

Passing the Torch: A Case Study of Mentor-Mentee Relationships in the

Teaching Profession

by

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Abstract

“Google was my only mentor!” These were the words of a novice teacher who desperately wanted the support of a senior mentor. “If you are a teacher and you cannot be considered a mentor, what does that say about your professional being?” asked a senior teacher actively involved in mentoring her novice colleagues. These sentiments are indicative of the stories shared by teachers in this study that explored (1) the motivations of senior teachers who become mentors and (2) the representations of novice teachers regarding the contributions of their senior mentors. Situated in the interpretive constructivist paradigm and using the lived experiences of mentors and mentees, participant stories were collected and analyzed in the context of rapid enrolment decline and limited hiring of new teachers in Nova Scotia. While senior teachers indicated that they entered into mentoring relationships with a sense of duty to the profession, the novice teachers reported that help was not always forthcoming. An undercurrent that novices had to pay their dues to the profession was suggested. Both mentors and mentees were probed as to the value they placed on the mentoring relationship and data analysis indicated all participants greatly valued the experience. An examination of the themes emerging from the data include a discussion of the effects of school culture on the motivation of senior teachers to engage as mentors and the use of a network of mentors to encourage and develop the professional growth of novice teachers.

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Finally, I dedicate this work to the memory of my father, Baxter Clarke. He did not have the opportunity to attend university but he was an author and a scholar at heart. I know he would be proud.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Statement of Research Problem

This research will explore different representations of the relationship between senior and novice teachers focusing specifically on interactions through the phenomenon of mentorship. This qualitative research study is intended to gather information from cases of senior and novice teachers engaged in the mentorship process. Situated within the current educational context of Nova Scotia, it will consider why senior teachers become involved in mentoring, how novice teachers represent the contributions of senior teachers engaged in this process, as well as how this contribution is valued by those engaged in mentorship.

1.1 Background

Calls to “Go West” ring loud and clear along the shores of the Atlantic Provinces. For generations, Atlantic Canadians have followed the ebb and flow of prosperity. As natural resources and industries have risen and fallen, so too has the population of the area. Global and national events continue to precipitate demographic change. The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council [APEC] (2012) refers to weakening demographic prospects, a significant urban-rural divide, industrial restructuring and interprovincial labor flow as measurable factors impacting population trends in Atlantic Canada. Fertility rates in Atlantic Canada fall below the national average while the median age of the population continues to rise. Labor force growth has occurred specifically in urban centers of the region as employment steadily declines in rural areas. Atlantic Canada has experienced a marked decline in large industries and manufacturing. The mobility of workers has been steadily growing. APEC (2012) reports out-migration of almost 5,100

people per year from Atlantic Canada to growing labor markets in Alberta. Population downturn is first felt in schools and manifested in enrollment declines.

Recent government responses to these enrollment changes in Nova Scotia in particular, have led to tense times between school boards and the Department of Education which funds them.

The winter of 2011 saw pressure mount within the Nova Scotia education system. The Department of Education set school boards the task of identifying ways to operate with a significantly reduced budget– as much as 20 percent less over a three year period. School boards replied with proposals that involved severe staff cuts and loss of programs. When the dust settled and the provincial budget was tabled, the overall cut was much less than anticipated yet the reductions still involved serious reductions in staffing levels. Because salaries comprise the largest proportion of education expenditures, these cuts translated into the loss of teaching positions across the province, especially positions occupied by younger non-tenured teachers and those teachers with the lowest seniority. These were difficult times; as senior teachers who were working in the system at the time, my colleagues and I felt the tensions evident in school staff rooms and union meetings. The budget process of 2012 reignited the same kind of tensions that were present during the previous year. In year two of the government’s three-year reductions plan, school boards again faced funding shortfalls resulting in the elimination of teaching positions across the province.

In 2011, I watched and listened as the cuts came down. As a teacher with more than 20 years of classroom experience, I was disturbed by the tenor of the discussions in the staff room. It was becoming an “us against them” situation. In my own experiences, I had worked with and learned from both senior teachers and novice teachers. I perceived benefits

in a multi-age workforce. Yet, as young teachers were being laid-off, term teachers were being told there would be fewer opportunities in the next school year and day to day substitutes were told they would have to wait even longer (up to five years, in some cases) for permanent job prospects to improve, I wondered would there be even more of our young people following the trail to prosperity in the west?

As teachers waited to hear how the government's announced budget reductions would translate into the loss of local teaching positions, the issue of retirements was a frequent point of discussion. Many teachers in Nova Scotia are eligible to retire in their mid to late fifties. There was a feeling emerging that more retirements would mean more young teachers could retain their positions. Some of these discussions seemed to denigrate into resentment towards those senior teachers who were eligible to retire but chose not to leave. Some novice teachers questioned the quality of work performed by senior teachers as outdated and resistant to change.

A closer look at staffing projections prepared by the Nova Scotia Department of Education indicates that new teachers have good reason to be pessimistic about job prospects. According to the *Nova Scotia Public Education Teacher Supply and Demand 2012 Update Report*, the overall supply of teachers in Nova Scotia is expected to remain constant, however, between 2009 and 2018 the Department of Education had projected a 12 percent decrease in student enrollment (p. 9). According to the report, only 29 percent of substitute teachers who were teaching in 2003-04 had obtained a permanent teaching position five years later and only 10 percent had obtained a term position (p.v). Enrollment is fundamentally linked to the demand for teachers.

Given the declining enrollment in Nova Scotia, the assumption that more teacher retirements will result in favorable job prospects for new teachers is unsubstantiated. Teachers are not being replaced at the same rate as they retire. The Nova Scotia Department of Education (2012) predicts an average annual adjustment of **-132** teachers entering the system each year until 2017-18. The *Nova Scotia Public Education Teacher Supply and Demand 2012 Update Report* (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012) states that approximately 38 percent of teachers will retire when they first become eligible with almost half of the teacher work force continuing to work past their date of eligibility to retire. In Nova Scotia most new teachers will be first employed as substitutes. Across the province most new positions are term positions, leaving these teachers vulnerable to cuts if there is a need to reduce the workforce (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012, p.7). A reduction in the number of teacher positions through enrollment decline, therefore means fewer opportunities for substitute teachers since teachers holding term positions would be the first to move into permanent positions.

Interplay of organizational politics is evident in the local struggles that have been associated with educational funding reductions. In the school where I work it seemed as if an Old Guard versus New Guard (Hoy & Miskel, 2008) dichotomy was beginning to emerge. This dichotomy was characterized by coalitions formed along the lines of divergent beliefs, values, knowledge and perceptions (p. 236). The New Guard talked of senior teachers who were stuck in a rut of “old-style teaching” and needed to move out and make room for new teachers with new ideas. Senior teachers had collected their salaries for 35 years and now it was time to let in the younger teachers. Senior teachers insisted they were engaged in good practice honed from many years of practical experience. In light of

these contrary positions, the question of the role of senior teachers in our system emerged. In our staff room there were teachers with 30 or 40 years experience who regularly accepted pre-service teachers into their classrooms. These senior teachers helped those new to our school understand the intangible expectations of the job, everything from classroom management to the first parent-teacher interviews. I remembered my first year in the classroom. I relied heavily on the support and guidance of a senior teacher to see my way through the year. These senior teachers play an important part in integrating novice teachers into the teaching profession. Formal and informal mentoring was happening between senior and novice teachers. This phenomenon of mentorship offers a specific vehicle to explore the relationship between senior and novice teachers and the current climate in education in Nova Scotia offers a particular lens through which to view the mentor relationship at work.

1.2 Research Problem

The provincial budgets of 2011 and 2012 resulted in major funding reductions to school districts in Nova Scotia, the result of rapidly declining enrolments and a general downturn in the economy. An abundance of qualified teachers means that substitutes work for many years waiting to become tenured teachers. In my staff room, novice teachers experiencing poor employment prospects indicated resentment against those senior teachers who are eligible to retire but choose to remain in the workforce.

This perceived tension is contradictory to extant research. Much of the literature on human resource management in the education sector suggests that senior teachers play a valuable role, not only in what they bring to the classroom, but also in terms of expert advice and mentorship for young teachers (Glazer, 2008; Juarez-Torres, Lane Hurst, & Hurst, 2007; Martinez, 2004). By their own admission, many novice teachers report feeling ill-prepared

for the challenges they face entering the classroom (Carter & Francis, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Van Nuland, 2011). This case study explores senior teachers who act as mentors, how mentoring is represented by mentees and how the mentoring process is valued by participants in the current educational climate of Nova Scotia. This research will explore different representations of the relationship between senior and novice teachers focusing specifically on interactions through the phenomenon of mentorship. This qualitative research study is intended to gather information from cases of senior and novice teachers engaged in the mentorship process. Situated within the current educational context of Nova Scotia, it will consider why senior teachers become involved in mentoring, how novice teachers represent the contributions of senior teachers engaged in this process, as well as how this contribution is valued by those engaged in mentorship.

1.3 Need for the Study

Currently, student enrollments in Nova Scotia are declining and there is an oversupply of teachers. In 2011, the government announced a four percent reduction in funding to education to be followed by a further three percent reduction in 2012. This translated into an overall loss of teaching positions and fewer permanent contracts. Based on the *Nova Scotia Public Education Teacher Supply and Demand 2012 Update Report*, we know that the number of teachers certified in the province continues to grow each year and supply exceeds demand. There are a significant number of teachers in Nova Scotia eligible to retire, almost half of these teachers choose to remain in their teaching positions beyond the date at which they are eligible to retire.

The employment situation for teachers in Nova Scotia contrasts sharply with supply and demand concerns in many other parts of the world. For example, Departments of

Education in the United States and Australia are struggling to secure and retain qualified and motivated teachers (Moore Johnson, Birkeland, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Peske, 2001; Martinez, 2004). There is a significant body of research focused on teacher attrition and retention (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). Many novice teachers leave the profession within the first three years due to a lack of support as they transition from being “students of teaching to teachers of students” (Fry, 2007, p. 216). Moore Johnson et al. (2001) have observed that mentorship, in an international context, is seen as an important part in teacher induction and retention, and a means by which jurisdictions can maintain workforces of well-trained and dedicated teachers.

The perceived tensions between Old Guard and New Guard are contradictory to extant research on the benefits of mentoring relationships between senior and novice teachers. Teaching is the only profession that puts new graduates and novices into situations with the same performance expectations it holds for its most senior and experienced members (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010; Van Nuland, 2011). Senior teachers can provide a scaffold for new teachers. Juarez-Torres et al. (2007) state that many senior teachers feel a responsibility to help new teachers and their peers towards improving education in general.

According to Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009), there exists significant research on the benefits of mentoring to pre-service and novice teachers. As well, there has been a recent interest in understanding the benefits for those in the mentorship role. In their study, Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009) report a “need to deepen the understanding of the motives and benefits for mentors in order to highlight the potential contribution of the mentoring relations to the mentor, to novice teachers, to schools, and to the society” (p. 61). Understanding the mentor’s motivations can lead to a better understanding of the role of the senior teacher

within the school system. Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005) call for the need for “nuanced descriptions of interactions between thoughtful mentors and beginning teachers in order to understand how mentoring can be a strategy to promote effective teaching and learning” (p. 681).

Current teacher demographics, the state of employment in the Nova Scotia schools, the number of senior teachers and the job prospects for young teachers make this research timely and necessary. A void is created when retiring teachers take with them their experience and expertise and are replaced by novice teachers many years removed from their original teacher training. Studying the mentoring relationship in a time of teacher oversupply, as it exists in the Nova Scotia context, provides a different lens through which to view this phenomenon. Through an exploration of the stories of senior and novice teachers, this research examines the role mentoring plays in the cycle of teachers in the Nova Scotia school system.

1.4 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this collective case study is to explore different representations on the relationship between senior and novice teachers by exploring the phenomenon of mentorship. *Mentoring* is defined as a “nurturing process in which a skilled or more experienced person teaches, sponsors, encourages, and counsels a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (Anderson & Shannon, 1988, p. 45).

The individuals who represent the groups identified in the research, namely senior teachers and novice teachers as stakeholders, are defined as the following: *Senior teachers* are those who are actively teaching and possess twenty or more years of experience in the

classroom. *Novice teachers* are those with fewer than five years of classroom experience who are new to the system, the school or the grade level.

Qualitative research using a case study design provides specific examples from imbedded individuals. Semi-structured interviews with mentors and mentees provide nuanced descriptions of teacher mentorship within the current educational context in Nova Scotia. The data offer a perspective of the “us against them” mindset while representing the views of the two participant groups and expanding our understanding of this complex interpersonal relationship.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research offers an important perspective for teachers, both senior and novice, to consider during this current cycle of teacher employment in Nova Scotia. An Old Guard vs. New Guard dichotomy runs contrary to the reported benefits of senior-novice mentoring relationships. The situation as presented in Nova Scotia schools provides an opportunity for deeper investigation. The alternate context of teacher oversupply provides a different lens through which to see the mentoring relationship and the role of senior teachers.

This research gives voice to senior teachers who choose to act as mentors and to their novice protégés. Understanding the role that senior teachers play in mentoring, often as an informal endeavor, provides an opportunity to assess the value placed on this role by those actively involved. Mentoring can have a positive impact on inducting and acclimating novice teachers into the profession.

The findings of this study will benefit teachers working within the current constraints of education funding in Nova Scotia. In times of pressure in the funding of education, the knowledge and experience of senior teachers is an important resource for school boards.

More broadly, learning why senior teachers choose to become mentors, how this relationship is perceived by the novice and understanding the value attributed to the experience has implications for tapping into a resources and expertise that can improve practice for both the novice and senior teacher.

Enrollment projections and teacher supply data indicate that the present situation will not be altered in the near future. This research takes the stories of imbedded individuals and offers their view from inside the mentoring relationship. In the face of evidence of the benefits of having both senior and novice teachers in a school system who are actively seeking out and practicing mentorship, an anticipated outcome of this study is a greater respect for the contributions of teachers at different experience levels. Teachers in Nova Scotia will be better able to achieve a constructive perspective in these times of declining enrollment and teacher oversupply.

1.6 Research Questions

In this qualitative study I intend to explore different representations on the relationship between senior and novice teachers by studying the phenomenon of mentorship. Through semi-structured interviews with senior and novice teachers, I will examine teacher mentorship within the current educational context in Nova Scotia. Specifically, this study will seek to answer three principal questions: 1) Why do senior teachers act as mentors to novice teachers? 2) How do novice teachers represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors? and 3) To what extent is this contribution valued by those engaged in the mentorship relationship? Analyzing and interpreting the data will develop the understanding of the role senior teachers play in this school system and the value stakeholders place on this role.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduced the study, described the problem under investigation and outlined the purpose for conducting the research. In this chapter, I outlined my personal motivations for undertaking this research through relevant background information. I described the current employment situation for teachers, as it exists in Nova Scotia today and into the near future. Working from the perception that senior teachers should retire and make way for novice teachers to enter the system, I propose to examine the relationship that exists between senior and novice teachers by specifically exploring the phenomenon of mentorship. I will examine the motivations, perceptions and valuations of the stakeholders.

Chapter Two presents a thorough review of extant literature relevant to the research problem namely, considering mentoring relationships, what role do senior teachers play in regards to novice teachers and is that role valued by the stakeholders. Here I provide insight into the literature that defines this situation. Current demographic data and projections for school employment as they exist in Nova Scotia are compared and contrasted from a Canadian as well as global perspective. Economic perspectives are presented which counter the notion that if more senior teachers retire it will translate into more novice teachers being hired.

The phenomenon of mentoring is explored as it relates to this research. Mentoring is viewed in the context of the impact and benefits it has on the stakeholders in the process, namely senior and novice teachers. Research will be presented that relates specifically to the senior teacher as mentor and the novice teacher as mentee.

The literature will outline gaps in existing research and illustrate a need for further study, specifically into the perspective of those who act as mentors. Positioning this research in the living context of Nova Scotia schools lays the foundation for dialogue into the role of senior teachers in their relationships with novices.

Chapter Three details the methodology for this qualitative research. In this chapter, I explain the use of the collective case study as the theoretical and conceptual framework for the research. As well, I will present the research design and the procedures that were followed in conducting the study and collecting data from participants actively engaged in the mentoring relationship. The use of semi-structured interviews for data collection as well as data analysis strategies will be explained. Issues of trustworthiness, transferability and conformability will be discussed as well as possible limitations of the research methods.

Chapter Four presents data and findings. The aim of data collection was to collect the lived experiences of senior teachers acting as mentors and novice teachers who participate in the relationship as mentees. In keeping with the collective case study model of qualitative research, data analysis involved both within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2008, p. 489). According to Baxter and Jack (2008), “[a] multiple or collective case study will allow the researcher to analyze within each setting and across settings...examining several cases to understand the similarities and differences between the cases” (p. 550). As several participants in the mentor/mentee relationship were studied, analysis of this type enabled a rich understanding of the data to emerge.

Chapter Five is the final chapter of the thesis. I examine the principal findings of the research, identifying and discussing the educational implications of the research. In this chapter I suggest how the findings can be directly connected to the current and on-going

situation in Nova Scotia schools. Referring to the research questions, I demonstrate the value of the present study in expanding our knowledge base and applying it to teachers. I offer encouragement for more senior teachers to become involved in the mentoring process. As well, concrete suggestions as to how novice teachers can develop and expand a network of mentors are offered. I conclude with an analysis of the limitations of my research and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This chapter presents a thematic review of the literature. Themes significant to understanding the research questions and the purpose of the research are explored. An exploration of extant literature supports the need for this study.

The phenomenon of the mentorship as it occurs between senior and novice teachers offers the opportunity to explore the relationship between educators at opposite ends of the career continuum. Situating this exploration in the province of Nova Scotia allows for an examination of this relationship in the context of changing teacher demographics, population decline and enrollment projection factors.

The Nova Scotia context is examined as it relates to teacher resource allocations, teacher supply and demand and how these impact senior and novice teachers. The review also presents research on mentoring, the benefits of mentoring, and senior teachers as mentors and novice teachers as mentees.

2.1 Nova Scotia Context

To authentically interpret data collected in this research, the study must be positioned in the local context as it impacts the circumstances of the participants as well as how data can be related and understood on a broader level. Several important factors are at play in Nova Scotia that directly impact human resource allotments in schools. Demographic drivers such as low birth rates, an aging population and out-migration are pushing down enrollment in Nova Scotia schools (APEC, 2012). Nova Scotia currently has an oversupply of qualified teachers. Senior teachers are not retiring when they reach the age of eligibility and Bachelor of Education programs continue to admit pre-service teachers at a steady rate (Nova Scotia

Department of Education, 2012). According to Van Nuland (2011), these factors - declining enrollment, fewer retirements, and high numbers of graduates - means there is substantial unemployment or underemployment among young teachers. Increasingly, new graduates enter the system as substitute teachers. A very small number find permanent employment in Nova Scotia, and while some secure term positions, most graduates will work as substitutes. For those working as substitutes in 2003-04, 29% had found permanent jobs, 10% had term positions, and 22% remained substitutes in 2008-09 (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012).

In February 2011, the Minister of Education released a letter to parents, students and staff, which outlined the Department of Education's strategy for funding reductions in Nova Scotia school boards. In the letter, the Minister explained that school boards had been directed to "achieve savings primarily through teacher and staff retirements and significant reductions in administration while maintaining quality in the classroom" (p. 1). According to a report released in June 2012, the *Canadian Occupational Projection System* [COPS] forecasts that over the next five years, "Employment in occupations associated with the primary and secondary school system is expected to weaken as enrollment continues to decline and budgets tighten" (p. 2). The report predicts minimal growth from 2011-2016 in social sciences, education and government services in the range of 0.2% (COPS, 2012). In each of the five years between 2003-04 and 2008-09, teaching certificates were issued to an average of 392 graduates from within Nova Scotia and 589 teachers trained elsewhere (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012, p. 17).

The interplay of these factors (demographics, reduced funding and teacher over-supply) results in novice teachers spending at least five years awaiting their first term or

probationary teaching position. In the meantime, many young teachers work sporadically as substitutes, often in many different schools. According to Van Nuland (2011), new teachers are also finding work outside of the public system in private schools or in museums, libraries or the private sector.

These findings suggest a difficult labor market for new teachers in Nova Scotia. Students continue to enroll in Bachelor of Education programs, yet upon graduation, they may face several years of inconsistent employment before securing permanent jobs in the system. The employment path to permanent classroom positions may take novice teachers in many different directions not directly related to their pre-service training.

The next sections of this literature review will focus on the phenomenon of mentoring as well as those senior teachers who act as mentors and novice teachers in the role of mentees.

2.2 Mentoring

In keeping with the purpose of this research project, this review of literature will focus specifically on defining mentorship and what it means to mentor.

Mentoring is defined by Anderson and Shannon (1988) as a “nurturing process in which a skilled or more experienced person teaches, sponsors, encourages, and counsels a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (p. 45). Traditionally, mentoring has been seen as a “ dyadic process between a senior person and a less experienced protégé” (Ensher & Murphy, 2010, p. 254).

According to Feiman-Nemser (2001), mentoring has been part of the discussion in education since the 1980s. The practice has been described as one that provides professional,

social and emotional support (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009), as well as fostering a sense of trust between senior and novice teachers (Juarez-Torres, Lane Hurst & Hurst, 2007).

Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) state that mentoring “is integral to our approach to teaching and professionalism” (p. 50). To truly learn the craft of teaching, educators need role models in the form of mentors. Feiman-Nemser (2001) says that such support is critical in the beginning years of teachers’ careers as they are teaching and learning to teach at the same time.

Mentoring can be formal and scheduled or informal and spontaneous. Green-Powell (2012) refers to two types of mentoring: natural and planned.

Planned mentoring occurs within a structured environment or program in which voluntary participants are screened and matched through a formal application process.

In contrast, natural mentoring occurs through friendship and collegiality, teaching, coaching and counseling – more a self-selection process (p. 101).

Some senior or veteran teachers in schools assume the role of formal or informal mentor to those entering the profession or those new to a school or a subject area.

The notion of mentoring in education has been evolving. Several models of mentoring have developed:

- Traditional Model - The traditional model of mentoring emerged from research in the 1980s. According to Feiman-Nemser (1996), this is when “mentoring burst onto the educational scene as part of a broad movement aimed at ... reforming teaching and teacher education” (p.2). Traditional mentoring is a hierarchical dyad with a one-way flow of information from the older, more experienced and often more powerful mentor to the protégé. The protégé invests less and benefits professionally and

psycho-socially (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Jones & Brown, 2011). This model is still the standard today in practical situations, for example when pre-service teachers are placed with supervising or co-operating teachers.

- Reciprocal Model - Recent research considers the traditional model as too simplistic in explaining what happens in a mentoring relationship. Jones and Brown (2011) look at both the mentor and the mentee as stakeholders in the relationship. Green-Powell (2012) observes that there are benefits and rewards for both the mentor and the mentee. Reciprocal mentoring is seen as collaborative with information flowing in both directions. Both participants reap rewards from the experience. No one teaches in complete isolation and the mentoring relationship allows for shared learning between the mentor and the novice in a form akin to a small learning community (Juarez-Torres et al., 2007).

Current trends point to a broadening of the concept of mentoring. New models are emerging to reflect changing interactions between participants and the ways participants come to be involved in mentoring relationship.

