UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF MENTOR TEACHERS AS TEACHER LEADERS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL CONTEXT

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract
Recognition that beginning teachers require ongoing support in their first year of teaching gave rise to Ontario’s New Teacher Induction Program which started in September of 2006. This program created a new role for classroom teachers to become informal teacher leaders as they support beginning teachers. Although numerous studies explore pre-service candidate experiences and responses to their induction, few examine the perspective of school-based mentors who repeatedly support novice teachers following the pre-service program. This study focuses the lens on mentors and gives voice to their experiences and perspectives. In so doing, it explores supports that influence mentor understanding and enactment of their role as teacher leaders, describing mentor orientations towards learning to teach, and illustrating how mentors interpret and implement this induction policy. It highlights mentor practices including the costs and benefits of performing their role as educational companions, decoders of instructional practice, local and transitional guides, professional interpreters, and agents of change.

This qualitative study explores educational reform through the lenses of teacher leadership, mentoring, and educational change implementation through semi-structured interviews with 17 secondary school mentors who support beginning teachers as part of this provincial new teacher induction program in one urban district in the province of Ontario, Canada. Findings from this study inform policy developers, teacher educators, school and district leaders, and researchers providing insight into mentor interactions and contributions as participants in the induction of new teachers.
Acknowledgements

“As we learn from each other’s experiences and interpretations, we see the issue in richer detail. We understand more of the dynamics that have created it. With this clarity, we know what actions to take and where we might have the most influence.” (Margaret Wheatley, 2002)

As I reflect on this dissertation journey, I realize that I have not travelled alone. Along the way, many guides and companions have inspired, enriched, and enhanced my learning experiences. I would like to acknowledge these important individuals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

This qualitative study explores one aspect of an educational change precipitated by the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) which began implementation in the province of Ontario in 2006. As part of the NTIP induction component, new teachers are provided with a mentor to support them in their first year of teaching. The NTIP program gave rise to a new role for classroom teachers to become both in-school mentors to new teachers and informal teacher leaders. This study examines mentor understanding and enactment of their role as primary actors in NTIP implementation through the lenses of mentoring, teacher leadership, and educational change in one large school district in Ontario.

This chapter outlines the background and context for this study. To begin, it details the policy factors and the provincial context that serve as the background to the problem. It then presents the problem statement that has precipitated the need for this study and identifies the purpose of the study. Additional policy and district contextual information with respect to the New Teacher Induction Policy (NTIP) intentions and mentor professional learning options is provided. This chapter also articulates the research questions that have influenced the conceptualization and execution of this study. It concludes with an outline of the dissertation.

Introduction to the Problem

Between 20 and 30 per cent of new teacher members leave publicly funded schools in Ontario within the first three years (Glassford & Salinitri, 2007), making sustainability as much a consideration in the teaching profession as it is in other social, economic, and ecological contexts. Both in our provincial and neighbouring communities in the United States, mentoring as part of new teacher induction has captured the attention of educators, policy makers, and researchers for more than twenty years. Induction mentoring has long since been viewed as a means to address teacher retention (Anderson & Shannon, 1998; Cole, 1991; Cole & Watson, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fullan & Connelly, 1987; Fullan, 1994; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002; Moir, 2009). Support for beginning teachers through a mentoring relationship continues to be viewed as a viable mechanism to support teacher retention, despite the lack of a solid research-based, foundational grounding (Hanson, 2010; Little, 1990b) and understanding about a number of aspects of mentoring.
The province of Ontario is a specific instance of the adoption of school-based mentoring as a policy intervention to address the problem of teacher retention and isolation. The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) mandate was issued beginning in 2006 as a follow-up to a position paper (Fullan & Connelly, 1987), a comprehensive study of Ontario’s support for beginning teachers (Cole & Watson, 1991), a report by The Royal Commission on Learning (1995), and The White Paper presented by the Ontario College of Teachers (2003). This policy has resulted in a significant change in the context of teacher professional relationships and dynamics in Ontario schools. The result is both a proliferation of school-based mentors who support new teachers, and a new informal school-based leadership role for teachers who, as colleagues, are partially responsible for facilitating the induction of new teachers. This new quasi-leadership dynamic, in turn, has resulted in the creation of new relationships uniquely different from the traditional subject leadership roles present in secondary schools. These relationships often operate beyond the traditional departmental or subject leadership roles and established boundaries of formal leadership. Although mentors are not specified as leaders in policy documents, the policy role description implies that they are informally “leading” new teachers in their induction into the profession, and names them as significant actors in NTIP implementation. Ostensibly, this policy mandate casts mentors into a new role as informal teacher leaders in secondary schools.

Nested then, in this large-scale policy mandate meant to support novice teachers, are mentors, who serve as teacher leaders in this educational change. New teachers make it abundantly clear that mentoring continues to be one of the most important parts of their induction experience (Frank, 2013; Kane, 2010; Marable & Raimondi, 2007). According to novice teachers, the mentor role is an important one. In this respect, as well as with other components of the induction experience, continuous opportunities are provided for new teachers to voice their views. For instance, since 2006 the Ontario Ministry of Education has annually conducted studies to learn about the experiences of new teachers. Recently, the Ontario Ministry of Education published findings about beginning teachers’ induction experiences (Frank, 2013). In the past, other researchers have also investigated the perceptions of beginning teachers participating in induction with respect to how the program impacts them (Cherubini, 2007; Youngs, 2007a), their perspective of formal and informal leaders during pre-service experiences (Cherubini, 2008), and the influence of school culture on them during their induction (Cherubini,
Novice teacher views about the significance of mentor support in the induction process (Marable & Raimondi, 2007), the impact of mentoring style on beginning teacher learning (Schmidt, 2008), the impact of administrators (Youngs, 2007b), and novice teacher perceptions about induction preparation (Kosnik & Beck, 2009) have also been investigated. In addition, a critical review on induction and mentoring (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) has also revealed that induction has a significant impact on teacher commitment, retention, and instructional classroom practices. Numerous authors have voiced the need for new teacher support (Cole, 1990; Corcoran, 1981; Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille & Yusko, 1999; Johnson, 2004). Directly or indirectly, prevalent beginning teacher voices repeatedly inform researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

While much is known about how induction support affects new teachers, little is known about how this educational change has influenced school-based mentors who actively participate in the induction of new teachers beyond the pre-service component. In fact, despite their significant induction involvement, little is known about the experience and understanding of mentors in this informal teacher leadership role. As they consistently participate in this educational change, mentor voices about how they conceptualize their role over time through repeated opportunities to mentor novice teachers are relatively absent in the literature. Although studies with cooperating teachers have revealed how they process their roles, (Caruso, 1998), or experience their role as both tutors and assessors (Heilbronn, Jones, Bubb, & Totterdell, 2002), “relatively few studies focus on the influence of induction programs on the mentors.” (Hanson, 2010, p. 125) In spite of its popularity, “there is limited evidence about the effectiveness of mentoring (or, indeed, of coaching), most particularly, within the specific circumstances of newly qualified teachers entering the profession.” (Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006, p. 1056).

Additionally, based on existing literature about formal teacher leadership, one can surmise that, as with most educational change, mentor implementation of this policy is likely not devoid of challenges and complexity (Bascia, 1996; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Fullan, 2007; Honig, 2006), conflict and uncertainty, (Little, 1995; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Smylie, 1992), and new learning (Coburn, 2001). As well, there are identified gaps in understanding about mentor practices and derived benefits, although there are suggestions that mentoring is a reciprocal activity (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992; Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005). Furthermore, even less is known about how mentors in secondary schools construct their understanding of the role over
time as a result of their continuous interaction as policy actors. As informal school-based leaders who support novice teachers, mentors, too, are shaped by their experiences. Their voices about how they understand and enact this role as a result of multiple opportunities to mentor a new teacher also have educational interest and value.

**Rationale for the Study**

This study has practical and academic value given the importance placed on mentors as designated actors in implementing the NTIP policy and the previously stipulated gaps in existing literature. First, from a practical perspective, this study has intrinsic significance for the educational community and policy makers alike; through its examination of how mentors conceptualize and enact their role as informal teacher leaders, it provides an indication of the dynamics embedded in the mentor-mentee relationship. Secondly, this study provides insights into the impact of mentoring on practising mentors who repeatedly undertake this role. Thirdly, it contributes understanding about the role currently played by school-based mentors in supporting beginning teachers beyond the pre-service year and the role they may play in future induction designs, particularly since, towards the conclusion of this study in 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Education announced that the pre-service year is being extended to two years beginning in the spring of 2015 (Duguid & Sandals, 2013). As this new accreditation process moves forward, findings from this study provide insight into the potential ongoing role of school-based mentors. This study clarifies the dynamics of the mentor role — from the perspective of the mentors — for administrators, district leaders, and policy makers, providing direction for future resource allocation to implement designs that would create conditions conducive to supporting NTIP policy implementation.

In addition to its practical and academic importance, this study has empirical credibility as a result of its sturdy basis in three domains of educational research. For one, it applies a theoretical lens in two areas that have previously been found to lack grounding in the research: teacher leadership and mentoring. Previous researchers have communicated the need for a theoretical conceptual framework to examine and explain teacher leadership (Fullan, 1994; Smylie, 1997; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In addition, it seems that “rhetoric and action...have outpaced both conceptual development and empirical warrant” (Little, 1990b, p. 297) with respect to mentoring. In response to this perceived need, this study employs a theoretical
perspective to analyze the findings using Feiman-Nemser’s (1990) five conceptual orientations or paradigms of pre-service teaching. Through the application of research-based exploration into mentor role understanding and enactment, this study has the distinct advantage of providing a theoretical understanding of teacher leadership and mentoring within the dynamics of this educational change. From a research standpoint, this study’s methodology and findings are anchored in a research-derived conceptual framework that provide theoretical points of departure for continued examination and understanding of mentoring through a teacher leadership lens.

As well this study also has empirical salience in augmenting previous research in the area of teacher leadership and mentoring. Teacher leadership, as revealed in previous studies, is accompanied by challenges and obstacles. Past studies have outlined the professional burdens that formal teacher leaders encounter as they take on a new school-based leadership role. Historically, studies reveal that formal teacher leadership enactment is laden with complexities, tensions, and challenges. In both elementary (Smylie & Denny, 1990) and secondary school contexts (Feeney, 2009; Little, 1995; Siskin, 1994), formal teacher leaders wrestle with role ambiguity and collide with isolationist professional cultural norms that thwart the execution of their role. However, very little is known about the challenges of informal teacher leadership in the context of induction mentoring, particularly in secondary schools. Despite their prevalent, unofficial, active role in supporting policy implementation in new teacher induction, mentor understanding and role enactment as informal teacher leaders remains a mystery. Few studies trace the dynamics of mentoring (Hanson, 2010; Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006; Little, 1990b) or evolving mentor role conception of their work with beginning teachers. Furthermore, although mentoring holds promise in the induction of new teachers, understanding about the actual work of mentors and mentor role conception is limited (Little, 1990b). This study illuminates the practices, tensions, and collaborative dynamics (Little, 1995) embedded in mentoring role enactment as a teacher leadership role, as well as mentor practices and outcomes. As a result, it augments previous findings in the literature in these two areas.

Lastly, this study provides a rare exploration in educational research, highlighting how teacher leaders established under a new government policy co-construct and evolve their understanding and enactment of their role given repeated opportunities to mentor novice teachers over time in a secondary school context (Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). From a policy implementation perspective, this study sheds light on policy micro
implementation by isolating a secondary school teacher sub-group of the secondary teacher population. It reveals the unique understandings of mentors as local agents of reform implementation who possess discretion about how policy is implemented (Clune, 1990; Lipsky, 1983). This study is timely, particularly since, in the policy’s eighth year of formal implementation, the process of implementation can be examined. Furthermore, the voices of practising mentors who share their reflections and experiences as mentors and as teacher leaders provide fulsome details and perspectives that can help understand their experiences and their contributions to new teacher induction beyond the rhetoric of mentoring (Little, 1990b). Qualitative investigation of this phenomenon through mentor-described role enactment and role understanding provides this in-depth knowledge to inform both policy research and practice about factors that shape their understanding of their role over time. This study responds to the need for research that is concerned less with success or failure of implementation, and more with how reform gets implemented by practitioners who are named and implicated in the policy. It contributes to knowledge generation about implementation by focusing upon implementation agents, in this case mentors, in an attempt to describe change at the bottom-up level, although there is still a top-down mandate. It reveals insights into the complexities involved in policy implementation, including both intended and unintended effects. Consequently, of note is this study’s potential for discovery of new awareness about teacher leaders’ implementation of policy over time.

Undeniably, both from a practical and research standpoint, this study contributes to existing knowledge about educational policy implementation by filling a void in the existing literature and extending existing research. From a research perspective, this Ontario policy, which has induced a confluence of informal teacher leadership, mentoring, and educational change, presents a unique opportunity to address understanding previously undocumented in the research literature.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore mentor understanding of the informal mentor teacher leadership role made possible by the policy context in one large Ontario school district. Using theoretical underpinnings of the research on mentoring, teacher leadership, and educational change implementation precipitated by the NTIP, this study examines how
secondary school mentors develop an understanding of their role and enact their role with repeated mentoring experiences as informal teacher leaders in NTIP reform. In so doing, it examines the process and ongoing dynamics of policy implementation as manifested in the development of this new mentor teacher role, the complexities of the teacher leader role, and the impact on mentors as a result of this changed professional teaching context. It invites mentor insights about their self-perceptions as teacher leaders, their collegial practices, and the influence of social interaction and context on their practice over time. It identifies the unique understandings and practices of mentors as informal teacher leaders, and reveals the dynamics of interaction embedded in their collegial relationship with new teachers. It surfaces implications for policy developers, for faculties of education, for district leaders, and for research. This study did not investigate the effect of mentoring on teacher retention; research on retention effects would likely provide more fulsome insights if conducted after five to ten years of implementation. Rather, this study focuses exclusively on the mentoring component of new teacher induction.

Research Context

Ontario’s new teacher induction policy overview.

In response to the problem of projected hiring increases, new teacher retention, and isolation, the Ontario Ministry of Education in March of 2006 launched the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), a formalized policy requiring districts to implement the NTIP, specifying a framework and requirements in the 2005–2006 Program Guideline. On June 1, 2006, the government passed the Student Performance Act, which stipulated that “as of the beginning of the 2006–2007 school year, all publicly funded school boards offer the NTIP to their new teachers and that all schools participate in the program” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 6). The policy requires each publicly funded school board to provide induction to new teachers. Provincial induction must include orientation to the school and to the board, mentoring, and on-going professional development. In addition, principals are required to conduct two teacher performance appraisals in the new teacher’s first twelve months. While minor revisions to the 2006 policy implementation manual have been made from time to time, the fundamental components of the policy mandates, parameters, and expectations have remained constant.
The NTIP policy provides incentives as part of implementation of its mandate. Specifically, it affords each district with a proportional per teacher amount, currently for teachers in rows 0, 1, and 2 of the board’s Teacher Qualification and Experience grid, and a base amount of funding to be used at each board’s discretion to advance program development. As well, the policy details responsibilities and expectations of boards, administrators, mentors and new teachers. While parameters are outlined, the policy allows some discretionary, flexible implementation in design and delivery of the NTIP at the school board level. As part of this process, school boards are required to present both an annual NTIP Plan and NTIP Report in July. A detailed accounting summary of release days provided and expenses incurred are required components of the annual report. Projected implementation plans and expenses are stipulated in the annual NTIP Plan.

NTIP mentor professional learning and district context — mentoring as induction support.

Mentors occupy an important status and share implementation responsibility in the NTIP. The NTIP policy rests on the assumption that mentors comprise one of the three integral components named in the policy design (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, 2008, 2010). The NTIP policy specifies that all new teachers, in addition to orientation and on-going professional learning opportunities, receive the support of a mentor to support their growth and professional development in their first year of teaching. The qualities of mentors, the role, and expectations for the specific training that those taking on the mentor teacher role must receive are clearly defined. According to the Ministry, the role of the mentor is as follows:

The mentor provides ongoing support to enable the new teacher to improve his or her skills and confidence through participation in an effective, professional confidential relationship…. The relationship is envisioned as a supportive one, with the mentor acting as a role model, coach, and advisor to the new teacher, sharing his or her experience and knowledge about teaching on an ongoing basis. This relationship is based on trust and confidentiality. The desired outcomes are improved skills and knowledge for new teachers, as well as a more collaborative and professional environment in Ontario’s schools. (p. 18)

Also implicit in the policy is that mentoring support will encourage new teachers to remain in the profession.

According to the NTIP policy, mentors are to be provided with training. To that end, the district in this study offers a one-day foundational course and a follow-up two-day mentoring
institute, during which mentors explore the role of the mentor and learn strategies for participating in learning-focused conversations through questioning, active listening, and communication strategies. Beyond this, the district offers additional ongoing opportunities for mentors to learn about coaching, assessment, supporting English Language Learners, and embedding culturally responsive practices. Mentors attend all sessions voluntarily and are provided release time to do so. In addition to these mentor-specific opportunities, they may accompany their mentees to participate in ongoing, annual sessions that focus upon Classroom Management, Assessment for Learning, Differentiated Instruction, and Supporting English Language Learners. Mentors and new teachers apply to attend these sessions through an electronic registration process.

In the district under study, mentors are matched with mentees at the same site and supervised by the in-school administrator. Although in some contexts, mentors support novice teachers in multiple schools, in this large district that also continues to build and open new schools on an annual basis, the new teacher population constantly shifts, making the school-based opportunities to mentor frequent and dynamic. New teachers and their mentors are allocated release days for in-school professional investigation. They can also access additional release days for professional learning being provided by the district through NTIP and other district initiatives, or by other local organizations. District announcements about continuous professional learning sessions for mentors and mentees and registration forms are posted both on the NTIP website and on the district electronic professional learning site.

**NTIP mentoring as an extension of the pre-service academic experience.**

The Ontario Ministry of Education views the NTIP as “building on and complementing the first step: pre-service education programs” and providing “another year of professional support so that new teachers can develop the requisite skills and knowledge that will enable them to achieve confidence and success as experienced teachers in Ontario” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 3). This envisioned mentor role connects with the inquiry-oriented paradigm of teacher education (Zeichner, 1983). Novice teachers are not viewed as passive recipients of knowledge; instead, they are perceived as educators who continue to expand their knowledge base as a result of their experiences and job-embedded learning. Mentors mediate this experience, providing professional support for beginning teachers as a follow-up to their pre-
service program in a non-evaluative capacity. Unlike supervising teachers in the pre-service program, NTIP mentors are embedded in the daily context of the novice’s teaching and learning situation as opposed to the opposite scenario in which teacher candidates are embedded in the host teacher’s classroom. This context provides new teachers with opportunities for on-the-job, differentiated learning and professional development as they wrestle with the challenges of day-to-day teaching.

On June 5, 2013 — towards the completion of this study — Liz Sandals, Minister of Education, and Brad Duguid, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, announced changes to the teacher accreditation process. Beginning in 2015, pre-service teacher candidates will be required to complete a two-year program at the faculty of education that will involve four semesters of pre-service education instead of two, 80 days of practicum instead of 40, and additional compulsory components (Duguid & Sandals, 2013). According to both Ministers, this change will enable alignment of candidates with available teaching positions. At the time of this study, the implications for the NTIP initiative are unknown.

The NTIP, then, is embedded in the described provincial and local context. This study explores the contextual mentoring and teacher leadership opportunities that have resulted within the current political and historical climate.

**Research Question**

As a basis for the research for this study, I reviewed the literature on mentoring, teacher leadership, and educational change. I developed a theoretical framework based on this literature and used this framework to explore policy implementation dynamics and gaps in the research. The following overall research question focused this study:

*How do secondary school mentors understand their role over time as informal teacher leaders in NTIP reform?*

The following are sub-questions of the research question:

1. *How do provincial and district NTIP policies shape mentor understanding of their role?*
2. *How do NTIP mentors explain or define their role in supporting the induction of new teachers?*
3. *How do mentor experiences with new teachers and other key stakeholders shape their sense of the mentor role and their subsequent practices over time?*
4. How is mentor understanding of their role shaped by the school and district context?

Significance of the Research

This research contributes to policy study in a real-world context. It provides insights for policy makers, district leaders, faculties of education, and future researchers through its close examination of teacher interpretation and enactment of policy by highlighting the dynamics of policy implementation within one stakeholder group: classroom teachers who operate as school-based mentors and informal teacher leaders.

Because policy designs invariably contain embedded expectations and assumptions about local actor participation, policy developers can gain insight into the practical forces influencing teacher policy implementation. This study surfaces those embedded expectations and illustrates how mentors as teacher leaders are navigating them in their daily practices. Practically speaking, the study findings inform provincial NTIP education officers. For instance, the view that mentors bring to this work, their negotiation of the policy, their contextual variables, their challenges, and their intentions inform about mentor supports and future NTIP implementation directions. The content of mentor professional learning sessions, mentor resource development and allocation, and in-service may be guided by the findings of this study. System leaders, particularly those responsible for overseeing NTIP implementation in their immediate constituencies, can be informed about the complexities of individual actor implementation. Ultimately, knowledge about how mentors perceive their role can inform about further supports that might be provided to beginning teachers in light of secondary school contextual and relational complexities. Findings from this study can potentially influence district decisions about resource allocation and supports, and invite an expanded perspective on leadership, viewing mentors as informal teacher leaders, and as potential contributors to instructional capacity building. Insights into the connection between pre-service and professional induction support can inform decisions about program alignment.

From a research perspective, this study, by utilizing a research-based conceptual framework for mentoring implementation study, offers a unique research-grounded framework for investigating informal teacher leadership and bottom-up change (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Elmore, 1997). This study surfaces valuable insights into the technical, intellectual, socio-emotional, and socio-cultural factors that impact individual agent implementation. The interplay
of these factors informs how teachers interpret, adapt, or transform policy (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000) and negotiate policy implementation (Clune, 1990) with respect to this particular NTIP policy.

**Dissertation Overview**

Chapter One introduces the problem of the study and details research intentions and significance. It also provides contextual information and outlines the research questions.

In Chapter Two of the dissertation, I introduce critical literature in the three strands central to this research: mentoring, teacher leadership, and educational change. I explain how the literature base provides a basis for the development of the research question. I indicate gaps in the existing literature and potential new areas of research that have been identified in the literature. The chapter concludes with the original conceptual framework, developed from a synthesis of key concepts derived from the literature review that informed and anchored this study.

Chapter Three describes the methodology and analytical process I used to conduct my research. I address key components of the research design, including: data sample, sampling criteria, access to participants, data collection, coding, analysis, and the researcher context.

In Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven, I present the findings and discussion, organized by themes arising from the research question, and show how findings in this study confirm existing research, augment current understanding, or provide alternative ways of understanding mentors and their role as teacher leaders in the context of this NTIP reform according to the conceptual framework.

Chapter Four presents findings about how provincial and district policy influences shape mentor understanding of their role. I discuss independent negotiation of district policy and policy understanding derived as a result of professional learning about the role. I also present unanticipated findings about how mentors perceive their role in connection to pre-service education through mentor comparison of their role with the associate teacher role.

In Chapter Five, I elucidate and explain mentor perceptions of their role in supporting the induction of new teachers. The key areas addressed in this chapter include: the mentor role as teacher leadership, mentor practices, the impact of mentoring on mentors, and mentor challenges and tensions as informal teacher leaders.
In Chapter Six, I focus entirely on details of evolved mentor role understanding over time as a result of their multiple experiences of mentoring new teachers. I outline a progression in mentor role understanding and enactment from a mentor-as-expert to a mentor-as-co-learner stance and explain mentor role enactment changes over time.

In Chapter Seven, I highlight how mentor understanding is being shaped by school and district context.

In Chapter Eight, I present a synthesized analysis of the findings according to each of the research sub-questions. I also provide overall conclusions in response to the main research question.

In Chapter Nine, I synthesize conclusions, and discuss implications of this study. As well, I provide concluding comments as a researcher.
Chapter 2: The Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed rationale for conducting this research on how mentors understand and enact their role as informal teacher leaders in New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) reform. Educational researchers have synthesized the mentoring literature and identified the gaps in understanding in this area. Similarly, in the area of teacher leadership, a gap in understanding the dynamics of informal teacher leaders surfaces as undiscovered territory. The study of educational change implementation by a specific group over time is also an understudied phenomenon explored in this study. This current research study sought to build upon existing knowledge through the combined lenses of mentoring, teacher leadership, and educational change implementation, in order to understand the dynamics of sustained teacher policy implementation over time.

This chapter outlines the literature review that forms the basis for this inquiry. It details what is currently known in the areas of mentoring, teacher leadership, and educational change implementation as these relate to this study. These three instrumental facets of exploration anchor the conceptual framework of this study and provide a platform from which to answer the overall research question, “How do secondary school mentors understand their role over time as informal teacher leaders in NTIP reform?” In the ensuing discussion, I isolate foundational studies that serve as a lens of exploration. As well, in this chapter, I identify previously determined potential avenues of further exploration identified by researchers that have also led to this study’s research question. Finally, this chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides this investigation and acts as an organizer in the exploration and determination of the findings.

