

A Tale of Two Novices  
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The purpose of this multiple case study (Yin, 2014) was to examine the mentoring experiences of two novice music teachers in different school districts to identify the types of mentoring assistance each experienced and their perceptions of mentoring based on their experiences. Data collection consisted of nine journal entries with prompts given by the researcher, two interviews and two questionnaires. The two participants were Cynthia, an elementary (K-6) general music teacher at two different schools in rural Pennsylvania, and Diana, a high school music (instrumental and vocal) teacher in rural Virginia.

Findings revealed variations in almost every aspect of the program. Cynthia participated in a program consisting of formal and informal district-wide and building-based activities planned and implemented by both district and building level administrators, while Diana participated only in informal building-based activities planned and implemented by building administration. Cynthia was happy with the support received and her teacher growth, while Diana received far less support from her mentor, and was frustrated with the experience and disappointed in her growth as a novice. Their respective programs and their mentors had a profound effect of their overall mentoring experiences and their perceptions of mentoring.

Novice music teachers often find themselves isolated from others who teach in the same subject area. They are isolated in their building, this isolation is often related to their subject, and it can have a negative effect on teaching (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). Diana's stated frustrations and lack of support definitely left her feeling isolated. On the other hand, Cynthia felt quite integrated into her school and district. In addition to her mentor she communicated a great deal with the other three elementary music teachers in her district.

Improvements to existing mentoring programs and designing new mentoring programs to best provide high-quality mentoring that has the potential to impact novice teacher growth and support is necessary. The first principle toward high-quality mentoring is to recruit, select, train, and support highly skilled mentors (Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2009). This is often not carried out. In many instances, as was the case with both Cynthia and Diana, their mentors were selected by principals using limited criteria.

Cynthia's mentor was a music teacher. Diana's was not. The pairing most likely to succeed is the one where mentor and mentee are matched by subject and grade level in the same school (Portner, 2001). The importance of matching mentor and mentee by subject has been well-documented in the literature (Conway, 2003; Stevanson, 2005; Vartanian, 2002). This may be difficult for music teachers, as often there is only one music teacher per school. Having connections with other schools and districts provides more opportunities for quality novice teacher mentoring than districts who are self-contained (Jacobs, 2008). The network for music teachers must be broadened beyond school districts or immediate regions. Advances in technology including video conferencing and social networking provide multiple possibilities (Weimer & Thornton, 2014). Jacobs (2008) created a model for the effective mentoring of music educators that starts with the foundation of state government funding and administration, then adds layers of support from professional organizations; mentor selection, training and compensation; mentor-mentee release time, with a multi-year design for the program. Further development of this model could assist with providing novice teachers high-quality mentoring and reduce teacher isolation.

Increasing the effectiveness of novice music teachers must be a priority in the profession. This study reinforces the importance of not only having a mentor to provide emotional and professional support, but having a mentor in the same subject area and grade level, and adequately preparing mentors to take on their roles as mentors, beginning with a structured identification, selection, and preparation process within a well-designed program.

#### References

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## Applications

- Novice teacher mentoring programs must be designed and implemented based on researched models.
- Novice teacher mentoring programs must have clearly defined goals for the program, the mentor, and the mentee.
- Mentors need to be properly identified, selected, prepared and continuously developed to best fulfil their roles as mentors. This includes mentor identification and selection by a team of people, not one person, based on a set of criteria that matches the goals and purposes of the program. It also includes proper initial preparation of mentors and ongoing professional development.
- Mentor and mentee must be matched by subject and grade level as closely as possible. When this is not possible in smaller or more rural districts, consider broadening the program and fine alternative ways of matching (through technology)
- Novice teachers (mentees) should be asked what kinds of assistance they need, then the mentoring programs should consider the needs of the novice teachers when designing, implementing, assessing, and evaluation individual programs