

Behind Every Great Teacher Is a Supported Mentor: A Research Brief

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Abstract

The purpose of this research brief was to examine the literature surrounding mentors in teacher residency programs. Mentorship plays a critical role in fostering the growth and development of novice teachers, especially in high needs schools where the demands are complex. However, the focus on mentees often overshadows the essential support required by mentors themselves. Effective mentoring is contingent upon mentors having the resources to sustain their dual roles as educators and guides. Without adequate professional development, opportunities for reflection and administrative backing, mentors may experience burnout or struggle with meeting the needs of their mentee. This research brief explores the necessity of prioritizing mentor support in teacher residency programs, allowing mentor teachers to continue to develop their craft. Ultimately, the outcome is to bring awareness to providing support for mentor teachers, resulting in better prepared novice teachers.

Key Words

mentor, mentorship, teacher residency programs

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In teacher residency programs, assigning a qualified mentor to novice teachers can significantly enhance job morale and retention, particularly in urban school districts (Klinge, 2015). Mentorship is a cornerstone of residency programs. It plays a pivotal role in both the personal and professional development of its audience. In this dynamic relationship, the mentor serves as the linchpin, offering guidance, support, and expertise to foster the resident teacher's growth and confidence in the classroom. The success of teacher residency programs hinges on the mentor's ability to model effective teaching practices, provide actionable feedback, and create a supportive environment where novice teachers feel empowered to take risks and refine

their craft (Chu, 2019). Acting as guides, role models, advocates, and mentors in residency programs helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, equipping new teachers with the tools and strategies necessary to navigate the complexities of diverse and high-need classrooms. Through shared experiences and insights, mentors not only promote professional development but also cultivate meaningful relationships. These relationships empower resident teachers to achieve their goals, build resilience, and develop a strong sense of efficacy.

Beyond sharing expertise, mentors in residency programs cultivate an environment of trust and encouragement, offering constructive feedback that allows resident teachers to thrive (Ewing, 2021).

Effective mentors possess both deep content knowledge and the ability to recognize and nurture the unique potential of each mentee. They act as catalysts for growth. They help residents identify their strengths, address areas for improvement, and set realistic yet ambitious goals. Additionally, mentors expand their mentees' professional networks, facilitating opportunities for peer collaboration and exposure to new instructional strategies and perspectives.

This multidimensional approach strengthens the mentor-mentee bond and ensures that the residency experience is both impactful and transformative. By providing consistent, high-quality support, mentors contribute to the development of confident, competent teachers who are more likely to remain in the profession and positively impact their students' learning (Garza et al., 2018). Ultimately, mentors in teacher residency programs shape not only the trajectory of their mentees' careers but also foster a culture of reciprocity, collaboration, and sustained growth in the schools and communities they serve.

This structured support of mentorship reduces feelings of isolation and burnout (Gardiner, 2011). By fostering a sense of belonging and professional identity, acts of mentorship cultivate teacher retention, reinforcing a commitment to the field, particularly in high-need urban schools. This continuum of support frames mentorship not as a temporary intervention but as an ongoing developmental process. By embedding mentorship into a long-term framework, teacher residency programs enhance immediate job satisfaction and fortify the structures that lead to increased retention and success. As resident teachers transition into full-time roles, the mentorship experience instills resilience, reflective practice, and a deeper connection to their school community, increasing the likelihood that they will remain in the classroom and contribute to long-term educational stability (Reinhardt et al., 2023).

Problem Statement

Mentorship is a crucial component of teacher residency programs (Oh et al., 2024). However, there is limited literature available that describes what this

mentoring includes for the mentors themselves. While mentoring relationships are widely recognized for their transformative potential (Pfund et al., 2016), the role of the mentor often remains under-supported and undervalued, leading to challenges that can hinder the effectiveness of these relationships. Mentors are expected to provide guidance, foster growth, and address the unique needs of their mentees. This, all while balancing their own professional responsibilities and personal development, has detrimental effects. Many mentors report feeling ill-prepared for the multifaceted demands of mentorship, citing a lack of training, resources, and institutional support (Sanchez et al., 2016). Without a clear framework or access to ongoing professional development, mentors may struggle with key aspects of their role, such as navigating difficult conversations, managing mentee expectations, or fostering an inclusive and equitable mentoring environment. This gap in support not only impacts the mentor's ability to effectively guide their mentees but can also lead to frustration, burnout, and disengagement. Addressing this issue is critical to ensuring that mentors are equipped with the tools and resources needed to succeed, ultimately strengthening the overall quality and sustainability of mentoring relationships.