- Reverse Mentoring - This evolving form of mentorship is relevant now in times of rapidly changing technology. For example, as technology becomes more and more part of everyday practice, young, technologically savvy workers are now positioned to be mentors to their senior co-workers who may be less comfortable (Ballard, 2013; Jones & Brown, 2011; Sensenig, 2011).
- Bottom-Up Mentoring: A method of mentoring that is becoming more and more accepted as novices seek out other professionals, including senior practitioners, through social media like *LinkedIn* which results in a kind of virtual mentorship

(Ballard, 2013; Sensenig, 2011). With the rapid changes experienced in most work places due to innovations in technology and the transfer of information and ideas, novices have to look for opportunities to share and learn (Mavrinac, 2005).

- Peer Mentoring (Lateral Mentoring): Defined by Bryant and Terborg (2008) as “an intentional one-on-one relationship between employees at a same or similar lateral level” (p. 11), peer or lateral mentoring offers a further option to novice teachers. Different from traditional mentoring, it offers a sharing of experiences for career and organizational support. The definition of peer mentoring is further expanded by Mavrinac (2005) to be a non-hierarchical relationship that involves a variety of peers. Sensenig (2011) states that those peers do not have to be part of the same organization.

Teachers in schools are situated at all stages along the career continuum. Some may consider themselves experienced in one situation yet novice when working within an unfamiliar grade or subject area. While much of the daily work of teachers takes place in the relative isolation of classrooms, the school can also be conceptualized as a medium through which the teachers are brought together in a professional culture (Kardos, Moore Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001). It is within this type of school setting or strong positive culture that mentor relationships are established and nurtured (Peterson & Deal, 1998).

Mentoring is not a static process. It is growing and evolving, yet the overriding philosophy of mentoring remains the same. Those who enter into a mentor relationship are involved in a process that supports the growth and learning of teachers. The following section will look specifically at the benefits of being involved in a mentor relationship.

2.3 Benefits of Mentoring

The role of mentor may be as basic and natural as a parent passing on language to a child or as complex as a tradesperson passing on the secrets and subtleties of their craft to an apprentice. Like the journeyman, becoming a master teacher is an iterative process, the skills and learning necessary being acquired over a career. Research indicates that senior teachers are sharing their knowledge and experience with novice teachers through the act of mentoring. The work of several researchers (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010; Carter & Francis, 2001; Feiman- Nemser, 2001; Green-Powell, 2012; Hall, Draper, Smith, & Bullough, Jr., 2008; Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka, 2009; Juarez-Torres, Lane Hurst, & Hurst, 2007; McCann, 2010; McCann, 2011; Spangler, 2010) discusses many different aspects of mentoring. This section will review the current research concerning its benefits.

Retention of new teachers is a common trend in school staffing that exists across many jurisdictions (including Nova Scotia where there is an oversupply of teachers). Retention is an issue in other places in Canada, the United States, Australia and Europe (such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, and France) where data show that there is an adequate supply of teachers (Barrera, et al., 2010; Moore Johnson, Birkeland, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Peske, 2001; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012) but where poor salaries, working conditions and on the job support may not be sufficient to entice people to stay in the profession (Moore Johnson et al. 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2003). Many young teachers begin their careers only to abandon the profession in the first three to five years (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). In the United States, it is estimated that about one third of new teachers will quit in the first five years (Darling-Hammond,

2003). Each year in Nova Scotia, approximately 20% of licensed teachers leave the province to seek positions in other provinces or to find work in other sectors (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012).

There are considerable costs in terms of money, time and training, to the excessive turnover of teachers in a school system. “There is widespread agreement among policy-makers in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom that early career teacher attrition is of economic, social and educational concern” (Long, McKenzie-Robblee, Schaefer, Steeves, Wnuk, Pinnegar, & Clandinin, 2012, p. 7).

According to Darling-Hammond (2003) a school system does not reap any long-term payoff from time and training invested when novice teachers exit the system. Loss of teachers’ human capital has been found to impact student growth and learning (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). While other sectors may well benefit from the skill sets of trained teachers, their potential is not realized within the education system.

While there are various reasons for attrition among novice teachers, many cite a lack of support in their personal transitions from students to teachers as the main reason for leaving the profession (Fry, 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010; Moore Johnson et al., 2001). While others report a lack of support within the school community itself (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Moore Johnson et al., 2001), McCann (2011) states that novice teachers are often placed in the most difficult teaching positions with the most challenging students and Ingersoll and Strong (2011) refer to teaching as the only profession in which we “cannibalize” our young (p. 202). According to Le Maistre and Pare (2010) other professions like physiotherapy, occupational therapy and social work apprentice their novice professionals. Teaching is the only career in which we expect those new to the job to

perform to the same standards as those with considerably more experience (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008; Van Nuland, 2011).

According to Van Nuland (2011), some pre-service teacher training programs are trying to expand the intern experiences of their student teachers. Some examples include cohort models involving one school or a family of schools that works with a specific group of students. As well, some faculties of education provided for ongoing practicum throughout the whole program.

Investigators have studied the role that mentoring can play in the retention of new teachers and how mentoring can help ease the transition of novice teachers into the classroom. Wang et al. (2008) state that the first years are crucial in the professional development of teachers and their desire to continue in their careers.

The art of teaching is not mastered in a university lecture hall or in a teacher-training program. Most of what novice teachers need to learn about teaching happens on their feet, in classroom placements as pre-service teachers or as novice teachers working in their own classrooms for the first time. Van Nuland (2012) refers to this process as the “continuum of teacher development” (p. 414). Novice teachers have been trained in the theory of teaching. They are students of the latest methods and philosophies in education. Coffey (2012) reports that without the proper supports in place, novice teachers quickly forget the new methodologies and turn to survival mode, implementing strategies they experienced themselves as students in school. According to Long, Hall, Conway, and Murphy (2012) many novice teachers prefer to become invisible and hide rather than to step forward and ask

for help. The strong support of an empathetic mentor can enable novice teachers to exercise what they have learned and apply it to their personal practice (McCann, 2011).

It is not simply the theory of teaching that concerns novice teachers. It is also the practice of teaching, the link between instruction and the social environment (Glazer, 2008). Novice teachers look to their fellow teachers for more than just how to teach but also how to fit into the school culture (Kardos et al., 2001). New teachers need to be able to navigate the organizing structures that determine their interactions with their colleagues as well as the intangibles of running a classroom and meeting the needs of their students (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Van Nuland, 2011). Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005) state “new teachers need help making the transition to independent teaching” (p. 679). They require psychological support, technical assistance and guidance as to customs, culture and policies. All of these demands and expectation offer particular challenges to novice teachers.

The overall benefits to a novice teacher of having a senior teacher as mentor have been discussed in the literature. Green-Powell (2012) states “[m]entoring programs are seen to bridge the gap between professional post-secondary programs and independent exercise of professional roles” (p. 99). According to Ingersoll and Strong (2011), mentorship plays an important role in developing teacher commitment and retention, improving classroom practice and enhancing student achievement.

An exploration of the roles of senior teachers who act as mentors and the novice teachers whom they mentor will be presented in the following sections.

2.4 Senior Teachers as Mentors

Mentor is not a role embraced by every senior teacher. Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009) have studied senior mentors to “deepen the understanding of the motives and benefits

for mentors in order to highlight the potential contribution of the mentoring relations to the mentor, to novice teachers, to schools, and to the society” (p. 61). The following discussion will further explore these ideas to better understand the function of the senior teacher within the mentor-mentee relationship and to represent the reasons some senior teachers chose to become mentors.

The motivations for a teacher to become a mentor appear to be both intrinsic and extrinsic and related to school culture and personal ethos. “Those most likely to become mentors are teachers with strong ideological convictions or a tendency to act altruistically” (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009, p.60). Some teachers who assume the role of mentor feel a sense of responsibility to other teachers, their profession and the future of education (Juarez-Torres et al., 2007). Senior mentors can remember themselves as novices and place themselves in the position of newcomer (McCann, 2011). According to Juarez-Torres et al. (2007), some mentors view the process as “a continuing collaborative effort, which generates life-long learning and professional interdependence in the form of nurturance within a professional and personal friendship” (p. 17).

Hall et al. (2008) indicate a distinct difference between those who act as mentors for in-service novice teachers and those who occupy the traditional role of co-operating teacher for pre-service students of teaching. According to Hall et al., co-operating teachers provide a placement for pre-service teachers. They model teaching and allow pre-service teachers to practice teaching. Mentor teachers engage in activities that are much deeper and complex. For a novice teacher, their senior mentor may occupy the role of parent, advisor, counselor, model, coach and guide (Hall et al., 2008). Mentors, on the other hand, are not supervisors; they act as supporters to the novice teachers.

By examining a variety of research literature, a profile of the senior teacher as mentor can be developed. Barrera et al. (2010) characterize mentors as those teachers who are generous with their time and praise while conveying a positive attitude about mentoring. Rippon and Martin (2006) state that mentors are approachable, credible, motivational and confident in their own ability to positively impact the teachers they mentor. Mentors are empathetic (McCann, 2011) and provide emotional and psychosocial support to their protégés (Carter & Francis, 2001). As well, mentors provide professional and technical support to their mentees. They are comfortable talking about their own practice. Mentors listen to the concerns of their mentees and encourage them to reflect on their developing practices (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2011). These personal traits lead many senior teachers into the role of mentor.

Combined with the characteristics that make many mentors ‘teachers of teachers’, there are other philosophical and organizational factors that lead senior teachers to the role of mentor. Many mentors were themselves members of a mentoring relationship in their novice years. According to Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009) these mentors want to “return the favor” (p. 53) as a professional duty and give back to the system that helped them develop as teachers. Juarez-Torres et al. (2007) report that many mentors feel an obligation to the profession to help novice teachers. On a broader scale, mentoring has been perceived as making a difference for students, schools and the education system in general (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). Mentors seem to hold a greater respect for the profession and a desire to further its growth.

There are benefits for senior teachers who engage in a mentor relationship. Many senior teachers feel mentoring is an opportunity to expand their personal and professional

growth. They see it as a validation of their practice and years of accumulated experiences as well as an opportunity to pass on their wisdom (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). According to Juarez-Torres, Lane Hurst, and Hurst (2007), mentoring cultivates the senior teachers' passion for learning while some senior teachers re-engage with their own practice and experience professional renewal as they interact with novice teachers (Rajuan, Tuchin, & Zuckermann, 2011). Senior mentors develop a growing sense of trust in their novice colleagues (Juarez-Torres, Lane Hurst, & Hurst, 2007). Effective mentors hone their own skills while guiding their protégés (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). These reciprocal benefits indicate that mentoring has positive consequences for the mentors.

Researchers report that there may also be negative consequences for mentors including strains on the senior teacher's physical and mental resources (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). Some teachers are hesitant to engage in a mentoring relationship because of time limitations and workload demands (Barrera, Braley & Slate, 2010; Rajuan, Tuchin & Zuckerman, 2011). Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009) also found that some senior teachers encountered negative attitudes from their novice protégés as well as push back that seem to be rooted in the organizational culture of the school.

This examination of senior teachers as mentors demonstrates that certain internal motivations and external factors can be attributed to senior teachers who act as mentors. The mentor relationship offers benefits for senior teachers but with the role also comes some possible negative consequences for mentors. To balance the exploration of the stakeholders in the mentor relationship, the following section will focus on novice mentees.

2.5 Novice Teachers as Mentees

In the five years between 2005 and 2009, the Province of Nova Scotia issued an average of 981 new teaching certificates (p.18) annually. In 2008-09, only 4.5% of those holding permanent or probationary contracts in Nova Scotia were under the age of 30 (p. 38) so novice teachers are spending many years removed from their teacher training and practical pre-service experiences before securing positions in their own classrooms.

Novice teachers are faced with many challenges as they work through their foundational years in the profession. These challenges can impact their success and satisfaction with the job as well as the decision to remain as teachers or to seek other forms of employment. Given these circumstances of employment, Liebenberg (2010) states that many novice teachers report a desire to have a professional relationship with a senior teacher and want to seek out a mentor to help ease the transition into their new responsibilities.

The current demographic makeup of the teaching profession presents ideal conditions for the development of mentorship arrangements. People who are now entering the teaching profession are referred to as the *Millennials* - those born in 1978 and later (Richardson, 2011). Richardson (2011) contrasts the Millennials to groups called the Traditionalists, Baby-Boomers, and Gen Xers. The shared experiences of these generational groups produced teachers with distinct orientations and skill sets. The Traditionalists are considered to be managerial and technically efficient, the Baby Boomers are individual and professionally autonomous, and the Gen Xers more collaborative and collegial. The Millennial teacher is significantly different from these three categories of teachers who currently dominate the system. Millennials have a high tolerance for change and innovation; an easy fit with teamwork; an ability, if not desire, to multi-task; a love of technology and a comfort with

accountability. Richardson (2011) states, “Millennials are eager to be mentored by older, experienced teachers” (p. 17). Accustomed to being supported and encouraged by their parents and teachers, Millennials value support and feedback and want to collaborate and contribute with senior teachers in their schools (Richardson, 2011). New teachers have the latest professional theories and senior teachers have the experience to guide those theories into practice (McCann, 2010). There is the opportunity to combine the generational traits of those entering the system with the experience and knowledge of senior teachers.

Novice teachers are looking for professional, social, and emotional support (Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka, 2009; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005) and according to Barrera et al. (2010), “[i]t is during the first years of teaching that beginning teachers can be expected to realize the most gains in their profession” (p. 62). Novice teachers report feeling ill prepared for the realities of the classroom (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Fry, 2007; Long et al., 2012) and experience difficulties bridging the divide between practice and theory (Van Nuland, 2011). In their research, Hebert and Worthy (2001) found consistencies in descriptions of early teaching years. Many novice teachers characterized their first years of professional growth in negative terms citing frustration, isolation, demanding workloads with challenging students, difficulties with planning and classroom management, and having to learn through trial and error. Many novice teachers indicate that they want to ask for help. However, they perceived this need for help as negatively impacting their credibility (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010) and/or an admission of failure (Hebert & Worthy, 2001).

Kardos et al. (2001) expanded their research beyond professional development to consider the social growth of novice teachers. They reported that novices look to senior teachers for more than just how to teach but also how to fit into the school’s organizational

culture. Understanding norms of behavior, expectations and interactions are important to the social development of novice teachers. As well, Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, and Bergen (2011) found that novices sought emotional support in the form of trust and care with a senior mentor. Similarly, Carter and Francis (2001) found that schools that provided conditions of support and collegiality were environments that allowed novice teachers to develop positive professional relationships with senior mentors.

The slow and difficult work of becoming a teacher is managed best when teachers have the emotional and task support they need in a mentoring relationship (Hennissen et al., 2011). Research indicates that in general, novice teachers benefit from positive relationships with senior teachers and are ready and willing to engage in mentor relationships. The following section will explore the research available on the value stakeholders place on the mentoring relationship.

2.6 Valuing the Mentor Relationship

The term *value* can be considered in several ways. Value can indicate monetary worth. It can also refer to standards of behavior or more specifically for this study, the consideration of something as important, worthy or useful. Representations of these interpretations of value can be found in the mentorship literature.

Research indicates that mentoring provides economic and professional value for those paying for the professional development of novice teachers. Formal mentorship programs are being developed for novice teachers as a means of induction in an attempt to increase retention (Kardos et al., 2001; Moore Johnson et al., 2001) and as a vehicle for instructional leadership to improve practice (Glazer, 2008). Given fiscal restraints and budget cuts, the act of mentoring makes sense. In 2000, Hargreaves and Fullan wrote that mentoring was

“central to the task of transforming the teaching profession itself” (p. 50). They indicated that while overall teacher effectiveness is increased, the benefits extended to a rejuvenation of senior teachers. Mentoring contributes to the experienced teachers’ professional development (Hennissen et al., 2011). Iancu-Hadda and Oplatka (2009) list several other areas of growth for senior teachers including enhanced self-esteem, the opportunity to pass on personal values, validation of their experience and knowledge as well as a means of making a lasting contribution to a future generation of educators.

For novice teachers, Hennissen et al. (2011) indicate that there is “increasing evidence and recognition of the value of learning in the workplace” (p.1049). Novice teachers indicate a preference for more practical experiences and time in schools throughout their teacher training programs (Carter & Francis, 2001). Mentoring in the workplace has been shown to have benefits for new teachers’ technical, social and emotional development (Hennissen et al., 2011). There is an “increased need for continuous learning, reliance on informal learning, and on-the-job development [and] mentoring offers an inexpensive method of engaging in these activities” (Germain, 2011, p.123).

There is less concrete evidence available that considers the value that mentors and mentees place on the mentoring relationship. Most research examines mentoring processes and practices and focuses mainly on the benefits accrued by the novice teachers in the relationship with little research into the reasons why veteran teachers become mentors (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). Understanding the mentor’s motivations can lead to a better understanding of the value senior teachers place on the mentoring relationship. As well, the work of Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005) indicates that expectations and values of the novice teacher impact the success of the mentoring process. Long et al. (2012) suggest

“it is vital that beginning teachers’ voices are heard in designing what would support them in their development as beginning teachers... [including] questions around the support that beginning teachers value” (p. 22). Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship. The views of stakeholders on both sides of the relationship will impact the success of the process. Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005) state a need for “nuanced descriptions of interactions between thoughtful mentors and beginning teachers” (p. 681) in a school culture that supports and values teachers helping teachers. This research project endeavors to provide a forum for the voices, experiences and values of senior and novice teachers in mentoring relationships.

2.7 Summary of Research Literature

The literature presented in this chapter focused on several important aspects of the context that informed the development of this research and the phenomenon of mentoring as it exists as a dyadic relationship between senior and novice teachers.

This investigation is situated in Nova Scotia in the evolving climate of changing teacher demographics, declining enrollment, out-migration and reductions in education spending. These factors directly impact the research questions for this investigation. There exists a surplus of teachers with more new teachers being licensed each year. In combination with declining enrolments and reduced funding, the result is limited employment prospects for novice teachers (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012).

Literature related to the phenomenon of mentoring, specifically what it means to mentor and the benefits of mentoring provide the foundational perspective for the concepts that were used in the development and design of this study. Of particular significance is an understanding of mentoring as a relationship between a senior and a novice in which the growth and development of the novice is guided and supported by the senior (Anderson &

Shannon, 1988; Ensher & Murphy, 2010). Mentoring has been discussed in relation to teaching since the 1980s (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The traditional dyadic representation of mentoring has been evolving and several new models have emerged including a reciprocal model (Green-Powell, 2012; Jones & Brown, 2011), reverse mentoring (Ballard, 2013; Jones & Brown, 2011; Sensenig, 2011), bottom-up mentoring (Ballard, 2013; Mavrinac, 2005; Sensenig, 2011), and peer or lateral mentoring (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Mavrinac, 2005; Sensenig, 2011).

Retention of early career teachers and the associated costs in terms of money, time and training is a worldwide concern (Barrera et al., 2010; Moore Johnson et al., 2001). Retention issues are present in Nova Scotia as well, even given the oversupply of teachers (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012). Of the teachers who choose to leave the profession in their first years, many cite a lack of support as they transition from being students to teachers as the predominant reason for attrition (Fry, 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010; Moore Johnson et al., 2001). Being involved in a mentoring relationship can provide a novice teacher with the support necessary to apply the theories of education learned in university. (McCann, 2011; VanNuland, 2011). Hennissen et al. (2011) conclude that mentoring results in a positive impact on the competency of novice teachers and their socialization into the school structure. Mentoring can provide practical and technical assistance as well as psychological support and navigation through customs, culture and policies (Glazer, 2008; Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Kardos et al., 2001; Van Nuland, 2011).

To position the research questions, it is necessary to understand the motivating factors for senior teachers who chose to act as mentors. Research literature identifies several characteristics in those teachers who are mentors. Motivated both intrinsically and

extrinsically, mentors often feel a responsibility to give back to their profession and see mentoring as making a broader difference for the educational system (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009; Juarez-Torres & et al., 2007). For some senior teachers, mentoring is an opportunity for their own personal and professional growth and renewal (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009; Rajuan et al., 2011; Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Given the realities of teacher employment in Nova Scotia, many new teachers work as substitutes or in temporary assignments often years removed from their teacher training. When they finally get tenure, working in relative isolation of a classroom can be a daunting experience. Novice teachers often feel ill prepared for the realities of teaching and report their early professional years in negative terms (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Fry, 2007; Long et al., 2012; Van Nuland, 2011). Novices often perceive asking for help as a sign of weakness (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). Mentoring of novice teachers has a positive impact on commitment and retention, classroom practice and student achievement (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011) and according to Richardson (2011), generational characteristics of those referred to as *Millennials* makes mentoring an ideal vehicle through which to support novice teachers.

The value of mentoring can be considered in terms both monetary and professional. Mentorship has been shown to make sense in terms of money, time and training costs to schools and the education system as a whole (Glazer, 2008; Kardos et al., 2001; Moore Johnson et al., 2001). Senior teachers report personal and professional growth and development (Hennissen et al., 2011; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). Novice teachers learn and develop in the work place while receiving technical, emotional and social support (Carter & Francis, 2001; Germain, 2011; Hennissen et al., 2011).

Attributing the value or importance stakeholders place on the mentoring relationship is less frequently recorded in the literature. Researchers indicate a need for descriptions beyond the process and benefits of mentoring to include the lived experiences of senior teachers who become mentors (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). As well, more research is needed to better understand how the novice mentees value this relationship in order to support their development as early career teachers (J. Long et al., 2012; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to explore the different representations of the relationship between senior and novice teachers using the phenomenon of mentoring to expand our understanding of this interpersonal relationship. By considering why senior teachers act as mentors and how this act is represented by the novice mentees, a description of the value the teachers place on the relationship will emerge. Studying this relationship, as it exists in the context of the education system in Nova Scotia provides a different lens through which to view this phenomenon and offers a contrast to data collected in other jurisdictions.

Chapter three provides the research methodology for this project. It will position the researcher from an epistemological perspective as it pertains to data collection and analysis.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This study is designed to explore the phenomenon of mentorship as a means to understand the relationship that exists between senior teachers who mentor, novice teachers who are mentored and to realize the value that each group attributes to the mentoring relationship. Chapter Two presented research from studies in domains that represented the themes covered in this exploration.

This chapter presents the methodology for this collective case study, describes the research paradigm, the procedures used to conduct the research and the data collection and analysis.

3.1 Epistemological Considerations and Theoretical Perspective

The act of mentoring as it occurs in schools, between senior teachers and their novice protégés, is a personal exchange. It may be a formal scheduled session to debrief and plan for the next day or it may be as simple as an encouraging pat on the shoulder and a smile on the way to class at the beginning of the school day. The relationship exists as an exchange between professionals in their work setting. According to Juarez-Torres et al. (2007) mentoring takes place “in a socially constructed context of experiential learning, such as a school, where interpersonal relationships provide guidance, advice, support and feedback in the learning process” (p. 16). McCann (2011) extends this further to describe the relationship of senior mentor and novice mentee as one of empathy in which the senior teacher is putting themselves into the role of the novice through understanding and compassion.

This research is situated within an interpretive (constructivist) paradigm. Crotty (2003) explains that this perspective accepts that there is no objective or stand-alone truth.

Truth and meaning develop as we engage and interact with our world; meaning is not discovered but rather constructed through our interactions with others in this world. Constructivism contends “truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). Hatch (2002) says that considering experience from this unique perspective means that those who live it construct reality in relation to their own place in the world. Hence, meaning is socially and culturally constructed.

Interactions alone do not result in the same meaning being constructed for each individual. “[D]ifferent people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 2003, p. 9). Knowledge and experience with the phenomenon of mentoring are “real” for the research participants in that they are constructed from their realities and emerge from their interpretations of the phenomenon. Interpretivism is a way to explain the social and cultural realities for the research participants involved in this exploration of mentoring. “The interpretivist approach...looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 2003, p. 67). It is these “relative” interpretations of the research participants that provide the focus of this study and attempt to answer the research questions.