Literature Review

Three bodies of literature inform this study of mentor implementation of this educational change precipitated by the NTIP policy: the literature on mentoring, the literature on teacher leadership, and the literature on educational change. All three areas occupy equal importance for developing knowledge in response to the research question. Key findings from existing theory and research in these three areas shape the conceptualization and design of this study. The scope
of literature in these three areas is vast. For instance, many have reviewed the history of educational change (Fullan, 1998, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Lieberman, Saxl & Miles, 1998) and policy implementation (Datnow & Park, 2009; Honig, 2006; House, 1981), and provided a number of perspectives on educational change (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1998, 1997; Hargreaves, 1998; House & McQuillan, 1998; McLaughlin, 1998; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Taylor, Risvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997). Similarly, the discourse on teacher leadership has been summarized comprehensively (Delaney, 2012; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Murphy, 2007; Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan, 2000; Sherrill, 1999; Smylie, 1997; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As well, the research on mentoring has been synthesized (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995; Hawkey, 1997; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009; Little, 1990b; Wang & Odell, 2002). This study is anchored within the interconnectedness of these broader educational research contexts and foregrounds concepts outlined by a select few in the interests of being strategic and focused, as described below.

**Mentoring**

The research on mentoring is a fundamental anchor for this study that investigated how mentors understand and enact the mentor role. Previous literature on new teacher induction and mentoring has provided a number of different avenues of understanding. Distributed mentoring functions and the importance of mentor training (Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, 2006), mentor dispositions and functions (Anderson & Shannon, 1988), the qualities or competencies of mentors (Rowley, 1999; Denmark & Podsen, 2000), descriptions of effective new teacher induction program models which include mentoring (Moir, 2009), the phases of a mentoring relationship (Gray & Gray, 1985), the mentoring journey (Daloz, 1999), and the mentoring cycle (Zachary, 2005, 2012) have been previously explored. Some of the mentoring literature has also focused upon ideal qualities and behaviours of mentors (Johnson & Ridley, 2004), on the importance of mentor style as a contributor to mentee growth (Schmidt, 2008), on the importance of mentor training (Carver & Katz; 2004), and on mentoring processes (Carr & Harris, 2005; Correia & McHenry, 2008; Lipton & Wellman, 2003; Porter, 2008). Other researchers have focused upon the content, function and form of cooperating teacher mentoring (Franke, A. & Dahlgren, 1996), a definition of mentoring (Gehrke, 1988), and mentors as instructional coaches, emotional support systems, and socializing agents (Butler & Cuenca, 2012).
Although some research has focused upon the professional practices of mentors (Schwille, 2008; Wang and Odell, 2002), on tension in the mentor-mentee role in pre-service preparation (Graham, 1997; Bullough & Draper, 2004), and on the personal and professional benefits to cooperating teachers or associate teachers as part of pre-service experience (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Simpson, Hastings & Hill, 2007), it has also been determined that research literature on mentoring as a phenomenon within the teaching profession to describe the actual work of mentors is limited (Little, 1990b; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). In her historical review of the mentor phenomenon, Little (1990b) states that “there are few comprehensive studies, well informed by theory and designed to examine in depth the context, content, and consequences of mentoring” (p. 341), adding that “observations of mentors’ work are rare in study designs, and rarer still in published reports” (p. 344). Information on the dynamics and consequences of mentoring has been limited (Little, 1900b) and continues to remain so (Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006). Little’s conclusions, are echoed by Hawkey (1997), in her advocacy for further research into mentoring, and her contention that few studies examine the intricacies of mentoring interactions or how mentoring relationships operate and that “much literature on mentoring is either descriptive or declarative with little analysis or theoretical underpinning to the study and practice of mentoring” (p. 325). To ground this study using research to develop a conceptual framework, I anchor my exploration in these theoretical underpinnings with respect to the absence of mentoring understanding. The literature facilitates exploration into understanding the mentor role, mentors as change agents, mentoring as reciprocity, and the role of the school and district in mentoring. A few critical pieces of research as described below ground my study and provide views of mentoring that are useful in helping to explain how mentors come to understand their role in the induction of new teachers.

**Mentor orientations and role understanding.**

To date, from a theoretical perspective, it is not entirely clear how mentors in general and NTIP mentors in particular conceptualize their role in supporting new teachers. Feiman-Nemser’s (1990) five conceptual orientations or paradigms of pre-service teaching and learning to teach — academic, practical, technical, personal, and critical/social — are particularly useful for organizing my discussion of the findings to explain how mentors understand their role as teacher developers.
The underpinning of the academic orientation in teacher education is the focus on preparing teachers with the content of the discipline to teach the subject and the transmission of knowledge to develop student understanding about subject-specific academic content. This orientation, usually linked to secondary teaching, understands teachers to be subject specialists and scholars who focus upon supporting students with academic knowledge about the discipline through a didactic approach with an understanding that this content knowledge is augmented by pedagogical knowledge.

The practical orientation “focuses attention of the elements of craft, technique, and artistry that skillful practitioners reveal in their work” (p. 26). This orientation to teacher preparation reflects the apprenticeship model; new teacher learning “occurs through a combination of firsthand experience and troublesome situations” (p. 26-27). In this orientation to teacher preparation, beginning teachers are encouraged to cognitively reflect and to “think through situations where there are no ‘right’ answers” (p. 27).

In the technological orientation, a coach focuses on teachers’ learning about a specific research-based instructional strategy or procedure allowing practitioners to see implementation in action, to practice it, and to receive feedback. The technological orientation emphasizes the application of scientific, procedural knowledge about teaching.

The personal orientation focuses more on learning than on teaching. In this orientation, novice teachers are viewed as learners who are guided by advisors to take risks and to develop as a professional. From this standpoint, teachers are learners going through a “process of learning to understand, develop and use [themselves] effectively” as they search for meaning and make a transition involving a “psychological shift from the partly dependent role of student to the fully responsible role of teacher” (p. 32). Pre-service teachers are encouraged to take risks in an atmosphere of support and encouragement.

The final orientation of teaching, the critical/social, views the teacher as “both an educator and a political activist” (p. 35) who can “create a more just and democratic society” (p. 35). In this orientation, democratic practices and social justice are in the forefront as teachers exercise their influence to create positive social change in the school and in the community. Teachers promote and value student voices and empower students to advance change at the school and community level.
These orientations serve as useful lenses to explain how mentors view and enact their role with respect to facilitating new teacher learning as part of the NTIP.

**Mentors as change agents.**

As informal teacher leaders who guide novice teachers in exploration of their instructional practice, the concept of mentors as change agents is particularly relevant to this study. The scant existing literature exploring mentoring suggests that mentors have the potential to act as change agents (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Cochrane-Smith & Paris, 1995; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). Both Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1992) and Cochrane-Smith and Paris (1995) provide an empirical base for speculating that mentoring can challenge the isolationist culture of teaching. For instance, Cochrane-Smith and Paris offer a vision of mentors as agents of change who work jointly with novice teachers on learning about teaching in reciprocal, inquiring ways. In a similar vein, Feiman-Nemser and Parker offer three perspectives of mentors: mentors as local guides who help novices ease into the school; mentors as educational companions who inquire into teaching; and mentors as agents of change who foster norms of collaboration and inquiry through conversations and observations. Feiman-Nemser and Parker speculate that, while mentors in their study did not view themselves as agents of change, they could conceivably be regarded as such when they engage with mentees in conversation about and observation of teaching, activities which extend beyond the norms of isolation and involve teacher collaboration. These two studies provide a basis for my analysis and discussion.

To examine the described practices of mentors as change agents in this study, I also connect with the literature base. Specifically, in her discussion of mentoring as an evolving professional practice, Schwille (2008) identifies those educative practices in which mentors who effect change engage. Educatve mentoring involves mind activity (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005) which engages beginning teachers in the intellectual demands of teaching. Paralleling Feiman-Nemser and Parker (2002), Cochrane-Smith and Paris (1995), Schwille (2008), and Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005) echo the types of practices that move beyond emotional or resource support to educative mentoring. According to Schwille (2008), cognitive activity like coaching or stepping in to support the flow of the lesson, collaborative teaching, lesson demonstration, observation and debrief, co-planning, and writing are key educative, potentially
culture-changing mentor practices as suggested in the NTIP manual. The notion of mentors as educative colleagues and change agents (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006) is relevant to this study’s quest to explore mentor role understanding and enactment, and to understand dimensions of their leadership role as informal teacher leaders.

Similarly, other researchers contend that mentors are educational colleagues who, as change agents, must move beyond a “buddy” mentality (Little, 1987, p. 498), isolated gestures of informational support, and norms of balkanization and privatization (Hargreaves, 2003), towards a mindset that conceptualizes mentoring as central to the task of re-culturing or transforming the teaching profession itself (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000) in order for mentoring to reach its potential. To implement mentoring deeply, as intended in the NTIP policy, mentors are required to foster confidential, trusting, non-evaluative relationships that move beyond the traditional isolationist culture of teaching. The NTIP policy specifies that mentors can engage in lesson observation, demonstration, modeling, coaching, and consulting. However, such mentoring practices require mentors to step out of their role as classroom teachers into the realm of educative colleagues and into the role of change agents who transcend traditional norms of independence and privatization. Mentors, to be effective, must engage in “developing a practice based on a conceptual stance toward mentoring” (Schwille, 2008, p. 143). They must also develop a repertoire of practices and skills that will effect positive development and a focus on instructional practice. These educative practices, signifying change agentry, provide a basis for understanding the stance that NTIP mentors have about their work with novice teachers, and for investigation into their practices to augment the previously identified five orientations of teaching.

**Mentoring as reciprocity.**

The practitioner literature and theoretical discussion on mentoring (Little, 1990b) suggests that mentoring also benefits mentors. Specifically, research findings advanced by both Cochran-Smith and Paris (1995) and Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1992) surface the notion that the work of mentoring involves reciprocity. Lopez, Real & Kwan (2005), who discovered that mentors learn through self-reflection and collaboration with mentees, also highlight that mentors derive benefit from their mentoring. The NTIP policy does not specify or assume outcomes for mentors; however, the potential co-construction of understanding arrived at through
collaborative work and the impact on mentors is integral to this study. Reciprocity is explored in this study to determine whether and how NTIP mentors benefit from their mentoring relationships with novice teachers over time.

**Impact of school and district context on mentoring**

The school and district context within which mentors interact is also a consideration in this study. Professional teaching conditions (Little, 1987; Oakes, 1989), including subject department environment in secondary schools, administrative support, and opportunity and time for mentoring, constitute contextual elements. District context is defined in this study by terms of access to knowledge through professional learning opportunities, release time, and resources (Anderson, 2006; Oakes, 1989; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

In conclusion, salient elements in the existing literature serve as launching points for conceptualizing and investigating the stance and work of mentors involved in this study as change agents and as reciprocal participants in the mentoring process.

**Teacher Leadership**

To support this research-based investigation of mentors as informal teacher leaders, the literature on teacher leadership also serves as a foundation for this study, providing a lens with which to study the understanding of mentors as informal teacher leaders. There are a variety of views of teacher leadership residing in practitioner and empirical literature. It has been stated that all teachers can be leaders (Barth, 2001, 2013), that leadership can be a shared enterprise (Lambert, 2002, 2003, 2006), and that teacher leadership as teaming (Conley & Muncey, 1999) can offer insights into teacher leadership. In the past, Anderson, Rolheiser & Gordon (1998) offered the suggestion that teacher education can be a natural partner in fostering school improvement by supporting pre-service teacher leadership and collaboration around school improvement. Some of the empirical literature on teacher leadership identifies the integral skills that teacher leaders, as individuals, require (Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 1988). Teacher leaders are also viewed as leverage for school reform. For instance, Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) detail descriptions of informal teacher leaders who challenge the status quo and lead as a result of conviction of their beliefs. Lieberman and Miller (2004, 2005) offer the notion of teacher leadership as collaborative transparency and deprivatized practice in which teachers
collaboratively engage in transparency by “going public” (p. 91) with their work. A vision of teacher leadership through engagement in inquiry in professional development schools (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995) suggests possibilities for expert teachers to support the learning of novice teachers, socializing teachers into a collaborative, inquiry-minded profession. Some of the existing literature provides images of teacher leadership through various roles (Reason & Reason, 2011). Feeney (2009) examined the tasks undertaken by department head chairs as teacher leaders. Andrews and Crowther (2002) position teacher leadership as parallel leadership with an organizational view of teachers enacting the role in concert with administrators as a strategy to enhance school outcomes for successful school reform. Another group of researchers have focused upon the broader perspective of teacher leaders as participating in a view of distributed leadership (Fullan, 1994: Lambert, 2002, 2003, 2006). Other studies surface the challenges and difficulties encountered by teacher leaders (Little, 1995; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Wasley, 1991). Additionally, past research on teacher leadership has focused primarily upon elementary teachers in formal roles played by restructured formal leadership roles in secondary schools (Little, 1995) experiencing roles as career enhancements through formal leadership positions including but not limited to mentor teachers (Smylie & Denny, 1990; Smylie, 1992). Within the scope of this research, studies which describe the work of secondary school informal teacher leaders, who engage in ongoing policy implementation as mentors to new teachers, are not prevalent in the literature. This study, isolating one particular group of teacher leaders, sheds light on the collegial interactions and over-time understanding of secondary school mentors as teacher leaders and participants in policy implementation in regards to their role.

Teacher leadership and the need for a theoretical framework.

Lacking in the theoretical discussion about teacher leadership thus far, despite a number of discussions in this area, is an understanding of informal teacher leadership that is discerned according to a viable theoretical framework. Although comprehensive historical summaries of teacher leadership research currently exist (Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 1998; Murphy, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), some researchers maintain that a theoretical gap prevails in this area. More specifically, a few specific educational researchers contend that a conceptual framework and theoretical underpinnings are absent in this area of research (York-Barr & Duke, 2004;
Fullan (1994), for example, argues that for teacher leadership to flourish on a large scale and to enable the study of informal teacher leadership, a conceptualization of the work of teacher leaders needs to be determined as a guide. He proposes six domains comprising the knowledge necessary to examine teacher leadership: knowledge of teaching and learning; knowledge of collegiality; knowledge of educational contexts; knowledge through continuous learning; knowledge of the change process; and moral purpose. According to researchers, little has changed in the exploration of teacher leaders since Smylie (1995) addressed this topic (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In addition, York-Barr and Duke also assert that “much of the literature in this area tends to be descriptive and focused on teachers in formal leadership positions as well as being idiosyncratic in nature” (p. 287). York-Barr and Duke (2004) argue that “definitive answers to the question ‘What is known about teacher leadership?’ is difficult to ascertain” (p. 287). What is known, however, is that the research on teacher leadership falls generally into two categories: teacher leadership as a formalized leadership role focusing upon curriculum and instruction and staff development; and teacher leadership as an informal role, one that does not fall within the traditional, administratively sanctioned leadership structure in secondary schools. These assertions present a departure for this research given the development of an informal teacher-leader role within the NTIP policy context.

**Challenges and tensions of teacher leadership.**

Previous studies reveal that teacher leadership is fraught with complexity and challenge. The creation of a teacher leadership role does not readily translate into role understanding, enactment, professional collaboration or instructional improvement. Studies examining the impact of formal teacher leadership on teacher professional relations in elementary (Smylie & Denny, 1990) and secondary schools (Feeney, 2009; Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Little, 1995; Siskin, 1994; Zinn, 1997) identify tensions and ambiguities that formal teacher leaders experience in performing their roles. For instance, Smylie & Denny (1990) surfaced the impact of deeply rooted normative cultural factors of equality, privacy, and autonomy, which create tensions and ambiguities for formal teacher leaders. Similarly, studies in secondary schools identify the power of subject department organization to impede teacher leadership (Little, 1995; Siskin, 1994). In her analysis of evolving teacher leadership in two restructuring high schools,
Little (1995) illuminates findings on the contested ground of teacher leadership for appointed teacher leaders. Subject specializations in the perception of teacher leadership are powerful antagonistic forces; subject expertise continues to be identified as a pre-requisite for leadership credibility. Little’s insights into the countenance of teacher collaborative work (1990a) also illuminate this current study’s findings in describing the nature of the work occurring between mentors and new teachers. Additionally, Bascia’s findings (1996) about structural adversity encountered by informal teacher leaders who attempt to contribute beyond the classrooms further attest to the challenges of informal teacher leaders. Challenges that teachers face when implementing educational change have also been categorized as technical, intellectual, socio-emotional, and sociopolitical (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000). The tensions and obstacles that are being navigated by mentors as they enact the mentor role have not yet been fully examined. Findings from these previous studies provide a theoretical avenue to explore the experiences of informal teacher leaders.

The current study, founded on this theoretical base, also explores challenges and tensions that NTIP mentors encounter as informal teacher leaders executing their role. Key concepts identified in the literature serve to develop potential new understanding of the dynamics experienced by teachers who undertake this informal teacher leadership role.

**Educational Change Implementation**

This study, foregrounding the evolution of a role for mentors as implicit, informal teacher leaders, is also rooted in the scholarly literature on educational change implementation. For instance, policy change implementation has been studied less as a top-down process focusing upon compliance, failure, sabotage, or lack of capacity, and more as a negotiated process (Clune, 1990). The educational change literature reveals that researchers have moved from an examination of what gets implemented (Honig, 2004a, 2006) or from the focus upon the impact or failure of reform (Elmore, 1977, 2004; McDonnell & Elmore, 1988) to a focus upon the more interactive lens of reform implementation (Datnow & Park, 2009; McLaughlin, 2006), a perspective that acknowledges the importance of the complex dynamics of implementation (Honig, 2006). Honig argues that policy implementation has become complex because of accountability for improved student achievement and diversity of policy contexts, and the conditions under which policy gets implemented. In her view, policy implementation research
should “aim to reveal the policies, people, and places that shape how policy implementation unfolds” (Honig, 2006, p. 2). Context and places in which policy implementation is located become significant in research. Honig (2006) contends that “existing research provides little insight into the processes and dynamics by which teachers’ interactions with colleagues create opportunities for learning that facilitate or constrain policy implementation” (Honig, 2006, p. 27). The above perspectives provide a foundation for exploration in this study.

**Policy implementation as a dynamic learning experience.**

Specifically, to inform one of my embedded research assumptions about policy implementation, an umbrella understanding is Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) contention that “teacher learning is more constructivist than transmission oriented — that is, it is recognized that both prospective and experienced teachers (like all learners) bring prior knowledge and experience to all new learning situations which are social and specific” and that “it is now broadly understood that teacher learning takes place over time rather than in isolated moments in time” (p. 258). The concept of teacher learning occurring interactively over time as part of policy implementation is key to this study, setting up its inherent logic that mentors, through their social interaction with novice teachers, develop an understanding of their role over time. The co-construction perspective of policy implementation (Coburn, 2001, 2005) considers the interaction of multiple actors during implementation — and the sense they make of it — as socially implemented in cultural contexts. Guiding the exploration for this study is the understanding that policy implementation is a dynamic, evolving experience and a cognitive process.

**Policy implementation as a cognitive process.**

Former sense-making studies and discussion suggest that policy implementation is a cognitive process shaped by an individual’s experiences and beliefs (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Honig, 2006; Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006; Weick, 1976, 1995). Implementation involves individual interpretation that guides action. For one thing, teachers’ prior knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences serve as foundational, interpretive anchors to determine how mentor context is shaping enactment of the NTIP policy. The sense-making and co-construction perspectives on policy implementation (Coburn, 2005; Spillane, 2004) guide this study’s
examination of the process under which NTIP policy is being implemented by individual mentors. For another, policy implementation is also an interactive process; mentors offer insights into their ongoing understanding of the role as they interact with their mentees and other colleagues to co-construct the role over time. The investigation of the social interaction between mentors and new teachers reveals how mentors understand their role as part of policy implementation. Mentors — informal teacher leaders who have been involved in NTIP implementation since its inception — offer unique insights about their evolved understanding and function in the role. Investigation into mentor sense-making with respect to their enactment of the policy over time can provide insights into the process of policy implementation (Honig, 2006), an area not yet explored extensively in this context in the literature. The notion that implementation can be viewed both as a single-agent cognitive, negotiated process, and as a contextually based, creative, active, collaboratively determined process is particularly germane. Mentors’ understandings of their role as the result of experiences over time is explored in this study.

Conceptual Framework

Intrigued by the convergence of mentoring, teacher leadership, and educational change implementation that the NTIP policy context provides, I developed an original conceptual framework, using a possible approach suggested by Miles & Huberman, (1994) to guide this study by grounding my thinking in the existing research in these three areas. Graphically, the synthesized conceptualization is represented in the model depicted in Figure 1.

The figure represents the NTIP policy mandate that provides the impetus for educational change occupying the background, the area shaded in green, surrounding the implementation elements in the graphic. The policy has provided the impetus for educational change and for the creation of the role of mentors as informal teacher leaders. Within the policy mandate, context including individual mentor, school, and district context are brought to bear on mentors’ understanding of their role. Both context and mentor experiences and practices as teacher leaders interact to foster sensemaking and co-construction leading to mentor understanding of their role. Feiman-Nemser’s (1990) orientations, the academic, practical, technical, personal, and critical/social, in addition to change agentry and reciprocity frame understanding of how mentors are viewing their role. The literature base and this conceptualization provided a
framework for informed investigation in this study. Both allowed for an examination of the dynamics of implementation, dynamics that are social, involving mentor–mentee interaction in the context of a non-traditional teacher leadership role. The framework facilitated a conceptualization of the nature of teacher leadership, mentoring, in the context of educational change and the design of the study.
Chapter 3: The Methodology

Introduction

This study explores the question, *How do secondary school mentors understand their role over time as informal teacher leaders in New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) reform?* As identified in the previous chapter, an exploration of the policy context, which includes mentor mindset, school and district conditions, and mentor interaction with new teachers over time, informs policy study about implementation. In this study, mentor experiences and practices are explored to provide an understanding of informal teacher leadership understanding and role enactment within the NTIP reform. This chapter details the research design processes and the rationale for the procedures I used to conduct this inquiry, including the data sample and selection criteria, data collection procedures, data coding and analysis, and the researcher context and experience.

Research Question

How do secondary school mentors understand their role over time as informal leaders in NTIP reform?

Sub-Questions

1. *How do provincial and district NTIP policies shape mentor understanding of their role?*
2. *How do NTIP mentors explain or define their role in supporting the induction of new teachers?*
3. *How do mentor experiences with new teachers and other key stakeholders shape their sense of the mentor role and their subsequent practices over time?*
4. *How is mentor understanding of their role shaped by the school and district context?*
Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

This exploratory study employs descriptive methodology (Merriam, 1998). The unit of analysis in this study is secondary, school-based mentors. This study is as an interpretive one within the tradition of descriptive research, one that probes the thinking of mentor teacher leaders as they implement NTIP change over time in their schools. I used descriptive research methodology to gain understanding (Cresswell, 2008) about evolving mentor understanding of their role as teacher leaders based on their reality and views (Merriam, 1998).

Research Context

I conducted my research in a large school district in Ontario which serves more than 200 schools in urban and rural settings and more than 30 secondary schools. The students and the teacher population are demographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. The selected school board met the criteria with respect to size and growth; as an expanding board, it has continued to hire teachers in large numbers since 2006, making it possible for mentors in the district to have supported new teachers in a sustained manner since that time. As well, the researcher was able to gain access to the database used to invite mentors practicing since 2006 to participate in this study. Participants involved taught at 16 different schools, representing the district geographically as well as departmentally.

Data Sample — Selection of Participants

The target population of this study was male and female secondary school teachers who had been consistently mentoring new teachers in a large urban Ontario school district in the province of Ontario. Practising and experienced mentors in secondary schools were included because the primary study goal was to uncover mentor understanding and enactment of their role in an ongoing way as part of the NTIP policy implementation. Mentors who were new to the role during the data collection year were excluded. Both the qualitative perspective and the target group allowed me to isolate the perceptions of those individuals involved in the NTIP policy implementation in order to obtain answers to the research questions I posed.

I used random purposive sampling to identify participants according to criterion-based determinants. I created a comprehensive list of all potential participants housed in the district database who had served as NTIP mentors 4–5 times since 2006 in secondary schools, and
provided them with an opportunity to participate through a mass invitation sent out by the district research department on my behalf. Ultimately, 557 mentors received the invitation. From this all-inclusive sample, only those candidates who satisfied the criteria below were invited to participate in the study. This open process mitigated against sample bias; all potential participants in the district had an opportunity to voluntarily participate in this study.

I reviewed consent forms as specified by the ethical review process before the interview. I asked candidates to sign the consent forms just prior to the interview. I undertook this study in compliance with the university ethical standards. Appendix – C illustrates this process.

**Research Sample and Sampling Criteria**

My intention was to interview 25–30 participants who had had multiple opportunities to mentor new teachers. Ultimately, 52 mentors responded to the invitation and completed the preliminary electronic questionnaire. However, I excluded 35 of the 52 respondents for a number of reasons: they had either recently become department heads, vice-principals, or resource teachers; or they had not mentored a new teacher more than once. In a few cases, participants did not provide contact information or chose to decline the invitation to participate in an interview. In the end, 17 candidates of the total 52 respondents met the criteria. The findings in this study are derived from interviews that I conducted with these 17 candidates.

