following to gather more data. "The semi-structured interview...has the advantage of being reasonably objective while still permitting a more thorough understanding of the respondent's opinions and the reason behind them..." (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 452). Additional perspectives were added with semi-structured interviews of university personnel who were frequently on these same campuses.

To answer Questions 7 and 8 a separate series of t-tests were calculated. Both questions sought to address the impact of higher percentages of mentor teacher responders. Question

7 addressed the impact on campus context or climate by comparing the ratings for the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions on campuses with high percentages of mentor teacher responders and campuses with lower percentages of mentor teacher responders. Question 8 compared percentages of TAAS mastery in math and reading between campuses with lower and higher percentages of teacher mentor responders.

## **Participants**

Most participants in focus groups were mentor teachers who had participated in completing the earlier survey and who were invited by or selected by their principals. The range of socioeconomic status and ethnicities for the home schools that participated in the survey and in the focus groups and interviews is shown in Appendix A. There were two exceptions in the participant selection process where a former student teacher now serving as a beginning teacher was selected to participate. In another exception a participant was suggested by the University Field Service Director. All had been actively involved in mentoring during the 1995-1998 years of the State grant. Participants in the university interviews were selected by the Field Service Director.

Most of the teachers who participated in the focus groups were female (11 of 13) and mentored at the elementary level (8 of 13). Thirty-eight and one-half percent (38.5%) of the focus group members taught at the secondary level. Male teachers formed fifteen percent (15%) of the total number who participated in the focus groups. Five of the 6 teachers who were interviewed were selected by their principal. One was selected by the Field Service Director. Each of these teachers came from campuses who had not participated in the focus groups. Altogether, 12 campuses were represented in the focus groups and another 6 were represented in the individual interviews. Thus 18 of the 24 campuses surveyed had teacher representation providing feedback about the survey results.

## **Procedure**

The three focus groups were organized and held at a school site to encourage participation based on convenience of location for teachers. The first group had 4 participants and the second and third focus groups had 5 participants. The focus groups represented homogeneous groups with respect to both rural locations and school socioeconomic status. The focus groups were led by the researchers. After introductions and a brief review of the purpose for the focus group, six questions (Appendix B) were posed one at a time to the group. When question #5 was addressed, a further explanation of each of the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions was given to the teachers. Information about the preliminary findings of the survey had been forwarded to the principals and some of the participants had read that report. In two of the focus groups the definition provided by the authors of the survey, Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer (1997), were distributed. In the third focus group, the actual survey questions associated with each dimension were used to spark discussion. This latter procedure was used in the individual interviews as well.

All focus groups and interview sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed. Analysis of these transcriptions were completed independently by the researchers. Common findings were identified and compared and finally matched after coding/categorization of responses or ideas.

## **Limitations and Assumptions of the Study**

There were two parts to this study. The first part addressed research questions #1 through #6 in a qualitative search for further information from individual teachers to learn about teacher perceptions of mentoring in the SHCPDEP and to explain findings related to an earlier survey from 684 teachers across 24 campuses. One of the limitations related to this first portion was that it highlighted the understandings of 19 teachers representing 18 of the 24 campuses. Representatives of all 24 campuses were invited to participate but not all were able to do so within the established timeframe. Thirteen of these teachers participated in one of 3 focus groups and 6 of the teachers participated in a structured interview. Questions in the 3 focus groups and in the 6 interviews related to findings derived from the 684 SHCPDEP teachers surveyed earlier. Interviews were conducted of university personnel who had been on site with these mentor teachers as well. Several research tools were used to ensure accuracy in data collection, analysis and reporting, but it is still recognized that qualitative methodology brings an inherent limitation to the comprehensiveness and extent to which the study can be generalized (Borg & Gall, 1989). The findings may be generalizable only to teachers on campuses within the SHCPDEP.

A second limitation relates to the accuracy and comprehensiveness with which the mentor teachers were able to identify and describe the context for the mentoring experience in terms of the 7 teacher leadership factors. This limitation was addressed by providing a working definition of each dimension to the teachers.

Several assumptions were made regarding the study. One of the assumptions made was that all participants would understand the 7 school teacher leadership factors. The concepts of school teacher leadership formed a context for the response of the interviewees and focus group members. Second, although in most cases principals invited the teachers who participated in the interviews and focus groups, it was assumed that teachers felt secure enough to respond truthfully and accurately. In a parallel manner, even though university staff were invited to participate in an interview session by the field service director, it was assumed that they also felt secure enough to respond truthfully and accurately when questioned.