3.2 Situating the Researcher

In interpretive inquiry, the investigator provides a voice to study participants. To understand the words and to value the message generously given by the participants, researchers must first place themselves within the context of the research. According to Walker (2005) “an introspective look at ourselves as researchers...is critical to producing work that is valid” (p. 33). Hellowell (2006) contends that researchers must place themselves on the insider-outsider continuum and engage in “deliberate self-scrutiny in relation to the

research process” (p. 483). Researchers are encouraged to become more reflexive, to see “the role of [their] beliefs and values ...in the selection of research methodology for the generation of knowledge and its production as a research account” (Hellowell, 2006, p. 483). This push for reflexivity guides the researcher to uncover and acknowledge their own subjectivity and biases as they approach the research.

Working within the context of this study, I recognize that I am an insider on the continuum, sharing characteristics and experiences with those being studied. I am a teacher who has benefitted from the knowledge, guidance and support of a mentor and who has also worked in the role of mentor to pre-service and novice teachers. I am interested in the value placed on the role that senior teachers play in integrating new teachers into the school system. I believe that the contribution of senior teachers, in their unpaid, self-directed efforts to help new teachers, to be crucial to the success of our profession and school system, overall.

While I acknowledge these biases, as a researcher involved in the collection and analysis of data from participants within the same professional group, I am well positioned to hear the voices of the participants and interpret their representations. Hatch (2002) states that it is impossible for a researcher working within this paradigm (interpretive constructivism) to be distant and objective. Researcher and participant are mutually engaged to construct a subjective reality. It is perhaps from this subjective viewpoint that I can best understand the motivations of senior teachers, the perceptions of novice teachers and the notions of valuation held by the stakeholders.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Qualitative research approach. Situated in the interpretivist paradigm, this study uses a qualitative research approach in the form of a collective case study model. To best understand the emotional and interpersonal nature of the exchanges that take place between senior and novice teachers engaged in the mentoring relationship, a qualitative approach to research is required. As Ritchie and Lewis (2003) state, “The aim of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the nature and form of phenomena, to unpack meanings, to develop explanations or to generate ideas, concepts and theories” (p. 82). The act of mentoring as it takes place in schools, between individuals carrying out similar tasks with differing motivations, perspectives and experiences, requires such an approach. Qualitative research is appropriate for educational research because it allows for expression of the views of those participating in the phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). “Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings” (Hoepfl, 1997, para. 4). The interpersonal dynamics of the mentoring process do not lend themselves to be represented by numbers but are better understood through the words of those engaged in the process.

3.3.2 Collective case study model. According to Hatch (2002) “[c]ase studies are a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized contemporary phenomenon” (p. 30). The “case” or unit of analysis focuses what will be examined (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this study, the current educational milieu that exists in Nova Scotia establishes the context for the study. The current climate of teacher over supply provides a particular challenge for new and novice teachers trying to secure positions in the Nova Scotia teacher labor market. Rapid population decline, an aging population, large reductions in

education spending and loss of teaching jobs created anxiety among new teachers and strong competition for the few available positions. These factors provide the background or context for the phenomenon under study.

Stake (1995) refers to research that focuses on understanding a particular phenomenon to be an instrumental case study, while Creswell (2008) classifies an instrumental collective case study as one that explores “several cases that provide insight into an issue (or theme)” (p. 477). A collective case study uses several “cases” to understand the phenomenon and gain insight into the issues that drive and define it (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The search for the motivations, perspectives and valuations of those who have participated in the mentoring relationship will enhance understanding of the act of mentoring as it naturally occurs, revealing many of its nuances and complexities. Yin (2003) encourages the use of a case study design when asking “why” questions of participants who are in certain contextual conditions. Differences within and between cases can then be explored. This allows for an examination of the phenomenon from various perspectives that provide rich detail and expand the understanding of this complex interpersonal relationship.

3.3.3 Binding the case. Creswell (2008) says that a case study takes place within a “bounded system” (p. 477). Defining the boundaries and specifying units of analysis are crucial to case study design (Hatch, 2002). The bounded system helps the researchers decide what the case is as well as what it is not (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case studies focus on individuals involved in an activity and a “case” may include several individuals who represent the process or activity. For the purposes of this study, the boundaries are defined as two related cases; one case being senior teachers who have acted as mentors and a second case of novice teachers who have been mentees. Five participants represent each case. This

model allows for analysis within each case and across the two cases. The boundaries of this case study delineate an instrumental case (Creswell, 2008) in that they utilize a particular issue, specifically mentoring, to provide insight into the nuances of the relationship between senior and novice teachers.

3.3.4 Using interviews in collective case studies. Interviews are a preferred method for data collection in qualitative research (Crotty, 2003; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews provide a “flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experiences” (Rabionet, 2011, p. 563). Interviews allow the researcher to collect participant knowledge, perspectives and perceptions while providing a means to continually analyze and adjust the questions to probe for more information (Whitt, 1991). Working within a collective case study model, semi-structured interviews provide an appropriate method by which to collect data and achieve insight into the research questions and the purpose of the investigation. Semi-structured interviews are useful when interviewing multiple participants, as in a collective case study model.

Individual in-depth interviews allow the researcher to “co-create meaning with interviewees by reconstructing perceptions of events and experiences” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to guide the interview but not limit the scope of feelings and experiences that may emerge from the interaction between the researcher and the participant. Based on the research questions, specific topics can be explored yet the participants’ stories can still emerge (Rabionet, 2011). The general theme of the interview is the same for each participant but open-ended questions allow for revision and redirection as the interview progresses through the collection of stories from a group of individuals with shared experiences on a topic.

3.3.5 Limitations of data collection. According to Creswell (2008) multiple forms of data are often used to achieve an in-depth understanding of the cases being studied. Baxter and Jack (2008) state that the use of the case study model “ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (p. 544). In this case study however, interviews were the sole method of data collection.

The original proposal for this study included an observational component that would require observation of senior and novice teachers actively involved in mentoring relationships. In compliance with the *Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics and Human Research*, Memorial University of Newfoundland, the observation component was removed from the study design. The Committee felt that an imbalance of power between the senior mentor and the novice mentee might impose social and employment risks to the novices involved and limit the novice’s ability to withdraw from the study. As well, since observations were to take place in schools, there was a concern that confidentiality and anonymity might be at risk.

To partially compensate for the change in research design, the sample size was increased from three participants in each case to five. In addition, the design was adjusted to ensure participants did not have any direct involvement in mentor relationships with other participants in the study. As well, interviews were not conducted at school sites but rather at locations of the participants’ choosing to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Notwithstanding these changes, the research design will still provide robust data that reflect the lived experiences of the participants. Hoepfl (1997) indicates that interviews can be used as the primary source of data collection in qualitative research. Further, DiCicco-

Bloom and Crabtree (2006) confirm that while unstructured interviews are often used in conjunction with observational data, semi-structured interviews can be used as the sole method of data collection. According to Hatch (2002), educational studies with a focused purpose and research questions and an organized and consistent set of guiding questions aimed at understanding the perspectives of a group of participants engaged in a phenomenon, can successfully utilize interviews as the sole method of data collection.

3.3.6 Researcher obligations. Researchers need to be aware of the footprint they are leaving when they enter the lives of others and be responsive to the well being of participants (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). I recognize that by asking participants to share their stories they are opening up a part of themselves to scrutiny. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) “the purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the [participants]” (p. 314). Working within an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, this research relies on the participants’ views to delve into the mentoring phenomenon while at the same time recognizing the impact of the researcher’s background and experiences on the situation being studied (Creswell, 2008). Further to this line of thinking, the qualitative research interview participant is, as DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) describe, “more a participant in meaning making than a conduit from which information is retrieved” (p. 314). At the same time, the researcher is exploring meaning and perceptions to develop a better understanding of a situation. As the participants share their descriptions of the phenomenon, the researcher works to interpret them (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

In developing a trusting, open and respectful relationship with participants, Walker (2005) suggests the researcher be prepared to enter the participants' world by knowing enough about the subject to be credible, asking the right questions during the interviews and coming to know and understand those with whom they are engaged. In following these steps as outlined by Walker (2005) I came to each meeting with an interview guide that had been well researched and carefully compiled. I followed the lead of the participants by attending respectfully to their stories and asking follow up questions to delve deeper into their responses and understand the meaning of their experiences.

The trusting, respectful relationship is further strengthened by reciprocity, something Creswell (2008) describes as the opportunity to give back to the participants in your study. The teachers who participated in this research generously shared their experiences in mentoring relationships as well as how the experiences have shaped their professional interactions thus far. By attending respectfully to their stories, the teachers were given a forum to present their thoughts and feelings about their own evolving practice and professionalism and hopefully the experience provided an opportunity to gain insight into the role of mentorship in their personal development. As part of the process, participants have the knowledge that their stories have contributed to research that will be shared in the form of a published report.

3.4 Research Design

The genesis of this research project is what I observed to be an "us against them" mindset representing the views of two groups, namely senior teachers with tenure and novice teachers seeking tenure. Set in the context of reduced funding to education, changing teacher demographics and declining enrolments in Nova Scotia, this qualitative case study aims to

use the mentoring relationship to understand the motivations and perceptions of senior and novice teachers and the value the stakeholders place on the experience.

The following section will outline the methods and procedures used to guide the study. The specific processes of participant selection, development of interview questions, data collection and analysis and credibility are presented.

3.4.1 Participant selection. Data were collected from two participant groups representing the cases in this collective case study. *Senior teachers* are those who are actively teaching and possess twenty or more years of experience in the classroom. *Novice teachers* are those with fewer than five years of classroom experience who are new to the system, the school or the grade level.

Because the study involves understanding and describing specific groups of participants in depth, two homogeneous samples are required (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006a). A homogeneous sample includes those identified as possessing a similar characteristic resulting in a sub-group defined by that characteristic (Creswell, 2008). Data were collected from five (5) senior teachers and five (5) novice teachers. This sample size ensures an appropriate number to represent the relationship and provide diversity, as well as give the comprehensive range of experiences required for rich exploration of the phenomenon.

Convenience sampling was used to identify potential participants from the population of teachers working in schools administered by the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board (CBVRSB). Creswell (2008) defines a convenience sample as participants who are known to the researcher as available and agreeable to taking part in the project. Other potential participants were identified through recommendations of other individuals who became aware of the study and knew of teachers who might be interested in participating in

the study. This form of recruitment is known as snowball sampling (Creswell, 2008). In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, participants are often able to identify other possible participants (Hatch, 2002). Potential participants were drawn from a population of teachers involved in mentoring relationships who met the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Potential participants were contacted directly by the researcher first through email to see if they would agree to participate. Further contact was made by email or phone to arrange for convenient locations for the interviews. All issues of ethics and consent pertaining to participants were addressed as per guidelines of the *Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research*, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Participants were asked to sign a participant consent form that provided detailed information about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw, potential risks to participants and contact information for my supervisor at Memorial University.

Of the five senior teachers who participated in data collection, four were elementary teachers and one was a high school teacher. The senior case consisted of an elementary school principal, two former elementary principals, a former senior high acting vice principal and an elementary teacher all currently working in the classroom. The novice case consisted of five elementary teachers working in different grades at different schools. None of the novice teachers have permanent contracts with the CBVRSB. Attempts were made to locate mentees at the junior/senior high level. I was not aware of mentees teaching at this level and identification of possible participants through co-constructed snowball sampling was unsuccessful. These issues of sampling will be further explored in Chapter Five.

No activities related to data collection occurred during school hours or on school property. As some potential participants were contacted using their work email addresses

and issues discussed were associated with teacher practice in the CBVRSB, I officially contacted the School District to inform them that the project was to be undertaken.

3.4.2 Development of the research instrument. The rationale for using interviews as the sole method of data collection in this collective case study was described in section 3.3.4 of this chapter. This following section will focus on the development of the questions that served as a guide for the semi-structured interviews conducted with senior mentors and novice mentees.

Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009) indicate that mentoring takes place on three different levels – professional, social and emotional. To allow for deep conversations between the researcher and the participant that explore these levels of interaction, interviews followed an individual in-depth format. “The in-depth interview is meant to be a personal and intimate encounter in which open, direct, verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). By using semi-structured interviews, a data collection experience is created that builds on open-ended questions to allow the researcher to probe deeper and revise the questions as the interaction proceeds (Hoepfl, 1997). The flexibility afforded in semi-structured interviews allows both the researcher and participant to be responsible for the questions and answers (Hatch, 2002).

Two sets of semi-structured interview questions were developed to guide the interview process, one for senior mentors and a second set of questions for novice mentees. The goal is to facilitate the co-creation of meaning between the participant and the researcher “by reconstructing perceptions of events and experiences” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316).

The development of the interview questions for senior mentors was guided by the questions used by Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka in their 2009 study of mentoring. The work of Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009) was used as a template to develop four categories of questions (background, who becomes a mentor, motivation and valuation). Once the interview guide for senior mentors had been developed, a similar instrument, also grounded in the research questions and extant literature, was developed for interviews with novice mentees. Four categories of questions (background, why do novice teachers become involved in mentor relationships, the mentoring relationship and valuation) were developed to enable the researcher to explore deeply within the research parameters of this study.

Hatch (2002) considers the qualitative research interview to be a kind of social or speech event. Guided by societal norms, he recommends each interview have a beginning, middle and end. The senior mentor interview guide comprises 21 questions. Each category is introduced by a broad question that signals the intent of the section. Several follow-up questions were used as necessary to further probe the category and there was a summative question at the end of each section. Following the same format, 19 questions comprise the interview guide for novice teachers. A complete list of all categories and questions are included in Appendices A and B.

Using the guiding set of questions in the data collection process of this collective case study ensures several important criteria for qualitative research. The interview guide provides sufficient focus to explore the experiences of the homogeneous sample (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The interview guide allows the researcher to narrow down topics while still allowing the stories of the participants to emerge (Rabionet, 2011). The open-ended nature of the questions allows for a variation of responses across research

participants (Hoepfl, 1997) and the researcher is free to stray from the guide as new ways of seeing and understanding the phenomenon emerge (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006b). The use of the interview guide makes the interviews more systematic and comparable (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006b; Hoepfl, 1997).

In a qualitative case study, data collection and data analysis happen concurrently. This section focused on the research instrument used to systematically gather data necessary to ensure study quality and trustworthiness (Baxter and Jack, 2008), issues that will be further discussed in a later section of this chapter. The following sections will explicitly detail data collection and analysis.

3.4.3 Data collection. The process of data collection was guided by Hatch's (2002) principles for successful interviews. Acknowledging the uniqueness of the interview "conversation", all interviews were held in locations deemed to be comfortable by participants. Interviews involving the ten (10) participant teachers were conducted in several locations convenient to the participants including the researcher's home, a coffee shop, a participant's home and one telephone interview (due to scheduling issues). All interviews followed the rules of polite conversation (Hatch, 2002) and were recorded using an iPad and an app called iTalk. To honor the contributions of the participants, the researcher was well prepared for the interviews and participated as an active listener and facilitator to capture the participants' deep understandings of the mentorship phenomenon.

The interviews were later transcribed for analysis. Participants agreed to the recording and transcription of their interviews during the consent process. Hand-written notes were also taken during the interview to reinforce the transcription and guide the

direction of the interview. All participants except for one senior teacher consented to the use of direct quotations of their words in the written report.

The interviews were conducted over a period of several weeks commensurate with the schedules of participants. Interviews ranged in length from 15 minutes to almost two hours. As themes began to develop in the interview data, the interviews became longer. This is in keeping with the qualitative approach to data collection and the use of semi-structured interviews for the purpose of data collection (Hoepfl, 1997; Whitt, 1991).

Data analysis began during the interview process. As stories were gathered, an informal analysis of the information was started. Handwritten notes on the interview guides served as reminders of emerging themes. As recognizable themes in the data began to emerge, the semi-structured interviews pursued more depth and understanding of these themes. According to Creswell (2008) the analysis of themes occurs when the researcher “moves away from reporting the ‘facts’ to making an interpretation of people and activities” (p. 484). These initial interpretations generated further questions during the interviews leading to a deeper understanding of the participants and their activities.

3.4.4 Data Analysis. When data collection and transcription were complete, formal data analysis began by following the model for interpretive analysis outlined by Hatch (2002). This model does not prescribe a rigid protocol for analysis but rather offers a guiding framework on which to build analysis when working in an interpretive paradigm. Hatch (2002) defines data analysis as “a systematic search for meaning [and] a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others” (p.148). Hatch (2002) recognizes that interpretation is the foundation of all qualitative research and that qualitative researchers are constantly making interpretive judgements.

Interpretation situates the researcher as an active player in the research process...

This process of data analysis provides the researcher tools for linking interpretations to data [and] to produce meaning that makes sense of the social phenomena they are studying (Hatch, 2002, p.180).

This methodology follows a relatively linear progression. Keeping in mind the iterative nature of data collection and analysis, and the progression of interpretation that occurs during and after data collection, these steps are presented here as a way to organize and represent the data analysis. The actual process followed the basic structure laid out by Hatch (2002) with some steps repeated several times (see Table 1).

Table 1

Steps in Interpretive Analysis

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole
2. Review impressions previously recorded and record these in memos
3. Read the data, identify impressions and record impressions in memos
4. Study memos for salient interpretations
5. Reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged
6. Write a draft summary
7. Review interpretations with participants
8. Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations

Source: Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings, p.181, by Hatch, J.A., 2002, Albany: State University of New York Press

Step 1- Read the data for a sense of the whole: Data analysis began with a thorough review of the interviews. Transcriptions for each case were read in their entirety and in the order the

interviews were recorded. As noted by several authors (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2008; Fry, 2007; Whitt, 1991) data collection and data analysis happen concurrently in qualitative research. By reading the interviews in the order that the data were collected, general impressions of the data develop and become more apparent. Due to the iterative nature of qualitative data collection these general impressions are more thoroughly explored as the interviews proceeded. The senior case was reviewed first followed by the novice case. Creswell refers to this as a “preliminary exploratory analysis” designed to develop a general sense of the data (p.250).

Step 2- Review impressions previously recorded and record these in memos: Hatch (2002) recommends that researchers take handwritten notes directly on the interview guides while the interview is occurring. This process of note taking helps to keep track of the questions asked as well as direct what questions should come next. Key words or phrases presented during the interview can lead to deeper questioning of the participant or they can indicate emerging themes. The handwritten notes on the interview guides were reviewed in this step. Notes from the senior case were reviewed first and in order followed by the novice case. Impressions emerging from this review were recorded in memo form using different color paper to record phrases, concepts, themes and relationships, a process recommended by Creswell (2008).

Step 3- Read the data, identify impressions and record impressions in memos: Once again returning to the transcribed data, each individual interview was carefully read and then cross-referenced to the notes and memos from Step 2. Using the same method of color-coding, memos were made based on specifics in the interview data. During this phase of data analysis, careful attention was paid to relate impressions and emerging interpretations back to

the research questions. Baxter and Jack (2008) indicate that at this stage of data analysis there develops a risk of looking at data sources independently and not focusing on the understanding the overall case. To achieve consistent within-case analysis, reading and memo taking were much more deliberate and systematic. The major focus in this step is, as Hatch (2002) describes, “on discovering new impressions that may develop into interpretations that bring meaning to the data” (p. 184). Some transcriptions were read several times to build on the impressions that were becoming strongly developed as well to search the data for support for those impressions that were not as strong. Some initial impressions were also discarded at this time. Although interpretations are “subjective, creative and individual” (Hatch, 2002, p. 185), the interpretations emerging at this stage of analysis were firmly rooted in the data and based on the research questions.

Step 4- Study memos for salient interpretations: In this step, all of the memos that were developed were considered. Memos that reflected similar themes were combined to consolidate the data. As well, previously unidentified relationships were also noted. Some memos were interpreted as being inconsistent with the research questions and were removed. This process allowed the memos to be organized into new color-coded categories representing major ideas in the data.

Step 5- Reread the data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged: This step was based on the color-coded organization developed by reviewing all of the memos in Step 4. The interviews were read again to search for specific examples of the big ideas interpreted from the memos. Colors corresponded to ideas and specific examples in the transcriptions were marked. As well, when specific quotations were found that reflected particular interpretations, they were matched to existing ideas so in effect, the process was

cyclical. At this stage, ideas or themes were compared and combined as the big picture *within* each case developed. Specifically, the motivation of senior mentors and the perceptions of novice mentees were interpreted from the data.

To develop a more robust understanding of the phenomenon of mentorship and to interpret how the motivations of senior mentors and perceptions of novice mentees could be interpreted as valuations assigned by the stakeholders, *across* case analyses were also necessary. Cross-case analysis was used to identify common and different themes between the cases (Creswell, 2008). The color-coded themes were compared and contrasted and specific examples in the data were again sought to support the emerging interpretations. Also of particular interest at this stage were ideas or themes that surfaced in the data that challenged the researcher's preliminary interpretations and offered alternative explanations of valuations. A conceptual model of the mentoring relationship that exists between senior mentors and novice mentees in the specific context under study began to emerge from the research data.

Step 6- Write a draft summary: The next step involved writing a tentative summary of interpretations. As Hatch (2002) explains, the purpose of this summary was to “focus on communicating the explanations, insights, conclusions, lessons, or understandings” that grew from data analysis (p. 187). In writing the summary, thoughts about the data were put into words. The story that evolved from these summaries was then referred back to the research questions.

Step 7 – Review interpretations with participants: In this step, Hatch (2002) recommends returning to the participants to review the interpretations arising from the data. For the purposes of this study, participants were interviewed only once. Acknowledging that data

collection would take place in a single interview format with five participants for each case, questions were designed with a degree of redundancy to provide confirmation of participant expressions. This served as a form of member checking (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2008; Hatch, 2002). The nature of the open-ended questions in the interviews allowed for the researcher and participant to co-construct follow-up questions based on the flow of the conversation and the emerging perceptions. As well, it provided an opportunity to confirm the responses (Hatch, 2002). The thorough exploration of the interviews that followed is considered to be adequate in obtaining sufficient data on which to base interpretations.

Step 8- Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations: At this stage, Hatch (2002) recommends revising the summary. With each reread of the summary, Hatch recommends, “refining and clarifying interpretations [to] communicate the understandings constructed, clarifying what they mean in the context of the study and representing what is captured in the data” (p.189). By repeating this process of revision, I was able to construct interpretations of the mentoring relationship and the motivations, perceptions and valuations of the stakeholders.

As the above explanations detail, the processes of data collection and analysis were lengthy and dynamic. Throughout, issues of credibility were constantly being considered. The next section will address these credibility procedures directly.

3.4.5 Credibility procedures. Qualitative research cannot be moulded to the rigors of replicability and reliability that have been established for quantitative research (Whitt, 1991). Baxter and Jack (2008) state that credibility procedures must be in place to establish “truth value” (p. 556). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), validity and credibility are established when the account presented by the researcher interpretations represents the

participants' view of the phenomenon. For this reason, key elements of credibility have been integrated into this study through the methodology and research design including data collection and analysis processes.

Baxter and Jack (2008) consider the following key elements specifically in terms of case study research. They encourage the researcher to “ensure enough detail is provided so that readers can assess the validity or credibility of the work” (p. 556). To accomplish this, the research questions needs to be clearly written and the questions must be supported in the data. Sampling must be purposeful; data must be collected, systematically managed and analyzed correctly.

Because of the case study design, five senior mentors and five novice mentees provided data to explore the phenomenon of mentoring and offer insight into the research questions. The number of participants meant that multiple perspectives were collected allowing for corroboration from different individuals. This served as triangulation of data sources based on idea convergence and confirmation of findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2008).