Participants shared a number of common characteristics, making this a purposeful, representative sampling within the larger random group of potential candidates. Participants were required to be teaching in secondary schools. The selection criteria included the following parameters:

- Participants in this study were experienced mentor teachers with a minimum of five to seven years of teaching experience. The Ministry mandate for this reform specifies that mentors are experienced teachers with instructional expertise as a foundation from which to mentor.
- Participants were active mentors, currently or recently involved in mentoring a new teacher in the district. Since this study probed the experiences of mentors, it was ideal that they were in the midst of policy implementation.
- Mentors in this study served as formal mentors more than once since the beginning of the NTIP reform in 2006. In fact, most mentors had worked with mentees more than five
times, three times, or in three instances, two times. This study required mentors to describe their understanding of their role over time; therefore, a variety of experiences in the mentor role were a requirement for data collection in this study.

- Mentors self-identified by responding to an e-mail invitation and completing a preliminary screening survey. A balance of gender, age, subject, and geographic representation within the district was facilitated in this fashion.
- Participants were a cross-subject group. The study requires diversity of context and captured the range of department organizations typically used in organizing secondary schools.
- The study sample included mentors who had identified on the preliminary questionnaire that they had received some form of professional development. The Ministry mandates that mentors receive mentor training that includes an understanding of the program and the mentor role. Most in the sample had participated in both a one-day and two-day professional learning opportunity, and in some cases mentors had participated in sessions beyond these two opportunities. Others had accessed either an orientation or board informational resources.
- Excluded from this study were mentors in formal leadership positions. This study sought to understand informal teacher leadership; therefore, those mentors who held formal positions of responsibility were excluded.

Appendix D details the characteristics of the research sample.

**Instrumentation/Content Validity**

I encompass the four markers of a good qualitative researcher as identified by Miles and Huberman (1994): 1) familiarity with the phenomenon under study; 2) strong conceptual interests; 3) a multidisciplinary approach; and 4) good “investigative” skills and the “ability to ward off premature closure” (p. 38). I ensured that research questions aligned both with the conceptual framework and with the research questions (Roberts, 2004). Table 1 identifies this parallelism, illustrating how I aligned the interview questions with the research sub-questions and the conceptual framework to ensure validity.
Preliminary Questionnaire

Interested participants completed a preliminary electronic survey linked to the e-mail invitation. They provided details about their department affiliation, mentoring preparation, and mentoring activities. The survey is provided in Appendix F.

Interview Protocol

Because I explored concepts from three bodies of literature — mentoring, teacher leadership, and policy implementation — and created an original conceptual framework, I developed an original interview protocol that corresponded with this inquiry. Appendix D contains the interview protocol I used.

Participant Recruitment and Consent

I invited potential candidates in the invitation email that was sent by the district’s Research Department to all secondary mentors who had participated repeatedly in this mentor role since September of 2006, roughly 557 mentors. Appendix A, “An Invitation for Side by Side Mentors to Participate in an OISE/UT Study,” illustrates this process. The invitation outlined the purpose of the study, criteria for selection, and confirmed confidentiality safeguards for participants. Attached to the invitation was an electronic link to an on-line survey that allowed me to adhere to the established criteria. Mentors who completed the electronic survey and indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up interview were asked to provide contact information. The 17 participants were derived from this group of volunteers. Appendix B (Recruitment Form) and Appendix C (Consent Form) contain the information I used to inform participants.

I then set up interviews in locations convenient for the candidates. I conducted individual face-to-face interviews from November 30, 2011, until April 4, 2012, mostly at off-board sites and outside of the candidates’ teaching schedule. I met candidates at coffee shops. In three cases, I conducted the interviews at the teacher’s school after school hours, and in one case during a lunch period. I reviewed consent forms as specified by the ethical review process undertaken as part of this study and asked candidates to sign the consent forms just prior to the interview.
Data Collection Procedures

To answer the research question that investigates how mentors come to understand their role as informal teacher leaders in NTIP reform, the interview protocol (Appendix E) included three components. Preliminary questions prompted mentors to share how they became involved and continue to be involved in mentoring novice teachers. Primary questions explored the policy mentors are using, their practices, challenges, perceptions of themselves as leaders, school and district influences on their work, and whether and how their mentoring practices have evolved. Concluding questions invited mentors to provide advice for mentors, to share guiding principles they are using, and to provide their vision of mentors for the future. The interview questions aligned with the conceptual framework, which hypothesizes that mentor mindset and school and district context impact mentor understanding of their role. As well, it postulates that mentors, as informal teacher leaders, co-construct their understanding of their role through their repeated interaction with novice teachers. Questions asked of the participants were intended to surface understanding that would illuminate this hypothesis and answer the research questions.

Prior to the interviews I field tested my preliminary survey and interview questions separately with two Resource Teachers in the district who had a comprehensive understanding of the NITP policy and who had no involvement in the study. This field test provided insights about necessary wording alterations, redundancy, and revisions to produce the final version of interview questions. Appendix F provides the question protocol used in this study.

My independently designed question protocol allowed me to conduct semi-structured interviews with probes for specificity. I conducted face-to-face interviews with 17 participants, five male and 12 female secondary teachers. On average, the interviews lasted 45–60 minutes. The semi-structured, open-ended interviews allowed me to surface participant experiences and responses. This format facilitated a systematic process for data collection and allowed for probative departures of inquiry where necessary. This combination of structure and flexibility enabled rich responses and in-depth interviews with mentor participants.

I recorded the interviews and had them transcribed verbatim. I sent the transcripts to participants to review, allowing them an opportunity to make additions or to correct any misinterpretation. Brief field notes, recorded immediately following the interview, served as an aid to memory for me (Denizen, 1989). I reviewed the transcriptions and followed a systematic process for coding and analysis as described below.
Data Coding, Analysis and Results

I collected data and conducted my analysis simultaneously between November of 2011 and April of 2012. This ongoing process allowed for a constant comparative method of data processing (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998). The process involved in organizing, reducing, and interpreting the data included four phases: initial reading of transcripts for content and to establish tentative categories; coding and organization of responses; final coding; and matrix development.

Initial reading of transcripts.

In the first phase, each transcript served as text for analysis; I reviewed each transcript carefully and repeatedly. During the first reading, I engaged in a preliminary content analysis by noting key ideas and initial thoughts directly in the margins of the transcriptions. Second, I reconnected with the voice and ideas embedded in the transcript by simultaneously reading the transcript and listening again to the interview; this step allowed me to note intonation, verbal emphasis, and subtle nuances of voice. I highlighted key words and phrases and made additional margin notes about emerging or recurring ideas. This close and repeated reading of each interview transcript together with margin comments enabled me to gain a holistic grasp or general impression of the interview statements, and to identify tentative categories (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998). As interview transcriptions were completed, I continued this process of systematic reading and coding of the text, a process which supported my constant interaction with the data and the constant exploration of potential meanings embedded in the data. This cross-interview analysis allowed me to confirm or disconfirm emerging categories in an ongoing way.

Coding and organization of responses.

As the interview process continued, I also coded subsequent interviews and engaged in continual reconnection with the provisional categories based on commonalities within the responses. As the data base grew, these initial open codes and categories were either confirmed or disturbed; sometimes new categories surfaced for consideration. These preliminary categories ultimately led to clustering within the preliminary categories so that final categories and concepts emerged. This constant comparative process also enabled me to determine final concepts used
for data analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout this process I was also attentive to linguistic elements such as key words, symbols, metaphors, and similes that surfaced within the categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

**Final coding.**

In the final phase of analysis, I coded responses to each interview question by speaker, by subject discipline, and by number of formal mentoring experiences according to the established categories. I then grouped all participant responses together with each question. I used Microsoft Word copy, paste, and comment functions to identify emerging categories that appeared to share commonalities across participant responses. This constant comparative process (Miles & Huberman, 1994) revealed speculative, tentative, emergent, and provisional categories, which ultimately led to final categories and then to themes across the data. I used these final themes to develop matrices that I created for each question or cluster of questions according to the interview questions posed. To do so, I grouped coded responses to each question together in a section according to the conceptual framework. I prepared a matrix of categories and corresponding questions that I asked according to the conceptual framework driving this study. This allowed for alignment of research questions, conceptual framework, and question protocol. This coherence ensured that emerging theories were grounded in the theoretical framework.

**Matrix development.**

I created matrices, tables, charts, and mind maps to display the data, all the while looking for relationships within responses to each interview question or within clusters of interview questions. These graphic organizers created an opportunity to further examine the data, a process that ultimately led me to interpretation. Such charting and analysis facilitated an additional level of refinement of themes. For data reduction and conclusion to find meaning, I grouped question responses that fit together into visual displays to enable big ideas to surface (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For instance, I used tables to compare mentors’ stated self-perceptions as teacher leaders with their identified external indicators that colleagues might use to identify them as perceived leaders. This comparison revealed an interesting duality of mentor perception of the role as informal teacher leadership. In another instance, I grouped related
questions to conceptualize an illustration of how mentors have shifted in their beliefs, understandings, and practices and the influential factors contributing to that shift. I developed matrices by considering logical rhetorical patterns such as cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and sequence and hierarchy based on my experiential knowledge of linguistic patterns of discourse. This process of visual representation provided me with a way of interrogating the data to interpret the findings beyond coding and indexing, and to arrive at conclusions about the data. In my search for these relationships within the data, I became aware of assertions that I could make.

**Alignment with Conceptual Framework.**

Ultimately, all data were reviewed to ensure that there was alignment with the conceptual framework. Each research question was tied back to the interview questions and to key research guiding this study. Table 1 illustrates this process.

**Researcher Context**

This study grew out of my continued interest in teacher preparation, mentoring, teacher leadership, and policy implementation inspired by my studies in policy and educational change as an OISE student. As researcher, I was the sole interviewer and data analyst for this study. I adopted the stance of an OISE student conducting an academic inquiry. My direct engagement and contact with mentors in this study is minimal. There was no personal gain for candidates who chose to participate in this study. As well, there was a wide population of potential participants to draw from, most of whom I have never directly met.

As an educator and as district Coordinator of the NTIP program, I am curious about how this policy plays out. I collaborate with the NTIP Steering Committee comprised of elementary and secondary federation representatives, representative principals and vice principals, and various district resource teachers to co-construct program initiatives to provide multiple, varied professional supports for new teachers and mentors across the district.

Using a predetermined formula based on teachers’ full-time equivalent, I determine release days for new teacher and mentor job-embedded learning and allocate these release days to more than 250 elementary and secondary administrators. The allocation of these release days is communicated to site administrators and then accessed by mentors and mentees at the school
for job-embedded learning based on the goals identified by new teachers. The principal is responsible for overseeing the NTIP at the school site.

In spite of my district support and perspective, I do not have knowledge about the job-embedded practices that mentors may engage in at their schools when they work with their mentees to access school-based release time. As well, I am not in a position to make school visits, arrange mentor/mentee partnerships, or supervise the use of mentor/mentee school-assigned job-embedded release days. As a student of policy study, I am curious about how the mentoring component of the NTIP policy is being implemented in schools and about the role of the mentor is in this process. My capacity for reflection and my background knowledge about the district perspective have enabled a sensitive and fulsome interpretation (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). I adopt the stance of an educational practitioner and academic researcher who, in a reflective, contemplative and curious way, explores the experiences of mentors in this program. Although I endeavoured to minimize potential researcher influence and I have no personal relationship with participants, I cannot be completely certain that my district role had no influence on their involvement in this study.

**Researcher Experience and Stance.**

My professional experience has helped me to develop interview skills that I drew on for this research. As a student of facilitation, I have developed strategies for instructional coaching (Lipton & Wellman, 2003; Knight, 2011). This professional learning, together with my exploratory stance as an educator, allowed me to adopt a non-judgmental, non-evaluative stance as an interviewer in the process of this research. As well, I understand that as a researcher I bring my own values and assumptions to this study, and I recognize the importance of acknowledging those assumptions. I took this interpretive disposition, my academic stance, my “familiarity with the subject,” and my “strong conceptual interest” (Huberman, 1994, p. 38) with me into this research exploration. My knowledge and understanding of the district context provided rich contextual background. Archival information about the NTIP program evolution provided by the previous NTIP coordinator and my current knowledge of district supports for new teachers and mentors provided background knowledge as a basis for understanding. I engaged in a thoughtful, systematic inquiry to intentionally align the literature base with the research questions, and used rigorous methods of analysis.
The challenge I experienced was not to make assumptions about the data given my background knowledge about the mentor professional learning program the district has put in place. As well, I was aware of my belief that mentor professional learning has value. To manage these assumptions, I needed to intentionally engage in mental discipline. This meant that I had to adopt a clinical mindset and approach and maintain strict fidelity to research process. I engaged in rigorous and systematic data collection procedures, coding and analysis, consciously striving to maintain a stance of curiosity. I engaged in reflexive questioning, constantly asking myself to think about what I was learning (Patton, 2002). I made brief journal notes and drafted diagrams to explain what the data seemed to be saying, revisiting the data and these notes. I reflected openly on participant comments being conscious of not jumping to hasty conclusions. In my analysis, I provided rich descriptions, interpreted impartially and without judgment.

I read numerous professional resources (Butin, 2010; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Patton, 2002; Roberts, 2004) to inform my methodology and to guide me in this research. In the process, I read about important researcher considerations for conducting qualitative research, and was reminded to keep my assumptions and personal biases in check. These reading reminders ensured that I maintained a researcher identity and stance in the forefront of my inquiry as I sought to discover, not to evaluate.

Lastly, my personal value of respecting and honouring all voices provided an ethical stance and foundation, helping me to ensure that I represented all participants in the findings discussion. The voices of all mentors were reflected throughout the analysis. I worked consciously to ensure that my researcher voice was true to participant voices.
Chapter 4: Policy Context (How are provincial and district New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) policies shaping mentor understanding of their role?)

Introduction

This chapter is the first of four chapters that presents findings of this study in sequential order according to the research questions posed. To arrive at these findings, I sent each potential candidate a preliminary electronic survey to determine eligibility according to the criteria established. I then interviewed 17 secondary school mentors by engaging them in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with a set of predetermined questions, probing for specificity where required. The ensuing discussion presents the salient findings related to research question #1, *How do provincial and district NTIP policies shape mentor understanding of their role?* The purpose of this question was to determine how policy is shaping mentor understanding and role enactment. To gather data in response to this question, mentors were asked what policy they are using to guide their work with their mentees. Mentors were also asked whether they felt that their role dovetailed with the Ontario Ministry of Education view of NTIP as a continuation of the mentees’ pre-service teacher education programs. The following discussion provides findings about district and government policy influence on mentor role understanding and enactment. As well, mentor perceptions of the NTIP mentor role as an extension of the associate teacher role are detailed. This chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings in response to the above research sub-question. Figure 2 provides a representation of the ensuing discussion about mentor policy understanding and enactment.

Participant Data Cluster

The data revealed that participants fell into distinct clusters according to these factors: prior formal professional learning about the mentoring role and number of previous mentoring experiences. One group consisting of 12 mentors had participated in at least three days of district-provided mentor professional learning focusing on the role of the mentor and strategies for facilitating mentee learning and thinking. Release time was provided for this professional learning. This district-supported group was comprised of mentors who had a range of teaching experience from 5–25 years and had mentored 3–5+ teachers. A smaller portion of the participants (5) had not had opportunities to participate in district-provided professional learning;
however, they had accessed district-provided information about conducting the role through website and orientation information. Members in this group of 5 had on average 10–15 years of teaching experience and had mentored a new teacher more than five times on average. Within these two groups, twelve mentors (12) had mentored a minimum of 4 teachers and more than 5 teachers. The remaining five teachers had mentored new teachers two or three times. Study findings discussed below are correlated with these participant characteristics to show differences among the respondents clustered.

**Policy Context for Mentor Role Enactment**

According to Ontario’s NTIP policy, the role of the mentor is to support new teachers in their first year of teaching in a publicly funded school board or school authority. The qualities of mentors, dimensions of the role, and mentor training specifications are clearly defined according to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006) and are consistent with subsequent Ontario Ministry of Education NTIP implementation manuals (2008, 2010):

The mentor provides ongoing support to enable the new teacher to improve his or her skills and confidence through participation in an effective, professional confidential relationship…. The relationship is envisioned as a supportive one, with the mentor acting as a role model, coach, and advisor to the new teacher, sharing his or her experience and knowledge about teaching on an ongoing basis. This relationship is based on trust and confidentiality. (p. 15)

Suggested activities for mentors include the following: engaging in mutual observation and professional learning; and meeting “during the school day to work on specific aspects of teacher development that need to be addressed” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 20). Release time is provided for mentors to support their mentees. Within this description and these suggestions, there is latitude for mentors to enact their role as they engage in school-based “ongoing support and guidance” while participating in “an effective professional mentoring relationship that is purposeful and structured” (p. 20). School boards are obligated to provide mentors with opportunities to learn about conducting the role, including some of the following: training in consulting, collaborating and coaching, listening, conferencing skills, providing meaningful feedback and using appropriate language. In the district involved in this study, the school administration team oversees mentor selection, mentor-mentee matching, and mentor-mentee participation in the NTIP. Mentor participation and attendance at district-provided mentor professional learning sessions, for which release time is centrally provided, is voluntary.
The secondary school mentors who participated in this study were asked to discuss what policy is guiding their enactment of the role. Broadly speaking, policy in this study is defined as directions and guidelines regarding the mentor role that are provided by the Ministry or by the district. Findings indicate that within this group, mentors defined and enacted their roles primarily according to either a policy understanding derived from district-supported professional learning and resources, or to their independent interaction with district information and materials. Two distinct policy influences appear to impact mentors’ understanding of their role.

**District Policy Influence on Mentor Role Understanding**

Two thirds of the mentors in this study, regardless of the number of mentoring experiences, referenced district-supported professional learning opportunities and resources as the primary source of their understanding of the NTIP mentor implementation. Within this group, participants cited centrally provided mentor professional learning opportunities that anchor their enactment on the job. They made reference to opportunities to learn about the role of the mentor, about how to facilitate learning-focused conversations, and about how to support and challenge novice teachers. This learning served as a touchstone for mentor policy understanding for this group of study participants. Mentors in this group reported that release time to attend centrally provided professional learning sessions allowed them to learn about and to clarify their understanding of the mentor role in working with new teachers. Participants in this cluster of mentors also referenced learning from the same two-day district supported mentor institute, and in some cases, subsequent professional learning opportunities, as a guide for understanding and enacting their role. This group of mentors will henceforth be referred to as Group 1.

Mentors in Group 1 appeared to demonstrate a sense of direction or purpose, and a vision with respect to their mentoring that is mediated by specific learning about the role rather than by a tendency of personal interpretation of district materials. For instance, one of the mentors, recounting a visual in the mentor resource used in the sessions, spoke about how she views the mentor role as “juggling the dishes,” referring to three components of the role of mentors explored in the learning sessions: offering support, creating challenge, and facilitating professional vision (Lipton & Wellman, 2003, p. 74). This response suggests that this mentor understands the role is rooted both in the present and in the future, and that mentoring requires a
combination of support and challenge as she helps novice colleagues to develop a sense of professional identity. Similarly, another mentor referenced this learning and a district-developed resource that she consults to “facilitate whatever [the mentee] might need to know or put [her] back on track with guiding them.” Another mentor described her understanding of the role as follows:

My role as a mentor is to guide and build a relationship with a new teacher…. As a mentor, your goal is to help guide a mentee in a positive pathway.

Explicit in the above statements is a stance of relationship building and a determination to guide the mentee on a professional journey.

Another illustration of this disposition is communicated in the following explanation in which the mentor likened the mentoring approach to “watching your child ride a bicycle.” Under the protection of the mentor, a secure relationship is established:

You watch them, and they know you're watching them, so they feel safe. So it’s a good thing.

Implied here is an observant, supportive, experienced mentor who, in this protected relationship, is poised to respond with necessary interventions as the mentee navigates new skills and new tools in the new employment experience. Embedded in this mentor’s description is a collaborative, tacit understanding between mentor and mentee, a mutual acceptance of risk-taking and safety that is present in the relationship enabled by mutual trust about which both parties seem to be aware. Mentors appeared to focus upon developing their colleague, suggesting a sense of definition and direction that is being employed by mentors in this group. Group 1 mentors who have had opportunities to learn about their role through district-provided learning opportunities appear to adopt a purposeful approach that guides their work in supporting the mentee.

In addition to this tendency to develop a professional relationship cited by Group 1 mentors is the concept of conducting “constructed conversations.” One of the mentors related how she learned how to “paraphrase and pause and…speak in a more…facilitator’s tone as opposed to [engaging in a] teacher-student type of dialogue.” This statement illustrates her awareness of the importance of making a distinction between talking to colleagues and talking to students. The need to adopt a facilitator’s tone in lieu of a teacher-to-student tone surfaces as important, suggesting her awareness about a collegial level of communicating with her
colleague. Other mentors in Group 1 also spoke about how they learned constructive ways of providing assistance without criticizing or telling the mentee what to do. The following mentor comment is representative of this theme:

This [district] workshop and other workshops have shown me that there are more constructive ways of providing assistance without criticizing what’s being done or telling someone, “This is not the way” and “This is a better way” and offering options. I don’t think [I had] a lot of structure when I was initially a mentor and I think that structure really came from workshops.

The preceding statement connotes a mentor umbrella understanding of the desire to communicate without criticizing or supplying the answers. As an extension to this theme, another mentor commented on how professional learning has helped “in terms of the types of conversations to have [during] the different stages throughout the year…[and] disillusionment around the October stage and being aware of the emotional and mental state that the mentee is in.” In this case, the mentor was referencing the phases that beginning teachers experience in the first year (Moir, 1999): anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation. These new teacher tensions and dimensions of the mentor role are highlighted, emphasized, and anticipated in district mentor professional learning sessions through role playing, readings, and analysis of videotaped mentoring conversations. Mentors who have had opportunities to participate in professional learning appeared to display relational awareness and intentionality with respect to how they communicate as colleagues with their mentees.

These findings indicate that professional learning is brought to bear on mentor practices influencing their sense of the role with respect to priorities, conception, and enactment that is consistent with the policy intention. In their conception of the role, relationship-building, supporting risk taking, guiding, and collegial communication appear to be priorities. A sense of direction and intentionality anchors Group 1 mentor understanding and enactment of the role. Mentors in this group appear to express a consciousness about their role in guiding novice teachers with respect to how they communicate with mentees and provide support without telling. Group 1 mentors communicate a perspective of deliberateness and purposefulness. District professional learning and resources appear to have informed mentor participant policy interpretation in this study. Group 1 participants’ understanding can be attributed to the fact that district institutes and follow-up learning sessions focus explicitly on surfacing the mentor’s role and on conducting learning-focused conversations. Mentors, who have constructed their role
with district support, view their role as being mentor-active and mentor-driven. With this determination, they feel the responsibility lies with them to develop a relationship and to communicate and interact in a collegial manner as they support the mentee on their professional path. They appear to function as collaborative guides who drive the relationship and the communication in an intentional way. Explicit instruction as part of professional learning has impacted their role definition and focused them on the interaction and on facilitating their learning conversations.

**Personal Policy Influence on Mentor Role Understanding**

Approximately one third of the mentor study population (five participants), subsequently identified as Group 2, communicated either an independent interaction with district materials or a district orientation and informational session as their policy anchor. A few relied on a self-determined personal interpretation of policy; others had attended an information session approximately seven years ago. In either case, their individual professional understanding of the role was flexible, yet supportive. To illustrate, one of the mentors made specific mention of district resources:

> School Board X provides us with lots of material. So the understanding comes from what they have listed and they give us all kinds of ideas…. They do have booklets and they have someone come out if you need them to come out to show you how to [locate] things on the [website] that will be resourceful for teachers.

A combination of independent exploration and orientation to electronic district resources grounded this mentor’s understanding of the mentor role as one of sharing information and resources. Another mentor in this group recollected a district orientation in-service that he experienced years ago:

> There was a program I remember… [where] they sat you down with your mentee and went over what the role was and what sort of things…you should be doing in working with the person.

Given this program, the same mentor’s view of the role was understood as providing general feedback:

> I think the role of the mentor is really just to provide feedback from somebody who is experienced and who has been through the same experiences that the new staff person is going to be going through and is going through.
In addition, another mentor in Group 2 who also attended a similar orientation in-service with her mentee cited the following as an information source for role determination:

They sent us to an event at the Board together, but they didn’t keep us together. We were somewhat separated if I recall, to go through different things.

As a result, in outlining her sense of the role, this mentor determined that her role is to provide support and respond to mentee questions:

[The mentoring] was very open. I just felt that the idea was that a new person feels a little bit lost and unsure. And even if they’re just out of school with their great ideas and their knowledge of their subject, there’s still a sense of being alone…and I just always felt that it was just to be a friend, be somebody that is there to answer a question right away.

Mentors who engaged with district resources or orientation information appear to view providing feedback, friendship, and support as key to the role.