The second part of the study, quantitative in nature, utilized the campus as a unit of analysis rather than the individual teacher. Such a small sample size of schools (n=24) does not allow generalization.

The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study can indicate potential areas for further research about mentoring and the relationship of mentoring to school context as defined by the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions.

## **Findings**

Findings will be reported question by question incorporating responses from both focus groups and interviews.

Question 1. What characteristics do mentor teachers deem most valuable for themselves in their role as mentors in the SHCPDEP?

Mentor teachers responded with the following list of characteristics to describe themselves: knowledgeable, experienced, thorough, empathetic, patient, organized, a people person,



using open communication, flexible, having good social skills, being truthful yet tactful, and being willing to take the time that is necessary. The range in years of experience as a mentor varied from 1 to 30 years. Almost all of the mentor teachers had had at least 4 or 5 years of teaching prior to serving as a mentor. Other comments extended the description "knowledgeable" to include knowing yourself, your students, your school and all the expectations of the school. Some of the elucidating comments follow.

University staff cited the following characteristics: being positive, patient, willing to listen, to share ideas and give of their time, tactful, supportive, risk-taking, a master teacher, learners themselves, clear communicators, keen observers, analyzers, and reflective.

An analysis of these summaries indicates that both groups have similar expectations for the role of a teacher mentor that parallels the description found in the literature. The difference between the two groups seems to lie in that the university identifies the risk-taking component and emphasizes the continuous learning that may occur through the processes of observing, analyzing and reflecting.

Question 2: What benefits do mentors perceive they have gained from their experience as mentors in the SHCPDEP?

Certainly growth as a professional is a primary benefit noted in all focus groups and in many of the interviews.

*"It gave me a chance to re-evaluate the way I was teaching. A lot of times things that I have taken for granted (I) just threw out there, I had to actually go and search and find out why and how you know."*

*"If someone new comes in, they are looking to you for guidance and new ideas and it makes you want to go to more workshops and develop your own professionalism."*

*"I have learned from the students."*

*"It strengthens my skills when I take a look at what I am and what I can share."*

*"I love it! I always ask for them because I learn more from them than they do from me."*

University staff responded in much the same way.

*"I've learned from the mentees. Because of sharing I have been able to expand my own knowledge."*

*"Mentoring is not a one-way street. It is reciprocal sometimes mentor, sometimes mentee sometimes colleagues collaborating."*

*"Mentoring has made me clarify and practice beliefs and paradigms for assessment and instruction."*

A sense of renewal is another benefit that was highlighted by the teacher mentors and University staff.

*"I think it gives me a fresh outlook. Their enthusiasm and high expectations give me a boost."*

*"It keeps you fresh and it keeps you on your toes, because a teacher can get really lax."*

*"It helps me go and share with other teachers or get information from other teachers."*

*"I think it's like a shot of B12 in the arm."*

*"I like working with student teachers because they are energetic and fresh."*

Other practical benefits were noted--the additional help in the classroom, the refocusing on the students, the sense of recognition or self-esteem.

*"From a physical aspect, having another pair of hands in my classroom has helped my students. It's helped me."*

*"The experience made me focus on each set of students I had."*

*"I think it gives our self-esteem a boost"*

University staff highlighted the sense of joy or satisfaction in helping someone.

*"I enjoy sharing with them. There is so much enthusiasm."*

*"I've learned the joy of seeing someone grow."*

Question 3. What benefits do mentors perceive their schools have gained from being involved with the mentoring program in the SHCPDEP?

Responses to this question sometimes overlapped with responses to question two. Helping the school (and district) meet staffing needs, gaining benefits for students during instruction, sharing the load, and professional growth were mentioned.

*"The staffing of needy areas."*

*"The school district itself benefits because a lot of our student teachers apply for jobs here."*

*"I think this helps at our school because it gives an excitement to our children and we really use that."*

*"We tend to have an older faculty where I am and it's good to have some youthful teachers on campus. It enlivens us.*

*"The new techniques, the new learning styles, having someone come in who is not burned out."*

*"I know my class benefited because we did so much group work then. There were children who needed a lot of one on one or small group work."*

An added dimension noted during individual interviews was the collaborative or sharing effect.

*"I think it strengthens the school when you have a lot of teachers helping other teachers."*

*"The more heads you have working together, the better off you are."*

As might be expected, university staff linked their responses to the reputation of the university.