As noted in the previous section, a form of member checking was established within the single interview format. Redundancy in the questions and the open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to confirm initial interpretations during data collection, often leading to more probing questions.

An additional strategy for integrating credibility into case study research noted by Baxter and Jack (2008) involves a form of reflection in which the researcher considers field notes taken during interviews to confirm interpretations. Hand written notes were taken directly on the interview guide during the interactions between researcher and participant.

These notes were carefully examined and explored during data analysis and were used to build initial impressions from the data. By applying these elements to methodology and research design, procedures for establishing credibility were embedded in this research.

3.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter Three provides the foundation and structure to support this research. Epistemological considerations and theoretical perspectives are presented. This study is grounded in the interpretive (constructivist) paradigm, an approach that enables the exploration of interpersonal relationships that exists between senior mentors and novice mentees in their professional workplace. This approach enables the researcher and participant to co-construct a relative interpretation of the social phenomenon of mentoring that is based on the reality that exists for both the participant and the researcher. Exchanges that take place between mentors and mentees are professionally, socially and emotionally constructed (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). Their stories hold meaning, explanations and ideas about the phenomenon. Qualitative research allows for the expression of these concepts in an education setting.

A collective case study model was chosen to explore two related cases, senior mentors and novice mentees. To ensure the fair and ethical treatment of all participants, (semi-structured) interviews were used to record their stories. As well, issues of researcher obligations and reciprocity are addressed.

Building on the methodology, components of the research are explained and discussed. A detailed description of the research design, participant selection, the development of the research instrument (semi-structured interview guide), are presented. The process of collecting and analyzing the interview data are described in sections 3.4.3 and

3.4.4. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the measures enacted by the researcher to address issues of validity and credibility in the research.

Chapters Four and Five will present the results and a discussion of the findings. Through presentation of data in these chapters, rich and detailed descriptions will suggest an explanation of the phenomenon under study as it relates to the purpose and research questions that guided this project in the Nova Scotia context.

Chapter Four

Results

Chapter Four honors the contributions of those who participated in this study by giving voice to their lived experiences as senior mentors or novice mentees. This chapter presents data collected from the in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants representing the two cases identified in this study: senior mentors and novice mentees. The stories for each case are explored as they relate to the research questions and themes arising from the data are presented and supported with examples.

The first section explores the case of senior teachers who act as mentors, in particular the motivation of senior teachers who become involved in mentoring relationships. The next section presents stories gathered from novice teachers regarding their representation of the contribution of senior teachers in the mentoring relationship. Finally, cross-case analysis is used to explore the value stakeholders place on mentoring and to identify new themes arising from the participants' stories.

To ensure the fair and ethical treatment of all study participants, every effort has been made to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity in the reporting of the results. All study participants have been assigned pseudonyms and no schools are named. Those teachers directly quoted have supplied signed consent for their words to be shared.

4.1 Senior Mentors

The senior case is comprised of five female teachers who met the inclusion criteria. Senior teachers are defined as those who are actively teaching and possess twenty or more years of experience in the classroom. In the sample, three teachers had more than 20 years and two teachers had 35 or more years of classroom experience. The stories that emerged

from the five participants are remarkably consistent even though their practical experiences vary by more than 20 years.

All of the participants in the senior case are well known to me. Their participation in the study was achieved through convenience sampling. Data collection occurred in familiar and comfortable settings (four interviews at my home and one interview at the home of a participant). Rapport with the participants was relaxed and conversational. Familiarity meant that there were ample opportunities to co-construct meaning and for me to engage in member checking.

The conversations proceeded as per the interview protocol. The first interview with a senior teacher lasted 15 minutes. The final interview took almost two hours. These variations may be explained in part by my improving skills as an interviewer and attention to the themes emerging from the interviews with earlier participants.

4.1.1 Linda's story. Linda is, by her own admission, a *seasoned* teacher. She is a veteran with more than 35 years experience. Throughout her career, she has worked in only two schools – the first was a small school with only four teachers. Three years after joining the staff, Linda assumed the role of teaching-principal. She taught in this school for 25 years. Now in her second school, Linda continues to teach the same grade she has taught for most of her 35 plus years in the classroom.

When Linda speaks, she does so with experience and authority in her voice. Linda admits that this was not always the case. When she began her career, three other teachers at her school, all senior teachers, acted as her first mentors.

Linda: “I started out with three older teachers, which was good. They were my mentors. Actually, one was my mother! They were very willing to help. They

helped me get used to my job and what to do when there was no other help. They would tell you what was most important – what the children needed. It was great!”

Over the years, Linda has reciprocated the kindness and guidance she received from her first colleagues. She has had no formal training as a mentor yet she has acted in this role for many young teachers, especially in the past 20 as her own practice has developed. At the time of this interview, Linda was informally mentoring a new teacher assigned to her school on a short-term contract.

Linda: “Well, being Principal in that first school after only teaching three years myself – I know what it feels like to come in brand new.”

Researcher: “You’re able to recognize a teacher that might need a hand?”

Linda: “Oh, yes, definitely! When they come in, they know it themselves. Most people will come and say do you think I should do this or do you think I should do that? That’s one good thing about young teachers today. A lot of them will say, ‘I really don’t know where I’m at with this. What would you do?’”

Linda feels strongly that mentoring is a powerful tool. She is very comfortable in the role of mentor and has actively sought out young teachers she feels need some support. She likens herself to a cultural elder who has compiled the wisdom that comes with experience and she works to pass this on to the next generation of teachers.

Linda: “I would never do it without feeling that the person wants the help. I really think that it doesn’t matter which culture you are in. The elders in the culture are there so take wisdom from them. They’ve learned it going down the road with a lot of hard travelling. Why learn it twice? It doesn’t mean you don’t use new ideas. It is

just to take the best of the wisdom that comes from [the elders]. That's how you learn.”

With 35 plus years experience in the classroom, Linda continues to be excited about teaching and continues to share her wealth of knowledge and experience. She says that the only thing that would keep her out of a mentoring relationship is retirement - which she also says is not coming any time soon!

4.1.1.1 What motivates Linda to act as a mentor? Linda is motivated by a strong sense of duty to the profession. She feels that as an “elder”, it is her responsibility to pass on the wisdom she has gained from years of teaching. Grown from her own experience, she recognizes that many novice teachers need a helping hand in the early days of their practice.

Linda's story is important to our understanding of the mentor relationship for other reasons. She represents one of the most senior teachers still actively involved in daily classroom practice that novice teachers are likely to encounter. She is a member of a group of senior teachers in Nova Scotia who are eligible to retire yet who have chosen not to leave. Over the years, Linda has entered into many mentoring relationships, some long term and others brief encounters, and she continues to value and pursue this role.

4.1.2 Barbara's story. Barbara's story shares several similarities with Linda's story. A senior teacher by her own designation, Barbara is working in her 35th year. Upon entering the profession, she felt well prepared for the challenges of the classroom. Barbara, too, started her career in a small school.

Unlike Linda, Barbara did not benefit from the support of a senior mentor in her early years of teaching. Her first years in the classroom were spent in a small satellite school that

was associated with a larger school a short distance away. At first, she worked with another teacher and then she worked alone.

Researcher: “When you were in the two-room schoolhouse, did you engage with the other teacher as a mentor?”

Barbara: “Not really. The other teacher was ... well, let’s just say it wasn’t a great experience. No, she was not much help. She was not helpful in any regard. I would talk to other [same age] teachers I knew. I found support from other teachers but I think sometimes you have to look for it. Teachers will always help each other.”

After a few years, Barbara moved to a new school and stayed there comfortably for 20 years. When her school was closed, Barbara found herself assigned to a grade that was outside of her comfort level. Barbara again turned to a peer for support.

Researcher: “So you needed a mentor yourself even after teaching all those years?”

Barbara: “Even after 28 years, yes indeed. My friend was teaching the other class and she helped and guided me through until I was comfortable. She was a wonderful mentor to me. She was responsible for my sanity that year. Once I got things under control, things were okay.”

Over her 35 years of teaching, Barbara has often found herself in the role of senior mentor to novice mentees. In some cases, teachers coming into her school approached her and on a few occasions, she initiated the relationship. Barbara relates that in most cases, she worked with the novice teachers on things like classroom management, setting up a classroom, developing routines and adapting to the culture and policies of the school.

Barbara: “I would tell them about the routine that I followed. I would help subject-wise with the curriculum. I would tell them to follow me for a while until you feel

comfortable. Every school is different even though we all teach the same curriculum. Within each school there are policies. That was how it worked. There are a lot of things that you are going to come across that were never put in a book for you. Until they felt comfortable ... I helped.”

Barbara enjoys a real sense of satisfaction and fulfillment from helping novice teachers. This sense of self-fulfillment is a strong motivator for her to continue her work with novice teachers.

Researcher: “I know you have worked as a mentor, informally, helping out other teachers. Why do you keep doing it, even as you approach retirement?”

Barbara: “Well, I think it is just in my nature. It feels good to think you have helped someone along the way. I think that I definitely felt it was a pleasure to do it. I feel good about it myself. It is worth going and helping someone. Whether it is offering a hand or lending a book or in so many different ways.”

Barbara is set to retire at the end of her 35th year. When asked about the notion that senior teachers should retire and make way for younger teachers, Barbara talked about balance in the school system.

Barbara: “We always need to have younger teachers and I think we always need to have senior teachers so they complement each other. One year we had four teachers retire and it was a big loss for the staff. I think it can be rather difficult when everybody is brand new. You need to have people to go to [for assistance] and try to look for answers or help when you don’t have that experience.”

Barbara has been a devoted teacher for 35 years. She recognizes that mentoring plays an important role in transitioning new teachers into the nuances of the classroom. In her

career, she has found herself in need of a mentor and has practiced what she learned as she, in turn, has mentored novice teachers.

4.1.2.1 What motivates Barbara to act as a mentor? Barbara is motivated by a strong sense of personal satisfaction and fulfillment when she acts as a mentor to novice teachers. She takes pleasure in knowing that she has helped someone through the difficult transition from student to teacher.

4.1.3 Charlene's story. Charlene is a senior teacher with more than twenty years experience teaching in elementary schools. As a student in her Bachelor of Education program, Charlene met a teacher who presented herself as an advocate for young teachers. This woman greatly inspired Charlene and helped to shape her later interactions with novice teachers.

Charlene: "She was an advocate and she was a great teacher. She was an advocate for all young teachers. This teacher would not let other teachers criticize new teachers and she reminded everyone about the hard work all teachers do each day."

Researcher: "Do you think this role of advocate is one we, as senior teachers, should assume with novice teachers?"

Charlene: "Without a doubt! You can feel like you are being thrown to the wolves. If anybody can make you feel more comfortable and make you feel that you are not alone, then that is a hill you don't have to climb by yourself."

Charlene's representations of her first years in the classroom were different than that of Linda and Barbara. As a novice teacher, Charlene did not feel prepared for her new position. She didn't feel as comfortable in the classroom. Charlene's first job upon graduating from university was teaching adult learners. Her first students were men aged 19-

65 who were taking courses required for their jobs. The experience was not a positive one for Charlene. She felt that she was too young and too inexperienced to deal with her adult students.

Charlene: I wouldn't go to the Department Head. It was something that I felt I should have been able to handle myself. I was mortified to admit that I couldn't handle my classroom."

She received some verbal encouragement from the administrator and Charlene chose not to push further. This experience impacted her confidence and influenced further interactions with senior staff.

The combination of negative experiences as a novice and the inspiration of an advocate teacher have shaped Charlene's interactions with novice teachers. Charlene has worked to support novice teachers and provide them with experiences she did not have.

Charlene: "I remember meeting this new teacher. She had never seen a curriculum guide. I took her in and told her this guide is your Bible. The main reason I did this is because it hadn't been done for me."

Researcher: "You were trying to spare her the learning curve you were on when you started?"

Charlene: "Absolutely! I was too scared to ask anybody for help. I didn't want anybody to know that I had gaps in my teaching... and there were gaps, let me tell you. I felt that if I was a teacher and I had a license, then there shouldn't be anything I didn't know about this job. There was a lot I didn't know! I know how all that felt and I didn't want her [the novice teacher] to feel like that. I come back to that feeling

of having to take care of the new teachers so they can have a stronger foundation than I did when I started.”

Researcher: “Do you think senior teachers have a responsibility to be mentors to novice teachers? How do you categorize that responsibility?”

Charlene: “Yes, I really do. There is no doubt about it. It’s like Spiderman: With great power comes great responsibility! [laughter] We are responsible to help. How can we watch a new teacher struggle when we can do something to alleviate it?”

Even with more than 20 years experience, Charlene is still not completely comfortable in the role of mentor. She feels that professionally, she still has much to learn. Charlene chooses to use her interactions with novice teachers as a chance to grow and develop her own practice as well.

Charlene: “Even today as a teacher with 20 plus years experience, I know that there is still so much to learn. You have to be open and accepting. These young teachers are more flexible, they are innovative, they are not afraid of technology the way older teachers are. I think we are the 21st century teachers with the 20th century ways. The newer teachers, I think they could help older teachers. Traditional delivery is not such a big deal.”

Charlene continues to seek out novice teachers. In her role as advocate, she tries to share the innovations that the novices bring to their practice and learn from them by creating a positive relationship.

4.1.3.1 *What motivates Charlene to act as a mentor?* Charlene is motivated by a desire to advocate on the part of novice teachers. Influenced by the kindness of an advocate and still acutely aware of the negative experiences she had as a novice teacher, Charlene

takes every opportunity to assist and support novice teachers. Charlene's story offers another perspective to the stories previously presented in this chapter in that even though she has more than 20 years experience, she does not consider herself a seasoned veteran. Rather than imparting the knowledge she has gained over the years, Charlene prefers to learn alongside the novice teachers she is mentoring.

4.1.4 Julie's story. Julie has chosen not to share her words directly yet her story exhibits a deep commitment to the role of mentor and provides insight into the research questions. Julie has worked as a teacher for more than 20 years. She taught elementary, junior and senior high school but spent most of her career in high school as a teacher and Department Head.

Julie did not have a mentor when she was a novice teacher but she has found herself in the role of mentor on many occasions. Several times, she served in the role of co-operating teacher for student teachers in practicum placements and later as mentor when the same teacher secured a teaching position.

Julie takes a very empathetic stance when questioned about why she acts as a mentor. She says she approaches life with the goal of being caring and helpful and sees mentoring as a natural way to extend this personal philosophy into her professional life.

Julie takes a proactive approach to mentoring. She tries to make a point of welcoming novice teachers into the school. Having worked at all grade levels in several different schools, Julie points out that it is easy for novices to get lost, especially in a big school. She offers support up front and then watches to see if her help is needed. Julie says she often imagines herself in the position of the novice walking into a school for the first time. She relates to the novice by recalling her own experiences and the uncertainties and

apprehensions she felt as a novice teacher. Julie stresses that the mentor relationship does not have to start with a formal plan; it can be as simple as a friendly greeting in the morning.

Julie says she has found herself in the role of mentor more frequently in recent years because of the constant turnover of young staff members in schools. Many novice teachers are in term positions and this has meant greater turnover among younger faculty. She feels that some schools have a “sink or swim” attitude when it comes to helping novice teachers. Julie prefers an approach of subtle reassurance moving on to more direct support with curriculum and classroom management. Her ultimate goal is to offer assistance to novices so they can develop confidence in their own teaching.

Julie considers her relationship with novice teachers to be reciprocal. She feels she always gets back when she works with a novice teacher. She says that she continues to learn and constantly revises her own practice as she interacts with novice teachers. Julie recently changed grades and sought the help of a School Board mentor as she made the transition. The mentor turned out to be someone Julie had mentored years before.

Julie says she always encourages the students in her classes to ask for help when they need it. She puzzles over the fact that people in our profession do not always extend this same encouragement to our fellow teachers.

4.1.4.1 *What motivates Julie to act as a mentor?* Julie is motivated by a strong sense of empathy as it relates to her personal values. She embraces novice teachers as part of the teaching team and makes every effort to welcome them and offer support. She believes new teachers must be actively received into the school community.

Julie’s perspective is interesting in regards to this project because she initiates many of the contacts she has with novice teachers. She has found that she has mentored new

teachers in different contexts, both as student teachers and as novices. The support she has provided has also been reciprocated; someone who was once her mentee has mentored her.

4.1.5 Patty's story. The interview with Patty was by far, the longest of all the conversations related to data collection for this study. Patty is extremely passionate about education, both the process of teaching and the growth of her students. She was very excited to share her story and was generous in her contributions to this project.

Patty has occupied many different roles in the more than twenty years she has worked as a teacher. She has been a substitute and a teacher in single and multi-grade classrooms. She has worked as a formal mentor for the school board as well as a curriculum consultant. Today, she is a teaching principal in an elementary school.

Patty began her career more than thirty years ago but found herself on a substitute list and without tenure for 10 years. When she finally secured a permanent teaching position she was many years removed from her original teacher training. She immediately sought out a mentor.

Patty: "I spent 10 years as a substitute. I was hired when I was 34. The thing that makes me think I was very fortunate as a classroom teacher is that when I started in that primary class, I really didn't have a clue how to teach. In the first week of school, the Language Arts Coordinator for the School Board came to my classroom. Right away, very early in my career, she took me under her wing. Even though I was 34, I was really just a new teacher. I was very fortunate because I had support right away."

With the support of her mentor, Patty was an eager student and honed her teaching practice. She took part in professional development at every opportunity and her relationship

with her mentor grew stronger. With the support of her mentor, Patty was soon providing PD to other teachers.

Patty: "I tried to model myself after [my mentor]. I respected her so much. I could have curious conversations with her. I was totally honest with her. When I think back, she was very direct but very supportive. In those first few years, if it hadn't been for her, I would have been blind!"

Patty considers herself very lucky. In addition to her senior mentor, she found a colleague who acted as a peer mentor and shared in her growth and development. She had support on the small staff on which she worked. Patty thinks all these factors helped her grow as a teacher. By the time she assumed the role of curriculum consultant, she had benefitted from the guidance of a strong senior mentor, a peer mentor and a learning community in her supportive staff.

In her role as formal mentor and consultant, Patty found herself passing on her skills and support to other teachers. She had moved from the role of mentee to mentor. She reports a great deal of success and satisfaction in this role and to Patty's thinking, there is no reason for teachers to feel unsupported. She feels that even if there is not a formal mentoring program in place, help is available for teachers.

As someone who has worked at the School Board level and as a Principal, Patty places some of the responsibility for providing initial supports on school administrators. She feels that principals need to be aware of the comfort and ability of their staff with their assignments. The principal should be able to identify someone in need of support.

Patty also has concerns about how mentoring is perceived among others in the teaching profession.

Researcher: How do you feel others in our profession perceive the mentoring process?

Patty: “As hard as I have tried, I think people still assume that if you are being mentored, it is because you are a bad teacher.”

Although approaching retirement eligibility age, Patty has no intention of leaving her position. She says her vitality and enthusiasm continue to keep her connected. She continues to look for teachers who need support, never placing her role as mentor too far out of reach. Patty is committed to being a teacher and she considers mentoring to be a vital part of the process.

4.1.5.1 *What motivates Patty to act as a mentor?* While Linda was motivated by a strong sense of duty and responsibility to give back to the profession, Patty’s motivation for engaging in mentoring relationships is rooted more in a perceived responsibility for support for the profession. Patty sees a direct relationship between mentoring and improved classroom practice. Her lens for viewing the phenomenon is that of curriculum leader from both her role as school administrator and school board curriculum consultant.

Patty’s perspective is important for this discussion because she can speak to both cases being explored, senior mentors and novice mentees. As a novice, she needed help and she found it in a strong senior mentor. As her own professional practice grew, she came to find herself in the role of mentor. She feels administrators have a professional responsibility to bring people together to facilitate mentoring. Senior teachers need to be available to mentor novice teachers. As well, novices have a responsibility to look to senior teachers for help.

4.1.6 Why do senior teachers serve as mentors to novice teachers? For these senior mentors, their motivations for engaging in mentoring relationships are personal and professional and are reflected in their stories. Linda, senior among senior teachers, feels that as an “elder”, she has a strong need to give back to a profession to which she has dedicated over 40 years. Barbara takes a great deal of personal satisfaction in the success of novices she has mentored. Charlene acts as an advocate for novice teachers and Julie projects her personal ethos of caring and helping into a proactive engagement with novices. Patty passionately reflects her own growth as a professional into her work with novice teachers. She considers mentoring from many perspectives - mentee, teacher, administrator and consultant – and holds strong opinions about the value of mentoring for professional development and classroom practice.

4.1.6.1 Motivations for mentoring. In representing the motivations of senior teachers who act as mentors to novice teachers, the following themes can be interpreted from the data:

Table 2

Motivations for Mentoring

- Mentors felt a sense of duty to give back to the profession.
- Mentors gained self-fulfillment or personal satisfaction from working with novice teachers.
- Mentors wanted to act as advocates to help novices avoid the negative experiences they had endured as new teachers.
- Mentors considered the act of mentorship as a form of professional development.

- Mentors felt a sense of duty to give back to the profession. For Linda, the elder, this sense of duty was her primary motivation. Year after year, she has supported the growth and development of novice teachers because she felt it was her responsibility as an experienced practitioner to do so.

Linda: “Every senior teacher should mentor. Some older teachers sell themselves short. Teaching is like any other trade. The best way to learn is from co-workers and people in the know. You take the best practices you see and you try to implement them. We need to instil in these teachers [novices] the things that we know that are important. We need to try to teach them something every day. If [senior] teachers don’t take these young people on and teach them, how are they going to learn?”

- Mentors gained self-fulfillment or personal satisfaction from working with novice teachers. Barbara discussed the personal satisfaction she felt in helping a novice teacher achieve a goal and feel success in their work. She found satisfaction in the growth and success of her mentees as a strong motivating factor for being involved in a relationship.

Patty echoed this sentiment in describing her satisfaction in working with novice teachers.

Patty: “There is nothing that makes someone feel better than to be able to give something or share something with somebody else.”

- Mentors wanted to act as advocates to help novices avoid the negative experiences they had endured as new teachers. The need to advocate for novices is what motivates Charlene to step out of her comfort zone and engage new teachers in

mentoring relationships. Her positive experience with an advocate teacher during her training has taught her the importance of support in the early years.

Charlene: “You don’t have to have official mentoring training. You just have to have the betterment of the new teacher at heart.”

Barbara describes the need to help novice teachers in this way:

Barbara: “There is no point getting older if we don’t get a little wiser. Rather than letting them [novice teachers] get in over their heads, share your expertise and advice.”

Four of the senior teachers expressed a desire to spare novice teachers some of the hardships they had themselves experienced. Patty expressed the view that novice teachers should seek out help and find a mentor. Her perspective will be more deeply explored in the discussion in chapter five.

- Mentors considered the act of mentorship as a form of professional development. This motivation was perhaps most strongly expressed by Patty. She has been engaged in the process of mentoring in several different capacities (mentor, mentee, administrator, consultant) and sees mentoring as a catalyst for professional growth and good classroom practice. She had struggled as a novice and needed the support of a strong mentor to guide her teaching practice. She revealed that she became a better teacher because of this support and has since passed on her knowledge of curricula and effective teaching practice to novice teachers.