A few mentors in Group 2 also identified a personal “philosophy” or “approach” to their mentoring. Particularly when discussing the policy that he was using, one mentor explained his stance, saying:

So policy, per se, no. It’s more of an approach. It’s an approach about why I’m in this profession and why I [mentor], and not forgetting the fact that you have the ability to inspire, to lead, to engage, to support…. And I think that’s philosophically based. Policy tends to be rigid.

According to this mentor, the role is grounded in a personal philosophy that is holistic and fluid rather than “rigid,” with the intention to generally engage and support novice teachers. In a similar vein, another mentor in this group expressed a desire to “play it by ear” and “to be on call,” depending on individual novice teacher needs because he, too, felt that mentoring did not need to be “very rigid.” He also adopted an improvisational approach:

You give them the ability to do the best they can, but you’re always kind of there when they need you.

As indicated by the above responses, mentors in this group spoke of their desire to be flexible and to respond to mentee needs and questions.

Another guiding underpinning of the personal improvisational approach is the mentor desire to support the mentee in understanding the school environment. One of the mentors felt that the mentor’s role is to support the mentee to navigate unwritten rules operating in the new environment:
When the new teacher comes into a new school environment, there are so many unwritten rules and unwritten things that go on. Even just knowing who to talk to about what, where to go for this, what’s acceptable in how you use your prep time…. It’s the society, the feel of the school.

This mentor focused on orientation, helping the novice teacher navigate how the school operates. Experience has taught her that there is a school community with its processes and routines that might be confusing for a newcomer. She acted as an interpreter of the school context, paving the way for new teachers by providing information. Mentors who operated with an independent or personal approach had the confidence and generosity to be adaptable, readily available, and responsive based on the cues provided by the mentee.

Mentors in Group 2 also identify a conception of the role, enactment, and priorities as do Group 1 mentors, demonstrating an understanding that is driven by an independent personal policy using district supports. As street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1983), Group 2 mentors adopt a responsive, improvisational, holistic approach that is mentee-driven. Using personal discretion based on district resources and 10–15 years of professional experience, they allow the needs of the mentee to guide the relationship. They answer questions. They steer from the background. They flexibly respond to mentee needs, primarily interpreting their role as a supportive one which is outwardly determined. They appear to adopt a perspective of aid and view their role as being available to mentees. They position themselves as guides on the periphery, as part of the surround of support for the mentee. Policy interpretation that relies on personal approach guides mentors to a more exterior and reactive view of their role based on the assumption that the mentor role is defined by what novice teachers need. The role is reactive and responsive to external priorities as determined by mentees. Mentors in this group view the role as mentee-driven. They are available to their mentees and their priorities include responding to questions, providing resources and school orientation, and offering feedback and friendship. This finding suggests that mentors who have not experienced professional learning specific to their role as mentors allow their assumptions, interpretations, and experiences to inform their priorities, conceptions and practices in the role.

In contrast with Group 1 mentors, Group 2 mentors appear to demonstrate a responsive stance to supporting new teacher socialization as a result of their personal interpretation of the role. They seem to use personal discretion in interpreting their roles based on the practicalities of teaching. For Group 2 mentors, their personally determined assumptions about mentoring
appear to be the barometer for role understanding and enactment, making them more mentee-driven. Guided by the needs of their mentees, Group 2 mentors appear to function as improvisational guides. Their understanding encompasses a wide-reaching expansive view of the role; such role understanding may be the result of prior experiences and the knowledge that mentees have a number of needs as they begin teaching. Perhaps without explicit learning and strategies, self-directed mentors default to reacting to mentee needs and conception of aiding, where requested (Little, 1990a).

While all NTIP mentors who participated in this study aspire to support novice teachers, the manner in which they view and enact their roles differs. Member of both groups desire to be within close reach of the mentee; however, their sense of mentoring proximity to the mentee is different. In both groups, however, whether district or personally influenced, mentor sensitivities and actions are consistent with the overall, general policy vision. By providing guidance and support using either a district-supported or personal policy, mentors are paving the way “for new teachers to improve their skills and confidence through participating in an effective professional mentoring relationship” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.18). Mentors’ policy understanding, whether independently constructed or centrally influenced, allows them to support new teachers in one way or another. In either case, mentors do not reference Ministry policy as their source of information for enacting the role.

Discussion of Research Findings on Policy Influences

The above data provide information in answer to the research sub-question informing how Ministry and district policy influences secondary school mentor understanding of their role. Mentor priorities, conception of the role, and enactment are arrived at differently, depending upon the policy source from which they draw.

Mentors in this study provide a contextualized illustration of policy implementation with two types of district support: implementation that is co-constructed with district-supported professional learning; and implementation that is guided by individual interpretation as a follow-up to orientation or independent exploration of district materials. Both groups appear to be implementing the same policy but with a different understanding of the mentor role, which corresponds to the theory that policy is a co-constructed activity (Coburn, 2001, 2005). In their implementation of the NTIP policy, mentors co-construct their role relying either on mentor
preparation or personal interpretation. Mentor sense-making of their role enactment for participants in this study appears to be determined by one of these two influences.

Depending on these two different types of district support, mentor understanding of the role varies, suggesting a strong tendency towards being either mentor-driven or mentee-driven. Findings indicate that mentors who have had opportunities to formally learn about their role have an intentional, defined mentor-driven sense of the role causing them to have a purposeful role conception and enactment as facilitators of relationship building, collegial conversations, and professional guidance. They appear to take more latitude in collaborating with colleagues, a finding that corresponds to the notion that professional learning about how to mentor is a contextual factor that “shapes mentors’ expectations about the role and teaches them strategies and techniques to use” (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992, p. 7). On the other hand, mentors in Group 2 appear to understand their role as responsive, making them mentee-driven. They provide support by offering friendship, sharing resources, answering questions, and providing orientation information. While both policy influences and conceptions of the role ultimately support novice teachers in their induction into the profession, the mentoring dynamic contains these subtle shifts and areas of focus and intention with respect to mentor role understanding and enactment. Figure 2 presents a visual representation of this policy influence on mentor role understanding and role enactment illustrating this contrast in policy influence.

With respect to the literature review and the conceptual framework, Group 2 mentors appear to function as improvisational supports that align with role identification as “local guides” (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992, p. 14) who assist novice teachers with easing into the school and who employ somewhat of a “practical orientation” (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 26) as they support new teachers to take risks and to develop as a professional. Group 1 mentors who have engaged in district NTIP learning about the mentor role understand their role enactment from a “personal orientation” (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 32) with intentional guidance to surface and explain instructional practice through purposeful interaction, collegial communication, and relationship building. They display a tendency towards being “educational companions” (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992, p. 15) encouraging risk taking and engaging in collegial conversations with novice teachers.
The NTIP Role as an Extension of the Associate Teacher Role

This study also probed mentor understanding of the role with respect to the intended NTIP policy connection to pre-service education programs. The NTIP policy explicitly states that the induction component is designed to be the “second step” to complement the “first step” provided through initial pre-service teacher education programs at provincial faculties of education. This intended continuum, although not a policy mandate, was also explored in the interviews. A majority of the 17 participants agreed that this policy assumption and implicit intention “makes sense” in that beginning teachers are on a continuum of learning in their first year. However, most admitted that they had never before considered their role as an extension of the associate teacher role. In fact, most mentors in both groups in this study viewed their role as distinctly different from the associate teacher role. In their view, the pre-service experience provides teacher candidates with only a “glimpse into the role” of the teacher. Nine of the 17 participants had served as associate teachers; three of the participants were within their first five years of teaching and had participated in the NTIP themselves. To explain this perceived difference, NTIP mentors communicated that they provide a level of support that differs from what is provided to candidates from associate teachers connected to the faculties of education. Mentors acknowledged that both the associate teacher and the mentor support novice teacher learning, with the latter supporting learning after the pre-service experience, and the former providing support within the pre-service year. However, according to the themes revealed by this study, NTIP mentors viewed their role as vastly different. The themes revealing this difference that emerged from the mentors studied include the professional contextual factors of relationship stance, responsibility, and intention or emphasis.

Relationship stance.

Mentors in both Group 1 and Group 2, regardless of the number of mentoring experiences, agreed that the mentor role is unlike the associate teacher role in terms of the relationship stance.

Specifically, they viewed their relationship with mentees as “less formal” than the one with pre-service teacher candidates. Mentors considered themselves to be an “ally”. In fact, one of the mentors provided an analogy of the mentor as “a beanbag chair for [mentees] to just fall into…at the end of the day.” Suggested in this analogy is a relaxing relationship that relieves
tension and provides comfort. Mentors saw themselves as colleagues with whom the mentee can relax and talk without evaluative pressure. In contrast, they believe associate teachers working with pre-service teacher candidates adopt a “consultative role,” being explicit about instructional elements of teaching. Associate teachers identify specifics of classroom instruction that pre-service teachers need to demonstrate and evaluate the degree to which pre-service teachers are successful in a “type of pupil-teacher relationship.” NTIP mentors, on the other hand, are non-judgmental colleagues. Contractually, mentors have the same status as beginning teachers, making the NTIP mentor-mentee relationship “more collegial,” “deeper,” and “more mature.” Mentors described themselves as being more like “collegial friends” who can be counted upon throughout the school year. The relationship lasts beyond the block placement; it is not finite in time, in some cases extending well beyond the formal, one-year NTIP arrangement. In addition to being more lasting and continuous, the mentor role was viewed as being less directive and more collaborative in nature. According to participants in this study, there is an opportunity for “inclusiveness, of help, of friendship and camaraderie” in the mentor role that is not present within the timeframe and formal parameters of the associate teacher role. Mentors identified aspects of the relationship as a key difference in enacting their role. Despite Group 1 and Group 2 previously identified subtle differences as mentor or mentee-driven perspectives, most mentors viewed the associate teacher relationship as being different regardless of their definition of relationship. Whether the relationship is collegial and mentor-driven (Group1) or friendship and mentee-driven (Group 2), mentors viewed their relationships with mentees to be different from associate teacher and pre-service candidate relationships.

Responsibility.

The majority of mentors in both groups also explained the difference between themselves as mentors and associate teachers through the lens of responsibility. According to them, associate teachers have discretionary license; unlike NTIP mentors, associate teachers can intervene to adapt the teaching challenge for teacher education candidates.

To facilitate teacher candidate learning, associate teachers are at liberty to make timetable and responsibility adjustments, not possible in the mentee situation. Whereas teacher candidates from the Faculty of Education are “testing the water,” beginning teachers are solely accountable
for the learning and the classroom environment. This difference between mentor and associate teacher roles was articulated by the following mentor:

As the associate teacher, there are ways to ease the workload for that student, but when you are a mentor to a mentee, that teacher has to deal with the issues they have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. You can’t take away classes from them. You can’t say, “You cannot do your lessons today.” But with the associate teacher relationship, you are put in a different position.... When you are at the Faculty, there is less pressure, but when you are in the mentor/mentee role, this is the real thing. This is not a dress rehearsal, so there is a lot more pressure applied to [the mentee].

According to participants in this study, teacher candidates are temporarily role-playing or representing the teacher character in the associate teacher’s classroom while they are in the process of “developing their craft;” whereas, novice teachers are “IT.” Beginning teachers are not participating in a “dress rehearsal”. One of the mentors commented that “the jump from the Faculty of Education to being in a classroom on your own is just…immeasurable.” As teachers with assigned timetables, mentees have daily responsibility for their classrooms and their students for the duration of the teaching assignment. In contrast with the teacher candidate rehearsal run-through, novice teachers are liable for the real, polished performance. Novice teachers do not act out a role; they experience the pressure of solo performance and sole responsibility in a daily high-stakes audience situation with assigned students. There are no possible adaptations to their teaching assignment. Mentors believed that, unlike associate teachers, they support novice teachers with the real-time, real-responsibility of their contractual professional teaching commitment. The voice of this mentor affirmed this perception of the majority of the mentors:

It’s not the same as being in teacher’s college. It’s a different and unique situation, so in terms of growth, sure, but in terms of experience and responsibility, no.

Another mentor, expressing this difference in responsibility, reiterated this opinion:

Even though they have teaching blocks and they get experience, once [they] take on their own classroom...a lot of them have this, “Oh my God! I am responsible for [student] learning!”…whereas before… [they’re] testing the water. If the mentee makes errors, the associate teacher will “cover up.” “Now they are on their own.”

On a similar note, this mentor compared initial pre-service preparation with the experiential realities of the daily work of a contract teacher by providing this analogy:

It’s like being trained to go to war. You go to the army; you go through training prep, but when you’re sent to the front, the reality is different. The preparation and the reality of the daily demands of teaching differ.
This comparison underscores the difference between the anticipation of the role of professional teacher and the actual challenges of executing it. In this mentor’s view, one can prepare, but one cannot anticipate the challenges of the actual experience and how this prior preparation is to be applied. Mentors identified how they fulfill their role of helping new teachers to move beyond the exercise of practicing teaching to dealing with the daily responsibility and realities of the teaching profession. The responsibility of the mentee and, by extension, the mentor, is different from those of the teacher candidate and the associate teacher as perceived by mentors. The context and the supports are different in both instances and impact their role enactment accordingly. Clearly, NTIP mentors viewed the responsibilities of pre-service preparation and the actual responsibilities of teaching as being distinctly different.

In addition to this difference in responsibility, three mentors from both groups also identified that a strong focus for them was helping novice teachers to take their theoretical, conceptual pre-service learning into the realm of practical, providing “on the job” help. These mentors believed that their role is to support new teachers with the transition into teaching by filling the gap between the theoretical and policy learning that beginning teachers experience formally at the Faculty. They support new teachers with the implementation of theory on a day-to-day basis in the first year of teaching as novices experience each learning environment, each grade level, and each group of students within their assignment. They help teachers to transition from student to educator, and to deepen their practices as educators. Emphasized in the following statement is a declaration of this difference:

In the Faculty of Education, you deal with a lot of theory and policy...so [teacher candidates] were talking about [theory] a lot. Now [they’re] implementing it.

The difference between exploring theoretical concepts and implementing them is underscored, a difference that impacts mentor role enactment. Similarly, another mentor highlights practically supporting teachers beyond the pre-service component, emphasizing that pre-service teachers are provided with pedagogical knowledge; however, mentors bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical:

When they actually do get a position and have to manage not only students, and do lesson plans and so on, but they also have to manage a group of teaching assistants in their room — I think that the practical part of it is where I fit in.

In a similar fashion, this like-minded mentor emphasized the humanistic component of teaching, which he felt moved from the realm of theory into the practical realities of teaching.
I had a student teacher last semester. A fantastic student teacher! But he was critical because most of the time in his course at the school was spent on concepts, social justice and equity as an example. That’s fine…. When you’re walking into a class where you’ve got ten students with an IEP, where you’ve got behavioural issues, you’ve got social issues, and you’ve got kids with pseudo-care families…the reality is very different… But the reality is, you’re not dealing with concepts. You’re dealing with kids, the human side has to come in…. Because in order to be a professional as a teacher, you’re dealing with kids and the community. You’re dealing with people....

Mentors have a massive role in terms of providing [new teachers] with the realities of what it’s like to be a teacher and what it’s like to be a professional, and giving them the tips of the trade that will help them to succeed. It’s a daunting task at times. It’s certainly intimidating…the pressures…. Younger teachers come in with a lot of vigour and a lot of purpose, and sometimes the realities are a little bit different, and so I think I provide them with a certain support that they need to move forward.

One of the mentors in this sub-group felt that pre-service teachers are students; NTIP teachers, on the other hand, are developing a perspective of themselves as an educator. This group of NTIP mentors asserted that in their role they transition mentees from the academic faculty realm of the theoretical into the practical world of teaching. In this move from the theoretical to the practical complexities of working with parents, students, and colleagues, mentors fulfilled an expanded role as they support mentees with the formal obligations and responsibilities beyond the teacher candidate commitment.

Mentors in both groups (Group 1 and Group 2) in this study group shared insights into how school-based mentors conceptualize the practical responsibilities of their role beyond the pre-service conceptual learning and agreed that their role differs from that of an associate teacher in terms of helping novice colleagues with the responsibilities and practicalities of teaching.

**Intention/emphasis.**

In addition to this perceived difference in relationship stance and responsibility, mentors in both groups identified that they are attentive to different elements with novice teachers. Instead of focusing upon the immediacy of the development of lesson plans as associate teachers might, NTIP mentors functioned more as “a guide through the maze,” supporting teacher learning about “how the school runs. This mentor “[works] more as a model… instead of informing them what they need to do,” citing examples like completing period-by-period attendance and checking their mailboxes.
Mentors supplied “on the job help.” They contributed direction and focus, leading novice teachers through the complexities of the confusing network of daily school operation, suggesting pathways that are difficult to determine independently. They provided professional pointers such as “staying on top of the communication,” being conscious of “stepping on toes” or suggesting “how to work [with colleagues] without causing undue friction and stress on others and on [themselves].” Mentors functioned as guides than as information sources. They view their role as providing support and encouragement for beginning teachers to get established and enjoy the profession. Unlike associate teachers, NTIP mentors felt that they guide novice teachers with different priorities and intentions for the entire school year.

**Discussion of the NTIP Mentor Role as an Extension of the Associate Teacher Role**

Perspectives offered by NTIP mentors surfaced unexpected findings with respect to the policy intention and mentor sense of their role. While this study did not initially embark on a comparative exploration of the NTIP mentor and associate teacher roles, mentors identified distinct differences in how they define their role compared to the role of the pre-service associate teacher. NTIP mentors are supportive professional colleagues who appear to be functioning as professional interpreters working with beginning teachers without the evaluative component, making their function distinct from that of associate teachers as part of their enactment of the NTIP. Mentor understanding of their role with respect to the intended NTIP policy sheds light on how this induction component serves novice teachers beyond the pre-service year.

Based on these mentor perceptions and beliefs about how their role compares with that of the associate teacher, it becomes evident that both Group 1 and Group 2 NTIP mentors explain their role differently from that of an associate teacher. They tend towards the conceptions of teacher education as personal orientation as they guide new teachers to develop as a professional beyond the pre-service education component, facilitating their “psychological shift from the partly dependent role of student to the fully responsible role of teacher” (Feiman-Nemser, 2000, p. 32). They support new teacher transition from student to professional and provide support as novices assume the daily responsibilities of their teaching commitment. NTIP mentors assert that they provide different supports than associate teachers because of the context and professional parameters of the working relationship, teaching obligations, and intentions. With respect to the
Feiman-Nemser (1990) conceptions of teaching identified in the conceptual framework, NTIP mentors illustrate a tendency towards the personal orientation.

In addition to the orientations identified by Feiman-Nemser, NTIP mentors seem to function as professional interpreters and transitional guides, categories not present in the Feiman-Nemser & Parker (1992) roles. Mentors provide insight into the “connective tissue” that exists in this context along the continuum of learning to teach between pre-service preparation and induction with mentoring activities that are not exclusively “individualistic,” and illustrate what some of the central tasks of induction mentoring entail (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a, p. 1049).

In contrasting their role with associate teachers, mentors offer a unique perspective on the ways in which the NTIP is serving new teachers beyond the pre-service year. Mentor understanding of these differences provides insights into the various challenges that new teachers need to overcome in the first year and what the ongoing support beyond the pre-service year involves.

Given the understanding of the role provided by participants, it appears that NTIP mentors do, in fact, play a role in this Ministry-envisioned continuum. NTIP mentors provide additional and different supports than the types provided by associate teachers. Mentors appear to bridge the transition for new teachers as they begin their practice in secondary classrooms. The ways in which NTIP mentors understand and enact their role explains how this first year, in-school experience complements the pre-service experience. In the absence of research in this area, these findings offer a starting point for understanding the unique role that NTIP mentors play in supporting teachers beyond the pre-service year. This inquiry surfaced incidental findings that connect with the research question regarding how mentors view their role.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided insights into district facilitated prior learning and independently negotiated policy influences that shape NTIP mentor role understanding and enactment. Mentors in this study reference either district professional learning or personal interpretation of policy using district resources as determinants in their role understanding. These findings confirm that policy is “shaped and changed during implementation because of the discretion exercised by the field-level agents who actually deliver the services” (Clune, 1990, p. 261). Policy is open to interpretation (Werner, 1991). In either case, NTIP mentors do not cite
Ontario Ministry of Education policy as an influence in their policy understanding. It is evident that mentor priorities, conception, and enactment differ depending on the source of policy for NTIP mentors.

Emerging is an implication that depending on the policy influence, the mentor-mentee relationship is potentially variable as mentors enact the role; consequently, the support they provide is potentially variable, and by extension so is mentee experience of mentoring. Mentors who participate in formal learning about the role view their role as educational companions with a personal orientation, focusing on purposeful interaction surfacing learning about instruction. On the other hand, mentors who operate with independently derived policy understanding support new teachers as local guides, answering mentee questions and sharing resources, suggesting tendencies of the practical orientation in a somewhat apprentice-like support. As such, the support that mentees derive may also be variable in terms of depth and type of relationship, the type and degree of the professional interaction, and the depth and type of guidance they receive. Study findings also confirm the contention that district professional learning support is a positive influence on teacher professional learning (Anderson, 2006; Oakes, 1989; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Surfacing with clarity, also, is the overwhelming consensus by both groups of mentors that they perceive the mentoring role differently from the associate teacher role. Mentors support new teachers differently from associate teachers. Findings in this chapter revealed understanding about types of support that NTIP mentors provide as an extension of the pre-service experience through their perceptions of the mentor relationship, responsibility, and intentions. It becomes evident that NTIP mentors in this study do in fact provide a second step transition for new teacher learning beyond the pre-service experience, providing a different level of support as transitional guides and professional interpreters, roles that differ from pre-service associate teacher contributions. This finding suggests that NTIP mentors complement the pre-service experience.
Chapter 5: Mentor Explanation of Role in New Teacher Induction (*How do NTIP mentors explain or define their role in supporting the induction of new teachers?*)

**Introduction**

This chapter presents findings corresponding with research question #2 - *How do New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) mentors explain or define their role in supporting the induction of new teachers?* The aim of this question was to discover whether mentors view their role as a leadership role and to surface mentoring practices. To answer this question, mentors were asked whether or not they viewed themselves as leaders and to surmise whether or not their colleagues perceived them as leaders. In addition, they were asked to provide examples of their mentoring practices. Mentors were also asked to share the challenges and benefits they experience. In this chapter, I discuss findings in light of the two groups that emerged in previous chapters. Specifically, I explain mentor understanding of their role as teacher leadership, provide a description of mentor practices as teacher leaders, and identify mentor benefits and tensions. This chapter concludes with salient findings about mentor perceptions about their role.

**The Mentor Role as Teacher Leadership**

Although the provincial NTIP policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, 2008, 2010) makes no explicit statements that would recognize volunteer mentors as teacher leaders, the policy does anticipate that, in addition to contributing to new teacher development, “principals will also develop other leaders in schools by working closely with and relying on experienced teachers who will serve as mentors” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 11). Noteworthy is that, within this general intention, secondary school teachers in this study perceived themselves to be performing a leadership role as NTIP mentors. In the preliminary survey distributed to participants prior to the interviews as part of the sampling process, a majority of the participants (15/17) affirmed that, as mentors, they were fulfilling a leadership role. Interviews with participants probed this self-perception and explored mentor understanding of their mentoring role as teacher leadership.

Regardless of the number of teachers mentored or whether or not interview candidates had participated in district-provided professional learning about the role, all but two participants in Group 1 and Group 2 viewed themselves as leaders. Two of the seventeen participants
explicitly commented on how their mentor leadership is not formal, not like the role played by department heads; therefore, they dismissed themselves as leaders because they had considered only formal leadership in their definition of leadership. The remaining 15 candidates described their role as a leadership role without qualifying parameters.

In contrast with educators in traditional formal leadership roles, this group of NTIP mentors reported that they enact a form of unofficial leadership as they guide new teachers and help them “get acclimatized” as beginning teachers. As informal teacher leaders, NTIP mentors asserted that they conduct their roles without a “special designation,” but with experience and expertise. As an informal leader, one mentor described a preference to “fly under the radar,” suggesting that, as a “coach” he can function apart from formal school designation of leadership and without formal acknowledgement or recognition. His comments also suggest a modest, unassuming stance of teacher leadership:

   Leadership is not a portfolio. You can just stand at the end of the hallway [and supervise students] and there’s leadership. And so in terms of my experience, in terms of how I present myself, interacting with kids, yes I believe [I am a leader]. But I like to fly under the radar. I will deflect praise; I’m a coach…. Yes, I believe I am [a leader], and sometimes teachers substitute leadership for the ability to stand up and talk in front of staff. There’s quiet leadership [too].

The view of mentoring as coaching and as “quiet leadership” suggests a private view of leadership that is performed without external, conventional acknowledgement. Another mentor, in a similar vein, expressed his leadership as a professional responsibility rather than as a formal role with a title:

   Technically, [I am a leader]…because I am leading somebody or helping somebody, but I don’t view it like that. I just view it as the right thing to do. If you have experience, you should be helping out others, right?

This perspective of mentor leadership as a professional obligation and as a gesture of professional generosity is also reiterated in the following comment:

   I think that what does make a good leader is you give people what they need, not the other way around. You give them the tools and support that they need, and the leadership comes from their knowledge that they are supported by you.