Objective

This research brief focuses on the mentor's role within mentoring relationships, examining their responsibilities, challenges, and the impact of their guidance on mentee outcomes. By exploring the strategies mentors employ and the factors that contribute to effective mentorship, this study aims to deepen the understanding of how mentors shape the trajectory of those they support and to identify practices that enhance the success of these relationships in various contexts. As such, the questions to be explored in this brief are:

1. How do mentor teachers in residency programs perceive their roles and responsibilities in supporting novice teachers?

- In what ways does mentorship impact the confidence, instructional effectiveness, and retention of resident teachers?

By addressing these research questions, this study will also provide a comprehensive understanding of mentorship in teacher residency programs, leading to practical recommendations for strengthening mentor support, improving mentee outcomes, and enhancing the overall effectiveness of residency models.

While mentorship is valuable across many fields, its impact is particularly profound in educational spaces, where it fosters growth and success among educators, specifically novice teachers. Mentorship is a key component of educational success, providing novice teachers with professional and personal support and the resources they need to prosper (Ewing, 2021; Roff, 2012; Schatz Oppenheimer & Goldenberg, 2024). Effective mentorship promotes professional growth by providing sensible advice, modeling best practices, and advocating for continuous learning. This support is crucial for building confidence, as novice teachers often face significant challenges and uncertainties in their early years. Mentors also provide

emotional support, helping new teachers navigate the stresses of the profession and reducing the risk of burnout. Furthermore, mentorship positively impacts student outcomes by enhancing the teaching practices of novice educators, leading to more effective instruction and better student engagement (Collier, 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019). All things considered, mentorship fosters a cooperative and encouraging school climate, which is critical to teachers' personal and professional growth.

Methods/Methodology

Qualitative research methodologies provide the best vehicles for exploring processes and complex interpersonal dynamics underlying mentees' and mentors' experiences (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Hellsten, 2009). The articles examined for this brief strategically incorporate the use of observations and interviews to understand the role of these professionals. See the following table for a summary of selected studies.

Table

Summary of Selected Studies

Author (Year)	Title of Study	# of Participants	Method of Data Collection
Chu (2019)	Mentor teacher professional identity development in a year-long teacher residency	10	Interviews & Observations
Gardiner (2011)	Mentoring in an urban teacher residency: Mentors' perceptions of yearlong placements	8	Interviews & Observations
Garza et al. (2018)	Characterizing mentoring capital in a residency program through mentor's voices	45	Surveys
Oh et al. (2024)	The benefits of being a mentor teacher in a teacher residency program	5	Interviews & Focus Groups
Vaitzman Ben-David & Berkovich (2022)	Functions and relational aspects of mentoring for novice teachers during the second year of teaching	35	Interviews

Participant Selection

In qualitative studies examining mentorship in teacher residency programs, participant selection is typically guided by purposeful sampling to ensure that the study includes individuals with direct experience in mentoring relationships. Participants often include mentor teachers, resident teachers (mentees), and program coordinators who can provide rich, in-depth perspectives on the mentoring process. For this research brief, the selected articles were chosen based on (1) the focus of mentorship within teacher residency programs and/or (2) the use of interviews and observations. The inclusion of these criteria ensures that the studies analyzed provide relevant and meaningful insights into the dynamics of mentorship within residency programs. By selecting research that employs interviews and observations, this review captures both the lived experiences of mentors and mentees and the nuanced interactions that occur in real classroom settings. Additionally, prioritizing studies that explicitly focus on mentorship within teacher residency programs allows for a more targeted examination of how structured, yearlong support impacts teacher development, confidence, and retention. This approach ensures that the findings are directly applicable to understanding best practices in mentor-mentee relationships and the overall effectiveness of residency models in preparing novice teachers for the realities of urban and high-need school environments.

Interviews

Garza et al. (2018) present a strong case for interviewing participants and coding their responses, which is a theme seen in the other four articles. With this type of phenomenological study, the authors of the critiqued articles opted for the most ideal method in gathering data. Interviews and coding data are the best methodologies for researching teacher residency programs. They provide a deep, nuanced understanding of the complex relationships and processes that define these programs. Teacher residency programs are inherently relational, with mentorship serving as a pivotal component in

supporting the professional growth of novice teachers. Interviews enable researchers to access the personal experiences, perceptions, and reflections of participants, such as residents and mentors, allowing for a rich exploration of topics like mentorship dynamics, instructional strategies, and professional identity development (Oh et al., 2024). Coding this interview data allows researchers to systematically identify patterns, themes, and insights across participants' narratives. By categorizing data into meaningful themes, coding helps reveal commonalities and divergences in participants' experiences, highlighting what aspects of the residency are most impactful. This approach is particularly well-suited to qualitative inquiry because it respects the context-specific and interpretive nature of human experiences. This alone is central to understanding the particulars of teacher residency programs, especially as it relates to mentorship.