4.1.6.2 *Emerging themes in the data: Senior mentors.* Explorations of the data reveal several emerging themes. These themes relate to and reinforce many of the reasons for mentoring as conveyed in the stories of senior mentors. The mentors stated

they themselves benefited from the support of mentors and view mentoring as a professional practice that helps teachers at different stages of their careers. The senior mentors report their relationships with novice teachers have resulted in reciprocal learning and many lasting friendships:

Table 3

Emerging Themes in the Senior Case

- In addition to mentoring novice teachers, all of the senior teachers had served as co-operating teachers to pre-service interns.
- Mentors reported learning from their novice mentees.
- Mentors received the support of a mentor either as novice teachers or later in their careers.
- Mentors developed lasting friendships with their mentees.

- In addition to mentoring novice teachers, all of the senior teachers had served as co-operating teachers to pre-service interns. The philosophy of helping other teachers was evident in the accounts of the participants in this study whether it was in helping student teachers or novice teachers. For senior teachers who engage in mentoring, there appears also to be a commitment to helping fellow teachers at more than one stage of their professional development.

For Julie this played out when she became a mentor to a newly hired teacher who had once worked with her as a student intern. For Charlene, taking on a student teacher fit with her personal motivation to be an advocate for young teachers. She

engaged in similar experiences in her relationships with both novices and student interns.

Charlene: “I remember a student teacher coming into my classroom. I didn’t want her leaving me and saying nobody helped me. I know how that felt. It is just a simple thing but probably the most fundamental thing.”

- Senior teachers reported learning from their novice mentees. The senior teachers who were interviewed referred to their relationships as being reciprocal in nature. Julie made several statements about how her mentor relationships help to keep her fresh and connected with new methods and ways of thinking in education. She uses the exchanges with her mentees as an opportunity for introspection and evaluation of her own teaching practices.

Other senior teachers echoed these feelings, as well.

Patty: “These new teachers ignite me. I have learned so much from them. I think it is reciprocal. Years can give you experiences one way, but youth brings life and experience in a different way.”

Barbara: “Sometimes, the roles are reversed. The young teacher turns around to help the older teacher. They have given me some great ideas and I was only too happy to take their ideas and run with them. It can work both ways and it is lovely when it does.”

The senior teachers made specific reference to the reverse nature of the mentoring when it came to technology.

Linda: “It is all about being current and they have the new ideas. You learn so much about technology from them. I teach in a high tech school but I only know the

basics. Every time they [novices] come here, I learn something new about technology from them.”

Charlene: “There is a big disequilibrium. Computers are the future for our kids. We didn’t grow up with it like [the novices] did. In our schools, you are looking at both ends of the spectrum right now. These teachers from the newer generation, they help support the context of education and bring it to a more modern level.”

- Senior teachers received the support of a mentor either as a novice teacher or later in their careers. Four of the senior teachers had themselves been engaged as mentees at some point in their careers. For Julie and Barbara, the mentoring had come in the form of a peer mentor after more than 20 years as teachers. Both had grade changes that led them to seek the support of mentors at a lateral level. On the other hand, as a novice teacher, Linda found support immediately in a small school. She refers to her three senior mentors as “the ladies”.

Linda: “The ladies, they were towards the ends of their careers; it was great to work with them. They taught me what not to be so flustered about – those smaller things that we worry about all the time. That’s where a mentor can help.”

Reflecting the experiences of many of the novice teachers today, Patty needed the support of a senior mentor when she finally took charge of her own classroom after 10 years of working as a substitute.

For Charlene, it was the lack of a mentoring relationship that directed all her interactions with novice teachers. Her own hesitation in seeking out the help of a mentor drives her to find novice teachers in need of support.

- Senior teachers developed lasting friendships with their mentees. Barbara has kept in touch with many of the teachers she has mentored over the years.

Barbara: “I really have kept in touch with most of them right up until now. I like to share in a lot of their experiences with them. I like it when they come back and say, ‘I tried that [a suggestion for classroom practice] and it was so good!’ Working with other teachers [novices] has been a big part of my life.”

Julie has developed lifelong friendships with several of her novice mentees. She has followed their careers and takes great pleasure when their professional paths cross.

Patty reports similar feelings.

Patty: “Very many of them have stayed in contact with me. They still call me even though we are in different schools. I have gone to their weddings and held their new babies. They are my friends, too.”

Through the sharing of their stories, the mentors have provided examples of what motivates them to engage with novice teachers and share their expertise as senior teachers. It has been possible to identify specific personal and professional motivators that have led to mentoring relationships. Also emerging in the data are common themes that relate to their motivation for becoming a mentor and the benefits arising for the senior teacher in the mentoring relationship.

4.1.7 Summary - What motivates senior teachers to act as mentors?

The stories presented in this section represent the lived experiences of five female senior teachers who have acted in the role of mentor to novice mentees. Through in-depth conversations, the researcher collected their stories to answer the research question: *Why do senior teachers act as mentors to novice teachers?*

The next section of this chapter will focus on the stories of the novice teachers. Representing the second case, five novice teachers who are actively engaged in mentoring relationships were interviewed. Their experiences and perceptions of the mentoring relationship will be now be explored in depth.

4.2 Novice Mentees

The second case is comprised of five female novice teachers. Novice teachers are defined as those with fewer than five years of classroom experience who are new to the system, school or grade level. The novice participants in this study are graduates of B.Ed. programs from four different Maritime universities. At the time of the interviews, two of the novices were working in term contracts while three were in full-time positions without permanent contracts. Consistent with the conditions experienced by novice teachers in Nova Scotia, novices reported that they were continually changing grades and schools in these early years of their careers. All of the novices knew their positions would be terminated at the end of the school year. Job placements, if any, for the next school year were unknown.

The accounts that were generated from the five interviews with novice teachers are presented in the following sections. Each participant's story is directly connected to the research question; *How do novice teachers represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors?* The data provide insight into the perceptions of the participants in the novice teachers' case. I conclude this section with a discussion of themes derived from the data.

4.2.1 Candace's story. Candace is a novice teacher who has spent the five years since graduation working mostly as a substitute teacher. Candace secured several long-term teaching positions in these early years. At the time of this interview she was working in a newly created position.

Many of the themes shared in Candace's interview were repeated throughout the data collection process. As a recent graduate of a B.Ed. program, Candace related that she found many of her university courses to be irrelevant to the experiences she was now facing in schools. She felt that most of the learning in her B.Ed. program occurred in classrooms during her practical placements.

Candace had experiences with very different cooperating teachers during her pre-service placements. Her cooperating teachers were at opposite ends of the employment continuum. One teacher was young and had less than 10 years of classroom experience; the other had been teaching for many years and was nearing retirement.

Candace: "One was very valuable. I learned a lot from her. She was only about five or six years out [of university] herself. She was young and eager. She was up on all the things I should be doing as a new teacher. I kind of looked up to her. The other one was at the end of her career. I got from her what I *didn't* want to do in the classroom! She was very senior, you know, set in her ways. I basically had to deliver the material the way she wanted me to so I saw both sides of the coin."

In her first year as a teacher and prior to meeting her mentor, Candace says she felt unprepared. She was teaching in a long-term substituting position. She felt uncertain of how to do things, knew she needed help but felt none was available.

Candace: "The only time [the other teachers] said anything was when it was negative. '[Students] aren't supposed to be doing this or they aren't supposed to be doing that.' It was never anything good. It was very isolating."

Candace worked through her problems on her own and her first encounter with the teacher who would become her mentor did not come until she was called for a long-term

position the following year. She found herself responsible for setting up a classroom for a group of students known in the school for difficult behavior. She knew she needed help so she took the initiative in this position and went looking for assistance.

Researcher: “You sought out [a senior mentor] knowing that you needed help?”

Candace: “Exactly. I knew who she was and I had heard that she knew how it was *supposed* to be. I needed to make sure I was doing it right because I had never done it before.”

While not completely comfortable, Candace took the initiative to approach a senior teacher for help. In her mentor, Candace found someone to whom she could go for support. While Candace had earlier stated that she felt her university instruction to be irrelevant, she still felt she had a good grasp on the theory of teaching. She felt her deficits were in putting it all into practice. Often, the help Candace sought was for practical aspects of day-to-day life in the classroom including behavior management and communicating with parents.

Candace feels she is lucky to have found her mentor. She says she has encountered senior teachers who were not helpful or positive in their interactions with her and exhibited a great deal of negativity. She felt many of these teachers were just counting the days until retirement.

Candace: “Some senior teachers are burnt out. They’re tired and they are ready to be finished. They are on the way out and we [novice teachers] are eager to start. We want what they have so we are willing to get in there. They can’t wait to get out.”

The relationship Candace established with her mentor in her second year of teaching continues to be a vital part of her professional growth. Even though they no longer work in the same school, she keeps in regular contact with her mentor. Their relationship has

evolved into one of mutual learning. Candace has developed from a novice teacher seeking help and support to a colleague and collaborator. She thinks that all novice teachers would benefit from a relationship with a mentor as long as the mentor provides positive support. Candace says her experience with her mentor has strengthened her resolve to continue teaching and keep striving for a permanent job. She hopes one day to find herself in the role of mentor.

4.2.1.1 How does Candace represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors? Candace relates both positive and negative stories when referring to senior teachers she has encountered in her early professional life. In her first experience in a new school and in charge of her own class, Candace desperately wanted the guidance of a senior teacher. No one came forward to help. Instead, she felt the senior teachers were overly critical of her efforts. Not wanting to repeat these negative experiences, in her second year as a teacher, she took the initiative to seek out a senior teacher who she knew by reputation. A positive relationship developed and endures. Candace continues to turn to her mentor for help and guidance but now the relationship has evolved into one of mutual sharing. Her intentions are to perpetuate her positive experience and one day to become a mentor to novice teachers.

4.2.2 Stacy's story. Stacy became involved in the study through the recommendation of another teacher who thought Stacy's story would provide an interesting perspective to the discussion. Stacy is a new teacher working in her first position after graduating from a B.Ed. program. She is working as a long-term substitute in the same school in which she completed her practicum.

Stacy moved with relative ease from the role of student teacher into the role of novice teacher. She did not have to seek out a mentor or find herself alone in a challenging situation. Stacy maintained the positive relationships she developed with two senior teachers at the school who now act as her mentors. One of the teachers was a senior teacher with established classroom practice. The second teacher was younger and appeared to act as more of a peer mentor to Stacy.

When describing her teacher training, Stacy echoed Candace's sentiments when she said that she did not feel that the courses she took in university prepared her for what she faced in the classroom. Even with a support network in place, Stacy still felt there was much to learn every day in her new position as a classroom teacher.

Stacy: "There is so much that is assumed that you know and if you didn't learn it in your teacher training, you need to have someone to tell you. It's like, is this what we are supposed to know?"

Stacy relied heavily on the support of her mentors in her new position. She felt she needed their guidance to know what to do next.

Stacy: "There is so much that you don't know. If you can get comfortable with one of these teachers [mentors] then they can help explain things that you wouldn't otherwise know. Right now, it is overwhelming to think about going into a whole year in the classroom. When you do your practicum, it is all in a chunk of time. The [co-operating] teacher already plans it. They know what they are doing and you just jump right into it. But to organize a whole year, I need someone to help me and to guide me...someone to show me how to do it all."

When questioned about her relationship with her mentors, Stacy considered the experience to be very valuable in developing her practice yet she described their contributions in different ways. Stacy was assigned to these teachers as a student teacher and said she identified more closely with the younger teacher who later became her mentor. She found they were more alike in personality and teaching philosophy.

When speaking about her senior mentor, Stacy admitted their relationship grew a little more slowly.

Stacy: “It was a little bit uncomfortable at first. She knows so much and I just keep thinking of all the things I don’t know, from discipline to dealing with parents. It’s all that communication and the protocol. It’s the way [senior teachers] set up their classrooms. They know what they are doing and why they are doing it.”

At the time of this interview, Stacy was still working her way through her first experiences as a “real” teacher. With the support of her senior mentor, she has successfully managed her first parent-teacher interviews. When asked if her experiences with her mentor strengthened her resolve to be a teacher, Stacy replied in the affirmative.

Stacy: “Strengthened, for sure. When I came back here to work, I said to myself, ‘Yes, this is why I want to be a teacher. This is why I want to do this.’”

Stacy says that some day she would like to act as a mentor to a novice teacher. She has come to recognize how valuable the experience is and hopes to share what she has learned.

4.2.2.1 How does Stacy represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors? Stacy’s transition into the classroom has been relatively smooth. She continues to benefit from the supportive relationships she established as a pre-service teacher and she is

utilizing those relationships to engage these teachers as mentors. She acknowledges the contributions of two mentors who are at different stages of their own careers. She feels more aligned with the younger teacher who acts in the role of peer mentor. She feels comfortable with her and feels they work well collaboratively. While she acknowledges the contributions her senior mentor has made to her growth and development as a novice teacher, Stacy admits to feeling a bit intimidated by the vast amount of knowledge and experience her senior mentor possesses.

4.2.3 Isabella's story. Isabella is a novice who initially declined to become involved in the study. She did not feel her experiences were relevant. After several weeks, Isabella sent me an email stating that she had changed her mind and wanted to share her story. We met in a coffee shop and proceeded with the interview.

Similar to the stories shared by Candace and Stacy, Isabella feels the most practical part of her university training happened in the classrooms where she undertook her pre-service training. Unlike these other teachers, Isabella formed a tighter connection with the more senior of her two cooperating teachers rather than with the teacher closer to her own age.

Isabella: "I learned the majority of what I needed from my practicum.... [My mentor] was retiring that year but she was the most absolutely amazing teacher I have ever met... the way she spoke, her beliefs. I just grabbed on to it all. She took me under her wing."

Isabella explained that she would sit with her cooperating teacher at the end of the day to debrief and plan for the next day. The teacher would let her try out her ideas, always encouraging her and offering suggestions for support.

Isabella: “We had really good conversations...she took the time to talk.”

When she talks about her pre-service experiences, Isabella used the same word that several of the other novices would use to describe her placement. She describes her classroom experience as ideal, with no major behavior issues.

In her first teaching position, however, Isabella found herself in an unfamiliar school as a teacher in a grade primary class. At this time, she had not yet established her relationship with the woman who would become her mentor. The first few months were extremely difficult for Isabella.

After struggling in her experience in grade primary, Isabella met her mentor. Isabella gladly accepted the assistance of a senior teacher who approached her with an offer of help. The woman was a vice-principal at the school and in her, Isabella found a mentor and a friend.

Isabella: “Once I met her, I started getting the courage to ask for help. I realized that it was okay to ask for help. I needed help with the whole management piece and things like that. It is so hard to get them under way.”

Isabella has come to rely heavily on the support and friendship of her mentor.

Because her mentor held an administrative position, she was able to come into Isabella’s classroom to help her throughout the day. At times, Isabella’s mentor would demonstrate teaching practices and offer suggestions for lessons and planning. She would always comment on what Isabella was doing well.

Isabella: “I took in everything she did from her mannerisms to her tone [of voice]. I noticed all that with her. So I would watch and I would copy it. It is just like with

our [students], we want them to model us. She really has played a very important role in my teaching career, my style and my pedagogy.”

Besides the mentor that she found at her school, Isabella also took part in an after school program for novice teachers. New teachers would meet once a month and talk about concerns they had in their classrooms. Isabella enjoyed these meetings but found them limited in their scope to issues around curriculum. Frustrated by the many incidental things that arose daily in classrooms, Isabella felt a need for more support to help her manage these expectations.

Isabella worked in three different grades in three different schools. Her feelings about being constantly shuffled from grade to grade and school-to-school were consistent with the stories shared by other novice teachers. She also expressed some misgivings about the level of support she received from school administration.

Isabella: “There have been administrators who, for a lack of a better word, couldn’t care less about [mentoring novice teachers]. They think, this is your job. Just do it.

As long as everything is going well in the classroom, it’s good.”

Having benefitted from a thoughtful and supportive senior mentor, Isabella now feels better able to handle new challenges in her career. She feels that it is easier to seek the help of a mentor than to struggle through initiations to classroom teaching on your own.

4.2.3.1 How does Isabella represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors? As a novice teacher working her way through her first years in the classroom, Isabella has benefitted from strong role models in the form of senior teachers. She made a connection with a senior teacher who acted as her mentor during her pre-service training. She absorbed her mentor’s philosophy, beliefs and practice. After an unpleasant experience

during which time she struggled on her own, Isabella accepted help from a vice-principal who became her mentor. Isabella tried to copy this teacher in many ways from her mannerisms and tone of voice to the way she interacted with parents.

Now completing her fourth year in the classroom, Isabella continues to rely on the support of her mentor. She is in regular contact with her and she deeply values the contribution her mentor has made to her development as a professional.

4.2.4 Grace's story. In sharing her story, Grace echoed many of the sentiments shared by the other novice teachers who participated in this research. Grace classifies her pre-service placements as ideal – the same word used by other novices. Also, like the other participants, she does not feel that her university instruction prepared her for the challenges she has faced in her first years in the classroom.

Over the past five years, Grace has held five different positions in five different schools. She feels such circumstances are extremely challenging for young teachers who are trying to develop their practice.

Grace: “Most newer teachers are bouncing from grade to grade and different schools every year. Each year they are trying to get familiar with a new curriculum, a new school and a new staff. It is very overwhelming.”

Because contract-based teaching often requires constant moving from school to school, Grace identified another obstacle often faced by many novice teachers. Each year, she has found herself with very challenging classroom assignments - the class nobody else wants to teach.

Grace: “That has been what has happened every single year. It is an awful thing to say and an awful way to look at things, but its true. I have been told as much when I

get [to the new school]. As a new teacher you don't have all the experiences of a seasoned teacher yet in the run of a day you are dealing with more behavior scenarios than you are prepared to handle.”

Grace refers to an attitude among teachers and administrators that new teachers needed to pay their dues to the profession. She feels many new teachers are ill equipped for the challenges they faced and as a result, new teachers are leaving the profession.

Grace has been fortunate in that she has been able to establish a relationship with a senior mentor in almost every school. The relationship she developed with one particular senior teacher has persisted, even though they no longer work in the same school. In her mentor, Grace found someone to talk to and to support her. Her mentor offered suggestions to improve instructional practice and shared techniques for dealing with challenging students. Her mentor has guided her in developing assessment techniques and has helped her hone her own philosophy of teaching. Grace represents her mentor's contributions in terms of being a model teacher and also a friend and confidante beyond the context of the classroom. Referring to her own situation, Grace feels that every new teacher should have the benefit of a mentor who is knowledgeable about the students, the school and the community.

With the support and encouragement of her mentor, Grace's confidence has grown. She says that even though she is still working in very challenging classrooms, she is now more comfortable asking for help when she needs it - whether it be help from an administrator, for example, in dealing with behavior issues or help from a colleague in dealing with an instructional matter.

Grace: “I think the experiences I have had in these last five years trump the experiences of some of the seasoned teachers. A shift needs to be made so that our

newer teachers have an easier transition into the profession. They need to work with a mentor for their emotional, social and professional growth. The need to see what real-life teaching is all about.”

Grace clearly feels that she has benefitted from her relationship with a mentor. She also feels that in some ways, her challenging experiences have given her an advantage over many of the senior teachers she works with, an advantage she would like to share with other novice teachers.

4.2.4.1 How does Grace represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors? In the first five years of her career, Grace has found herself in many different and often challenging situations. Faced with what she perceived to be a professional climate of having to *pay your dues*, she received little support from school administrators or senior teachers. While these experiences were difficult to overcome, Grace feels she has grown stronger as a result.

For Grace, the most important part of her relationship with her mentor is not directly related to instruction or classroom management. The social and emotional support provided by her mentor is more highly valued. She appreciates a sympathetic ear at the end of a particularly difficult day; it reassures her that she is not alone.

4.2.5 Dianna’s story. While she refers to herself as a positive and upbeat person, Dianna’s story is rife with negative experiences as a novice teacher. She attributes her own disposition and the help of a senior mentor as the main reasons she has persevered in the teaching profession.

Reaffirming the words of the other novice teachers interviewed for this project, Dianna did not feel ready for her first real teaching assignment. Her practical experiences for her BEd degree were in classes that Dianna described as “textbook perfect”.

For her first teaching job, Dianna was one of two grade six teachers in her school. The other teacher immediately reached out to her and became a supportive mentor.

Dianna: “She [senior mentor] approached me on the very first day I was there. She was more than willing to help. She told me anything I needed or wanted just to ask her. She was a person who put an effort into her offer to share her expertise.”

Dianna’s first year in the classroom was under the guidance of a helpful and proactive mentor. She taught Dianna to apply the theory she had learned in her teacher training to delivering the grade six program. She helped Dianna navigate the curriculum; together they would develop lessons and at times, they would co-teach. Her senior mentor supported every step she took, but particularly with classroom management and interactions with students.

Since her first year as a teacher, Dianna has worked in several different schools in diverse communities. One year was particularly challenging. Between September and November, her teaching assignment changed three times. Starting out in grade two, Dianna was moved to a grade six job in another school in another community in October and then to a grade primary class in yet a third community by the first of November.

Researcher: “You are on a steep learning curve every year?”

Dianna: “Yes, every year it is different and no two schools are the same. You go where [the District] tells you and you try to survive.”

During our interview, Dianna also spoke to two other themes that have emerged in the interviews with novice teachers. She referred to the students she teaches each year and of

the impact of school culture on mentoring relationships. When Dianna assumed her latest job assignment, the notion of paying your dues was stated outright. She was told that she had been given the most challenging students at that grade level. Dianna also discussed school culture as impacting the willingness of senior teachers to engage with novice teachers. Having worked in several different schools, Dianna believes there is often a prevailing attitude in schools, something she calls 'sink or swim'.

Dianna's experiences of isolation and lack of support have impacted her attitude towards the profession.

Dianna: "In some schools it's awkward and it's different. They don't go out of their way to help. They just watch us [novice teachers] sink or swim. You feel like you are not welcome or wanted in the school. You feel like you are by yourself. Good luck to you! It is very discouraging a lot of the time."

In spite of her early challenges, Dianna represents herself as a dedicated teacher. Her experiences of moving from school to school have strengthened her resolve to help other young teachers avoid the negative experiences she has endured.

4.2.5.1 How does Dianna represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors? As a novice teacher, Dianna has been riding the roller coaster of job placement. Over the past number of years, she has been uncertain whether or not she would have a position, often finding out at the last minute to which school she would be assigned. She has moved through grades, schools and communities sometimes all in the same school year. She feels she has not had an opportunity to get established and grow her practice in any one position.

In her first year, Dianna found a senior teacher who mentored her, not only in matters of curriculum delivery but also in her relationships with her students. Dianna continues to use these valuable lessons in her everyday practice. In the succeeding years, Dianna has been searching for another mentor in the schools in which she has worked. She continues to rely on her first mentor.

Instead of supportive senior teachers, Dianna feels she has been met with indifference and an attitude that she must make it on her own.

4.2.6 Mentees have mixed representations of the contributions of senior mentors.

The following section presents interpretations of how the stories shared by the mentees relate to the research question specifically, *how do novice teachers represent the contributions of senior teachers who act as mentors?* In this exploration I begin with a discussion of the difficulties and frustrations encountered by the novices in their quest for senior mentors. This was identified as a recurring theme in the data and is important to understanding the lived experiences of novice participants.

The five novice teachers who shared their stories for this project all expressed a desire to have the support of a senior mentor to help them learn the intricacies of their new profession. The challenge arose in finding a helpful senior teacher who would assume the role of mentor. Most of the novices related stories of isolation and frustration while working in classrooms with challenging students and in schools with little formal assistance for new teachers. For the novices who did not feel comfortable asking for help, they described feelings of inadequacy. They also experienced co-workers and administrators whom they did not deem as approachable. Several common themes were repeated in participant stories:

Table 4

Finding a Senior Teacher to Act as a Mentor

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few senior teachers step forward to assume the role of mentor. • Novice teachers report periods when they felt completely isolated with no one to help. • Novice teachers experienced a school culture that was closed and uninviting. |
|--|

- Few senior teachers step forward to assume the role of mentor.