Implied in these statements is a notion of leadership as an unobtrusive activity, as an understated obligation, and act of professional responsibility rather than as a formal position. As teacher leaders, the majority of mentors in this study communicated a set of internal beliefs about their leadership role rather relying on externally imposed definitions.
In keeping with this inclination of mentoring as leadership, another mentor loosely compared mentors to administrators in that both serve as guides for colleagues. In this case, using administrators as touchstones for defining this guiding role in general terms, this teacher leader illustrated this commonly-held perception of mentors as guides:

If you’re a leader you have to be a guide or a mentor for everybody else, right? Like our principal of the school, it’s their vision that they’re following and they’re there to guide and support you as a teacher. And I think that’s the same for [how the mentor leads] a new teacher…. I think anybody in a leadership position should be a mentor or a guide…. I think they have to be aligned. They’re not mutually exclusive.

Like an administrator, who may guide staff as a formal leader based on a vision, this mentor guided new teachers according to a larger vision of professionalism and professional practice in a parallel, unofficial way. Within this general, holistic view of leadership, mentors also defined their leadership in terms of their ability to have a potentially positive impact on colleagues in the profession. Mentors viewed their leadership as influence rather than as position. They supported new teachers by providing tools and strategies, solving problems, and helping them to “smooth out the bumps.” Like formal leaders, mentors felt that they impact others in their profession: “I think [mentoring] is a leadership role because you can impact somebody very positively or negatively.” Mentors in this study conveyed a sense of guiding and supporting new teachers according to a vision, and engaging in leadership-like activities, such as problem-solving and supporting professional relationships, identifying loosely and conceptually with a general aspect of formal leadership in microcosm. They view their teacher leadership role as one of supportive influence rather than as a position as they perform the role of guide to new teachers.

Another function that mentors performed as influential leaders is role modeling. In this capacity, three of the mentors felt that they modeled collegial support and continuous professional learning:

I think of myself as a leader in terms of being a role model or a facilitator to help other teachers. In terms of whether I’m a leader like a department head or a future administrator, no, I have no interest in that.

This comment surfaces, once again, the understanding of mentor teacher leadership as influence rather than as title. Being professionally progressive, instructionally current, and engaged in constant learning were cited as a demonstration of leadership as role model:

In terms of demonstrating leadership…mentoring is a fantastic way to be a visible leader…[because] mentoring is all about learning and because teachers are all about learning too…because we look at the newest thing — Growing Success or differentiated
instruction, or different pedagogical practices that are new — that could also contribute to a mentor being perceived as a leader...they're having professional dialogue.

Mentors in this study consistently viewed themselves as informal, unofficial leaders. Unlike the formal, hierarchical leadership roles of department head and principal, mentors have no formal title; however, they assert that they are performing a leadership role as guides and as role models for beginning teachers. As leaders without formal title or designation, they theorized that they perform a leadership role by providing guidance to new teachers and by serving as role models of professional support and professional learning for them. Their leadership is perceived as professional obligation and influence that is performed modestly and supportively. As teacher leaders, mentors seem to conceptualize their role as guides, positive influences, and role models for novice teachers with a professional service orientation.

When asked whether their school-based colleagues would consider them to be performing a leadership role, all mentors in this study in Group 1 and Group 2, regardless of opportunities to learn formally about the role or of number of new teachers mentored, theorized that their colleagues would concur with their perception of mentoring as leadership. Interestingly, to substantiate this perception, they cited traditional school-based leadership activities that sometimes lead to positions of responsibility as examples. Mentors specifically named the following functions as external indicators of their leadership: participating in union roles, acting as staff sponsor for student clubs, producing the school drama production, organizing school-wide events, participating on school committees, facilitating school-based professional learning, and addressing colleagues at staff meetings. Some provided professional development for mentors and mentees or coordinated NTIP orientation in their school. Some mentors also identified coordination of school-based action research, serving as grade team leaders, developing and implementing new initiatives, and participating on leadership committees as outward indicators of leadership. As confirmations of their acceptance by colleagues as school leaders, mentors also referenced the formal awards they received, as well as encouragement by colleagues and administrators to apply for formal positions of responsibility such as department head or Vice-Principal. Mentors invariably provided examples of activities that are sometimes undertaken as avenues to formal leadership positions when determining the view of leadership that colleagues might have of them.
Interestingly, these mentor-identified leadership roles do not coincide with their expressed self-view of mentoring as informal leadership, as influence, and as unobtrusively guiding, facilitating, and leading a novice colleague. NTIP mentors in this study appear to operate with a dual sense of teacher leadership whereby their personal definition of themselves as informal influence — unobtrusive guides and facilitators — contrasts with their sense of the exterior definition by colleagues of leaders who lead novice colleagues. This double view of the NTIP mentor leadership role straddles two leadership spheres in which they identify with the traditional external perception of leadership as might be defined by their colleagues, while simultaneously identifying with a self-perception of themselves as leaders who operate at a level apart from the formal structures of school leadership: the domain of formal leadership and the domain of informal leadership. The NTIP mentors in this study appear to inhabit two contradictory yet simultaneous complementary planes of leadership, encompassing both self-perception and perceived collegial perception. On the one hand, they viewed themselves as unassuming leaders of influence who guide and serve as role models for beginning teachers, while on the other hand referencing more traditional, more public experiences that may lead to formal leadership as external indicators of their role.

**Discussion of Mentoring as Teacher Leadership**

Implicit in the NTIP policy is acknowledgment that there is a potential for mentor teacher leadership development within its implementation. Mentors in this study illustrate this unique dynamic by describing their understanding of their role as leadership. Unlike mentors in formal positions of responsibility in formally designated roles, mentors in this study, as self-defined teacher leaders, function informally and non-hierarchically within the existing leadership structure. Also unlike teachers leaders who have experienced tension associated with role ambiguity (Feeney, 2009; Little, 1995; Siskin, 1994; Smylie & Denny), 1990, this group of secondary school NTIP mentors appears to hold in mind a double identity as informal school leaders. They suggest a hybrid definition of their leadership as teacher leaders. They seem to operate with role duality, a duality that is synergistic and complementary. This lack of role ambiguity may be the result of repeated experiences with mentoring new teachers or professional learning about the role. With experience and learning, they have potentially defined their role over time.
This foundational premise of mentors as self-defined teacher leaders allows for an investigation into how mentors understand and enact this role within this self-perception and for discernment of the type of leadership orientation NTIP mentors bring to their mentoring. Their leadership is not dependent on structural organization (Bascia, 1996; Smylie & Denny, 1990). Also, unlike formal teacher leaders or department heads (Feeney, 2009) who viewed their formal leadership role as one of responsibilities and tasks, NTIP mentors perceived their role as one of supportive influence. They define their leadership by their practice, not by formal position (Feeney, 2009). NTIP mentors in this study expressed a dual understanding of their role, one that that merges formal and informal teacher leadership with a distinctness that brings clarity to defining the work they do in the larger school context and collaboratively with a mentee. They are in possession of a dually complex role definition and enactment, and these roles appear not to be in opposition to each other. Their identity as leaders is two-fold and complementary; NTIP mentors operate with two definitions of leadership: one that satisfies outward perceptions of formal leadership, and the other that satisfies their inward perception of informal leadership.

With respect to the conceptual framework, these findings provide a unique perspective of mentoring as teacher leadership. Mentors in this study confirm that they understand themselves to be fulfilling a teacher leadership role through their influence as guides and role models with a type of professional orientation rooted in obligation and responsibility. As experienced teachers and voluntary participants in supporting new teachers, NTIP mentors appear to be unencumbered by role ambiguity as they enact their roles. They also appear to have a broad view of their role as teacher leaders. Theirs is a situation of role duality rather than role ambiguity. This lack of role ambiguity may be explained by the fact that mentoring does not have any formally identified position in the school and does not challenge the existing formal leadership structure as in the case in previous studies of teachers who assumed formal positions of leadership (Feeney, 2009; Little, 1995; Siskin, 1994).

Another potential reason that enables their dual stance might be explained by the fact that their primary role in the school is that of teacher; mentoring is performed secondarily and voluntarily in addition to their teaching assignments and in addition to their in-school identity. In this way, mentors are perhaps able to operate both within and beyond formal department structures, particularly since, in the words of one mentor, mentoring is not “hugely celebrated” in the department. As well, within this context of professional collaboration, if energy is positive,
tensions and conflicts about who can lead whom are perhaps not present in the secondary schools investigated in this study. Perhaps there is a tacit value around supporting new colleagues in a way that does not challenge the status quo of formal leadership structures. It may also be that the work that mentors do is in the best interests of the department, ultimately to support the growth of new teacher instructional capacity, so that these mentors who obviously also assume extra responsibilities at the school level are accepted by their department colleagues.

Additionally, mentors may not be interested in formal leadership positions and therefore they do not encounter conflicts with formal leaders in the school. Although they may be recognized as aspiring leaders, they do not disrupt the existing leadership structure. As leaders, they seem to co-exist as formal and informal school leaders. As practicing mentors, they seem to have crafted a view of their role based on repeated opportunities to mentor a new teacher. For secondary school teacher leaders involved in this study, mentoring does not appear to disturb the established norms for school-based leadership.

**Mentor Practices as Teacher Leaders**

Mentors were asked to provide examples of their day-to-day activities as a means to determine how they enact their roles as teacher leaders. Three key practices revealed by mentor study participants as self-perceived teacher leaders surfaced in the data: informal school-based practical support, informal instructional support or analytical pedagogical support, and collaborative professional learning. When interacting with new teachers in these roles, it can be inferred that mentors described themselves as collegial guides, motivational confidants, unofficial instructional coaches, and models of personal and collaborative professional learning. As well, mentors described themselves as models of collaborative professional learning and models of professional moral purpose. Figure 3 summarizes mentor practices, roles and conceptual orientation to teaching.

**Informal school-based practical support.**

The majority of mentors in both Groups 1 and 2 identified a number of practical supports that they provide to new teachers on a daily or weekly basis as informal teacher leaders regardless of the number of mentoring experiences or prior formal professional learning about the role. They described ongoing dialogue and contact with new teachers through varied
practical, spontaneous supports such as informal conversations, BlackBerry check-ins, coffee break visits, hallway encounters, or lunch break meetings during which mentors engaged in relationship building, supporting new teacher wellness, and providing moral support. According to mentors, this informal contact builds relationships and trust, which is an important goal that sets the foundation for the partnership. For the most part, mentors instituted regular check-ins to provide advice, personal support, debriefing of classroom management and instructional strategies, help with locating forms and materials to learn about school processes, meeting school personnel, and setting up classrooms. During these informal connections, mentors supported new teachers in navigating the cultural and political “conventions of the school,” answering questions such as, “How does this school work? Where do I find these forms? Who do I ask? Who do I see? and “Am I stepping on toes if I do this?” Although mentors did not explicitly describe themselves as collegial guides or advisors, in essence, informal practical support seems to involve ongoing, spontaneous guidance and advice-giving in the relationship.

In addition to serving as collegial guides, some mentors in both groups appear to perform the role of motivational confidant, supporting and encouraging the new teacher. Mentors recounted how they provided novice teachers with encouragement, instilling confidence in their ability to fulfill the requirements of the job throughout the year. In this role, mentors demonstrate optimism and hope as “cheerleader,” championing the incremental progress that new teachers make. Such encourager role enactment is described in the following quotation:

> With the young teachers, sometimes they get very frustrated quickly. They can lose focus. They can become demoralized…. So…I think part of [mentoring] is acting [in the] role of a cheerleader, as a rah, rah coach…you’ve got to keep their spirits up there, because the first years are very tough on new teachers, very tough, and I find that you’ve got to try and keep their heads above water because they don’t think they will.

As a mentor, this teacher acts as a motivational coach for new teachers, providing school-based support while focusing on the positive energy that they bring. Along the same lines, another mentor articulated that it is her goal to “build that climate…to keep it positive, to remind [new teachers] of that constant idealism that we should be striving for.” A number of mentors in this study provided preliminary support for new teachers joining the profession because it is sometimes “difficult to cope” and a large urban school can be a “lonely place.” One mentor believed that mentors acted as “sounding boards” or “emotional crutches,” encouraging beginning teachers to move forward in their chosen profession. They “removed obstacles” and challenges, inspiring confidence in novice teachers by expressing a belief in the beginning
teacher’s potential to succeed. The following mentor spoke about his support in helping novice teachers to maintain professional balance:

New teachers really don’t know balance yet…and they get so overwhelmed because they want to please everyone. They want to please their kids, they want to please their department head, their department members, their principal, and they get so out of their depth.

According to the majority of mentors in Groups 1 and 2 in this study, an optimistic, supportive, nurturing stance keeps novice teachers buoyant, thereby allowing them to “keep their heads above water” in the face of potential inefficacy. In an ongoing way, then, mentors support teachers as collegial guides, local guides, motivational confidants, helping teachers find resilience as part of their informal practices.

**Informal instructional support.**

In addition to these informal practical, emotional supports, mentors in both groups in this study also provide analytical pedagogical support. Instructional support as it relates to classroom lessons and management (14) and assessment practices (12) constitutes the majority of the instructional support that mentors provide as unofficial leaders. Such support in lesson design and assessment are two key foci for all mentors in both cluster groups, regardless of formal prior learning about the role or number of previous opportunities to mentor a new teacher.

Lesson exploration and observation (14) surfaced as the most prominent activity for Group 1 and Group 2 mentors in which they collaboratively engage with new teachers. In three cases, mentors co-taught lessons with their mentees. While supporting new teachers with instructional practice, other mentors assumed the position of collaborative colleague, critiquing lesson materials or co-creating lesson materials with the mentee. Some of the mentors, in this capacity, modeled reflection and analysis through examination and review of the appropriateness of resources. One of the mentors invited his mentee to critique his teacher-designed instructional materials, saying, “This is a handout I made. What do you think of it? Will this work?” Modeling collaborative review of instructional material, this mentor invited his mentee to offer input and to contribute to the development of the mentor’s handout. This gesture, containing a positive presupposition of valuable mentee input, encouraged the mentee to think critically about the match between lesson intent and content. The collaborative nature of mentoring as pedagogical support resounds in the statement below:
So we were doing a lot of co-creating of lessons because of our independent strengths. So I was helping her with the literacy piece in our curriculum and she was helping me with numeracy. And together, we created a fabulous lesson surrounding and focusing on graphing, data collection, figuring out percentages and that sort of thing. And [the mentee] did a wonderful job and it’s still a resource that I use today. It was fun to be able to do that, and it was fun to see her excited over the fact that she felt at one point that I was always helping her and she felt very, very grateful that she could help me as well and so we ended up developing a deeper relationship at that stage.

Mentors also collaboratively explored instructional options with their mentees, brainstorming possible directions:

So, I'll give like a couple of scenarios, and they’ll make suggestions and then I’ll help them refine their choices of delivery and then, we’ll have feedback during the session, whether [the lesson] worked or not and how to make it better.

Some mentors modelled lessons and provided opportunities for mentee observation and debriefing of lessons and classroom management strategies. One mentor and mentee videotaped her classroom instruction and reviewed this recorded material together, noting aspects of classroom management strategies. Collaborative lesson exploration or lesson development and debriefing surfaced as key areas of mentoring activity. Mentors modelled transparency of practice and open dialogue about teacher-created resources and instructional practices, providing guidance about instruction.

A second area of priority that surfaced for mentors in both Groups 1 and 2 was assisting novice teachers with their assessment and evaluation practices in accordance with *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (2010), the recent provincial 1-12 assessment and evaluation policy mandated for implementation in September 2011. Mentors in this study helped new teachers with assessment for learning, formative assessment strategies, and examining student profiles to determine assessment strategies. Others identified a focus upon assessment of learning strategies with respect to the use and development of rubrics and preparation of new teachers with the development of end-of-semester culminating final evaluation activities. This support involved helping new teachers to prepare final evaluations to match the *Growing Success* achievement chart categories of knowledge and understanding, thinking, communication, and application. Mentors helped teachers to answer questions like, “Is this a good thinking question?” The assessment and evaluation focus areas were numerous, as indicated by one mentor who explored various dimensions with the mentee. For instance, they explored “different ways that teachers assess, mark sheets, levels, using [a software program]
Mentor and mentee also talked about policies like giving zeroes [and] late penalties.” Also in the area of assessment of learning, mentors participated in group-moderated marking of student work for instructional adaptation, and developing report card comments in accordance with Growing Success. The following mentor comment illustrates the collaborative nature of mentor work with a focus on assessment:

We went through all of the expectations of Growing Success and, by the end of the day, we had typed up an entire [student report card] comment bank based on Growing Success that would help the entire department.

Mentor assessment and evaluation practices surfaced as a second principal area of focus for NTIP mentors who participated in this study. In this area, mentors appear to be functioning as pedagogical classroom coaches.

In addition to this focus on assessment, a number of mentors in this study also spoke about their intentional creation of a safe space for mentee trial and error as part of instructional learning and processing. According to one mentor, “If you build a trust system where there’s no judgment, it’s a safe zone. There’s more opportunity for feedback in that way.” On a similar note, another mentor recounted the professional safety zone that he intentionally created for novice teachers as illustrated by his approach with mentees:

I am going to give you some rope and you are going to see how far you can go with this. I am going to let you swim a bit and then grab the life raft if you need to, but I am learning more that it’s important for [mentees] to fail and to feel it’s okay, and to be supportive, but not necessarily jump in all the time and say, “No you’re doing it wrong. You have to do it like this.” [As a mentor] you’ve got to let them try their own methods and figure out a solution sometimes. Don’t always be willing to give them the right answer, because it may not work for them.

This passage suggests the mentor’s understanding of the need for gradual release of support with the readily accessible “life raft” while the mentee navigates the waters of trial and error in a safe way. The mentor provided latitude for mentee exploration, decision-making, and experimentation while attempting to foster independence and confidence by providing the mentee with opportunities to determine and choose the instructional path. Mentors described how they examined the components of practice with teachers and provided incremental support, allowing beginning teachers to experience a safe place to take risks. They emphasized their desire to support but not direct their mentees by providing a safe space to make instructional and assessment decisions. Mentors appear to enact their role with an understanding of the importance of emotional safety as a critical component of the learning process as they guide their
mentees. In both groups, they seem to be performing the role of informal classroom coaches and de-constructors or decoders of practice.

Regardless of their experience as mentors or their formal learning about the role, some mentors in this study engaged mentees in sophisticated, analytical examination and analysis of instructional practice, providing conceptual scaffolding as they engaged mentees in thinking through both instructional components and school-based processes. In this case, mentors had a vision of sustainable support through analysis of practice in that they engage mentees in ways of thinking about their practice so that they learn to become independent, reflective professionals. Mentors in this study attempted to make instructional practices visible to teachers. One mentor described adopting a balcony view of his instruction:

You have to kind of step out of where you are to get a good view on [instruction] so then you can decode it so the [new teacher] understand[s] what you’re doing and why. Similarly, another mentor explains a topographical examination of instructional practice:

So we break [instruction] apart and we kind of dissect the things that they are doing so that they can learn if there is something they want to change. [What] would that look like? And then go through all of that so they have that constant looking and being reflective all the time.

The concept of “breaking [practice] down” and “dissection” suggests an analytical focus as mentors made the elements of reflection on practice transparent for novice teachers. Mentors appear to want to foster a deeper understanding of the cause and effect of lesson design:

It’s easy for someone to tell you how to do something and you might be able to repeat that because it’s almost memorization, but you didn't really learn it. You didn’t understand why you did it. You didn’t understand reasons why this works versus something else. You didn’t break it apart yourself so it’s a different scenario. You will learn more by a little bit of failure and then reflection and then try again. I think that’s more powerful.

Another example of deconstruction and analysis of practice conducted by mentors was procedural scaffolding and analysis, as illustrated in the following comment by the mentor who transparently models a think-aloud process with the mentee, provoking reflection on procedural thinking. In supporting the mentee to solve problems about student behaviour, this mentor provided a sequenced exploration to describe how to use school-based processes for the beginning teacher:

Helping [mentees see] “This is where your student is at. Here are the types of stages that you can go through to help support your student. So in terms of guiding the mentees through…Have you conferenced with the student? Have you had a conversation with
them? Okay, so, and you’ve made a plan together…that didn’t work. Okay, so then…have you talked to the parent? Okay so that didn’t work. Have you referred them to Student Success? Okay, have you talked to Guidance…[I] just sort of guide them through that process. It seems so natural to the rest of us, but it’s so, like, “Where do I go first?” for [mentees].

This mentor offered guidance and scaffolding of the process by asking questions to guide the mentee through the stages of conferencing with the students, establishing a plan of action, communicating with parents, and making referrals to school supports. In the process, the mentor elucidates the sequence of steps in the path to follow for a resolution to a problem. Evidently, mentors as teacher leaders engage in instructional support that involves analytically exploring solutions to problems in teaching practice.

A few of the mentors in this study also believed that they serve as advocates for students when helping new teachers to look beyond curriculum delivery to view students as individuals and as learners. The following mentor comment illustrates this intention:

You can’t just go in with a curriculum and deliver it…[if] a kid…is way upset about something else…. You should pull him aside and talk to him and see if there’s something else that might have nothing to do with what you’re supposed to do [as the teacher] that day.

This mentor and the next one quoted below believed that mentors can help mentees focus upon students in need to address issues beyond the curriculum, thinking it is important to:

have opened [mentee] eyes to a few aspects of teaching that we don’t like to look at as professionals. It’s difficult to completely open your eyes and look into the dark corners of…the kid that’s not just difficult in your class, but where they’re coming from and what it means.

A few mentors would like their mentees to respond sensitively and deeply examine troubled students as individuals which, beyond the complexity of addressing curriculum expectations, is a potentially sustainable mindset for problem-solving about students.

Instructional support for both Group 1 and Group 2 mentors as it relates to classroom lessons and classroom management (14) and assessment practices (12) constitutes the majority of the instructional support that mentors provided as unofficial collaborative coaches. Such support in lesson design and assessment are two key foci for all mentors in both cluster groups, regardless of formal prior learning about the role or number of previous opportunities to mentor a new teacher. Additionally, a few mentors focused the lens on individual students.
Professional Role Models

In addition to providing practical school-based support and instructional assistance, mentors in both groups revealed that, as teacher leaders, they serve as models of professional learning and professional moral purpose.

Models of collaborative professional learning.

Beyond providing guidance with instructional and assessment practice, mentors in both groups identified modelling collaborative professional learning in their work with mentees. For instance, some of the mentors in Group 2 expressed the importance of emphasizing life-long learning and acknowledged that the learning process is continuous for their mentees. They felt that learning is ongoing, regardless of years of experience. They viewed the collaborative work with mentees and the learning as a reciprocal “two-way street.” Another Group 2 mentor comments, expressing the sentiments of several of the Group 2 mentors, “that reciprocal learning, to me, in any sort of collaboration, is always very important.” Group 2 mentors in this study had a learning orientation; they asserted that mentoring provides them with continuous learning and opportunities to model it:

I don’t claim to know everything because I know I have a lot of learning still left to do. So I would be hoping that what [mentees] would take away [from this] is the fact that I still value learning, and that’s still something I plan on continuing doing, no matter how much more experience or years of experience I have.

While most Group 2 mentors spoke about reciprocal learning in these general ways, most of the Group 1 mentors who have engaged in district professional learning (6) illustrated the tendency to be specific about their modelling of collaborative learning. Together with their mentees, some Group 1 mentors attended district sessions on Assessment, Differentiated Instruction, and Classroom Management. According to them, district-provided mentor and mentee professional learning provided opportunities:

Where the mentor and the mentee can [sit] side by side and talk about something meaningful like assessment and evaluation …that new teachers and experienced teachers are still working through like assessment, like curriculum development.

Implied in this statement is a dynamic of co-learning that is focused upon by both parties. In another instance, after attending a district session on Differentiated Instruction with the mentee, a mentor met with the new teacher to discuss how to implement differentiated instructional strategies:
We took a look at a current unit and we decided it wasn’t working with our group of students.... [Students] were not being successful, so we implemented activities that incorporated Differentiated Instruction...we revamped the unit.

Collaboratively, this mentor and mentee applied instructional strategies they learned at the session. In another case, both mentor and mentee attended a district book talk on assessment and evaluation where they exchanged follow-up ideas for implementation in their respective classrooms. In another instance, the mentor recounted how:

Because [she] was facilitating all of the NTIP school-based sessions or [she] was hosting a guest speaker, [she was present at the session]. That’s when [the mentor] would be able to sometimes point out experiences that the new teacher mentee had gone through during that time. Then afterwards, [the mentor] would be able to talk to her.

Group 1 mentors and mentees also described mutual visits to other sites for program information related to supporting Special Education students. Learning collaboratively with the mentee and applying learning is also a practice engaged in by mentors who have a connection to district learning in this study. Whether espoused in general terms or explicitly illustrated, both groups of mentors suggested that they model professional learning and professional collaboration.