Furthermore, the coding seen in the critiqued articles allows for in-depth analysis, where researchers can refine their understanding of the data as new themes emerge. This ensures that findings are robust, credible, and grounded in participants' authentic voices. This methodology not only captures the depth of participants' experiences but also provides actionable insights for improving program design and implementation. Interviews are used as a primary methodology in qualitative research (Dowling et al., 2016). Because of the depth in which you can explore participants' actual experiences with mentorship, interviews are a good choice for studies that are about exploring their real experiences and perspectives, such as mentorship.

Observations

Observations are critical for qualitative research, particularly for understanding instructional practice and mentorship (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In educational settings, traditional observations conducted over a short period do not provide insight into the mentoring pattern. An entire year of mentorship can look very different when viewed through the lens of each participant instead of an outside observer.

Observational research provides a real-time account of the mentor and mentee interactions and the broad range of contextual factors that define the mentorship. Unlike self-reported data from interviews or surveys, observations capture real-time behaviors and interactions, offering an unfiltered view of how mentoring and teaching practices unfold in authentic classroom settings. This is particularly important in teacher residency programs, where the focus is on the practical application of teaching theories and strategies in high-need schools (Chu, 2019; DiCamillo et al., 2021; Gardiner, 2011). Observations allow researchers to see how mentors model instructional techniques, provide feedback, and support residents in navigating classroom challenges. They also reveal how residents implement learned practices, manage student engagement, and adapt to the complex realities of teaching. Very strategic in choice, each article alludes to the success of incorporating observations within their studies.

Moreover, observations are effective for this type of research because they enable the documentation of specific details, such as the school environment, classroom culture, and interactional details that might not be fully articulated in interviews. For example, researchers observed non-verbal communication, collaborative teaching moments, or instances of mentor intervention, all of which provide rich data for analysis (Chu, 2019). Observations also complement other qualitative methods by validating or expanding upon findings from interviews or focus groups, creating a more holistic understanding of the residency experience. By focusing on the real-world enactment of mentorship and teaching, observations yield actionable insights into how residency programs can better support the professional development of novice teachers and foster effective teaching practices.

Key Findings

Based on the problem statement and commonalities between the articles used to compile this brief, the data shows that mentorship is pivotal in implementing a teacher residency program. Though experienced in the field, mentor teachers still need

support. The task that they have agreed to take on is great in its regard and should be allotted the same levels of support and resources made available to mentees. Providing robust support for mentors not only enhances their ability to serve as effective guides but also ensures that the mentoring relationship remains mutually beneficial. When mentors receive consistent feedback, access to collaborative networks, and opportunities for reflection, they are better positioned to model best practices, address mentees' individual needs, and foster an environment of trust and growth. This investment in mentors has a ripple effect, improving the overall quality of the residency program and contributing to the success of novice teachers as they transition into full-time roles. Additionally, well-supported mentors are more likely to feel valued and engaged, which can positively influence their long-term commitment to the profession and their mentoring roles.

Discussion

There is a growing knowledge gap around teacher residency programs. To no fault of its own, teacher residency programs are an alternative to traditional teacher preparation programs. As a result, it's still in its infancy phase and needs opportunities to develop in high-needs areas. While these programs serve as a promising alternative to traditional teacher preparation pathways, their relative newness necessitates ongoing research, refinement, and investment. This is particularly evident in high-need schools where well-prepared, committed educators are most urgently required. Expanding teacher residency programs require intentional policy support, sustainable funding, and strong partnerships between universities and school districts to ensure their success. Additionally, fostering high-quality mentorship, embedding culturally responsive teaching practices, and strengthening program evaluation mechanisms will be crucial in shaping residency models that effectively prepare novice teachers for the realities of the classroom. By addressing these areas for growth, teacher residency programs can move beyond their infancy phase and become a cornerstone

of equitable, practice-based teacher preparation, ultimately ensuring that all students, especially those in underserved communities, receive high-quality instruction from educators who are well-equipped to meet their needs.

Mentorship as a Pathway to Culturally Diverse Classrooms

According to Lopez (2013), mentorship plays a crucial role in preparing novice teachers for the realities of culturally diverse classrooms, particularly within under-resourced schools. A well-structured mentorship program ensures that new teachers develop culturally responsive teaching practices, equipping them to meet the needs of diverse student populations effectively. Experienced mentors provide guidance on navigating cultural differences, fostering inclusive classroom environments, and implementing equity-driven instructional strategies. Through mentorship, new teachers learn how to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into their teaching, adapt curriculum to reflect diverse perspectives, and engage in meaningful, asset-based interactions with students and families. This preparation is essential in urban and high-need schools, where teachers often work with students from a variety of racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Reese et al., 2018).