Based on the stories of novice teachers involved in this research, few senior teachers come forward to accept the role of mentor. While novices point out that some senior teachers sought them out or responded favourably to pleas for help, most senior teachers seem unmindful of the challenges faced by novice teachers. The novices interviewed here suggest that the majority of senior teachers they encountered ignored their difficulties. In describing their experiences, they used terms like *isolated* and *on your own*. Help was not readily accessible in many of their schools. Isabella felt overwhelmed and says she cried for months, as well as Grace and Dianna report that they were left on their own in extremely challenging classrooms with little reinforcement from principals or their fellow teachers.

Candace's experience summarizes this phenomenon:

Candace: "I was in a school where I was basically on my own. It was my first year. I didn't have any support. No one offered support even knowing I was a brand new teacher."

- Novice teachers report periods when they felt completely isolated with no one to help. The job of classroom teacher is, by its very nature, a solitary pursuit - usually one adult in a classroom with a group of students. The one teacher to one classroom model is the accepted norm in many schools, however, the separation of which the novices speak, extended past the walls of their classrooms and seemed to be a combination of a professional, social and emotional isolation. Isabella says she felt afraid and alone in her first teaching position. She also felt like the other teachers were judging her. Candace also felt she was being judged by senior teachers. Grace talked about feeling alone as she tried to understand the school system as well as learn about herself, as a teacher.

Grace: "Teaching can be such an isolated career. You need help as much for your personal well-being as for the delivery of the curriculum for the students."

For Dianna there was physical isolation as well.

Dianna: "I was the third teacher. The other two grade primary classes were upstairs. When I got there the room was empty and I had nothing. I was given a handful of books and that was it. There wasn't even a block in the classroom... Google was my only mentor that year!"

- Novice teachers experienced a school culture that was closed and uninviting. Novice teachers all reported being uncomfortable asking for help. When they did ask for help, often times their requests were met with impatience. Stacy and Isabella both felt they were bothering the teachers they approached for guidance.

Candace described a conversation she had with the Principal on the first day in a new school.

Candace: “The principal said to me, ‘If I see you I know there is a problem. If I don’t see you, I know everything is fine’. That meant he knew that if I was coming to the office I couldn’t handle things. No support there!”

Although each of the novice teachers who shared their stories initially felt rebuffed, they were able to develop the meaningful and productive mentor relationships with other senior teachers who helped cultivate their professional and personal development. The following section will address the question of how the novice mentees represent the contributions of the senior teachers who acted as their mentors.

4.2.6.1 *Representing the contributions of senior mentors.* A common thread that ran throughout the stories of all the novice teachers was a recognition that they needed help. All the novices reported feeling overwhelmed when they found themselves in classrooms in which they were solely responsible for developing and delivering curriculum as well as other aspects of the job such as organization, classroom management, navigating school culture and dealing with parents. All novices also reported a strong desire to find a senior teacher to guide them through their own induction into the profession.

Once trusting relationships with senior mentors were established, all mentees reported positive professional development and personal growth as teachers:

Table 5

Contributions of Senior Mentors

- Senior mentors made novices feel more professionally competent in the classroom.
- Senior mentors made novices more confident to approach other teachers for help.
- Senior mentors offered opportunities for novices to celebrate their successes.
- Mentees developed supportive personal relationships with their senior mentors.

- Senior mentors made novices feel more professionally competent in the classroom.

Novice teachers highly valued the contributions of their senior mentors. They reported that the relationship with their mentors was critical to their development as teachers; they also felt that they would have benefitted from more opportunities to work with senior teachers.

The novice teachers all reported gaps in their professional learning and they felt that they needed help with everything from curriculum and assessment to report cards and parent-teacher interviews. In their mentors, they found the backing they needed to guide them through the processes of becoming a teacher.

- Senior mentors made novices more confident to approach other teachers for help.

Mentees reported that after establishing a positive mentoring relationship with one senior teacher, they were more likely to seek advice from senior teachers in each new

school. All relate that as their confidence in their practice grew, it became easier to approach senior teachers and administrators.

Isabella: “When I need help now, I’m not afraid to ask for it. There are people out there who are too proud to ask for help but they really should seek out help. It is so much easier than trying to figure everything out on your own.”

Grace thinks that if other novice teachers see mentors and mentees engaged in a mentoring relationship, it will encourage more young teachers to seek out a mentor.

- Senior mentors offered opportunities for novices to celebrate their successes. As further evidence of the positive aspects of mentoring, the novice mentees all referred to their interactions with senior mentors not only as an opportunity to learn but also to celebrate and acknowledge their successes. Grace and Dianna found that they felt like part of a learning community when they worked with their mentors.

On an individual level, all the mentees valued the conversations they had with their mentors and considered this to be a safe way to explore new practices and ideas. For Isabella, having someone to talk to before she tried a new idea gave her the confidence to go forward. Her mentor would challenge her to evaluate her ideas and look at them critically. This process strengthened confidence in her practice and allowed them both to celebrate together when things went well.

Stacy enjoyed the support of her mentor as they worked through her ideas together and her mentor shared her enthusiasm.

Grace points out that having a mentor means being able to collectively regroup after a misstep. She acknowledged that even the best made plans do not always work out.

Grace: “When you have someone that is close to you, you are able to have the conversation about what went wrong. It helps you deal with it, digest it and move on from there.”

- Mentees developed supportive personal relationships with their senior mentors. One of the unexpected benefits of professional mentoring relationships for all the mentees is that they were able to establish personal connections with their mentors. The relationships were rooted workplace circumstances, however; the novice teachers also formed friendships with mentors who offered personal support as well.

Dianna keeps in close contact with her mentor over the phone. She is grateful for the impact she has had on her life as a teacher. Isabella feels she has found a mentor who really cares. She feels that they are becoming collaborators rather than mentor and mentee. Candace echoes this sentiment of mutual respect and collaboration in her evolving relationship with her mentor.

For Grace, the emotional and social support provided by her mentor has been the most valuable aspect of their relationship. Even though they no longer teach in the same school, they have maintained their close ties. Grace’s mentor continues to play a supportive role and is always available to talk at the end of a difficult day.

Grace: “She cares so much. She always makes phone calls to check in. She values our relationship – our professional relationship and our friendship.”

4.2.6.2 Emerging themes in the data: Novice mentees. There are striking similarities in the interview data with novice mentees relating shared experiences. In some instances, participants made statements that were almost identical. The primary difference appears to be in how novices came to find themselves in mentoring relationships. One novice went to work

in the school where she had been a student teacher and continued the relationships she had established with her co-operating teachers. Another novice was assigned to co-teach with a vice principal and has since developed a strong personal and professional relationship with her mentor. For two others, a senior teacher initiated the relationship. Interestingly, only one of the novices went in search of help and guidance. This is borne out in the literature where several authors (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010; Long, F. et al, 2012) report that many novices regard asking for help as a sign of weakness or an inability to do their jobs.

Regardless of how the novices came to be in mentoring relationships, all the mentees reported similar experiences that led them to seek out the support of a senior teacher. This section will explore the common themes that emerged in the interview data with the five novice teachers:

Table 6

Emerging Themes in the Novice Case

- Novice teachers reported feeling unprepared for the realities of the classroom when they left their teacher training programs.
- Novice teachers placed higher value on their practical placements than the instructive aspects of their B.Ed. programs.
- Novice teachers felt that their practical placements did not reflect the realities they would face in their own classrooms.
- Novice teachers reported developing relationships with peers who were sharing the same experiences.

- Novice teachers reported feeling unprepared for the realities of the classroom when they left their teacher training programs. This theme was repeated with consistency in all the novice participants' stories. This sense of unpreparedness is an important aspect of the discussion of mentoring because it relates to the novices' perceived need for support from a senior mentor.

Stacy: "A lot of the courses that you have to take are based on theory and these deal with *ideal* situations that don't ever really happen. The practices that you need to use in the classroom...they don't really get taught. There is so much that is assumed that you know."

For the novice teachers, it is not simply a matter of being nervous about a new position - it relates directly to their performance on the job and their perceptions of themselves as professionals.

- Novice teachers placed higher value on their practical placements than the instructive aspects of their B.Ed. programs. Novices seem to value an "apprenticeship" model of teacher induction. It is when the novices moved out of the university lecture hall and into schools and classrooms that they reported their richest learning experiences.

Novices report these practical experiences were where the real-world learning took place. All the novices reported that their co-operating teachers presented with very strong and established practices.

Isabella has modeled her philosophy and style of teaching on the practices of her co-operating teacher. Grace also found a strong role model.

Grace: “I took a lot her of philosophies and adapted them to my own practice. I definitely learned a lot about my own teaching style.... It was very beneficial to me because I could see, in practice, all the things I was learning and wanted to try.”

For Dianna and Candace, the experience was a little different. Both novices reported placements with senior teachers approaching retirement. Both claimed that what they learned in these placements was what they *did not* want to do in their own classrooms.

- Novice teachers felt that their practical placements did not reflect the realities they would face in their own classrooms. The practical part of teacher training matches student teachers with experienced practitioners. For each of the novice participants, at least one of their placements was with a very senior teacher. They reported that the students in the classrooms of these senior teachers were “ideal” or “textbook perfect”. In referring to the actual situations in which they have been working, novice teachers reported that these ideal classrooms did not prepare them for the challenges they now face daily.

Grace: “Both of my practice teaching placements were kind of like the “ideal classroom” which is the complete opposite of what I have [taught] in the last five years.”

When referring to the challenging classes that many novices end up teaching, Dianna stated that she was not prepared for the many behavior and learning needs she has been experiencing.

Dianna: “It’s like you’re going to have 20 kids who will be perfect students and everybody will get straight As. You’re always placed with these senior teachers who

have been given these *ideal* classes. I am looking forward to being a senior teacher and getting one of those classes! [laughter] ...maybe in 20 years or so.”

- Novice teachers reported developing relationships with peers who were sharing the same experiences. Just as all of the novice teachers reported feeling isolated and overwhelmed in their new schools, all the novices also reported turning to same-age peers for support. Relating feelings of being scared or discouraged to ask for help, they often found it easier to turn to someone who was experiencing the same struggles.

Isabella: “There was a teacher in my school, about my age, and she had taught grade primary before. If it hadn’t been for her, I don’t know if I would have survived!”

For Stacy, support has been consistent since she continued to teach in a school in which she already had established mentors. Yet even in this situation, she found a peer with whom she closely related.

Stacy: “There was this other teacher and she was at the beginning of her career, too.

Our personalities were the same and our philosophy and our style. We were the same in terms of those kinds of things.”

4.2.7 Summary – How do novice teachers represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors? In the case of the novice mentees, several important and recurring themes emerged from the data. First, all the novice teachers stated that they felt ill-prepared for the full responsibilities of a classroom in the early years of their practice. Having acquired some knowledge and experience in their BEd programs, they felt they needed more guidance as they entered the transition from students to teachers. All of the novices sought the help of a senior mentor.

Second, the novices had difficulty finding a senior teacher who would assume the role of mentor. No formal program for novice mentoring existed in their district and novices felt challenged to find someone who would take on that role. Eventually, all the novice teachers found a senior teacher to act as a mentor. For the novices, this was an important and valued step in their personal and professional development as teachers.

Once mentoring relationships had been established, the novices experienced positive professional interactions. The mentees indicate that they became more professionally competent. Having experienced the benefits of mentoring and grown their practice through these positive interactions, novices felt more comfortable asking other senior teachers and administrators for help. Feelings of isolation were replaced with feelings of support and being in a mentoring relationship offered novices a chance to celebrate their successes with their senior mentors. Beyond professional development, novice mentees also report that they developed strong personal relationships with their mentors. They feel like part of a learning community and these personal connections continue to be important to the novices' social and emotional growth as teachers. Overall, the novices highly value the professional and personal contributions made to their careers by their senior mentors.

The next section will further discuss this notion of value in regards to the extent to which the contributions of both sides of the mentoring relationships were valued.

4.3 Across-case Explorations

When the cases are considered together, they can be labeled not as mentors and mentees but singularly as teachers involved in mentoring relationships. By comparing and contrasting specific examples from the data, interpretations can be made to better understand the phenomenon. In discussing the rationale behind pursuing across-case analysis, Creswell

(2008) contends that one of the reasons to look at similarities and differences between cases is to uncover emerging themes that may challenge the researcher's initial interpretations or offer alternate explanations.

The following sections will represent the themes that emerged from an across-case exploration of the data and move toward addressing the third research question, *To what extent is the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors valued by those engaged in the mentorship relationship?*

4.3.1 Similarities among cases. When considered as a whole, all of the teachers who shared their stories for this project were themselves mentored by another teacher. All the teachers had at some point learned part of their craft from a colleague. Mentors and mentees viewed the relationship in a positive light and expressed a high degree of value in the practice of mentoring.

Table 7

Similarities Among Cases – Valuing the Mentoring Relationship

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both senior mentors and novice mentees place considerable value on the mentoring relationship. • Participants consider the mentoring process to be essential to their professional success and indicate a desire for greater opportunities. |
|--|
- Both senior mentors and novice mentees place considerable value on the mentoring relationship. The most striking similarity arising from the data is that all those involved in mentoring relationships held the practice in high regard and valued the

process of mentoring as important to their personal and professional development. This theme of valuation bears on the third research question posed for this project. As detailed previously, each of the senior teachers who acted as a mentor to novice teachers held different reasons for doing so. However, they all felt a genuine desire to be helpful and held a strong sense of professionalism, feeling duty-bound to pass on their expertise to the next generation of teachers. All the senior teachers perceived their contributions to the profession and the novice individuals they have mentored to be valuable.

For Linda, who considers herself an elder, the value of mentoring is in the continuing development of the profession.

Linda: “It would be a shame not to instil in these teachers all the things that we know... the things that are most important for the students. We need to help them make the best of every day they are in class. We need to take these young people on and teach them the best that we can. That is how they will learn.”

For Barbara, mentoring was valuable because it offered balance to the system. Senior teachers passing along “tricks of the trade” while novice teachers infused the school with enthusiasm and new ideas. Julie and Patty valued the reciprocity and the opportunity to improve their own practice through working with a mentee.

The novice mentees placed equally high value on the process of mentoring. For Stacy, mentoring has meant an easy transition from her university program to the public school classroom. Isabella and Candace have developed their professional practice and are now more comfortable with the intangibles of the job from organization to classroom management.

Candace: “Sometimes people that [graduate] think they know everything and yet they only know what they learned through university courses. They don’t have the practical experience. [Mentoring] opens up your eyes a lot when you are just starting out and you don’t have a lot of experience.”

Grace highly values the personal relationships she has developed with her mentor and the social and emotional support her relationship provides.

- Participants consider the mentoring process to be essential to their professional success and indicate a desire for greater opportunities. All participants (mentors and mentees) represented the mentoring experience as crucial to their development as teachers. Teachers at all stages of their careers face challenging situations. Senior teachers like Barbara and Julie needed the help of a mentor when they changed grade assignments. Patty required a mentor when she finally gained tenure after many years as a substitute teacher. The novice participants consistently expressed the need for strong support for professional growth as they faced the realities of teaching beyond their degree programs. Dianna, having experienced many negative situations as a novice teacher, placed a great deal of value on the positive interactions she had with her senior mentor. She now initiates interactions with other novice teachers whom she meets in an attempt to engage them in mentoring relationships.

All of the participants were steadfast in their commitment to the value of mentoring as a vehicle for continued professional development. Whether it was senior teachers learning about technology from their novice mentees or novice teachers refining their skills in communicating with parents, all the participants referenced some form of professional growth related to their mentoring relationships. Just as senior teachers

indicated a desire to continue mentoring, the novice teachers expressed a desire to serve as mentors because they found the experience valuable to their growth and competence as teachers.

4.3.2 Differences among cases. The data also reveal differences in the perspectives of study participants. The most notable of these differences is expressed in the stories of those who came forward to act as senior mentors to novice teachers in need of support. While senior teachers who participated in this research all identified themselves as mentors, novice teachers indicated though that finding a senior teacher to act as a mentor was, at times, very difficult.

Table 8

Differences Among Cases – Identifying a Mentor

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novice teachers found it difficult to identify senior teachers who might act as mentors. |
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- Novice teachers found it difficult to identify senior teachers who might act as mentors. Table 4 in Section 4.2.6 outlined the challenges facing novice teachers in their quest to find a senior teacher to act in the role of mentor. Feeling isolated in their classrooms and working in schools that often presented with a culture that was unwelcoming, the novice participants found it difficult to engage senior teachers in a relationship.

This situation reflects a reality that is contrary to those senior teachers who are actively engaged with their novice colleagues. The senior mentors interviewed for this project had repeatedly participated in mentor relationships. They have initiated

contact with novices and advocated for their growth as teachers. They were motivated to accept and extend their role as mentors. The senior teachers indicated a desire to continue mentoring novice teachers and easing their transition into the profession.

Patty: “We have a professional responsibility to help.... If you are a teacher and do not consider yourself a mentor, what does that say about your professional being?”

While Patty’s statement indicates that the role of mentor is a natural one for her as a senior teacher, novice participant reports indicate that this is obviously not the case for all senior teachers.

This significant discrepancy between senior teachers who engage their novice counterparts and act as mentors and those senior teachers who do not, relates to the research question, *To what extent is the contribution of senior mentors valued by those engaged in the mentoring relationship?* As the results presented in this chapter indicate, for those novice teachers who find a senior mentor, the benefits can be substantial to their professional and personal growth as teachers. The fact that not all senior teachers accept the role of mentor requires a deeper explanation and will be discussed in Chapter Five.

4.3.3 Emerging themes from across-case analysis. In exploring across the cases, the theme of peer mentorship surfaced as a form of mentoring supplementary to the traditional senior/novice model.

Table 9

Emerging Themes from Across-case Analysis

- | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer mentorship is a supplementary model to the traditional senior to novice model of mentoring. |
|--|
- Peer mentorship is a supplementary model to the traditional senior to novice model of mentoring. The inclination of novice teachers to turn to their peers to assume the role of mentor was presented in Section 4.2.7 outlining common themes occurring in the novice case. The fact that the senior participants also report turning to peers during times of change in their careers makes this an interesting finding in the across-case analysis.
- Barbara and Julie were senior teachers who began to work in new schools and teach unfamiliar grades. These senior teachers sought out peers to ease their transitions. They both had considerable experience in the classroom yet required specific help with the curriculum and school routines.
- All of the novice teachers reported finding support and comfort in same-aged peers who were experiencing the same frustrations and challenges. Isabella felt her peer mentor helped her survive and Grace reported that without the support of her peers, she might have left the profession.
- For Dianna, a peer was the only other staff member with whom she interacted personally and professionally. Dianna found a peer mentor.
- Dianna: He was the only person that really spoke to me in the whole school. We just went through the year ourselves. We planned class projects together. We set up

Learning Buddies because no one else was interested. We were on our own...flying on our own.”

The role of the peer mentor and the relevance of this developing theme will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Five.

4.3.4 Summary of Across-case Explorations. Across-case analysis explored the research question: *To what extent is the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors valued by those engaged in the mentorship relationship?*

The concept of value in this context is used to consider how the participants, both senior and novice, regard the experience of being in a mentor relationship. The questions posed during the interviews were intended to elicit from participants the importance or worth they placed on mentorship.

Both mentors and mentees were very positive in how they represent the experience of being involved in a mentoring relationship. They all report that mentorship contributed to their personal and professional development. They consider the act of mentorship to be a vital part of teacher growth.

Senior mentors recall having relied on peer mentors when they were novices. As seasoned veterans, they also turned to peers when they needed support with the challenges of new schools or different grade levels. Novices also turn to their peers for support when experiencing similar challenges in adapting to new experiences. Novices seem to take comfort in feeling that they were not alone in their struggles to adjust to their profession. Peer mentors provide important social, emotional and professional support.

4.4 Chapter Summary

Guided by the research questions and the purpose of the research in Chapter Four, I presented the results of the data analysis. Working in a paradigm of interpretive constructivism, the goal of this chapter was to honor the contributions senior mentors and novice mentees by presenting their stories through rich descriptions that connect the data to the research questions and emerging themes.

In the senior case, each participant became a mentor for a different personal or professional reason. Themes arising from analysis of the senior case included reciprocity of learning from novices and developing lasting friendships with their mentees.

The analysis of the novice case generated stories of isolation and frustration followed by stories of satisfaction and growth as positive relationships with senior mentors developed. Themes emerging from the novice case included a feeling unprepared for the challenges of the classroom and encounters with school culture that was perceived as hostile to new entrants to the profession. Novices sought out senior mentors but also turned to peer mentors for support.

Through across-case analysis, similarities and differences in the cases were evaluated. The most notable similarities revealed that all participants value the act of mentoring and hold the mentor relationship in high regard. All participants felt that mentoring played a role in their personal and professional development.

The main difference was in the ability of novice teachers to identify senior teachers who would participate in mentoring relationships. The senior mentors in this study were actively engaged with their novice colleagues. The experience of the novices indicated that not many senior teachers are willing to step into this role.

Across-case analysis also revealed that among all study participants, the use of colleagues as peer mentors was prevalent. Novice teachers often turned to their peers in a kind of “misery loves company” situation, in which novices support each other emotionally, socially and professionally. Senior teachers indicated that they had also turned to peers as mentors even as experienced teachers well into their careers.

Chapter Five will present the discussion of these results, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and conclusions that have emerged from analysis of participant data.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

Five senior mentors and five novice mentees generously shared their experiences as members of mentoring relationships. During semi-structured interviews, I collected their stories and together we explored their perceptions of this phenomenon. Chapter Four, presented the results of our co-constructed representations of the three research questions: (1) what motivates senior teachers to become mentors, (2) how do novice mentees perceive the contributions of their senior mentors, and (3) what value do participants place on the mentoring relationship? My interpretations, supported by the participants' words, were used to convey their experiences and from these stories several themes emerged.

Chapter Five will present an in-depth discussion of the findings and further explore the themes arising from the participants' stories. Following the statement of the problem and the purpose of the research discussed in Chapter One, I will situate my interpretations of the data with reference to the extant literature and theorize some possible explanations for the findings.

This chapter will explore viewpoints of participants that are contrary to others in the study. These perspectives suggest implications for practice. In this chapter I also discuss limitations of this research and present recommendations for further research.

5.1 Discussion of Results

The purpose of this research was to explore different representations of the relationship between senior and novice teachers focusing specifically on interactions through the phenomenon of mentorship. Guided by the research questions and situated within the context of rapidly declining enrolments and a general downturn in the economy

in Nova Scotia, this research presented the opportunity to explore the stories of teachers working with an employment reality that is different from several other international contexts. Some jurisdictions in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia are struggling to secure and retain qualified and motivated teachers (Moore Johnson, Birkeland, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Peske, 2001; Martinez, 2004). The *Nova Scotia Public Education Teacher Supply and Demand 2012 Update Report* states that the number of teachers certified in the province continues to grow each year and supply exceeds demand. There are a significant number of teachers in Nova Scotia eligible to retire; almost half of these teachers choose to remain in their teaching positions. This seems to have led to a sometimes-adversarial sentiment of ‘us against them’ among teachers.

Enrolment projections and teacher supply data indicate that the present situation in Nova Scotia will not be altered in the near future (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012). This research looked at the stories of novice and senior teachers, and through constructive interpretation offered an important perspective from inside the mentoring relationship to help expand our understanding of this phenomenon and the role it plays in the current cycle of teacher employment in Nova Scotia.