*"The reputation of the school (university) rises and falls on the outcomes people see. Outcomes are what decision is based on, the decision to perhaps attend the University."*

*"The student teachers are really dedicated and take initiative. The reputation of Sam Houston State University is improving."*

*"Give us the opportunity to reach out and work with the public school systems. Sam Houston State University has learned from teachers in the systems."*

Question 4. How do mentor teachers explain their significantly higher ratings for dimensions of school context as defined by professional development, recognition, collegiality, and autonomy when compared to the ratings of non-mentors?

Responses include comments about each dimension as well as some general insights that link back to answers given in questions #1. Mentor teachers noted that mentors are positive, open people who view each other as colleagues. They feel good about "where they are" and what they are contributing. They enjoy learning. On the other hand, they suggested that teachers who were not asked to mentor, " maybe had problems with administrators and just felt that they weren't supported by their schools." Perhaps the non-mentors did not participate much in campus events and/or perhaps they were not listened to very well.

*"They [mentors] are the most positive people on the campus."*

*"They're willing and wanting to make everyone else feel good. It's not a matter of competing with each other. We're viewing each other as friends and colleagues."*

*"I think that any time you mentor somebody you feel valued and any time you feel a part of something then you are more willing to give more to it. Anytime you are valued and respected for what you do, you are more willing to give back to it."*

Another common thread was the recognition that the principal and/or administrative team impact the ratings by their support, recognition and trust of teacher leaders, i.e. mentors, and the emphasis on team and teaming.

*"I don't think these things happen because we are here. We are here because these things exist. I think the key to that is with the quality of the administration."*

*"They [mentors] enjoy sharing their knowledge and they feel like they have something to give, and also feel as if they are being respected because administrators have asked the and value the fact that they're being mentor teachers."*

*"Sometimes you are chosen to be a mentor because you are so actively involved in professional area not necessarily just what goes on in the classroom, but with other teachers, with new programs being developed."*

*"I think that if you have a strength here, the administration at the school always recognizes it and they use your strengths."*

*"I also think that a lot of this has to do with the leadership in your building. Your principal, assistant principal, your team you're on. It's easy to interact because we say at our school we're not a faculty, we're a family."*

A sense of autonomy has been part of the teaching culture in American schools (Little, 1990). As reported by Little, two other authors, Bird and Alspaugh (1986), write of a "mentors' dilemma as the tension between the leadership expectations implicit in the title of mentor and the inherited traditions of autonomy and equality (p. 315)." Lambert (1998) indicates that individual autonomy is recognized as one of the steps that teachers take through the growth process in becoming leaders. When the administrative trust factor was high, mentor teachers expressed a strong sense of autonomy while recognizing the rules or general guidelines that schools must follow.

*"I am encouraged to take initiative. My administrators feel like I'm the expert and I know what needs to be done, and they give me the freedom as much as is possible, to take care of things my way."*

*"I think it is a comfort zone [when] there is a lot of trust here. You know they trust me to know what I am doing with my students and what is best for them."*

Question 5. How do mentor teachers explain the lack of significant differences between mentors and non-mentors in rating the dimensions of participation, open communication and positive environment?

Survey results (Czaja, Prouty & Lowe, 1998) indicated that although mentor ratings of these dimensions were higher than those of non-mentors, the differences were not significant. Mentor teachers linked this finding primarily to site-based decision-making (SBDM) and the attitude and practices of the administrative team. When you are listened to on the campus, when your opinions are solicited, when you choose to participate in the various campus and/or district activities, it makes a difference in how you perceive each of these dimensions.

*"The teacher mentors are the ones that are involved."*

*"I think that you will probably find that your mentor teachers are those who are the ones who have input about school change and have a say in what happens."*

*"I see teachers who come [and] who do a lot more talking than working and they're going to weigh all of this in a completely different manner."*

*"There is a big canyon between those that do and those that don't."*

*"The more involved, the more you see the whole picture. A lot of times if you don't know the particulars of certain things then you tend to judge and be critical rather than if you were involved with all the work that took place."*

*"Any time people feel like at least they are going to get some support in some way, they feel more positive about the campus."*

*"If they remove the decision-making from the local level, then everybody is going to feel detached."*

*"Well we have what we call a Campus Improvement Team (CIT) team that teachers in each department to serve on as a decision making team. We would have department meetings and we would decide the kinds of things we would like to see happen and it was the CIT teachers with administrators that would share and talk about it. They [mentors] were called on more."*

*"Maybe it [the lower ratings] has to do with the negative things that have happened to people who aren't happy in the profession and maybe they see some of these things as pie in the sky stuff. Maybe they're just more negative people to start with."*

Question 6. How do mentor teachers explain that teachers trained in mentoring rated all 7 dimensions significantly higher than those not trained in mentoring?