Mentorship and Multicultural Education: A Critical Connection in Texas

In Texas, where classrooms are increasingly diverse, mentorship plays a crucial role in equipping new teachers with the skills needed for multicultural education (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2024). With a student population that includes a significant percentage of Latino, Black, Asian, and multilingual learners, mentorship ensures that novice teachers develop culturally responsive teaching practices that reflect the needs of their students. Experienced mentors help new educators navigate issues of language diversity, incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy, and build strong relationships with students and families from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, Texas faces significant educational inequities, particularly in under-resourced schools with high teacher turnover. Mentorship in teacher residency programs directly addresses these disparities by preparing new educators to thrive in these settings, reducing attrition, and improving student outcomes. Veteran mentors guide novice teachers in understanding systemic inequities, adapting instruction to meet diverse learners' needs, and fostering inclusive classroom environments.

By integrating mentorship with multicultural education, Texas can strengthen its teacher workforce, ensuring that all students—regardless of background—receive high-quality, culturally affirming instruction that supports both academic achievement and personal growth.

Implications

A strong emphasis on mentorship in teacher residency programs has several key implications that can influence teacher preparation, retention, and educational equity. These implications are critical for shaping sustainable and effective teacher workforce strategies, particularly in urban and high-need schools. To enhance mentorship in teacher residency programs, educational institutions and policymakers must implement targeted strategies that prioritize mentor preparation, compensation, and ongoing support. First, institutions should establish formalized mentor training programs that provide mentor teachers with research-based coaching techniques, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and best practices for providing constructive feedback (Chu, 2019). This training should be standardized, required, and ongoing, ensuring that mentors are equipped to effectively support resident teachers effectively. Second, policymakers should allocate funding to provide financial incentives such as stipends, salary supplements, or loan forgiveness programs for mentor teachers, recognizing the additional workload they take on (Guha et al., 2017). Compensation not only increases mentor retention but also attracts highly qualified teachers to these roles. Third, structured collaboration time must be built into residency programs, allowing mentors and residents to

engage in co-planning, reflective discussions, and real-time feedback cycles without the constraints of an overloaded schedule (Chu & Wang, 2024). This could be achieved through reduced teaching loads, co-teaching models, or dedicated mentorship hours within the school day. Lastly, stronger partnerships between universities and school districts should be established to align mentor selection, training, and evaluation criteria, ensuring a cohesive, high-quality mentorship experience that ultimately strengthens teacher retention and effectiveness in high-need schools (Guillen & Zeichner, 2018; Hill-Jackson, 2023). By implementing these actions, institutions and policymakers can elevate mentorship from an informal support system to a structured, well-resourced pillar of teacher residency programs, leading to better-prepared teachers, stronger schools, and improved student outcomes.

Conclusion

Mentoring relationships can successfully achieve their intended goal if all components are given the support they need (Klinge, 2015). Mentorship is a dynamic and multifaceted process, particularly within the context of teacher residency programs, where the relationship between mentor and mentee is crucial to the professional development and retention of novice teachers. However, for mentorship to achieve its intended outcomes, it is essential to recognize that mentors themselves require comprehensive support. This includes targeted training, resources, and ongoing professional development to equip them with the tools necessary to guide their mentees effectively. Without such support, even the most well-intentioned mentorship programs risk falling short of their potential, leaving both mentors and mentees underprepared to meet the challenges they face.

As teacher residency programs continue to expand, the role of mentorship will remain central to their success. Future residency models will likely emphasize more structured mentor training, increased financial support for mentors, and enhanced collaboration between universities and school districts to ensure program alignment with the realities of K-12

education. Additionally, equity-focused mentorship will also be prioritized, ensuring that resident teachers are prepared to serve diverse student populations with culturally responsive, inclusive pedagogical strategies.

Ultimately, the success of teacher residency programs depends on cultivating a sustainable mentorship model that prioritizes the needs of all stakeholders. By addressing the challenges mentors face and providing them with the resources and recognition they deserve, educational institutions and districts can strengthen the foundation of these programs. Such efforts not only enhance the outcomes of mentorship but also contribute to building a culture of professional collaboration and growth. This, in turn, can improve teacher retention rates, particularly in high-need areas, and ensure that both mentors and mentees are empowered to thrive in their roles, driving positive changes in schools and communities.

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