**Models of professional moral purpose.**

Mentor-expressed beliefs about the role also revealed mentors’ understanding of the moral professional dimensions of their role. Mentors in both cluster groups in this study believed that their work has implications for new teachers and for the teaching profession. NTIP study participants believed that they are helping to facilitate a culture of mentoring and support. Their comments imply that mentoring fulfills a compelling obligation, a moral responsibility to “pay it forward,” and a hope that they are perpetuating a cycle of professional generosity and support for new teachers, as highlighted in this sentiment:

I always felt right from the get-go that I had to pay it forward, what was given to me. So therefore, that sort of ownership and that obligation was there. Not out of saying that I had to, but out of the desire that it was the right thing to do.

A cycle of ongoing support is an important aspect of the role. Mentors spoke about how they hoped to inspire beginning teachers to contribute as a mentor in kind: “I would like my mentee…to turn to me and say, “I want to do the same thing for someone else.” They hoped that the supportive relationships that they built with new teachers might inspire them to respond in a similar fashion: “I think the relationships you build with people and knowing that you now have somebody else that maybe is going to pay it forward to the next person [is] important.” Mentors
also understood the complexities that confront new teachers, and they believed that it is important that support be provided to help them remain in the profession:

The reality is [that] in this job, you’re dealing with kids. You’re dealing with parents. You’re dealing with administrators. You’re dealing with the community. There’s a lot of pressure. It’s a tough job, but [new teachers] have to be able to manage it appropriately. We lose so many young teachers because they realize it’s not for them, and a lot of them should stay in the profession, but unfortunately, they’re not mentored in the right way. That, for me, is important.

These comments illustrate mentor perception of their role as sustainable perpetuators of support who aspired to promote a culture of mentoring in new colleagues. Their inner drive encouraged them to help teachers to transcend isolation and to create safe spaces for intellectual engagement. As part of perpetuating this cycle of support for new teachers, mentors also valued the relationships they develop with new teachers. They commented on the “camaraderie” and the equality of the mentor-mentee relationship. The following comment provides an indication of a mentee relationship that has grown and evolved over time:

I’ve had a [colleague] that I work with now, still, and she still refers to me as her mentor even though she’s my Department Head. So it’s friendship, and it almost seems to be more of a symbiotic relationship that we help each other eventually.

Group 1 and Group 2 mentor beliefs provided insights into their understanding of their role as including a cyclical model of support for new entrants into the profession based upon a moral imperative. Findings suggest a tendency towards change agentry in mentor-expressed aspirations that the new teachers they are serving might participate in kind to pave the way for their future colleagues.

Discussion of Teacher Leader Practices

Little (1990b) believes “there are few comprehensive studies, well informed by theory and designed to examine in depth the context, content, and consequences of mentoring” (p. 341). Probing into the practices that NTIP mentors perform has provided insightful information about the content and depth of mentoring in an area that has been identified as insufficiently explored (Little, 1987; Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006; Hawkey, 2006). Study findings about mentor practices provide a basis for understanding how mentors enact their role as it relates to the literature review. While this study is far from comprehensive, it offers a further understanding of the day-to-day practices of mentors, assuming mentor roles as guides, professional interpreters,
motivational confidants, decoders of instructional practice and models of professional learning, and as pay-it-forward cultural perpetuators of a mentoring culture.

Group 1 and Group 2 mentor-reported activities indicate that they are enacting their roles from primarily a personal orientation to teaching. Both groups describe informal school-based practical support that they provide, giving advice and offering general school support. As such, they enact their role as local guides, professional interpreters and motivational confidants. A majority of mentors provide informal instructional and assessment support engaging mentees in analytical, pedagogical, and procedural scaffolding. The data indicate that as “educational companions” and decoders of instructional practice, mentors perform many practices that engage novice teachers in instructional inquiry and improvement. Mentors as informal teacher leaders appear to be engaging in “educative” practices, consistent with Schwille (2008), who describes mentors’ work as potentially culture-changing. Teachers in these partnerships engage neither in contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1991) nor in balkanized (Hargreaves, 1994) situations, but in activities that are collaborative and transparent. Their practices involve “more than just hand-holding” or “emotional or psychological support and resource procurement” (Schwille, 2008, p. 141) as they engage novice teachers in the “intellectual nature of teaching and learning to teach” through “the process of construction of knowledge” (Schwille, 2008 p. 141). This type of professional support by mentors moves beyond storytelling, aid and assistance, and sharing (Little, 1990a) into the territory of “joint work” (p. 25). As collaborative colleagues, mentors are offering assistance in an intentional way, providing feedback, sharing in the creation of instructional tasks and materials, critiquing each other’s work, analyzing practice, and sharing views and opinions. From a leadership perspective in contrast with formal department chairs, the NTIP mentor leadership role is related to practice, not position, and is not focused upon “managerial, non-instructional tasks” (Feeney, 2009).

In addition to their practices, mentor beliefs align with Feiman-Nemser and Parker’s notion of change agentry (1992) as they model norms of collaboration and transparency of practice. Mentors engaged in collaborative activities and hoped that their modelling and support would encourage future teachers to reach out to new teachers in their tenure. They recounted how they serve as role models of collaborative learning and a models of professional moral purpose. These data also confirm and amplify findings previously determined about mentors having the potential to act as change agents and to impact the isolationist culture of teaching.
Mentors in this study amplify this notion of teacher leaders as change agents. Mentors transparently engage with their mentees, advocate for students, learn in concert with their mentees, and reveal themselves to be perpetuators of mentoring support that connects with their moral imperative (Fullan, 1994) to “pay it forward” and to support novices entering the profession.

NTIP mentors act as local guides, educational companions, and agents of change through their collaborative efforts (Cochran-Smith and Paris, 1995). As change agents working jointly with novice teachers, mentors in this study interact with transparency and a collaborative focus. They operate apart from the formal hierarchical leadership structures and appear to adopt a non-hierarchical approach to their mentoring. They appear to foster norms of collegiality and experimentation by discussing teaching practice, participating in observation, co-developing materials, and learning from each other (Bird & Little, 1986). These roles correspond to the practical orientation in that mentors share their craft as skillful practitioners to support novice teachers.

Interestingly, despite previously identified differences in mentor policy understanding of their role as mentee-driven within a practical orientation as local guides, (Group 2) and mentor-driven educational companions with a personal orientation, (Group 1) when mentors describe their practices, there appeared to be no difference in their mentoring activity. There appears to be a discrepancy between what mentors say as policy interpreters and what they do as teacher leaders. For example, both groups of mentors seem to function as educational companions with respect to the informal instructional support they provide suggesting that both groups act as agents of change. Despite previously identified difference in policy influence and conception of the role, findings with respect to mentor practices are similar. This commonality in mentor focus upon assessment practices may be the result of a competing policy attention being emphasized at the school and in the district. More specifically, Growing Success implementation was predominant as a mandated Ministry and district implementation priority at the time of this study, and therefore an active focus of implementation by all teachers in the schools, including mentors. As well, classroom management and instructional strategies likely emerged as areas demanding mentee priority and, by extension, mentor attention. I wonder if further investigation would reveal differences in the nature, frequency, and depth of the instructional and assessment conversations that occurred in each group given the professional learning that mentors previously
referenced. Nevertheless, breaking down practice and the belief that, as teacher leaders, the mentor role incorporates a moral responsibility to support colleagues and to “pay it forward” are common to both groups. A guiding principle is the moral imperative and a desire to be a positive influence rather than to obtain a formal role or title.

Through their described practices, both Group 1 and Group 2 mentors adopt a personal orientation to teaching.

**Impact of Mentoring on Mentors**

Mentors were also asked to discuss whether or not they derive benefits from their mentoring interactions with new teachers. As part of determining how mentors view their role, mentors were explicitly asked to comment upon what benefits they are deriving from mentoring. While the NTIP policy does not specify intended outcomes for mentors, the findings in this study reveal that the work that mentors do also impacts them significantly. The NTIP policy intention to “support the growth and professional development of new teachers” (p. 3) is also indirectly contributing to mentor professional development.

As they reflected on benefits that they are experiencing, mentors in this study unanimously described the work as reciprocal, symbiotic, and impactful. Data collected in response to this question, however, revealed different findings between the cluster of Group 2 mentors who operate from a personal philosophy or approach and the Group 1 mentors who experienced formal training about the mentor role. Group 2 mentors identified reflection and confidence building as key outcomes for them, as did members of Group 1. Group 1 mentors, however, also cited professional learning, and networking and relationship building as outcomes in addition to reflection.

**Confidence building and reflection.**

Mentors in the Group 2 cluster who operate with independent negotiation of the policy identified general confidence building and reflection as the primary benefits for them as a result of their mentoring. One of the mentors commented on this two-way gain for mentors:

> It’s kind of reciprocal. You know, did you feel someone gaining confidence and feeling happy and adjusted or grateful? It’s just like a mirror. You feel that, too [as a mentor].

Implied here is a feeling of professional fulfillment and efficacy that, for the mentor, results from seeing a mentee develop a sense of confidence. The positive mentee experience reflects a
positive mentor experience. Professional reflection on practice also surfaced as a key outcome for mentors in Group 2, as a mentor in this group commented:

[MENTORING HAS] allowed me to reflect a lot more on best practices and reflect on my profession and what I do and why it’s important.

This mentor experienced reflection on practice, as well as a confirmation about the importance of mentoring to the teaching profession. Also regarding instructional reflection, the following mentor described the consciousness and reflection he engaged in as a result of repeated opportunities to mentor:

I get reconfirmed in my beliefs because I have to verbalize them. I have to demonstrate them.... The best way to learn something is to teach it. So I think being a mentor is the same thing. You’re teaching what you really know and it makes you really think, “Do I really know this enough to teach it?”

Similarly experiencing reflection as a beneficial outcome of mentoring, another Group 2 mentor said, “you get to reflect. It’s important, I think, and it’s useful to reflect on your craft, on the things that you do.” His mentoring focused reflection on the craft of teaching. Group 2 mentors identified confidence and reflection on practice as reciprocal gains resulting from mentoring.

Mentors in Group 1, regardless of number of mentoring experiences, also reported reflection as an outcome for them; however, their reflection appeared to be more specifically in the form of metacognition, revisiting their perspective and being influenced to notice their current instructional and mentoring repertoire in a critical way. Three mentors explicitly commented upon how opportunities to mentor made them reflective about their instructional practice. One of the mentors said this about the metacognitive opportunity:

[MENTORING] makes you reflective on yourself, on how you are doing things, and on the guidance you can offer — whether it’s in the classroom or with the other teachers to see if that’s effective.

Here mentoring provoked reflection on the quality of his effectiveness as a teacher and on his guidance as a mentor. Another mentor in this group similarly identified instances of this type of metacognition:

When you’re talking about coaching the mentee, you’re also reflecting on your own practice as well, so…you’re actually coaching yourself indirectly.

Conversations with mentees about instruction encourage mentor reflection on practice. Another mentor highlighted that in the act of mentoring, “you’re actually giving yourself constructive criticism.” Such comments suggest that these mentors assume a reflective, aerial view of their instructional and mentoring practice in ways that allow them to simultaneously critique
themselves as teachers and mentors. Mentoring served as a vehicle for metacognitive review of their practices.

In addition to reflection on practice, Group 1 mentors reported opportunities to reflect on their own professional growth: “[mentoring] gives you a chance to see yourself in a different way…[giving] you that different lens to look at things with.” A few mentors gained a perspective on their own growth as they remembered their learning curve as beginning teachers, and realized how far they had grown as professionals. New teachers offered a measure of their own learning journey as educators. Seeing teaching through the lens of an inexperienced teacher provided opportunities for mentors to observe and renew their craft. According to mentors in the Group 1 cluster, mentoring stimulates them to interrogate their practices as well as affirm their own growth as professionals. It is possible that explicit professional learning about the role of the mentor has encouraged a new awareness of professional practice and new ways of thinking about their practice. The coaching techniques that mentors learn may also become useful lenses for looking inward and examining their practice. This data indirectly suggest that mentors have grown to understand themselves as having a sense of professional identity, both as classroom teachers and as mentors. Mentoring has inspired reflection on their practices and on their professional growth.

**Professional learning — acquisition of mentoring knowledge and skills.**

In addition to experiencing opportunities to review their instructional craft, mentors in Group 1 also reported general and specific learning as beneficial. Over time, mentors have learned that they need to be open to the possibility of learning through mentoring.

In general, mentors typically and explicitly commented on their learning: “I learn a lot, I have to say. There isn’t a person that I have mentored that I haven’t learned something from.”

The same mentor continued:

I think, for me, the most important thing is lifelong learning, [and knowing] that I can’t be a mentor and not continue to learn, to go to workshops and take courses and then hope to mentor someone ten years down the line.

Both the expectation to learn and the opportunity to learn surfaced in mentor comments such as the following:

You’re also open to learning from your mentee. Because you can’t go into that relationship thinking that you know everything. Otherwise, your own learning is stifled and your own growth is stopping at that point.
The learning theme was reiterated by many, as confirmed in statements like:

I have acquired a lot of knowledge [from professional learning sessions] that I wouldn’t have access to or really wouldn’t have known where to look for otherwise. I’ve developed. A cynic might say that you can add it to your portfolio, but it’s more than that. It’s the knowledge that you have actually developed as a teacher and you continue to develop.

While general learning is identified by some mentors in Group 1, several others commented specifically on learning to be effective mentors. Communication awareness and communication skills were particularly commented upon by mentors. The following mentor statement underscores some of this awareness and communicative skill-building:

I’ve learned a lot about having discussions with people. I mean mentoring is a lot of conversation — personal, public…. I’ve learned a lot about the importance of active listening, what you can bring to a conversation, the importance of paraphrasing, asking for clarification..., all of those things that we take for granted when we’re busy and we’re in a meeting, and we just want to get stuff done.

The importance of intentional, focused listening and paraphrasing while engaging with the mentee is highlighted here. In a similar fashion, the following mentor identified the intentionality with which she communicated more skillfully as a result of her formal learning about the role:

[I learned about] structuring [the conversation], how to have those conversations better, more effectively, to follow up with conversations, to make [the interaction] more meaningful...[the learning is] just endless.

Furthermore, the facilitation skills that mentors have learned about communication are reported to be transferrable to non-mentoring professional contexts like in-school faculty team meetings:

If I’m the chair of a certain committee, those [mentoring] elements allow me to listen, really listen, with active listening and pay attention to what’s going on. And so [what] I’ve learned as a mentor helps guide those conversations as well.

I come back to things overlapping, so if I’m learning…how to facilitate my mentee…. It is transferrable to a leadership role and how you’re facilitating something within your department even though…you’re not in a department head position, how you’re delivering something might come from that [training].

The skills of effective communication with adult learners and colleagues was also identified by some mentors as being a valuable outcome, specifically paraphrasing and seeking clarification, as part of active listening in a mentor role:

I’ve been learning. I’ve been building my own capacity in a lot of different ways. So as a mentor, it actually really has changed the way that I have conversations with everyone
that I work with...in terms of having those difficult conversations with colleagues and being a better listener.

Group 1 mentors who have had opportunities to learn formally about the role tended to report more specifically on mentoring skills when they discussed the benefits they derived from mentoring. Because they have learned to structure the mentor-mentee conversations and have learned skills of collegial conversation, they are conscious of these elements. Knowledge and transferable skills in the area of communication appear to be significant learning outcomes reported by this group of mentors. These findings suggest the ways in which Group 1 mentors are purposefully engaging with their mentees through communication.

**Networking and relationship building.**

Mentors in Group 1 also commented upon how networking with mentor colleagues has expanded their understanding about different career opportunities and enabled relationship building with other mentors within the board. One of the mentors described how she has learned about the variety of Resource Teacher and Coordinator roles in the district that are compatible with her potential for growth. In speaking about this awareness, she articulated that networking as a result of the mentoring has provided an expanded awareness of system employment opportunities:

> I don’t currently see myself anywhere near administration, but I now realize that there are other opportunities for leadership and for development, for my own development and challenge, out there other than Principal or Vice-Principal. There is more out there than that. And I didn’t realize these roles existed and they are more in keeping with who I am.

There have been opportunities for this mentor to work on board writing teams and to present her learning at the provincial level; mentoring has expanded her perspective on the different types of professional roles available beyond the formal administrative route. She was heartened to know that there are many types of district leadership role alternatives that are possible for her that are more “in keeping with who [she is].”

Group 1 mentors also reported having opportunities to network with mentor colleagues within and beyond their schools. In one case, a significant benefit of mentoring was belonging to an in-school, cross-curricular, school-based mentor team whose members had opportunities to collectively and collaboratively respond to new teacher needs as a group, organizing mentee professional learning and networking opportunities based on mentee survey results; mentor
members of this team supported new teachers in their school and in their departments individually and collectively.

Collaboration and networking also extended to beyond-school opportunities for other mentors who cited the ability to connect with positive colleagues, an opportunity which provide inspiration and motivation. As one participant said, “I find friendships, and just networking…to be really, highly positive.” Mentors also indicated that they appreciated belonging to a larger community of mentors within the district: “Now we have this group that we go to in the school and now outside of the school of professionally, seasoned mentors.” Group 1 mentors appreciated the opportunity to network with mentor colleagues in the system, allowing them to share mentoring dilemmas, continue learning, and to share strategies. The connections and friendships made with other mentors who are scattered throughout the district allowed them to see that they are part of a community beyond themselves, which sustains and motivates them:

I get to work with great people. That’s the number one thing. I wouldn’t be in the program probably as long as I have if there weren’t so many good, positive people who were passionate about what they do…. I’ve made a lot of relationships in this program…and when I have been busy in other areas, where my life has been chaotic, I’ve still been able to do this [mentoring] because of the positivity that’s there.

Mentors mentioned the opportunities to belong to a community as a beneficial outcome of their mentoring involvement. Collaboration with positive mentors was a force that sustained Group 1 mentors in this study. In addition, lasting relationships with mentees — that extend beyond the formal mentoring experience — were appreciated by mentors. Establishing supportive working relationships with novice colleagues is a key consequence for mentors. Mentoring fulfills the need to nurture and provides satisfaction as a result of working with new teachers, encouraging them at the outset. The ability to make the first year more comfortable for a new teacher and the sustained informal mentoring that goes beyond the structure of the formal mentoring in the first year was gratifying. Professional networking and relationship building surfaced as key benefits for mentors in Group 1.

Both Group 1 and Group 2 mentors identified a variety of benefits from their mentoring, although the benefits differ in type and degree. These data suggest that mentors who have taken advantage of opportunities to learn about the role experience different outcomes with respect to reflection professional learning, skill building in the area of communication, and networking. Their description of the reciprocal nature of mentoring is more detailed. Perhaps awareness about the role and opportunity for ongoing learning and networking lead them to attend to a
variety of outcomes that impact their reflection. Group 1 mentors’ understanding of benefits of the role was more broadly explained as is evident in their descriptions. Based on their reported benefits, Group 2 mentors appear to understand the benefits to be fewer and more general.

**Discussion of Reciprocal Consequences for Mentors**

Although the NTIP policy has not intentionally been designed to directly impact mentors, these data uncover distinct, unintended professional advantages that mentors experience as a result of mentoring new teachers. The notion of mentor reciprocity has not been comprehensively elucidated in previous studies; however, as evidenced by some of the research findings described, NTIP mentors in this study confirm and amplify the concept of reciprocity.

Study participants view their work as reciprocal and equally beneficial (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995), confirming that the mentor-mentee relationship is not hierarchical, but instead results in shared benefits. Findings from this study further extend the notion of reciprocity. More specifically, beyond reflection and focusing on their own instructional practices (Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005), new insights into mentor reciprocity are revealed. Mentors in the Group 1 study sample, in particular, recounted extending themselves professionally by learning mentoring practices and by building professional relationships with other mentors as being beneficial. This explicit mention of the benefits — connecting with a larger mentor community, gaining career awareness, acquiring mentoring knowledge and skill — adds new dimensions to understanding about mentor reciprocity.

These findings illuminate one of the research sub-questions informing how mentors are enacting their role. While mentors guide new teachers, they appear to simultaneously learn and engage in experiences that augment them as professionals. These findings extend the existing knowledge base in terms of outcomes for mentors, specifically in the areas of deepening mentoring skills and relationship building through networking.

**Challenges Experienced by Mentors as Teacher Leaders**

Teacher leaders in the literature review experience challenges and conflicts that relate to role understanding and enactment (Feeney, 2009; Little, 1995; Siskin, 1994; Smylie & Denny, 1990). This study sought to uncover whether NTIP mentors, as informal teacher leaders in
secondary schools, experience challenges in their role. In this pursuit, mentors were asked whether or not they experience risks, tensions, or challenges.

A minority of mentors in this study reported minimal challenges. For example, three of the five mentors in Group 2 and one mentor in Group 1 reported that mentoring is not challenging. These four mentors have in common that they have all been teaching from 10–15 years. Mentors in Group 2 were divided in their responses about tensions. One of the three mentors who reported no challenges stated that mentoring was not challenging, but rather that “[mentoring] is fun, like teaching.” Another mentor in the same group expressed that mentoring is “a privilege.” Mentoring is “uplifting because it is a supportive role.” Another felt that his prior experience as a manager in a business context was transferrable to the educational mentoring role, so that mentoring was not challenging. The two mentors in this group who identified challenges, reported tensions with respect to the scarcity of time and the challenges of the responsibility; their views are incorporated into the Group 1 findings discussed below.

Otherwise, tensions were reported by all remaining Group 1 mentors, regardless of years of experience or number of teachers mentored. Group 1 mentors who had experienced prior learning about the role communicated challenges that commonly fall into three distinct categories, with the top two challenges being temporal and interpersonal/relational. Following these challenges, political, emotional, and metacognitive/intellectual challenges also surfaced as tensions for some mentors. The challenges reported by Group 1 mentors are detailed in the discussion below.

**The tension of time.**

A majority of the mentors in Group 1 (10/13) and one member of Group 2 reported the scarcity of time as their most significant challenge in carrying out the responsibilities in their mentoring role. While mentors enjoyed the collaboration, they also acknowledged that mentoring was time-consuming work. Mentoring done well, according to these respondents, required time for multiple conversations and sustained collaboration. As part of the mentoring commitment, dedicating time for preparation and follow-up work created tension. Capturing time, during which the mentor can “attend fully” by blocking out other pressures and distractions, was challenging. When preparation times and lunch periods do not align or when allocated release days are exhausted, mentors dedicated time after the school day or felt pressure
that they could not do so because of their own family commitments. When mentors work purposefully and thoughtfully with their mentees, they perceived time constraints as challenging:

There’s a lot of preparation work and a lot of follow-up work and it takes time…. If you are really trying to do [mentoring] properly, there’s a lot of conversation you should be having before, and after, and during, and that takes up time.

In addition to the time spent on multiple conversations, finding time for strategic planning and an organized approach is also time-consuming. The following mentor quotation, which compares the components of the backward design process of student assessment and evaluation with the process of mentoring, communicates the commitment of time:

I think [mentoring] is challenging if you do it right. Because if you are going to set it up like you’re working an assessment with a student, and you’re looking for outcomes and you have goals and you want to see where you are, then yes. [Mentoring is] challenging because you have to find times to meet. You have to have time to sit down and go through [the goals] and revisit what you are doing.

Developing a structured plan with purpose and intended outcomes results in pressure to find time. Group 1 mentors in this study appear to be invested in the learning process for mentees and feel the pressure of lack of time required for planning, doing, and following up:

And for me, it’s often feeling guilt, like I don’t spend enough time with my mentee, or I haven’t checked in enough with her, or I haven’t asked her the right type of questions to pull out that information…. So for me, it’s actually finding the time… [to] be focused with my mentee.

The pressure of not being able to find time to fulfill the requirements of mentoring within the school day, even when release time is provided, was one of the most significant obstacles identified by Group 1 NTIP mentors in his study, and is consistent with Bird and Little’s (1986) contention that the provision of time is one of the most important resources for improvement. Unlike all but one participant in Group 2, Group 1 mentors felt that the pressure of finding time was a significant tension.

**The challenge of communication.**

Equal in importance to finding time for ten Group 1 mentors was the challenge of communication required for developing and maintaining positive professional relationships with mentees. Mentors commented on the challenge of juggling the tension between providing constructive feedback and preserving the professional relationship. They felt that it was important to develop communication tools to foster relationships of trust and inquiry. The
comment below captures this tension in a mentoring relationship that goes “beyond answering [mentee] questions:”

In order to engage in a conversation that is a sensitive conversation, you have to have a toolkit that you can draw from. Because otherwise, you risk damaging the relationship, or you risk offending someone with inappropriately worded constructive criticism, or feedback or questioning. And so the risk that is involved…it’s on a relationship level, I think.

This awareness about the delicacy of communication and the desire to balance that with discussions about teaching requirements was experienced as a tension causing mentors to be concerned about the professional relationship. Embedded in this type of conversation is the challenge of guiding the mentee without evaluation, as one mentor admitted: “my challenge is to make sure that I am not coming off as being someone who is judging or assessing.” According to a majority of Group 1 mentors in this study, balancing sensitivity to the working relationship and the linguistic dexterity for communicating teaching responsibilities and expectations surfaced as another prominent challenge, a challenge not identified by Group 2 mentors.