A university staff member who has a broader picture of the entire set of mentoring experiences in the SHCPDEP shared this insight.

*"Because mentoring relationships require all 7 of these factors. Like a spiral reciprocating--as you give out, you get back."*

This insight was also reflected in the comments from mentor teachers.

*"Through the training they've tried to help the mentor teachers realize how important their part in mentoring others [is] and just how important that part they played in it was and help them see all the positive aspects of it."*

*"For the teacher it [mentor training] gives a paradigm in which to learn and to become comfortable with our skills and our knowledge and expertise."*

*"Like I said before, by having mentoring training you get a knowledge base of what to do in a situation. I think training is always really important in anything that you do."*

*"I have had training from Region 6. We didn't learn anything new that you didn't know already. But it was just given in such a positive [way]. You just feel you are special."*

*"It's a confidence factor. Now that they have training, that gives a lot more confidence in what they are doing."*

Question 7. Does a campus with a high percentage of mentor teachers have a more positive organizational context or climate as defined by the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions--developmental focus, recognition, autonomy, collegiality, participation, open communication, and positive environment--when compared to the context (climate) on a campus with a low percentage of mentors?

A series of t-tests were completed to determine if significant differences could be noted between each of the 7 dimensions for campuses that had a high percentage of mentors and those that did not have a high percentage of mentors. The percentage of mentor teachers on a campus ranged from 20.41% to 73.33%. A break in the range fell about two percentage points below 60% and two percentage points above 60%. This produced two types of campus groups, Group 1 with a percentage of teacher mentors above 60% and Group 2 with a percentage of teacher mentors below 60 %. The mean scores for each group were compared using t-tests with the following results.

**Table 1**

Comparison of Means for Leadership Dimensions between Campuses With >60% and <60% Mentor Teacher Responders

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>&gt;60 % mentors</u>	<u>&lt;60 % mentors</u>
	<u>Mean Score-Group 1</u>	<u>Mean Score-Group 2</u>
Developmental Focus	33.2292	30.6665**
Recognition	28.8083	27.5117
Autonomy	29.0529	27.4902*
Collegiality	27.0764	25.4691*
Participation	24.8983	23.6849
Open Communication	26.3787	25.2014
Positive Environment	28.6685	26.5987

\*\* Significant at the  $p < .01$  level

\* Significant at the  $p < .05$  level

Three of the dimensions were significantly more positive in Group 1 when compared to Group 2. The data also indicate that in all cases the mean score for Group 1 campuses, those with more than 60% mentor teacher responders, was higher than Group 2.

Question 8. Is there a significant difference in percentage of TAAS mastery on campuses with higher percentages of teacher mentor responders (above 60%) when compared to campuses with lower percentages (below 60%)?

The same two groups (as identified in question 7a) were again used to compute t-tests. Campuses with higher percentages of mentor teacher responders were compared with campuses with lower percentages of mentor teacher responders to indicate whether there was a significant difference between the groups in TAAS mastery in either reading or math. Schools or campuses having more than 60% of the mentor teacher respondents had significantly higher mastery of TAAS reading and math at grade 4 ( $p < .001$ , Reading;  $p < .05$ , Math). Significantly higher mastery of TAAS also is noted for reading at grade 3 ( $p < .05$ ). None of the other differences between the means for mastery were significant. A review of campus data indicated that the TAAS test results did not reflect ethnic or social class patterns as seen in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Comparison of School Data for Schools with > 60% Mentor Responders and <60% Mentor Responders

<u>Schools with &gt;60% Mentor Responders</u>						<u>Schools with &lt;60% Mentor Responders</u>					
% TAAS Mastery						% TAAS Mastery					
<u>Gr. 4</u>	<u>Gr. 4</u>	<u>Gr. 3</u>	<u>% Low</u>	<u>%</u>		<u>Gr. 4</u>	<u>Gr. 4</u>	<u>Gr. 3</u>	<u>% Low</u>	<u>%</u>	
<u>Rding</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Rding</u>	<u>SES</u>	<u>Minority</u>		<u>Rding</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Rding</u>	<u>SES</u>	<u>Minority</u>	
<u>Ave.</u>	94.73	89.73	90.70	61.38	40.70	79.85	81.00	81.02	41.12	31.50	