5.1.1 Challenging the researcher’s assumptions. In Chapter One, I outlined the reasons why I was interested in this research and the assumptions that led to the research questions. Creswell (2008) contends that in analyzing data, the researcher challenges his/her initial interpretations or assumptions and generates alternate explanations. Among my beliefs was the assumption that senior teachers play a vital role in the development of new teachers and thus, the growth of the profession as a whole. Senior teachers who have mastered their craft through years of experience share this accumulated wisdom generously

with novice protégées. Another assumption I held was that novice teachers think that many senior teachers are in a professional rut and should retire to make way for younger teachers with new methods and ideas. A third assumption, reflected in my research design, is that mentoring between teachers occurs mostly in the traditional dyadic model of senior mentor to novice mentee. The assumptions I made regarding the role of senior teachers, the perceptions of novice teachers and models of mentoring were challenged in the results that emerged from analysis of the participants' stories. The following sections will address these how these assumptions were tested by my research findings.

5.1.1.1 – Assumption #1 - Senior teachers are reaching out to mentor novice teachers. In Chapter One, I disclosed my perception of an 'us against them' mindset between novice teachers and those in a position to retire. I attributed this to weak employment prospects for novice teachers in Nova Scotia. I was motivated to pursue this research based on my belief that senior teachers play an important part in integrating novice teachers into the teaching profession.

The data collected from novice teachers however, indicates that mentoring behaviors are not necessarily widely demonstrated by senior teachers and administrators. Mentees revealed that while some senior teachers embrace the role of mentor, few actually come forward to support novices in need. Novices reported feeling isolated in schools where the culture was unwelcoming and they were discouraged from asking for help. Novices in this study report that school administrators offered little support and reinforced this feeling of isolation by indicating that coming to the office for help would be a sign that they were not capable of doing the job.

These data challenged my previously held notions of how mentoring takes place in schools. As a senior teacher who regularly supports novice and pre-service teachers, I assumed the practice to be widespread. I perceived the contributions of senior teachers to be of critical importance in the ongoing cycle of teacher development. The senior teachers in this study who also accepted this role of mentor held similar views. They valued the mentoring process in ways that were both professional and personal. These findings are consistent with several of the studies cited in Chapter Two. The senior teachers in this study became involved in mentor relationships for altruistic reasons. Consistent with Hall, Draper, Smith, and Bullough (2008) and Juarez-Torres et al. (2007), senior mentors say they were motivated by a sense of responsibility to the profession and felt satisfaction and pleasure in watching their young mentees grow and develop. They described a renewed interest in teaching and continuing their own professional growth.

The mentors interviewed in this study expressed a high regard for the act of mentoring and valued the mentoring relationships they had forged. All were motivated to accept and extend their roles as mentors. They stated the desire to continue to work with novice teachers to help ease their transition into the profession. However, the representations of novice teachers were different; senior teachers were not stepping up to help new teachers early in their careers. Candace said she perceived an attitude of ‘sink or swim’ from the senior teachers in her school. Once she had been given a basic orientation to the school, she was on her own to do the job as best she could.

To better understand why more senior teachers do not connect with their novice colleagues, I returned to the interview data and the extant literature and offer the following explanation.

5.1.1.2 Theorizing the findings: The role of school culture. The research literature indicates that school culture can impact the way novice teachers are initiated into schools and the degree of support they receive in their new positions. Peterson and Deal (1998) define school culture as “the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges” (p. 28). The novice teachers in this study report that as they moved from school to school they have encountered cultures that were not welcoming to new teachers.

According to Peterson and Deal (1998), “culture is extremely powerful...Culture influences everything that goes on in schools: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, the practice of instruction and the emphasis given to student and faculty learning.” (p. 28). Kardos, Moore Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, and Liu (2001) found that the success or failure of novice teachers is often linked to the school culture and the interactions of novices with their colleagues. Novices look to senior teachers for signals about how to teach, how to act and how to fit into their classrooms and the larger school community. The participants in this study also expressed these perceptions.

Several researchers suggest that the responsibility for establishing a supportive and engaging school culture lies with the school administration and specifically the school principal (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Long, McKenzie-Robblee, Schaefer, Steeves, Wnuk, Pinnegar, & Clandinin, 2012). Angelle (2006) argued that school leaders act “as the fulcrum for organizational climate and socialization” (p. 319). Kardos et al. (2001) point to the important role of the principal in developing and maintaining the culture that facilitates mentoring and professional exchanges.

In the interview with Patty - a senior mentor, former consultant and principal - she too referred to the role of administrators in the mentoring relationship.

Patty: "It all comes back to the school culture. If the administrator doesn't take the lead, it is really hard for the teachers to do it. Principals need to support [mentoring] and have conversations about it. If we truly want to be in a place where we respect each other then we need a huge shift. Administrators need to make that shift. It is their role."

Novice teachers Grace and Dianna emphasized the importance of the role played by administrators. Grace reported no support from the principal when she was struggling to cope with difficult circumstances in her first classroom. Conversely Dianna found herself in a school where the culture promoted positive interactions between teachers. The culture and climate in this school was welcoming and conducive to the establishment of mentoring relationships. The first day of school Dianna found a senior mentor who helped shape and guide her practice throughout the year. She holds this school up as a model for positive school culture.

These findings are consistent with other research that represents mentoring as an essential part of the sustained growth and development of both mentors and mentees. The question that arises from this discussion is how to create school climates where more senior teachers are propelled to come forward to share their expertise and assume the role of mentor. The data from this study suggests substantial administrative responsibility in developing and maintaining a school culture that accommodates mentoring and is conducive to the emergence of a supportive and respectful environment for all teachers. It starts with a school leader who welcomes all staff members; someone who is able to identify strengths in every teacher and encourage him or her to share these skills. Administrators need to strive

for a school culture that encourages collaboration and team building while entrenching a structure that facilitates sharing and allows teachers opportunities to come together.

5.1.1.3 Assumption #2- Novices feel senior teachers should make way for new blood. The next assumption to be challenged concerns the representation of senior teachers by their novice counterparts – the ‘us versus them’ debate. When referring to senior teachers in general, some of the novices observed that they were too traditional and closed to new ideas. The data show that for the cases examined in this study, once novices developed meaningful relationships with senior mentors, their attitudes changed. Mentees showed respect for the knowledge and skills sets of the senior teachers who had acted as their mentors. They valued their mentors’ abilities as teachers and contributors to their own personal and professional development. Isabella and Grace regarded their senior mentors as role models whom they wished to emulate. For the novices, being involved in mentoring relationships served to breakdown stereotypes and unfounded presumptions about senior teachers.

My original assumption was that novice teachers held a general view that those senior teachers who could, should retire and make way for young teachers with new pedagogy and ideas. This was not borne out in the research data. Themes emerging from the novice stories indicate that novice teachers felt they needed the help and support of senior teachers to navigate the complexities of their new positions. They generally felt unprepared for the demands of the classroom and in many cases were totally overwhelmed. Feeling that they were drowning they wished for a senior teacher to throw them a lifeline.

When a mentoring relationship developed, the senior teacher was valued and her contributions were accepted and appreciated. Unfortunately, not all novice teachers are able

to secure mentoring relationships. In cases where there is no guidance or where the school culture is competitive or not nurturing, novices felt like they were left on their own by senior colleagues, leading to the development of negative perceptions of senior teachers.

The very act of mentoring means that the mentor and the mentee come together in a kind of learning community. The collegial support offered in this kind of community may help to explain why the novice teachers who had benefitted from a relationship with a senior mentor held a more positive view of the contributions of their senior colleagues.

5.1.1.4 Theorizing the findings: Mentor relationships in an integrated professional culture. The act of coming together with the shared goal of enhancing the professional development of novice teachers combines the ideas around school culture that were presented in section 5.1.1.2 and the guiding philosophies of professional learning communities. These concepts may provide an explanation for the shift in how novice mentees view senior teachers. School culture was defined above as setting the tone for professional interactions that take place in a school. The culture is pervasive and can impact every aspect of school life, including the climate around mentoring (Angelles, 2006; Kardos et al, 2001; Peterson & Deal, 1998).

There is a wealth of literature offering definitions of professional learning communities but overall they can be understood to be “models [that] emphasize the importance of nurturing learning communities within which teachers try new ideas, reflect on outcomes, and co-construct knowledge about teaching and learning in the context of authentic activity” (Butler, Novak Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004, p. 436). A learning community does not have to be large. When educators come together to improve practice, share what they are learning and then act on it, they are working in a learning

community (Hord, 2009). Once a mentoring relationship is established between the novice and the veteran teacher, they have in essence formed a learning community.

One kind of learning community detailed in the work of Kardos et al. (2001) is called an integrated professional culture. Here there is sustained support for new teachers that include frequent encounters with experienced teachers. As part of an integrated professional culture, collegiality is stressed and communication and co-operation are the norm. They build on the strengths and needs of all participants and encourage open exchanges of perspective (Kardos et al., 2001). When traditional mentoring relationships start, it is expected that senior teachers will be passing on their skills and knowledge to novices. In an integrated professional culture collegiality grows and there is reciprocal learning. Collegiality and reciprocity were represented in the stories of the participants as they explained the evolutions of their mentoring relationships. As their co-operative work grew and strengthened, both Candace and Isabella felt a shift in the relationships with their mentors from being solely recipients to being more like collaborators and colleagues. The evolving mutual respect allowed for more collegial interactions and a greater appreciation for the skills of the other.

The novices also came to appreciate the skills of their mentors. In the beginning, Stacy was impressed and somewhat intimidated by the vast amount of knowledge and experience of her mentor. Dianna and Grace came to appreciate their mentors when they worked as co-teachers. Both referred to their mentors' skills in classroom management and student interactions as being as important as their knowledge of curricula. The findings also establish that senior mentors perceive their interactions with mentees to result in reciprocal learning. Patty said she was always excited to learn from the young teachers she mentored.

Julie found that through helping her mentees examine their practice, she viewed her own practice with a more critical eye. These results suggest that the traditional hierarchy that characterizes the beginning of a mentoring relationship is subject to change. As the relationship evolves, so does the way mentors perceive their protégés. The relationship seems to become more collegial as the hierarchical structure becomes more akin to a peer-to-peer arrangement. The novices with their senior mentors were working within an integrated professional culture.

The shift in perception that results from being part of an integrated professional culture may also explain why the attitude of ‘us against them’ prevails in my local teaching community. Those novices who have experienced positive mentor relationships have come to appreciate the role of senior teachers in the cycle of professional development. However, many novices do not seem to have secured these positive relationships with more established senior teachers. As long as senior teachers are not stepping up to help novice teachers, the opportunity for an integrated professional culture is lost and the attitude of ‘us against them’ will persist. This research suggests that greater opportunities for mentoring could foster a more cohesive and constructive professional culture in schools.

5.1.1.5 Assumption #3 – Mentoring in schools follows a traditional dyadic model.

The purpose of this research project was to use the mentoring relationship as a vehicle to explore different representations of the relationship between senior and novice teachers. My focus was on the traditional top-down, senior veteran to novice protégé model of mentoring as it provided an opportunity to examine the interactions between these two specific cases.

The senior teachers in this study entered into mentoring relationships with generous intentions. The novice teachers interviewed appreciated the contributions of their mentors but

often felt a certain disconnect with the senior teachers and their practices as mentees indicated senior teachers usually had ideal classes with limited behavior and learning challenges.

Dianna, Candace and Grace reported being told outright that they had been assigned classes with all the challenging students. This trend is reported in the literature. New teachers often are subjected to the least desirable teaching assignments and difficult daily schedules (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010; McCann, 2011). McCann (2011) refers to this as a caste system within schools. A situation exists in which “teachers with seniority enjoy the perks that they assume they have earned by virtue of their years of experience and newcomers have to pay their dues to move up in status” (p. 103). The resulting learning curve for novice teachers is steep.

Given these daily classroom realities, novice teachers often found it difficult to relate to senior teachers. When they were unable to find support, some novices I interviewed turned to their peers for help. In some cases, this was their preferred form of mentoring relationship. They had a greater degree of comfort turning to teachers of similar age who were working in the same kinds of classrooms and having the same daily experiences. Stacy, Isabella and Grace stated they felt a strong connection with other young teachers who were experiencing the same professional challenges. The novices indicated that in terms of what was happening in their classrooms and with their practice, their peer mentors were in comparable situations and shared their teaching styles and philosophies.

Some of the senior teachers interviewed also referred to the benefits of having peer mentors. Patty learned alongside a peer mentor when she was in her first classroom position after 10 years as a substitute. She credits her peer mentor with helping her refine her practice

and enact some of the suggestions from her senior mentor. Charlene expressed similar views and said she continues to seek out support from her peers.

In Chapter Two, I introduced several definitions of the mentor/mentee relationship that position the interaction as one between an established or experienced senior practitioner and a protégé (Green-Powell, 2012; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009; Juarez-Torres, Lane Hurst, & Hurst, 2007; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010; Long, Hall, Conway, & Murphy, 2012). The novices interviewed here indicate that they have all been a part of this kind of traditional model. They have also had the opportunity to develop mentoring relationships with teachers who are closer in age and/or experience. Some of the novices in this study indicated that these peer relationships were more comfortable and in many ways, they perceived them to be better learning opportunities. Novice teachers valued their senior mentors but they admitted that at times they felt intimidated by them. Some research suggests, however, that peer mentoring may not be the most beneficial model. Long et al. (2012) presented findings that reinforce the traditional model of mentoring as more effective than peer mentoring.

“[Y]oung staff members are not necessarily the most suitable to act as mentors. They may have so many unresolved issues themselves that they want to hide their own vulnerabilities from [other] novice teachers” (p. 631). Furthermore, Le Maistre and Pare (2010) refer to the limited problem-solving strategies that younger teachers have in their professional repertoire. They stress the importance of having a veteran to help navigate the complex problems of teaching. McCann (2010) states that veterans have the advantage of experience in that they are able to offer suggestions anticipate outcomes and utilize available resources. The relationship between senior and novice allows the new teacher to experiment. The novice

has the latest theories and practices and the senior teacher has the experience to help them apply those theories.

5.1.1.6 Theorizing the findings: Network of mentors. As discussed, the traditional method of senior to novice mentoring has benefits for both the mentor and the mentee. While the novice teachers acknowledged these benefits, they also expressed a desire to connect with peers and establish supportive mentoring relationships at a lateral level. In Chapter Two, I presented a discussion of familiar and emerging models of mentoring. In addition to the traditional dyadic model there is reciprocal mentoring that is collaborative and flows in both directions (Green-Powell, 2012; Jones & Brown, 2011). Reciprocity was noted in the findings in section 4.1.6.2.

There are also emerging models of mentoring that include reverse mentoring whereby rapid changes in technology and the ease with which new teachers embrace technological advances can be imparted to senior teachers (Ballard, 2013; Jones & Brown, 2011; Sensenig, 2011); bottom-up mentoring that occurs when novices take the initiative to seek out other professionals using such means as social media (Ballard, 2013; Mavrinac, 2005; Sensenig, 2011); and peer or lateral mentoring that is defined as one-to-one non-hierarchical relationship that involves a variety of peers (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Mavrinac, 2005; Sensenig, 2001). A Developmental Network Perspective based in Social Networking Theory (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Jones & Brown, 2011) may be useful in explaining the mentoring patterns and preferences emerging from the participant data. Higgins and Kram (2001) put forth the theory that mentoring is a multiple relationship phenomenon and that a novice may have more than one mentor at any one time. They acknowledge that most novices begin with one senior mentor in a traditional dyadic relationship. This was reflected in the data collected

for this study. When asked about mentoring relationships, the novices always began by discussing the senior teacher with whom they were involved in a traditional mentoring relationship. As the interviews progressed, they referred to peers of similar age and experience with whom they were also involved as equal partners in mentoring relationships.

While the novice participants indicated that they wished for mentoring relationships with senior teachers, they also felt that many senior teachers had little interest in mentoring. Novices were often too intimidated to ask for help or sensed the senior teachers felt the novices needed to 'pay their dues'. Mavrinac (2005) points out that given this outlook, novices may feel there are more peers available to become mentors than senior teachers.

Jones and Brown (2011) expand on the concept of peer mentoring and say that most novices go beyond one or two mentors to seek assistance from a whole set of individuals. If a novice has a network of people to serve as mentors, the benefits are self-actualizing and authentic. Changes brought about by globalization and new technologies, including social networking, mean the traditional model of mentoring no longer seems to fit. In this new context, Higgins and Kram (2001) suggest "that individuals are experiencing increasing variation in both the sources and strength of their developmental support" (p. 264).

Given the more challenging and circuitous pathways into permanent teaching positions in Nova Scotia, many novice teachers find themselves in different positions in different schools each year. In the case of Dianna, she moved to three schools in two months. Establishing a stable, trusting mentor relationship with one person, in one physical location, is therefore difficult.

The Developmental Network model proposed by Higgins and Kram (2001) offers a context to explain this phenomenon of multiple mentoring relationships. It is based on four central concepts:

1. Developmental Network – the set of people identified by the protégé who take an interest in and assist the protégé. This can include people in different aspects of their professional/social network.
2. Developmental Relationships - those people named by the protégé as providing assistance. Higgins and Kram (2001) refer to them as developers.
3. Network Diversity - diverse sources of information provided by the network. The more diverse the set of mentors, the more dense the range of information.
4. Relationship Strength - emotional connections including affect, reciprocity and communication that exist between the developers and the protégé. Strong connections were related to strong motivations to help.

From these central concepts, Higgins and Kram (2001) have established four categories of developmental relationships: entrepreneurial, opportunistic, traditional and receptive. Each is a result of a combination of characteristics of the central concepts.

Based on analysis of the data, the novices interviewed for this project all appear to fit into a Traditional Developmental Network. This network is characterized by a protégé with a small number of developers. They have strong ties to one primary developer (senior mentor) often in the same organizational context. There are then additional ties associated with the same system (school). There is an interconnection in the organization (school district). The information received in this network is often redundant as it comes from the same social system. There is a similar message from different sources as the school system

provides a consistent point of reference. This network is not static. Interactions within the network can modify the structure. Individual factors (help seeking, safety, self-esteem, and motivation) or organizational factors (technology, proximity, opportunity and focus) can all impact the network (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Given the amount of change that the novice participants have experienced in their short careers, it is conceivable that their developmental networks will continue to grow. Novices indicate that some of their traditional hierarchical relationships have evolved into peer-to-peer relationships. As they move to new schools, they will likely enter into new traditional relationships with other senior teachers while cultivating their existing support relationships.

5.1.2 Summary. The assumptions that led to the development of this research were formed in the school staff room and were influenced by the pressures of rapid economic and demographic downturn combined with spending reductions and their impact on education in Nova Scotia. I felt that discussions of staffing and teacher demographics were represented by a kind of ‘us against them’ discourse (new teachers vs. senior teachers approaching retirement age). I began to wonder about the role senior teachers played in initiating novice teachers into the profession and whether senior teachers felt that they were still valued contributors to the school community.

In collecting and analyzing the data generated by participant interviews, my original assumptions were tested. In the preceding sections, I acknowledged these challenges and offered possible theorizations for these interpretations grounded in the research literature and supported by my interpretations of the data.

Based on these explorations, it is clear that some senior teachers do come forward to work with their novice counterparts in the role of mentors. Many senior teachers however, are more reluctant to share their accumulated knowledge and expertise. Some novices attribute this to senior teachers being in a rut or feeling that novices need to 'pay their dues'. School culture plays an important role in creating a welcoming environment that nurtures the mentoring process and school administrators have a significant role to play in developing a positive school culture. Being part of what Kardos et al. (2001) refer to as an integrated professional culture can impact the perceptions and interactions of novice teachers in regards to their senior counterparts.

Careful consideration of the participants' stories suggests that there is a role for a network of mentors in the initiation of novice teachers. Peer mentors can play an important part in the support structure of new teachers. Novice participants reported they often turned to their peers in a kind of 'misery loves company' context that helped them emotionally, socially and professionally. Senior mentors also indicated that they themselves had turned to peers as mentors even after they had become well established in their careers.

Many forms of mentoring were introduced in this report and a model of mentoring based in social networking theory was proposed. The Developmental Network Perspective of Higgins and Kram (2001) was proposed as a way of conceptualizing the themes identified in the data. Participants engaged in a traditional developmental network that involved multiple mentors who concurrently supported the novice while providing a scaffold to launch new ideas and practice. Given the conditions of instability in job prospects and constant movement among schools and grades, this model encourages novices to make use of available technology and system structures to build their mentoring network.

In conducting this research, my original assumptions were challenged. I have offered theorizations to reflect what I have learned from the research. The following section will describe some further inconsistencies and contrary views that emerged in the data.

5.2 Contrary Perspectives

When presenting participant data, Hatch (2002) indicates that due to the complex nature of interpreting the stories of participants, a realistic representation should include ideas that challenge the researcher and lead to the formation of new impressions. These outlier experiences, described by Fry (2007) as experiences that do not fit with the data provided by other participants and offer variations on a theme, have been identified and analyzed.

A common thread that ran throughout the stories of the novice participants was the feeling of isolation that they were left on their own to sink or swim. All of the novices reported struggling to make sense of what they needed to know and what they needed to do. They felt that senior teachers ignored their plight or thought the novice needed to ‘pay their dues’.

Barbara, the senior mentor who took such personal satisfaction in working with novices, felt there was no reason for novices to feel isolated. She said teachers are always available to support one another and help colleagues who needed it, regardless of their age or experience.

Patty also felt that help was available for novice teachers who actively look for it. Through her experiences as a teacher, consultant and administrator, Patty has worked in many schools and with teachers of all levels of experience. She strongly contested the proposition that novice teachers are left on their own to figure things out.

Patty: “You know those so-called “Millennium Kids” that think the whole world owes them something? It doesn’t work that way. ... Find somebody who is going to help you. It becomes a crutch for new teachers. It doesn’t take long sitting in the staff room to figure out whom you can approach and who you can’t.”

The interview with Patty revealed a counter narrative to the idea that senior teachers should be stepping forward to engage the novice. The responsibility is not entirely with senior teachers; it lies with novice teachers to do what they can to ensure they do their jobs well. Novice teachers need to come forward to seek mentors.

Another common theme in the novice data was the complication of maintaining relationships they had established with senior mentors when they were constantly moving from school to school and grade to grade. Several of the novices complained about not being able to hone their skills in delivering the curriculum for a particular grade because they had never taught the same grade twice.

Linda and Patty both posed contrary views to the idea that constant movement from school to school was detrimental to the development of strong practice and offered an alternative perspective, suggesting that these kinds of experiences can actually be beneficial to teacher induction. Instead of being discouraged by moving around, Linda suggested that novice teachers should take advantage of working in a wide range of classes and try to learn something new in every school they visit.

These contrary perspectives compelled me to reconsider my interpretations openly from both sides of the argument. While immersed in the interviews with novice teachers, I found that I became sympathetic to how novices problematized this instability as being disadvantageous to their developing practice. Every September, many novice teachers are in

new schools and communities teaching new grades. However, this also means they are becoming familiar with the curriculum for different grades, working with students at different developmental levels and being exposed to a large variety of teachers with whom they could possibly establish mentor relationships. Considering the perspective of two very experienced practitioners, this problem may in the longer term be a benefit.

The previous sections have provided a theoretical context for conceptualizing this research and offered contrary perspectives to my findings. The following section will discuss the implications of these findings and suggest recommendations for practice and policy.