**Collegial trepidation.**

Following these primary temporal and communication tensions, collegial trepidation emerged as the second most important obstacle that enters into the work of a few Group 1 NTIP mentors in this study. For instance, collegial tension was felt when a mentor encountered a mentee who was not receptive to advice. As part of the NTIP commitment, new teachers are expected to benefit from the support of a mentor. However, in a few cases, a reluctant mentee created tensions for some mentors as identified below:

Somebody who doesn’t want to accept your advice…someone who’s kind of shy and doesn’t really want to…seek the advice…. You want them to be successful. I’m a pretty open person; if there are any problems, come and talk to me, but sometimes people are very closed.

It is not possible for mentors to insinuate themselves into the teacher’s domain of professional learning if the mentee is unwilling to receive support, and such a scenario created tension. Similarly, the following mentor confirmed this collegial challenge, admitting that the conversations “are not always easy ones.” She addresses this mentoring complexity:

The [mentee] has to be willing to hear what you have to say…[advice is] not always received as a positive thing. Even though we try to be constructive, people feel it’s a real personal attack on them. So that’s where that element becomes difficult being a mentor.
It’s trying to divide that professional versus personal, with your curriculum delivery, your classroom instruction versus…who you really are. And I think that’s very blurred. Evidently, tension that potentially accompanies advice-giving and its delivery arose as an obstacle at times.

Two mentors in this group also commented on the political tension that they felt in respecting regulations and requirements of the Collective Agreement in the area of guidance giving. One of the mentors describes this balancing act explaining, “You are on the same scale; you’re not official.” In a colleague-to-colleague relationship, mentors have no formal authority and are legally not able to relate with their mentees in an evaluative, supervisory role:

You want to communicate what is to be done, what is required… So you have to communicate with people in a supportive kind of role. But yet, at the same time, this is your job. This is what needs to be going on…these types of responsibilities.

In discussing this type of challenge, the same mentor acknowledged:

You’ve got someone who’s supposed to be learning from you, but they are also your colleague. We have rules around that. I don’t want to say that the union’s the issue here, it’s not. But, we have tightly defined ways that we relate to each other as teachers…. We have complex relationships. You’re the experienced teacher and they’re the new teachers. But you’re also both just teachers [equal in status under the Collective Agreement].

On a similar note, another mentor was aware that “you can cross some union lines” with classroom visits and exchanges, although she admitted this does not worry her. This balancing of professional boundaries creates a tension dynamic for some mentors in Group 1. The complexity underlying the political dimension of fulfilling both mentoring roles and professional parameters is evident in the above comment. One of these mentors in this group added to this political challenge saying that, for him, tension arises as a result of “political dimensions” of another kind; at times he has had to function as a “political interpreter” who must communicate the implied messages embedded in “requests” to staff that come from administrators. For instance, a memo from the administrator communicating a deadline for submitting report card marks to the office is indeed a mandate, not a request. Such subtlety is not always interpreted accurately by mentees. Another identified political challenge recounted in this area had to do with mentor internal professional conflict around instructional strategies. In this case, the mentor, an avid consumer of professional learning and progressive instructional strategies, was being asked by her mentee to entertain a strategy that she thought might be less effective in the
classroom. For her, having the patience to navigate this professional conflict provided challenge. A similar tension existed for another mentor:

When [instructional] goals collide...how to navigate those waters...when we can ignore and just focus on ourselves, and when we can’t do that because of our other responsibilities.

Balancing the tension that comes with conflicting views or priorities was a tension communicated by mentors. An identified area of socio-political tension resulted for mentors when navigating the role within the boundaries and parameters of contractual stipulations. As well, mentors may also experience tension when reconciling their own professional beliefs about good practice with conflicting views held by mentees. Challenges in the context of advice giving and professional ethics surfaced as a key challenge by Group 1 mentors.

**The tension of accountability.**

Another significant challenge was reported in the emotional realm of managing self-imposed high expectations for fulfilling the mentor role and the pressure of responsibility expressed by several (five) Group 1 mentors and one member of Group 2 as explained in the following example:

If you really want to do [mentoring] right, then you have to be on point. You’ve got to be thinking about what you’re doing because you don’t want to set somebody up for failure.

This comment suggests a consciousness of accountability and high expectations. Helping “in the best way possible,” particularly when answers are complex, created tension for these mentors; the pressure to be “on point” and perform the role at their personal best caused mentors to feel stress. Mentors felt responsible for being a thoughtful guide with respect to explaining and fully addressing mentee questions:

You feel this sense of, “Oh my goodness! This person is asking for me for help,” and you want to help them in the best way possible, but the decisions are not always black and white.... So in order to give someone else advice, you have to be very careful. You don’t want it to blow up in their face.... So being a mentor is a lot of responsibility. Therein lies the challenge. You don’t want to be wrong.

Another mentor also articulated this sentiment as, “So you’re applying a kind of stress to yourself because you really want to make sure the person is successful.” The pressure of providing the right kind of support was an internal, emotional challenge for mentors who participated in this study. Perhaps their high expectations for fulfilling the role make them feel
personally accountable for enacting the role well according to their standard of effectiveness and for serving mentees well.

**Cognitive/intellectual challenges.**

A final challenge influencing Group 1 mentors only as they enact their role is a metacognitive, intellectual one. Some mentors spoke about mentoring as “conscious work” that requires them to wear “many hats,” creating conceptual challenges. The comment below relays one of the cognitive challenges:

I think [mentoring] is very challenging work. I think that it is very conscious work. A lot of people think, like I did in the very beginning…that all it is, is answering questions of someone who needs your help, and they don’t realize that there is more to it. [W]here you have to play many different roles, wear many different hats, and through that you get a much more rich experience.

The above comment suggests mentoring contains many dimensions that are based in mindful activity. Mentoring was described by others as deep, thoughtful work which requires intellectual versatility. Self-awareness also surfaced as important:

I think mentoring is challenging. When I, look at being a mentor, I look at it as being a leader. And I think when you look at being a leader, there are certain things that you need to…be aware of your own gaps in supporting that person. And I think that’s the same thing as being a mentor…you need to understand what your strengths are and what your, your limitations are…So I think recognizing [what] those gaps are…that’s important and challenging.

Self-understanding and self-awareness are part and parcel of mentoring for this mentor. For her, mentoring requires thinking and self-reflection on personal strengths and areas of potential growth.

In addition, the necessity of anticipatory thinking is as part of the cognitive challenge created tension for mentors. For instance, one of the Group 1 mentors spoke about looking towards the future “to prevent the mentee from falling in a pit hole.” The idea of preventing the mentee from experiencing a serious failure or setback is paramount in the mind of an engaged, experienced mentor. As well, when mentees are reaching beyond their comfort zone into an area of challenge, mentors felt that it is the mentor’s role to metaphorically be “in a corner, watching, making sure [he or she] doesn’t fall.” Mentors felt the tension of being a supportive bystander as they facilitate mentee efforts to become independent in their own classrooms. In another case, the mentor spoke about the tension of addressing anticipatory awareness because of taken-for-
granted assumptions that come with experience. She had forgotten to draw the mentee’s attention to the necessary process of doing a head count before leaving with students on a field trip. In this instance, an unapproved student attendee attempted to unofficially join the field trip group, and this caused confusion and stress for the mentor after the fact. Knowing that they are capable of making unintentional assumptions by not anticipating potential mentee needs created tension for the mentor. The conscious, intellectual tension of mentoring was reported as a challenge by Group 1 participants in this study.

The majority of challenges were reported by Group 1 mentors. These data suggest that mentors who have an understanding of the role and a defined sense of purpose in enacting it experience tensions and anxieties in the context of their practice. They appear to view themselves as colleagues with an active, mindful role to play. Tensions arise as a result of the scarcity of time to perform the role well. Group 1 mentors’ awareness about effective communication, preserving the relationship, navigating instructional priorities, the intellectual commitment, and accountability serve their mentee effectively resulted in tension as part of the mentoring process. Group 1 mentors communicated an understanding of the dynamic tensions that accompany the role for them. This understanding may be the result of their mentor-driven perspective that appears to be purposeful in different ways from Group 2 mentors. Group 1 mentors viewed the role as complex, intellectual, and intentional work. Group 2 mentors identified fewer tensions, perhaps because of their mentee-driven, responsive orientation to the role as discussed previously.

Discussion of Mentor Challenges and Tensions

Primarily Group 1 mentors in this study confirm that teacher leaders tend to experience challenges and tensions while enacting a teacher leadership mentoring role. Like teacher leaders in the literature, Group 1 NTIP mentors are not unencumbered. For instance, they report the scarcity of time and access that has been identified previously in the literature (Smylie & Denny, 1990). However, unlike teacher leaders in the literature who have exclusively experienced micro-political challenges of contested ground (Little, 1995) with colleagues in their departments and challenges of norms of equality, autonomy and privacy (Feeney, 2009; Little, 1995; Siskin, 1994; Smylie & Denny, 1990) that operate in secondary schools, data about the tensions experienced by NTIP teacher leaders in this study reveal additional and different dimensions.
These challenges extend beyond those tensions previously identified in the literature with respect to the micro-politics of departmental tensions.

Norms of privacy, autonomy, and equality (Little, 1990a) do not appear to impact the work of NTIP mentors with novice teachers. On the contrary, the majority of tensions experienced by Group 1 NTIP mentors in this study deal primarily with internal, self-imposed challenges as a result of feeling the weight of the responsibility, a desire to preserve respectful relationships, and the need to grapple with the conceptual complexities of the mentoring role. These ongoing tensions need to be managed as mentors engage with their novice teacher colleagues. As change agents who work in collaboration with their mentees, moving beyond norms of autonomy (Little, 1992), Group 1 mentors in this study are challenged by time, a sense of responsibility, and the sensitivity of colleagueship. These findings suggest that mentors view their role as complex; when executed with intention, purpose, and understanding of the role, mentoring is challenging. While enacting their role, mentors navigate the external tension of time; however, the majority of the challenges cited by participants in this study were of an internal, self-imposed nature, arising from an awareness about and desire to maintain the professional relationship.

Group 1 mentor participants in this study experienced tensions that reinforce Bascia and Hargreaves’ (2000) contention that when implementing educational change, teachers encounter technical, intellectual, socio-emotional, and socio-political challenges. Cognitive, emotional, and socio-political complexity is clearly embedded in the roles of these teacher leaders. According to the change literature, Bascia & Hargreaves (2000) cite the presence of intellectual demands because teaching is “complex work requiring sophisticated professional judgment that draws on deep intellectual resources of knowledge, expertise, reflection, research and continuous learning” (p. 7). As part of mentoring implementation, mentor comments attest to metacognitive challenges as they engage in “conscious work” with intention and with genuine self-reflection about the personal gaps and areas of potential growth that mentoring brings. Mentoring, like teaching is “profoundly intellectual in its underpinning purposes as well as in its complexity” (p. 8).

Emotional challenges also surfaced in this study paralleling previous research findings (Hargreaves, 1998; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). Mentor participants identified the pressure of accountability in enacting this role. Mentors want their mentees to be successful and they feel
the pressure of “helping in the best way possible.” They feel responsible for anticipating mentee needs, and creating safe places for mentee risk-taking to occur. As well, tensions arise when mentors strive to frame their comments as non-evaluative in the interests of preserving the professional relationship. They are reluctant to have power over (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000) mentees, as they understand that they are colleagues who have no license to be evaluative. Mentors are aware of the sensitivity in delivering feedback and in promoting confidence and growth in new teachers. This group of mentors reveals that they make heavy emotional investments (Hargreaves, 1998) in their work with novice teacher colleagues.

Paradoxically, within this deep professional commitment to support others, Group 1 NTIP mentors create stress for themselves to be the best that they can be so as not to fail their mentees. This is a different paradox from the one experienced by teacher leaders in the literature, who experience stress because of their inability to perform the role because of existing cultural norms of autonomy despite their intentions. For NTIP mentors, while aspiring to calm the waters for mentees, they inadvertently find themselves navigating the turbulent waters of self-imposed high expectations. Their tensions emerge as they enact the role they perceive as being beyond a buddy system mentality.

Other external challenges for a few of the mentors fall into the category of the socio-political. For instance, mentors referenced navigating the complexities of working with a resistant colleague, and the importance of adhering to regulations in the Collective Agreement. These tensions are not mentioned in the teacher leadership literature. Mentor tensions and challenges differ from those in the existing literature where teacher leaders encounter political and departmental tensions.

A noticeable difference in reporting tensions is evident between Group 1 and Group 2 mentors. Mentors in Group 2 reported very few challenges, unlike Group 1 mentors who discussed the challenges of finding time, communicating effectively, processing intellectually, and participating collegially and accountably. I speculate that perhaps given their more defined sense of the role and expectations around conducting the mentoring that mentors derived from the professional learning sessions, Group 1 mentors enact their role with more awareness. They are likely engaged in the role with a different sense of purpose, therefore, experiencing the challenges they identified. As they work intentionally with novice colleagues, they have awareness about communication and skills they learned and define their role differently. In
keeping with their mentor-driven, intentional approach, they perceive the act of mentoring to be challenging. In contrast, mentors in Group 2 reported minimal challenges. This lack of challenge may be the result of their individually constructed expectations for the role and their sense of mentoring as availability and the provision of aid. Role definition of mentoring as assistance may require less time, and less relational, emotional and intellectual investment, and may therefore result in fewer tensions for Group 2 mentors.

With respect to the conceptual framework, my assumption, based on the literature review, was that mentors would experience tensions. In fact, data confirm this assumption through mentor-reported challenges that echo those identified by Bascia and Hargreaves (2000). I speculate that mentors in Group 2 identified minimal challenges because of their reactive, improvisational, mentee-driven stance of the role as previously described. As well, without professional learning about the role and about the importance of communication in the mentoring process, Group 2 mentors may operate with a different definition and role understanding, making their perception of mentoring less complex and tension-ridden.

**Conclusion**

Mentors in this study resoundingly define themselves as leaders who straddle the spheres of formal and informal leadership. In their minds, mentoring is an expression of informal teacher leadership suggesting that they fulfill an implicit policy intention for mentors as leading new teachers as part of the induction experience. This finding may provide useful for administrators who are in a position to nurture this type of leadership and by extension the professional collaboration between mentors and mentees.

Mentor descriptions of their practices provide definition to mentor teacher leadership role in their context. As teacher leaders, they perform the role by modelling collaborative assessment and instructional transparency, professional learning and by serving as models of professional moral purpose. In this sense they are participating as change agents, sowing the seeds of collaborative professional learning and moral purpose. Both instructional transparency and moral purpose (Fullan, 1993, 2004) are powerful dispositions for agents of change and speak to the positive influence that mentors provide for novice teachers. Mentors provide more than emotional support as they transition new teachers into the profession.
Emerging from this study are insights into the influence of mentor previous learning about the role. Study findings suggest that professional learning about the role influences conceptions and experiences of the role, including the complexity of mentoring with respect to tensions and benefits. Mentors who operate with an informed sense of the role report challenges and tensions and may experience greater anxiety while they engage in the role, and may need additional administrative and district support to enact it.
Chapter 6: Mentor Role Understanding and Enactment Over Time (How do mentor experiences with new teachers and other stakeholders shape their sense of the mentor role and their subsequent practices over time?)

Introduction

This chapter presents findings in connection with research question #3 – *How do mentor experiences with new teachers and other key stakeholders shape their sense of the mentor role and their subsequent practices over time?* This question was designed to explore whether and how mentor understanding about their role is impacted by their ongoing mentoring experiences with their mentees, colleagues, and principals. In order to understand how mentors perceive the role over time, mentors were asked to comment upon whether and how their practices have changed as a result of repeated opportunities to mentor a new teacher. The discussion below highlights mentor accounts of the changes in their understanding about the role resulting from their on-going interaction with new teachers and/or professional learning about the role. Mentors were also asked to synthesize their learning by anticipating what novice mentors might need to know as they embark on the role of mentoring a new teacher and to envision their role in the future. This line of inquiry also discovered evolved mentor role priorities as a result of their repeated mentoring experiences. This chapter details a continuum of progression in mentor understanding and role enactment. It concludes with confirmation that mentor role conception and enactment is influenced by experiences with mentees over time. These findings also confirm that policy implementation is co-constructed in social contexts.

Evolved Mentor Understanding and Enactment

With the exception of one mentor in Group 2, all participants in both Group 1 and Group 2 acknowledged that their understanding and practices have evolved over time as they repeatedly mentored new teachers. In summary, nearly all mentors note a shift in understanding and practices. Not surprisingly, almost all of the mentors in Group 2, who have not participated in prior professional learning, attributed their deeper understanding of the role to experience. In addition to experience, Group 1 mentors also identified explicit professional learning about the role and reflection as key factors that led to their revised understanding. Nevertheless, these mentor-supplied data confirm that most mentors do, in fact, experience an evolution or
progression in their identity or perception of the role as a result of their experiences and professional learning. As they interact with novice colleagues, mentors appear to co-construct their understanding of their role over time along a continuum as described in Figure 4.

**From expert to facilitator and co-learner.**

When invited to comment upon how repeated opportunities to mentor have had an impact on their understanding of the role, a majority of mentors (10) from both Group 1 and Group 2 spoke about moving from approaching mentees from an expert mindset or from a stance of telling, towards a stance of listening. They also made fewer assumptions about mentee needs. As beginning mentors, they began with an understanding of themselves as experts. The following comment underscores this shift from a naïve to an expert stance:

> When I was first…a mentor, I would love to help people. But I saw helping as telling them what I had done, and telling them about my successes and that was the extent of the role in the very beginning. Now, I see it as the exact opposite. It’s not so much them listening to me, but rather me listening to them… I’m more empathetic now and I have to say empathetic because I’ve been where they’ve been, so I can sit back and understand where they are coming from…when they’re struggling. Because of the listening, the listening is a huge, huge, huge component and because of that I am able to really understand where they are coming from, and therefore try to lead them to a solution rather than give them a solution and kind of lecture or preach.

In this case, the study participant articulated this shift in understanding and practice over time. She no longer works from an expert stance or from a solution-based, personal center and makes fewer assumptions. She has become more attentive to her mentee, striving to lead the mentee to a solution through careful listening. As echoed by many other mentors, another participant underscores this change in self-to-mentee stance:

> When I was an early mentor…I didn’t think I had all the answers, but I did feel like sometimes I had a lot to say. I think I was giving a lot of advice that fit my situation rather than listening or helping them come to their own conclusion.

Over time, mentors have learned the importance of collaboratively exploring possibilities and assisting mentees to arrive at their own conclusions. As colleagues, they appear to have adopted a collegial stance, communicating, “I trust you. You’ve got good ideas….”. Mentors spoke about doing “less telling”, more “eliciting from [mentees]” and communicating a stance of “We’ll work it through together.” or a stance of “Here are some ideas.”
Several of the mentors explicitly (4) and implicitly (5) noted that they have revised their assumptions of mentee needs and have learned the importance of listening to ascertain those needs:

I listen a lot more. I let them engage in dialogue. I tend to keep prescriptions simpler… I’ve become a lot quieter. I was very bold when I started as a mentor… thinking of a thousand ideas and a thousand areas they can improve upon… but now [I understand] sometimes they just need an opportunity to vent, an opportunity to be heard, and I think it’s important as mentors that we sit and listen…. As a mentor I’ve evolved in terms of the importance of listening.

Rather than presuming and dispensing complex and perhaps overwhelming advice, this mentor was conscious of the need for focus, simplicity, and divining mentee needs. The importance of mentee supportive listening is also echoed in the following statement from another mentor:

When I first started out, I really didn’t know what I was doing. I kind of thought it was more like team teaching and we’d just get together and figure out what to do, you know? But it has evolved whereby I think I do more listening… I’m ahead of what their needs are going to be before they get to where their needs are.

Beginning role expectations of these mentors have evolved to include more listening to the mentee and anticipating mentee needs.

Some mentors indicated that experience and professional learning has informed them that, given the unpredictable nature of mentoring, they will not always have the answers. Another spoke about the comfort that she has with ambiguity and setting aside the expert stance:

[Repeated mentoring] has given me… the confidence to say, “this is not ready, but this is the best I have right now and let’s see if it works… it has also taken the pressure off me because it’s a “Let’s see if it works” kind of experience as opposed to having to be perfect.

Mentors appear to have learned that they no longer feel as if they are providing mentees with “the Holy Grail.” In light of this belief, and in fostering independence, they have moved away from the expert role as mentor. They make fewer assumptions about what the mentee needs and move from one-directional support to an awareness that learning is occurring constantly for both parties. Increasingly for them, repeated mentoring is a learning process and reciprocal:

It’s a two-way street. You’re giving as much as you’re learning. I think it helps me to grow tremendously. I learn about new resources. I learn about myself. I learn about issues facing new teachers that maybe I didn’t think of.

It appears that, over time, mentoring, like teaching, involves praxis (Freire, 1970): in the process of mentoring, mentors have learned about their role. Repeated mentoring experiences and interaction seem to have impacted this shift in mentor belief about the role. As well, the
dynamic unexpectedness of mentoring has taught experienced mentors that they are “never going to have all the answers.” As a result, over time, mentors seem to have come to view their role as adaptive, open-ended, and less directive. This data suggests a shift from a mentor-centric expert stance, that relies on fewer assumptions, to a mentee-supportive stance.

**From spontaneous support to purposeful practice.**

Within their differentiated understanding of their roles depending on district or independent influence, Group 1 and Group 2 mentors reported that they have moved away from a casual approach towards a more anticipatory mindset about the role in their various contexts. For instance, Group 1 mentors spoke about how they have become more purposeful and more structured with their interactions. Specifically, explicit district professional learning and experience in the role have fueled Group 1 mentor orientation towards planning and structuring conversations to resolve mentee instructional planning and challenges. Mentors in Group 2, relying on experience, recounted how they are more aware of the importance of doing more listening and guiding rather than advice-giving.

Mentors reported that repeated opportunities to mentor new teachers allowed them to revise and deepen their work and to develop an understanding that they are constantly "evolving". Specifically, a Group 2 mentor likened this evolution to the design and constant revision of a webpage. With hindsight and experience, as with the webpage, he has become aware of the need to expand his focus and scope and to redesign his initial construct about mentoring. With experience, mentors report understanding more deeply what needs to be done. As part of their desire for anticipatory support, they are moving towards more focused scaffolding of mentee learning. Explicit move towards purposeful activity is evident in this Group 2 mentor’s comment that acknowledges this shift:

[I am] not so lackadaisical…[mentoring] is something that’s serious, and it has value. It really carries a lot of weight and it will make a big difference in the end.

The importance and seriousness of the role is also amplified in the following Group 1 mentor comment:

Explicit learning, having gone to PD sessions based on the different roles…of the mentor [have impacted this understanding]. Having gone through exercises wherein I was forced to listen, rather than talk. I think those practical sessions where I was forced to go through these experiences have been the most beneficial because I draw on those a lot, and I think about those. They come to the forefront of my mind…. I realize that I am
taking too much…. I know when I need to be a consultant and I know when I need to tell them, “You need to do this.”

With experience and professional learning, a few mentors have moved towards facilitating mentee thinking through exploring solutions and intentionally creating safe non-judgmental spaces for learning. A more mature perspective propels mentors to be mindful of “maximizing the conversation” with the mentees and ensuring that they are “walking away with something” valuable. Working with new teachers over time was described as a “humbling experience” as mentors recalled the struggle of new teachers to learn and the challenges assumed by them in this professional undertaking.

With time, mentors also understand the importance of intentional listening to avoid making assumptions. Mentors identify the need to avoid falling into “the trap of giving [mentees] the answers.” One Group 1 mentor commented that she has learned that she does not need to be in control of the mentor-mentee relationship. Part of her craft now allows her to lead from behind, allowing the mentee to be at the wheel, driving though the pathway of novice learning.

My stance now is more of a backseat driver…. I’m not at the wheel anymore. It’s been hard because I am a micromanager, and so I like things in order and color coded, and so it’s been a struggle, but you also see the benefits in doing so, in allowing [novices] to take the lead.

Because of the need to be “careful about the words” they use, and avoid telling mentees what to do, mentors expressed a need to refrain from providing answers and solutions in order to support the new teacher’s problem-solving development. Mentors advise, “Try not to talk too much. Try to listen more. Try to be helpful without hovering. Don’t be a helicopter.” These experienced mentors understand the importance of giving up control. They would like potential new mentors to function more as coaches, rather than as experts, and as role models who demonstrate an adaptive, optimistic professional outlook that communicates an attitude of “We can deal with anything that comes our way.”

Mentors in this study admitted the need for mentors to be organized, accountable, and committed. This organization involves collaborating with the mentee to develop a structured plan to ensure that the mentee’s needs, requests, and anticipated challenges are addressed. To illustrate, for a Group 1 mentor, this means being prepared in a planned way:

There’s a time commitment…[mentoring] is beyond being available…[potential mentors] need to understand that there’s time that’s going to get sucked up…but there are also
things that you need to think about ahead of time. You need to kind of pre-plan where some pitfalls may happen and, intervene in a helpful, suggestive way so that you get the job done without there being disasters.

Forward planning is essential to circumvent potential problems that might professionally ensnare the unsuspecting, inexperienced mentee. With experience, mentors have learned to operate with a degree of foresight:

I will step back and think, “This could have been avoided if we had this conversation, or this could have been dealt with differently if we had looked at this sooner.