A t-test could not be calculated at grade 10 because there were not 2 high schools with 60% or more mentor teachers responding. There were 4 high schools with percentages of mentor teacher responders less than 60%. Comparison of actual TAAS mastery scores are seen in Table 3. The one high school campus with the greater number of teacher mentors has a higher percentage of mastery of TAAS reading at grade 10 than any of the other high schools and a higher percentage of mastery of TAAS 10 math in 3 of the 4 comparison schools.

**Table 3**

Comparison of 10<sup>th</sup> grade TAAS Mastery in Campuses with > 60% Mentor Teacher Responders and < 60% Mentor Teacher Responders.

<u>Campuses with &gt;60% mentors</u>		
	<u>TAAS % Math Mastery</u>	<u>% Reading Mastery</u>
High School #1	84.3	92.2
<u>Campuses with &lt;60% mentors</u>		
	<u>TAAS % Math Mastery</u>	<u>% Reading Mastery</u>
High School #2	75.1	91.4
High School #3	63.0	79.4
High School #4	85.7	89.8
High School #5	66.7	75.3
<u>Mean</u>	68.62	83.99

Although the number (n) of grade levels at schools with higher and lower percentages of teacher mentors is small, results indicate that more study in this area might be merited.

## **Discussion**

Responses from mentors associated with SHCPDEP indicate that characteristics deemed valuable for mentors follow the findings of earlier research. Benefits for mentors focus primarily on professional growth, a sense of renewal, and a way to gain self-esteem. Benefits to schools as organizations relate to the findings gained through studies of mentoring in business organizations as noted by Weinstein (1998) except that the link to developing leadership is never explicitly verbalized by the teacher mentors. This link is recognized in the literature on mentoring in education (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Lambert, 1998) but the teacher mentors never say anything like "This experience has helped me develop my leadership skills," or "The experience has helped build a leadership team on our campus." Teacher comments reference factors that enhance leadership--professional development, strengthening skills, collaborating--but never hit the proverbial nail (leadership) on the head. This is an aspect of schools that must be emphasized to build strong, effective schools (Lambert, 1998; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996). Senge (1990) emphasizes that the efficacy of an organization is developed when individuals' capabilities to lead are enhanced. Katzenmeyer (1997) emphasizes that when teachers are prepared as leaders, these teachers along with their principals have a real chance of making change in their schools....Teacher leadership and learning communities in schools are the practices that hold promise for developing the capacity within schools for change that impacts student outcomes (p.1)." Lambert (1998) develops the same thesis in her book, Building Leadership Capacity in Schools.

The effective schools movement recognizes instructional leadership as a first generation correlate (Effective Schools, 1999). The principal is seen as the instructional leader. In the second generation of instructional leadership all teachers share the leadership as "...a principal cannot be the only leader in a complex organization like a school....The role of the principal will be changed to that of a leader of leaders." (Effective Schools, 1999).

Thus another implication as suggested by Kathleen O'Connor at a University Council for Professors of Education Administration (UCEA) meeting and cited by Teitel (1996) is that principals be trained so that they see teacher leaders "...as more than pesky troublemakers to be managed, but as valuable assets to be nurtured for school improvement." Interviews from many of the participants in this study indicated that administrative support to their efforts is crucial as is recognition of their efforts.

In essence if a leader is one whom others follow, then a mentoring experience is one practical way to develop leaders on campus. Even the mentor training without mentor experience brought more positive perceptions of all 7 teacher leadership dimensions on a campus. As one of the mentors who was interviewed said, mentor training provides the paradigm for thought and understanding of the teachers' new roles. Another commented about the reciprocal relationship in mentoring, "...as you give out, you get back."

As evidenced through this study, one clear way to change one's perspectives and to develop leadership skills is to serve as a mentor. One clear way of building collegiality is to gather and train a group of mentors. In and through all of this the primary goal of mentoring must be kept in mind--student success (Texas Education Agency, 1995). Little (1990) notes that "At the school level, organized training and support are more likely where administrators and teachers have forged a clear link between the mentor role and school-level goals."