5.3 Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this research have direct implications for policy and practice in Nova Scotia. The results of this research, point to an obvious gap between the level of support novices say they need as they begin their induction into the profession and the number of senior teachers who step forward to provide that support. The findings demonstrate the value of mentoring – both to the senior mentors who act in this role and the novice mentees who receive the guidance of a caring mentor. Stakeholders who are actively involved in mentoring relationships acknowledge its value in terms of social, emotional and professional growth. The following sections outline the implications for practice that arise from this research and how this research can inform policy and help to bridge the gap to foster a climate of mentoring that facilitates teacher growth and development in this local context.

5.3.1 Mentoring is an important means of teacher induction and a key component of teacher growth. The extant literature represents that the first years of teaching are crucial to the development and retention of teachers (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010; Bickmore, 2009; Fry, 2007; Wang, Odell & Schwille, 2008). Intangibles such as

induction into school culture (Kardos et al., 2001; Wang, Odell & Schwille, 2008; Herbert & Worthy, 2001), nurturing confidence (McCann, 2010) and opportunities to reflect on planning and experiences (Kardos et al., 2001) are all vital to the developing teacher and can be provided by a relationship with a senior mentor. This research confirms the benefits of a traditional model of mentoring. Participants indicated that they valued the benefits of mentoring and realized an impact in their orientation to practice, teaching philosophy and career satisfaction. Novice teachers suggested personal and professional growth and development as a result of working with a strong and caring senior mentor. However, some novice teachers found it hard to make an initial connection with a senior mentor and thus establish a traditional mentoring relationship.

The notion of mentoring as a tool for professional development and teacher retention is not new. According to Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009), the phenomenon of mentorship and its benefits to teachers has appeared in the research literature since the 1980s. The employment realities for teachers in Nova Scotia make it important to use mentoring as a means of professional development for all teachers. The established benefits of mentoring must be recognized and promoted. Overt support for mentoring needs to be in the forefront of professional conversations at school, district and government levels.

School principals need to be aware of mentoring relationships in their buildings and openly recognize their value. As the educational leader in the school, the principal can identify those senior teachers who could fulfill the role of mentor and encourage them to initiate relationships with novice teachers. Allotting time in the schedule for mentors and novices to meet regularly would demonstrate the principal's commitment to the process.

The school district uses designated mentors to work with all teachers on curriculum delivery and provide support for teachers and schools for specific curriculum initiatives. The model of mentoring that is valued by the novice participants in this study requires a more personal and informal relationship involving a mentor that is readily accessible and able to assist with the many daily issues that arise in the classroom. To nurture this type of relationship, the district can demonstrate its support for mentoring by acknowledging those in mentoring relationships in a newsletter, on their web site or other district-wide communications. As well, districts can provide opportunities for caring senior teachers to come together with novice teachers or work to develop different type of mentoring programs that make use of on-line technologies. By identifying engaged senior teachers and facilitating relationships, novice teachers would be able to connect with a mentor if one was not available at their school.

5.3.2 A positive school culture creates the necessary conditions to foster mentorship. The lack of engagement with novice teachers by some senior teachers and administrators that appears to exist in the context of this study seems to be deeply rooted in school culture. In their explorations of culture, Hoy and Miskel (2008) conclude that culture in schools can be either “functional or dysfunctional... it can promote or impede effectiveness” (p. 182). Increased awareness of the impact of school culture needs to be addressed at the district and government levels but most specifically at the school level. Peterson and Deal (1998) state that the principal has a pervasive impact on developing and maintaining the culture of the school.

Novice teachers in this study felt that they were left to their own devices and forced to find their own way, with only superficial help from administrators. As long as this situation

prevails and novices are placed in the largest, most challenging classrooms; they will struggle in their own professional growth. Without supports in place, many novice teachers move into survival mode (Coffey, 2012; Fry, 2007; F. Long et al., 2012). They revert to old, familiar (and often questionable) practices that they experienced themselves as students in school. The opportunities to enact new theories learned in their teacher training programs are lost in the struggle to cope with what are often difficult teaching situations. Those teachers who are best equipped - veterans with experience and expertise - need to teach the most challenging classes. Until we move away from rewarding senior teachers with ideal classes and the best assignments, novice teachers like those participants in this project, will continue to be placed in situations where they feel overwhelmed.

As stated by the outliers in this study, novices cannot be completely sheltered from the realities of our school system today. McCann (2011) says, “our stance should be somewhere between hazing and coddling (p.103). To find a useful balance between these two extremes it is more helpful to conceptualize the need for novices to develop a kind of guarded independence that creates a safe place to learn with support as required. Novices in this study acknowledged that their most substantial learning in their B.Ed. programs took place on their feet in real classrooms. With this in mind, school administrators need to ensure that teaching assignments allow novices to learn in appropriate settings with provisions in place so they can hone their skills in real life situations. It is incumbent on human resources departments to make sure that novices are placed in teaching situations appropriate to their evolving skills and competencies.

Principals receiving novice teachers into their schools need to ensure that schools are welcoming, classrooms are sufficiently equipped and resources – both physical and human -

are in place to support new teachers. Schools that demonstrate openness to diversity among staff and actively create opportunities for professional development provide robust environments for mentoring to develop. This requires a willingness on the part of school administrators to embrace the principles of an integrated professional culture like that described by Kardos et al (2001) to encompass collegiality, co-operation and reciprocal learning.

As new teachers enter the school system, they should be encouraged to reach out to those senior teachers who express an interest in helping and try to develop a mentoring relationship. They need to tap into their mentor's knowledge and experience as they become more confident and comfortable with the intangibles of the job including classroom management and communication with parents and staff members. Novices should build on their experiences with senior mentors for support with curriculum and professional practice. School boards may wish to consider what kinds of incentives could be considered to encourage more senior teachers to become mentors. Boards could further encourage novice engagement with senior mentors by offering consideration for those novices involved in mentoring relationships during the interview process.

5.3.3 Establishing a traditional developmental network of mentors. An important finding emerging from this study was uncovering the novices' use of a network of mentors for support. Many novice teachers in Nova Scotia find themselves in different teaching positions each school year. They need to be able to adapt quickly, not only in their job assignments but with their support systems as well.

Novice participants indicated that their growth and development were aided by a relationship with a senior mentor. A developmental network of mentors at many different

levels augmented this growth. This arrangement was explained in Section 5.1.1.6 as a Traditional Developmental Network (Higgins & Kram, 2001). The mentoring networks of the novices in this study consisted of a primary mentor (senior teacher) and other mentors (peers) within the school and the district.

Novices should be encouraged to pursue a traditional developmental network that allows them to enlist the support of both senior mentors and peer mentors in formal and informal relationships to satisfy their range of needs. Working with a network of mentors instead of just one senior mentor allows the novice to move past basic survival and turn theory into practice. Combining new theories and practices with the experience and expertise of a more knowledgeable mentor offers the novice the opportunity to enact the new practices and share successes and challenges. Practice supplemented with the support and knowledge of a senior mentor means the novice could gain valuable practical experience and build professional confidence (Fry, 2007; Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011; McCann, 2010).

Based on the experiences shared by the participants in this study, teachers at all stages of the career continuum should be encouraged to pursue support from their colleagues. Senior teachers are not immune to staffing changes in times of downturn and enrolment decline. Some senior participants referred to seeking out mentors among their peers as a way to cope with changing schools and grades. As well, senior teachers spoke to the benefits of reciprocal learning that occurs when they are engaged with novice teachers in mentoring relationships. Mentoring offers the opportunity for professional growth for both novice and senior teachers.

Encouraging informal relationships at school sites and more formal arrangements at the district level can facilitate growth of mentoring networks. Schools can imbed time for sharing and support into their day by encouraging professional conversations in the staff room, by promoting ‘lunch and learn’ sessions, or by identifying time, away from class, during the regular school day for mentors to collaborate. A school-based program, known in this district as ‘Learning Monday’, can be dedicated to accommodating mentoring practices. At the district level, after school sharing sessions or the use of technology such as an on-line discussion forum could help to connect novices and senior teachers who are willing to become involved in mentoring relationships. Networks can be expanded beyond the confines of schools or even districts through the use of technology (Sensenig, 2011) and perhaps facilitated through the Nova Scotia Teachers’ Union (NSTU). Email and social media such as Facebook and Twitter can provide a vehicle for building a stable developmental network and once established, can be easily maintained. These connections can be extended to pre-service teachers as they become engaged in local schools through practicum placements.

5.3.4. Summary. Placing this research in the present context of Nova Scotia schools enabled a focused study of the mentoring phenomenon. Arising from the data are recommendations that are offered to help improve the inaugural experiences of novice teachers and help to grow their confidence and skill as teachers. As well, the benefits of mentoring to senior and novice teachers alike can be accomplished through focused acknowledgement and promotion of mentoring relationships at all levels of education system.

After immersion in the stories of the study participants and a thorough review of the literature, I arrived at recommendations and implications for practice stated above. I

acknowledge that there are limitations to the scope and structure of this research. These limitations will be outlined in the following section.

5.4 Limitations of this Research

Throughout the process of designing this research, collecting and analyzing data and writing the report, several limitations to the research have emerged. First, exploring the lived experiences of teachers in Nova Scotia provided a specific contextual focus on the phenomenon of mentorship. Being so heavily grounded in this context, it provides insight into a particular community of teachers and an in-depth look into the phenomenon from this unique perspective.

Second, all of the participants in this research were female teachers. The sampling process yielded no male candidates as a possible participant. This leads me to question whether the experiences of male mentors and mentees are similar or different to their female counterparts.

Finally, all but one of the participants in this study was an elementary teacher. When contact was made with secondary teachers during recruitment, I was unable to recruit any to participate in the study.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Questions and considerations have surfaced through interpretations of the data; and therefore, have given rise to possible research directions that could grow from this project. The data analysis suggests several questions that should be examined in future research on this phenomenon.

When collecting data on mentoring, is it necessary to separate the development of practice in regards to curriculum delivery from the other intangible skills that make for

successful teaching? Both are equally important to teachers in their classrooms yet the novices in this study considered them distinctly. Isabella attended after school support sessions for new teachers. She was disappointed that these sessions focused only on curriculum. She felt other aspects of school life were just as important. It would be useful to decouple curriculum delivery from other skills required to be a successful teacher and to identify and explore these skills and attributes.

Another question that arises is how important is the setting in which mentoring takes place? All of the senior mentors in this study referred to the fact that they felt mentoring happened more easily in smaller schools. Julie felt that new teachers often got lost in a big school with a large staff. This is an aspect that was not explored with the novice participants.

The findings of this report are focused on providing answers to the research questions relating to the motivations of senior teachers who act as mentors, the representations of their contributions by novice mentees and the value stakeholders place on the relationship. Beyond this focus and also emerging from the data is the role of senior teachers in engaging with novice teachers and how this seems to be related to school culture. Another strand of research could investigate more fully school culture and the phenomenon of mentorship. The development of mentoring networks to guide novice teachers through the transition from being students to being teachers also surfaced as a significant finding.

To further our understanding of the role of the stakeholders in this process in general, and in the Nova Scotia context specifically, a longitudinal study that would focus on specific mentoring pairs would be beneficial. As well, a project which followed the long term growth and development of novice teachers who frequently change teaching assignments and who were involved in mentoring relationships would lend itself to providing information into

curriculum practice and the development of the intangible teaching skills of a workforce in flux. A deeper look at those novice teachers involved in an established developmental network of mentors would also provide insight into different mentoring models.

I was unable to find secondary teachers who identify themselves as members of mentoring relationships. A next step could focus on the prevalence of this phenomenon at the junior and senior high level and the factors that impact mentoring in local secondary schools.

The role of senior teachers and more specifically administrators in developing a school culture that provides a nurturing environment for mentoring to grow was discussed in this report. To broaden the scope of this concept, a project that looked at teacher assignments would help us understand how teachers are assigned to classes in P-6 schools. It could also help inform whether different approaches to the assignment of novice teachers could help alleviate difficulties novices have adjusting to new school placements.

The above recommendations offer suggestions for research focused on individual teachers, their developing practice and the broader system of education. All of these are interrelated components of the complex interpersonal relationship that is the phenomenon of mentoring.

Final Thoughts

This thesis presents a collective case study exploring the relationship between senior teachers who act as mentors and novice teachers who are their mentees. In Chapter One I described the project, provided the background, purpose and research problem and outlined the need for the study.

In Chapter Two I provided a review of the existing literature. As well, I presented the rationale for using the phenomenon of mentorship in the context of education in the Province of Nova Scotia.

Chapter Three outlined the methodology that grounded this research project and the methods used in data collection and analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five senior mentors and five novice mentees. Situated in the paradigm of interpretive constructivism, I co-constructed meaning with the participants during data collection. The analysis of data and research findings are presented in Chapter Four. I also presented my interpretations that led to several generalizations from data analysis. In Chapter Five, I presented some possible theorizations and suggested implications for practice.

Nova Scotia is presently in a phase of sustained population decline. For the education system this means there are significant changes as funding for education is enrolment-driven. The demographics of the province's teachers are also shifting. Many senior teachers remain in their positions past their eligible date for retirement and there are fewer job prospects for new teachers.

It was from this socio-economic reality that this research project was launched. I was interested in the prevailing discourse on teacher employment – 'if only senior teachers would retire, more jobs would open up for young teachers'. I was also interested in how this played out in terms of the value of senior teachers as mentors. Conversations with senior teachers who mentor and novice teachers who are mentees broadened my understanding of the interactions between senior and novice teachers. There are factors that lead to some senior teachers to embrace the role of mentor. Many novice teachers look for the support from their

senior colleagues to help them make the difficult transition into our profession. All of the participants highly value the mentoring relationships in which they were involved.

As a result of immersion in the stories of these generous teachers and careful analysis of the data arising from their interviews, I conclude this report by making the following statements:

- The stakeholders involved in mentoring place great value on these relationships and regard them as integral parts of their professional lives. Novice teachers, through their own admissions, are not ready for the challenges they will face in our classrooms and senior teachers can do a great deal to foster positive orientation to the profession. For our profession to grow and be dynamic, teachers at all levels need to contribute to the progress and development of their colleagues. Senior teachers have a role to play in bringing new teachers into the profession. They also have a responsibility to carry out this role. More senior teachers need to reach out to novice teachers. Linda likened senior teachers to cultural elders. In this role, senior teachers should be seeking out those who need assistance and supporting those novice teachers courageous enough to ask for help.
- Novice teachers need recognize when they need help and take the initiative to develop a network of mentors to support their growth and transition to classroom teachers. Novices need to identify those in their school with whom they can relate and connect; those who can help integrate the theories of educational practice with daily school life. Novices should look for a senior teacher to help with the intangibles of the job as well as curriculum development. Likewise, peer mentors should be

sought so novices can network with other young teachers in similar circumstances to provide support and encouragement.

- School culture, through the leadership of administrators, needs to become such that teachers at all career levels are encouraged to help in the social, emotional and professional growth of their fellow teachers. There is a great deal that could be done to foster a school environment that is more conducive to mentoring and other induction strategies. This starts with the school principal who is responsible for creating an environment that supports and promotes learning communities.

Teaching is by its very nature a helping profession. Our job is to help – not just our students – but our colleagues as well. Every teacher can mentor and be mentored.

The sentiments of those who mentor and those who are mentored show that this phenomenon is a part of a valuable process that needs to be grown and cultivated through collegiality and communication in an environment that is supportive and respectful. As the master guides the apprentice, we must all take in turn our roles as students and teachers of our craft.

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Appendix A

Passing the Torch: A Case Study of Mentor-Mentee Relationships in the Teaching Profession

Interview Questions for Senior Teachers Acting as Mentors

A. Background

1. Briefly outline your teaching experience including how long you have been a teacher and the grade levels at which you have taught.
2. Did you have a mentor beyond a cooperating teacher during your teacher-training period? [If no, proceed to B1] How did you and your mentor come to work together?
3. If so, what was the mentoring process like for you? Was it useful? Was it pleasant or unpleasant? (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009)
4. At the time, did you feel the mentoring process was valuable to your development as a teacher? How do you characterize the relationship in retrospect?

B. Who becomes a mentor?

1. How did you come to find yourself in the role of mentor? How did the relationship start?
2. What kind of formal training (if any) did you receive to help you in your role as mentor?
3. Were you/are you comfortable in your role as mentor?
4. Do you think senior teachers have a responsibility to be mentors to novice teachers? How do you categorize that responsibility?
5. Is mentoring a role suited to every teacher? Explain.

6. Recently there has been much discussion in the school community about the loss of positions, especially for younger teachers with less seniority. Has that impacted the mentorship experience in any way? If so, how?

C. Motivation

1. How often have you found yourself in the role of mentor?
2. Why do you continue to act as a mentor?
3. What, if anything, did you think you would gain from the mentoring relationship?
(Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009)
4. What do you think novice teachers gain from the mentoring relationship? (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009)
5. How do you feel others in the profession perceive the mentoring process?
6. What could prevent you from being a mentor in the future? (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009)

D. Valuation

1. What do you see as the value of mentoring to senior teachers who engage in the process?
2. What value do you think novice teachers place on the process?
3. What value do you think other teachers see in the process?
4. What value do you think those in administration (principals and/or central office administrators) attach to the mentoring process?
5. Should other senior teachers be encouraged to become mentors to those new to our profession?

Appendix B

Passing the Torch: A Case Study of Mentor-Mentee Relationships in the Teaching Profession

A. Background

1. Briefly outline your teaching experience including how long you have been a teacher and how long you have been out of your teacher-training program.
2. Did your teacher training prepare you for the classroom position you are in today?
3. At the time, did you feel your relationship with your cooperating teacher was valuable to your development as a teacher? How do you characterize the experience in retrospect?

B. Why do novice teachers become involved in mentor relationships?

1. How did you come to find yourself in a mentor relationship? How did the relationship start?
2. Are you comfortable in the mentor relationship?
3. Do you think mentorship has a role to play in helping novice teachers adjust to new teaching assignments? How large a part is it playing in your personal development as a teacher?
4. Should every novice teacher be involved in a mentor relationship with a senior teacher?

C. The mentoring relationship

1. Has your mentor shared any of her/his personal beliefs about teaching and learning with you? Have her/his beliefs influenced your own in any way?
2. Does your mentor inquire or accept new methods or ideas that you may suggest? Does collaboration exist and does it ever involve alternative suggestions?
3. Has your mentor provided you with help beyond the curriculum such as classroom management, school politics or dealing with parents?
4. Has your experience in a mentor relationship strengthened or diminished your resolve to be a teacher?
5. How do you feel others in the profession perceive the mentoring process and does this influence you in any way?

D. Valuation

1. What do you see as the value of mentoring to novice teachers who are engaged in the process?
2. What are the negative aspects of being in a mentoring relationship?
3. What value do you think your mentor teacher placed on the process?
4. Do you think other teachers see value in mentoring?
5. What value do you think those in administration (principals and/or central office administrators) attach to the mentoring process?
6. Should other novice teachers be encouraged to become involved in a mentor relationship?
7. Would you consider being a mentor in the future?

Appendix C

Consent Letter for Participation in Research

Title: The Role of Senior Teachers in our School System: Are They Closing the Door on Younger Teachers or Guiding Them Through It?

Researcher A. Ruth Clarke
Masters thesis project, Educational Leadership
Memorial University of Newfoundland
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ruthclarke@staff.ednet.ns.ca or arc723@mun.ca

Supervisor Dr. Gerald Galway
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Contact: 709-864-6924
ggalway@mun.ca

My name is Ruth Clarke and I am a graduate student of Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am currently working towards a Master's degree, Educational Leadership (MEd). As part of my Master's thesis, you are invited to take part in a research project entitled: *The Role of Senior Teachers in our School System: Are They Closing the Door on Younger Teachers or Guiding Them Through It?*

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between senior and novice teachers, particularly the senior teacher/novice teacher mentorship relationship. This research will focus on three principal questions: 1) Why do senior teachers act as mentors to novice teachers? 2) How do novice teachers represent the contribution of senior teachers who act as mentors? and 3) To what extent is this contribution valued by those engaged in the mentorship relationship?

What you will do in this study:

If you consent to become a participant in this study, I will conduct an interview in which you will be asked to respond to a series of questions. The interview will involve myself as researcher and you as participant. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the interview will be conducted away from school at a time and location of your convenience. All information will be held in strictest confidence. I do not hold a position of power within the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board and none of the information collected will be shared with anyone associated with the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board. The interview should last about one (1) hour.

If you agree, the interview will be recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. My supervisor and I are the only persons who will have access to your interview data including the recording, transcription and analysis.

Withdrawal from the study:

Your participation is entirely **voluntary** and you may, at any time, choose to withdraw from this study. There will be no negative consequences to you now or in the future if you choose to withdraw. You do not need to give a reason for withdrawing from this study.

Confidentiality and Storage of Data:

- a) As a participant, your privacy will be maintained and your identity will be kept confidential. You should be aware that research such as this project with small numbers of participants has a possibility, although unlikely, that you may be identified. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants and school sites. Every reasonable effort will be made to maintain the anonymity of all participants. You will not be identified in any report or publication.
- b) As is often the case in this kind of research, some direct quotations may be used. You will have the option of whether or not to consent to having your words directly quoted in the completed project report. You may still fully participate in the interview and research project without consenting to the use of direct quotes. Your contributions will be synthesized into the final project without stating your exact words. At any time, you may change your decision about the use of direct quotations. You do not need to explain your decision and you may still continue to participate in the research.
- c) Data will be securely stored at the home of the researcher. The researcher will transcribe all recorded data. All documents that result from transcription and analysis will be stored electronically and protected by a password known only to the researcher. All data produced in hard copy (paper) will be stored in a locked file cabinet. As per regulations of Memorial University of Newfoundland policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research, all data will be kept for a minimum of five (5) years and then destroyed. Paper documents will be

shredded and electronic data will be removed from all computer sources.

Recorded interviews will be erased from the device.

Sharing of Results with Participants:

All of the information collected will be analyzed and compiled into a Master's thesis. During the data collection process, you may be asked to check the accuracy of the information. The thesis will be publically available and you may read it at your convenience. You can obtain a copy of the completed thesis from me directly through the contacts provided in this consent form. As well, you are informed that it is my intention to publish the thesis in scholarly journals.

Being involved has no risks:

It is not anticipated that there will be any risks of harm resulting from the interview involved in collecting data for this study. However, you will be asked to express opinions on the mentorship relationship including your motivations for becoming involved, perceived benefits or shortcomings and the value you place on the process. This may make you feel uncomfortable. You may also feel that your answers are a direct reflection or evaluation of the teacher that acted as your mentor or mentee.

Value of the Project:

In education there is need for a better understanding of how mentorship occurs, the extent to which it facilitates teacher development and the perceived value of the mentorship relationship. Your participation will provide valuable insight into the motivations, perceptions and valuations of both mentors and mentees.

Participant Consent:

Each person who participates in the interview will have provided informed consent to do so.

For Further Information or Complaints:

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: *Ruth Clarke* at (902)-562-3564 or through email at ruthclarke@staff.ednet.ns.ca or arc723@mun.ca. You may also independently contact *Dr. Gerald Galway*, Memorial University of Newfoundland at (709) 864- 6924 or by email at ggalway@mun.ca.

Participation Consent:

Please check

After reading the description of the project titled, *The Role of Senior Teachers in our School System: Are They Closing the Door on Younger Teachers or Guiding Them Through It?*, I hereby *consent to be interviewed* as a participant.

I *consent* to the use of direct quotes of the responses I provide during the interview process.

I *do not* consent to the use of direct quotes of the responses I provide during the interview process.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____