In the last part of this study, results showed that schools or campuses with a higher percentage of teacher mentors rated all 7 dimensions more positively. Three of the dimensions were rated significantly more positive than those without a high percentage of teacher mentors. Perhaps this extends the links of leadership to climate in a new way.

Percentages of mastery on the TAAS reading and math tests were generally not significantly different when comparing campuses with higher percentages (> 60%) of teacher mentors with those having lower percentages (< 60%). Only grades 3 and 4 indicated significant findings with mastery of TAAS tests. A new study with a higher (n) is recommended.

Study and discussion of the 7 school teacher leadership dimensions by all members of a school community at each campus as proposed by Katzenmeyer and Moller (1996) are recommended as one way to assist in building teacher leadership. Another path seems to be through the development of teacher leaders. The two seem to be intertwined as those mentors who were interviewed recognized the context as having great impact on how they completed their role.

## **Conclusion**

The process of mentoring can be a powerful experience for both the mentor and the mentee. Both may benefit from the experience in multiple ways as described by the mentor teachers in the first part of this study. Organizations may also benefit. In this case both partner organizations, individual campuses and the University, benefited from the several avenues available for mentoring within the Sam Houston Center for Professional Development and Educator Partnerships.

The particular focus on building teacher leadership through training of teacher mentors and the provision of support for teacher mentors through facilitative leadership on the part of the principal should be noted as one possible route to the goal of all campuses--improved student achievement. Mentoring and/or training associated with mentoring seem to change teachers views and thus the overall campus climate or context. However, because mentoring is a fairly narrow segment in the spectrum of possible experiences for building teacher leadership, perhaps a more realistic route would be to focus on the many possibilities for building teacher leadership. Certainly the findings of this study point to the need to assist teachers in seeing themselves as leaders, especially when they serve as mentors. The findings also point to the need for administrators to recognize teacher leadership and the need for further research.

## Appendix A

<b>Schools Surveyed;  Follow-up  Interview or  Focus Group</b>	<b>% Low SES</b>	<b>%African- American</b>	<b>%Hispanic</b>	<b>%White</b>	<b>%Other</b>	<b>% LEP</b>
1 Interview	83.2	30.2	60.1	07.1	02.7	52.4
2	71.5	17.6	59.9	14.9	07.5	52.0
3	33.9	28.6	08.5	60.9	02.1	05.3
4	46.6	32.5	11.5	55.2	00.8	03.8
5	33.9	28.6	08.5	60.9	02.1	05.3
6 Focus Group	44.7	00.0	02.6	97.4	00.0	00.0
7 Focus Group	59.2	00.0	00.0	100.	00.0	00.0
8 Focus Group	29.6	02.0	13.0	84.9	00.2	02.4
9 Focus Group	36.8	12.1	18.6	67.0	02.3	16.3
10 Interview	49.4	07.1	24.4	67.7	00.7	20.5
11 Focus Group	59.3	00.8	05.7	92.7	00.9	01.8
12 Focus Group	50.2	13.4	10.1	75.4	01.0	06.5
13 Focus Group	54.2	13.9	09.2	75.9	01.0	04.7
14 Focus Group	34.2	13.0	09.2	76.7	01.1	04.4
15 Focus Group	34.7	11.2	09.9	76.5	02.3	02.5
16 Interview	73.4	17.2	46.9	35.7	00.2	24.3
17 Focus Group	56.9	26.0	14.7	58.9	00.4	05.8

18	40.9	23.4	13.3	63.0	00.4	03.7
19 Focus Group	28.8	27.3	06.3	66.3	00.0	00.5
20 Interview	28.4	09.5	10.8	79.5	00.2	02.1
21 Focus Group	45.7	06.3	19.6	73.6	00.7	11.5
22	40.1	25.1	05.0	69.9	00.0	01.4
23 Interview	47.0	23.2	06.6	69.1	00.0	01.4
24 Interview	67.7	23.3	07.1	38.5	01.1	03.3

## Appendix B

### Focus Group Questions

1. How long have you been involved in mentoring?
2. What does it take to be an effective mentor?
3. How have you benefited from your involvement with mentoring?
4. How do you think the school has benefited from being involved with mentoring?
5. Why would mentors rate the 7 school teacher leadership factors higher than those teachers who did not mentor?
6. Professional Development
7. Recognition
8. Collegiality
9. Autonomy
10. Participation
11. Open Communication
12. Positive Environment

6. Why would teachers who have had some mentor training give significantly more positive ratings on all 7 factors?

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