By “alleviating future stress” this mentor thinks she is now practicing “backwards design”, where you are thinking about, “What problems can I anticipate?” Structure in the mentoring relationship is recognized as important because it helps to identify progress and growth. Mentors now understand the need to be invested in the commitment of time and energy and to have “conversations of accountability” with professionally committed colleagues. The following comment underscores the seriousness with which mentors are learning to take this responsibility:

Be prepared for the commitment to the role. You have to make a commitment. You are going to develop a relationship with someone who depends on you, who is going to come to you with insecurity but also with some pretty private things that they are going to share with you if you develop the relationship well enough. And you have to be prepared for that commitment; it’s not one that should be taken lightly.

The importance of availability, sincere commitment, and a depth of awareness is evident in this comment. As well, a deep understanding of the emotional dimension of the new teacher’s experience is part of the mentoring obligation. This mentor continued:

[ Mentors need to] understand that there is a quietness. I find there is a quietness about new teachers sort of in the beginning because they’re really unsure. So, make sure that you have the time. Make sure you really want to do [mentoring] first and foremost. And understand that this person coming in has these feelings.

This introspective comment indicates a deep mentor learning about the importance of the mentoring commitment, one that requires patience and understanding. Mentors in both groups have learned to be more focused, more intentional, and to understand this commitment more deeply.

**From fixed to flexible mindset.**

Surfacing over time is an emerging mentor sense of the fluidity of the role. Mentors in both groups confirmed that they differentiated their mentoring practices according to mentee needs. With experience, a mindset of flexibility allows them to respond to individual needs of
beginning teachers. As coaches and supports for new teachers, mentors, sensitive to accommodating the needs of the mentee, almost unanimously (14) differentiated their practices to suit the mentee profile through the use of observation and questioning strategies. Mentee age, previous experience, needs, requirements, teaching assignment, learning style, and employment context impact the support mentors provide. Mentors flexibly provided support in a “case-by-case” format, respecting the requirements of individual mentees, responding to many factors and different levels of success. They individualize their support according to expressed or perceived needs as teachers move through the chronology of semester responsibilities in their first year of teaching.

In fact, mentors compared this individual mentee support with differentiating instruction for students: “It's like differentiated instruction…[referencing Tomlinson, 1998] you really need to be aware of what you’re working with.” Mentors acknowledged that mentees come into teaching with a unique profile to which they attend. The following comment indicates this sensitivity to respecting and individualizing mentor practice based on mentee identity:

So I mean things that are part of a person’s identity… [might encourage you to] initially start to respond in a different way. You know, like the person is older than me, you know, or the person is younger than me. If it’s a man, if it’s a woman, if they’re an immigrant, if they’re not like me, all these things that make up a person’s identity, you may ask different things of them or reference different things.

One of the mentors used a customer analogy to illustrate this tailored approach to mentoring. A service minded mentality focused upon matching mentee needs to support is evident in the following comment:

It’s like dealing with customers, customer-to-customer, person-to-person. You just have to observe them and get a feel for where they’re at. And try to get an idea of their skill set and try to teach them how they can exploit their skill set.

Over time, mentors appear to affect their practice with individualization and precision. In the case below, mentor attunement to the needs of the beginning teacher involves informational, instructional, and metacognitive support:

So it depends on where they’re at with their own transition through their first year because their learning experience through the first year has a different path, but mostly the same endpoint in the first year of teaching. So depending on where they’re at, they might not know where to start or they know where to start but then they don’t know where to go to find the information or they don’t know how to finish or they don’t know how to reflect critically on what they’ve done.
Mentor supports vary from individual to individual, but they also vary from situation to situation. As this mentor comments, apart from the instructional support, their work is situationally specific at times.

So you learn that, you know, 555’s the emergency number … if something goes wrong in the classroom. But if no one tells you that [as a beginning teacher] How do you know what that is until there’s an emergency in your classroom? So, all those learning curves are still happening. And what goes on in your school… what happens at Thanksgiving and what happens on a snow day or what happens on a bus cancellation day when there’s no snow? What do you do with all the kids that are at school if half your kids aren’t there? And, and I think all of those learning curves within your school, for, for any teacher that’s new to a school – that’s what your learning, the newness of school – how to navigate around the building.

Individual and situational support is differentiated by mentors in both Group 1 and Group 2 as they serve their mentees as a result of their evolving understanding of the role.

Discussion of Mentor Understanding of their Role over Time

A key assumption in this study is the belief that learning occurs through interaction over time. Supporting this contention is previous research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), which acknowledges that, “teacher learning is more constructivist than transmission oriented” and that “teacher learning takes place over time rather than in isolated moments” (p. 258). Through repeated involvement in this role or through professional learning, mentors indicated altered beliefs, understanding, and practices shifting towards a more constructivist approach. Both Group 1 and Group 2 mentors experience similar evolutionary shifts, suggesting that they are being influenced by experiences with mentees. Also confirming this assumption is sense-making theory (Coburn, 2005; Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002) which asserts that policy is co-constructed through social interaction. Data derived from this study confirm that mentor beliefs, understanding, practices, and vision have been shaped through ongoing interaction with mentees. More specifically, mentors noted a shift from an expert stance to an exploratory, collaborative one as they engage over time with mentees, implying that mentoring can extend to joint work and a concerted effort on the mentor’s part to engage in “the real work of learning about teaching” (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995, p. 185). Over time, mentors have abandoned a sense of their role as transmitters of information and knowledge providers in favour of a role as co-learners. Repeated opportunities to mentor new teachers have had an impact on mentor understanding of the role. This finding offers insight into the dynamics
of mentoring deemed absent in the research (Little, 1990b). Findings from this study confirm the contention that mentoring as an educative practice, like teaching, “must be learned over time” (Schwille, 2008, p.140).

Data also inform the conceptual framework, confirming that mentor understanding of the role deepens with time, with learning, and with experience. Mentors appear to move from a preliminary understanding of their role towards a heightened sense of the commitment. As a result of this understanding, mentor practices shift as well; mentors become more formalized and purposeful with practice over time. They are report being intentional about anticipating mentee needs as the year progresses. They also become more conscious about communication, listening non-judgementally, and encouraging mentees to explore solutions to their problems rather than focusing upon on advice-giving.

With regard to the conceptual framework, perhaps a new orientation towards teaching is emerging with regard to an adaptive orientation. Mentors seem to be operating within a mindset of adaptability that involves collaboration and flexibility.

**Conclusion**

Findings discussed in this chapter enhance research knowledge about mentor role understanding over time suggesting that mentors experience an evolution in their role conception and enactment as a result of their experiences with mentees and professional learning.

Over time, mentor role conception and practice shift from a mentor-centric stance to a broader mentee-supportive stance. With time and experience, mentors express more comfort with being adaptive as they grow to understand that the role encompasses a more collaborative, more purposeful enactment. However, an interesting discrepancy is evident in this finding. Adaptiveness may be a variable orientation. For instance, both Group 1 and Group 2 mentors convey this progression from expert-to-mentee-minded practice, an evolution which appears to conflict with Group 1 mentor-driven policy understanding determined earlier. Perhaps Group 1 mentors are driven by both a mentor-dependent and a mentee-supportive stance, making their adaptiveness two dimensional. They adaptively respond to mentees as their understanding evolves; however, this adaptability rests on a foundation of policy understanding that is mentor-driven. They have evolved from an expert to mentee focus as they enact their role with mentor-driven intentionality. Group 2 mentors, who base their policy understanding on being mentee-
driven, may maintain this tendency within in their evolved practices. Perhaps they continue to be reactive and mentee driven within the context of their policy foundation and in their practice. Their adaptiveness is one dimensional. In other words, both policy understanding and evolved role understanding influence mentor role enactment. In their policy understanding and in their practices, they are mentee-driven. This discrepancy may result in varying degrees of collaboration and support for mentees.

Findings in this chapter confirm that policy implementation is co-constructed through the interaction of mentors and their mentees in social contexts and that teachers do transform policy. Findings also indicate that mentoring is a practice that deepens and is learned over time, supporting the contention that educative mentoring versus social support is a learned practice.
Chapter 7: Influence of School and District Context (How is mentor understanding shaped by school and district context?)

Introduction

This chapter presents findings related to research question #4 - How is mentor understanding being shaped by school and district context? This question was intended to examine whether and how school and district factors impact mentor enactment or understanding of their role. To gather data for this section, mentors were asked to comment upon the supports that they have received at the school and at the district level to explore how both are shaping mentor understanding and enactment of the role. The discussion below highlights mentor views on the influence of school, administrator, and district supports on their role.

School Support

Participants in both groups and across levels of experience unanimously identified the school administrator as the primary positive, contextual factor influencing their mentoring work. In terms of formal assistance, mentors indicated that administrators supported them by endorsing their access of district-allocated release days to meet their professional learning goals, by highlighting professional learning opportunities, and by encouraging the participants to attend district mentor-mentee workshops.

Mentors viewed administrators’ sanctioning their release time as the most significant support. According to research participants, administrators demonstrated support by “valuing” the mentoring program, “keeping it front and center” and “promoting the program” in the school. The freedom to access release days enhanced mentor confidence that they had administrator support. With respect to administrative trust, mentors commented, “they’d give you your release time no problems, no questions asked.” This sentiment is also illustrated in the statement below.

My principal has been extremely supportive. … and she’s been allowing me …to be released from school. So I haven’t had to worry about that.

This statement implies that accessing release time could conceivably be a “worry.” However, in this case, as in others’ experiences, administrative sanctioning of release time access liberated this mentor without impediments. Another mentor identified a similar theme whereby the administrator ensured the following:
Creating the feeling around taking [release] time together...that it was a good thing to do...valuing the process and communicating through the day-to-day pieces that [mentoring] is important, as distinguished from lip service.

Some Group 1 mentors noted that their administrators also facilitated collaborative learning for them and for their new teachers by encouraging them to attend district professional learning sessions. They ensured that NTIP participants were aware of district professional learning opportunities and supported their attendance in the event that they had missed the posting.

The principal was very, very helpful. He supported [mentoring] 100%...He made sure that we realized that we had some allotted time where we could get together during the school day. He would just highlight...opportunities, made sure we knew about [them] ahead of time so we could...get organized.

One of the mentors spoke about how the administrator creatively found time through strategic use of support staff during assembly periods so that mentor and mentee could meet to work together.

In a few cases, the administrator empowered mentors in the school by providing structure and resources that supported mentors in organizing site-based orientation and professional learning for new teachers. In these cases, the principal formalized the NTIP structure by encouraging a mentor leadership team to determine and coordinate school-based supports for new teachers. This team surveyed new teachers to determine needs and organized on-going meetings and professional learning throughout the year. The following comment explains this structure:

Our principal has been very big on supporting PD around professional development and the NTIP program and setting things up so we’ve got a structure of NTIP leaders and a kind of hierarchical organization that in the past we didn’t really have. It was a lot more formal. Now there is much more of a process and you can go with your mentee to PD and you can learn together. So, there is much more of that than there was before...

With respect to administrative support for establishing school-based structures, this same mentor comments:

I think that a supportive administration is critical to having a successful mentoring program because if you don’t have their support it just makes things more difficult to organize and run. The [NTIP] committee was his idea, but the execution and the overall vision came from the [mentors]...just emphasizing his belief in the mentorship committee and following up with mentors and mentees, I think, has made a really positive impact on the program and on the school.
Another administrator also encouraged a department NTIP mentor designate to facilitate mentor/mentee gatherings at the school. It appears that administrator support for release from classroom responsibilities to assume the role of the mentor surfaces as one of the primary elements in supporting mentor role enactment at the school level.

**District Support**

For mentors in Group 1, attending district-provided professional learning supported by release time was an enabling factor in role enactment. District workshops provided Group 1 mentors with opportunities to learn about the role, about how to support mentees, and about how to converse with mentees. As well, mentor-mentee professional learning opportunities created a sense of community extending beyond the school.

One of the mentors commented that the NTIP professional learning sessions “legitimizes” the importance of the role and creates a “feeling of value…that [mentorship] is a pretty important piece…that this is something important, something that’s valued in my organization, my profession.” Opportunities to learn about the role and about the skills for conducting it surfaced as being important.

The PD around the mentor role…understanding what your role is and how to be reflective and ask the right questions…how to communicate better with your mentee was really helpful.

In discussing the district-provided professional learning, another of the mentors commented:

The idea of framing the conversation, I thought, was really, really valuable because sometimes you…don’t know how to approach [the conversation], how much talking you should do, how to keep the conversation going. It helps [new teachers] process and come to their own conclusions.

Professional learning enables mentors to enact their role with purposeful strategies. Mentors appreciate:

Being able to just develop professionally…with that mentoring has been helpful…you’re continually learning about…different strategies that you can use as a mentor. And those have been helpful.

Mentors who participated in district-supported activities operated from an informed perspective and felt valued and supported in their role. This finding is consistent with previously established findings in the literature base (Anderson, 2006; Oakes, 1989; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). District informational publications, materials on the NTIP website, and professional book resources were supports also highlighted by mentors in both groups.
A few mentors in this study believed that, in some cases, mentoring has become an embedded practice in the department culture. Mentoring was perceived as strengthening relationships within the department. These mentors spoke about existing departmental mentoring practices and unspoken understandings regarding who will serve as a mentor in the department. In one of the schools, a leadership team works collaboratively to support novice teachers. From a department perspective, there does not appear to be a “contested ground” (Little, 1995) or tension created within the department resulting from the mentoring activity occurring within it or within the school. This may be attributed to the fact that mentors bear no official title which distinguishes them in any way that interferes with the existing formal leadership structure.

Discussion of School and District Support

NTIP mentors in this study enact their role within the broader school context of administrative support; the professional support for release day access and structural support provided by administrators emerges as a key in-school support. Administrators appear to support accessing of release time; they also sanction mentor absence for the purposes of professional learning and collaboration with their mentee. Free reign without authoritative judgment or scrutiny appears to be a liberating factor for mentors in this study. Principals’ capacity to provide this type of in-school support was also dependent upon district support in the form of release time and professional learning opportunities for mentors and new teachers. Findings from this study underscore the importance of administrative support at the school level and district support more broadly, and amplify previous assertions made in the literature (Anderson, 2006; Little, 1987; Oakes, 1989).

With regard to the conceptual framework, mentors confirm that school-based administrative support is an important contextual factor that affects their role enactment. Administrators who demonstrate that they value the program and the work of mentors encourage mentors and allow them to perform their role. Their facilitation of access to release time and professional learning and support of mentor-mentee professional learning emerge as valuable supports and visible demonstrations of their commitment to the program. School-based policy implementation can be facilitated by district resources to enable enactment of the role as in the case of NTIP implementation in the district in this study.
Conclusion

Study findings underscore the importance of administrators in enabling both novice teacher and mentor professional growth and collaboration. Like formal teacher leaders, mentors as informal teacher leaders, who voluntarily perform this role with no special designation, require administrative sanction to do their work. Such support liberates practicing mentors from experiencing additional tension or worry about accessing release time and allows them to focus on the mentoring more freely.

This study points to the role that administrators can play as formal school leaders in creating conditions that foster and sustain collaboration (Fullan, 1993; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992) and nurturing relationships (Fullan, 2001) that build teacher capacity.

These finding also attest to the importance of district support in terms of professional learning and release time to support teacher collaboration and learning. Professional learning, release time and validation of the role by administrators combine to facilitate freedom for mentors to engage in the role and to learn the skills to enact it.
Chapter 8: Interpretation and Discussion

Introduction

This study examined how secondary school mentors, over time, arrive at an understanding of their role as informal teacher leaders in New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) reform. Data were derived using a qualitative approach involving semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 17 NTIP secondary school mentors who had had repeated opportunities to mentor a new teacher. Participants (male and female) represented a variety of departments from different geographical areas within the district studied. These interviews allowed me to probe the policy that mentors are using in their work, their understanding, their practices, challenges, rewards, and the influences of school and district context on their work as they experience multiple opportunities to mentor new teachers.

The following summary presents salient findings in response to the research sub-questions posed.

Summary of Findings

This study, exploring educational change implementation, was guided by specific research understandings in the areas of mentoring, teacher leadership, and educational change. Ideas presented by key researchers in these areas served as a platform for this research in answer to the question, How do secondary school mentors understand their role over time as informal teacher leaders in NTIP reform?

The data analysis provided in Chapters Four through Seven provided insight into the research questions posed:

1. How do provincial and district NTIP policies shape mentor understanding of their role?

2. How do NTIP mentors explain or define their role in supporting the induction of new teachers?
3. *How do mentor experiences with new teachers and other key stakeholders shape their sense of the mentor role and their subsequent practices over time?*

4. *How is mentor understanding of their role shaped by the school and district context?*

Below is a synthesis of findings in relation to each research sub-question.

**Research question #1 - How do provincial and district NTIP policies shape mentor understanding of their role?**

Data indicate that mentor policy understanding and implementation is mediated both by district-provided professional learning and by mentor interaction with district informational resources with different outcomes. More specifically, mentors who independently utilize district information and resources view their role as improvisational and are inclined to be mentee-driven. As reactive resources to new teachers, they attend to answering questions, providing feedback, sharing information and resources, and orienting the new teacher to the school. They conceptualize and describe their role as “local guides” (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992, p. 14) who assist novice teachers with easing into the school and who employ a “practical orientation” (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 26) as they support new teachers to take risks and to develop as a professional. Norms of assistance (Little, 1990a) motivate them to react in an improvisational manner. Without explicit learning about the scope of the role and the skills with which to conduct it, they resort to “exchanges of aid” and “help-giving” (Little, 1990a p. 27).

In contrast, teachers who have engaged in professional learning about the mentor role understand their role enactment from a “personal orientation” (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p.32) with intentional guidance to surface and explain instructional practice through purposeful interaction, collegial communication, and relationship building. Mentors whose practice has been shaped by district professional learning view their role as mentor-intentional. They understand their sphere of influence to include professional relationship building through collegial communication, in addition to providing informal support as “local guides”. They also serve as “educational companions” (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992, p.15) engaging in joint, non-judgmental exploration of teaching with novice teachers. Norms of collaboration and instructional exploration foster their induction of new teachers (Bird & Little, 1986; Little, 1990a). In so
doing, as well as supporting new teacher development as professionals, they also model norms of collegiality that move beyond providing aid and assistance towards norms of collaboration.

Unexpected findings about how NTIP mentors perceive the role in comparison with associate teachers indicate that the majority of participants understand and enact the role differently from associate teachers with respect to relationship stance, responsibility, and intention or emphasis because of professional contextual influences. With this in mind, in addition to the orientations identified by Feiman-Nemser & Parker (1992), NTIP mentors in both groups function as professional interpreters and as transitional guides, categories not present in the Feiman-Nemser & Parker (1992) framework, which appear to be loosely connected to the personal orientation of teacher development. This role perception provides insight into the continuum of support provided from pre-service to induction as beginning teachers make the shift from pre-service student to classroom teacher. In non-judgmental relationships, mentors help novice teachers to navigate the new day-to-day, school-based professional responsibilities. Beginning teachers are not left to their own devices to “sink or swim” (Bird & Little, 1986). This finding provides emerging insight into the “connective tissue” that exists between pre-service preparation and mentoring as a part of induction (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a, p. 1049), described next in this discussion elucidating mentor practices.

**Research question #2 - How do NTIP mentors explain or define their role in supporting the induction of new teachers?**

Secondary school mentors in this study affirmatively define their role as informal teacher leadership. Their view of teacher leadership fuses formal leadership functions they perform within the school and their sense of leadership as a supportive influence. Their unique perception of teacher leadership permits a dual sense of their role as teacher leaders in their schools; their perception straddles both an informal and a formal view of their leadership, suggesting a hybrid definition of leadership. With this amalgamated view of teacher leadership, mentors view themselves as guides and as role models of collegial support and professional learning. As teacher leaders, mentors in this study understand their role as one of influence rather than as one of title or positional, hierarchical status. NTIP mentors in this study, as self-defined teacher leaders, function informally and non-hierarchically within the existing leadership structure and within their own conception as leaders. Their hybrid leadership perception is not
encumbered by role ambiguity or by the completion of administrative tasks (Feeney, 2009; Smylie & Denny, 1990). Neither is their leadership dependent on structural organization, career enhancement or school-based innovations (Feeney, 2009; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Smylie, 1995). NTIP mentors perceived their leadership role as supportive influence.

Mentor-reported activities also provide an illustration of how they enact their informal leadership role. The data indicate that mentors in both Groups 1 and 2 provide instructional support in the areas of classroom lessons, classroom management, and assessment practices. As educational companions (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992), mentors in both groups perform many practices that engage novice teachers in instructional inquiry and improvement. As teacher leaders, within their described practices, mentors appear to operate as collegial guides, motivational coaches, informal, collaborative instructional coaches, and in the case of Group 1 mentors, collaborative learners. They provide cognitive support (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Schwille, 2008) as they encourage teachers to examine and dissect instructional practice. A majority of mentors provide informal collaborative instructional leadership support engaging mentees in analytical, pedagogical, and procedural scaffolding. These practices suggest collegiality, approaching joint work, in that both parties benefit from and are invested in improvement in instructional or assessment practices.

As informal teacher leaders, Group 1 and Group 2 mentors both appear to be engaging in “educative” practices, consistent with Schwille (2008) who defines mentors’ work as potentially culture changing as they move beyond storytelling, aid, and sharing into the territory of joint work (Little, 1990a) within their partnerships. As educative, collaborative colleagues, mentors provide feedback, sharing in the creation of instructional tasks and materials critiquing, each other’s work, exploring instructional options, analyzing practice, and co-learning. From a leadership perspective, in contrast with formal department chairs, their leadership role is related to practice, not position, and does not focus upon managerial, non-instructional tasks (Feeney, 2009).

Mentor-described practices reveal that they enact their role through Feiman-Nemser’s practical orientation (1990) to teacher education. They reveal themselves to be local guides, educational companions, and agents of change (Cochrane-Smith & Paris, 1995), interpreting the school culture through their practical, informal support and helping teachers to integrate into the school. As educational companions, through their on-going dialogues, mentors function in the
“practical” orientation as they make transparent the elements of instruction and assessment craft with novice teachers as informal teacher leaders. As educational companions, some learn transparently with novice teachers at district-offered professional learning sessions and collaboratively transfer this learning to their classroom practices. As agents of change, they foster norms of collaboration by engaging in dialogue about teaching and learning, and participating in classroom observation. Unlike the teacher leaders described in literature, teacher leaders in this study support new teachers in the role professionally in their first year with a collaborative stance.

I was surprised that although secondary mentors help new teachers in a subject context, the data did not surface mentoring tendencies in the academic orientation (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). As well, given the tensions that teacher leaders can face with contested ground (Little, 1995) and the importance of subject-based identity, I expected more description about subject-specific mentoring activity. Instead, both Group 1 and Group 2 mentors appear to concentrate on similar, cross-curricular areas of classroom management and assessment. I speculate that, at the time of this study, the district was heavily immersed in Growing Success implementation, perhaps explaining why this area received such attention. As well, given novice teachers’ context as beginning classroom teachers, issues of classroom instruction and classroom management likely surface as priorities for mentor focus. It also surprised me that although both mentor groups appear to position themselves as either mentor or mentee-driven, that there was no reported difference in their described practices. However, although both groups of mentors appear to focus on similar areas of instructional and assessment practice, this study was not able to determine the nature and depth of the collegial interactions between the two groups. Given the emphasis of Group 1 mentors on communication and professional relationship building, the strategies they have learned, and their expressed tensions, I can only speculate that the nature and content of the discussions might have been structured and focused differently.

Consistent with findings by Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005), Cochran-Smith & Paris (1995), and Feiman-Nemser & Parker (1992), all NTIP mentors in this study confirm the notion of reciprocity and define the ways in which mentoring is reciprocal. Their comments both amplify and augment findings by Real and Kwan (2005); for instance, Group 1 mentors grow in the areas of confidence-building, acquiring mentoring knowledge and skills, and networking or relationship building. Group 2 mentors cite general reflection and confidence as outcomes.
Findings in this study differ from those in previously-identified literature in terms of mentor sense of moral purpose as part of mentor role understanding and reciprocity. A number of mentors spoke about how it was important for them to “pay it forward”. A sense of responsibility and obligation influences their role enactment. Like mentors in the literature base, mentors in this study are challenged by time (Smylie & Denny, 1990) even though they are supported with release time. However, unlike those described in the literature, participants in this study are challenged by their deep sense of responsibility and the sensitivity of colleagueship as change agents. They express a professional accountability to help their mentee to be successful and to support newcomers in the profession. Group 1 mentors in possession of learning about the role have a more complex understanding of their role and their sense of purpose. They also identified emotional tensions and surfaced the cognitive challenges of purposeful mentoring. Their experience of socio-political tensions results from their awareness of professional parameters rather than those of contested ground or of subject or department identity (Little, 1995). Mentors appear not to be focused upon role definition or subject specialty orientation; rather, they define themselves by their desire to be positive, collaborative, accountable influences.

These study findings offer a glimpse into “the nature and function of teacher leadership” and into mentor practices previously identified as insufficiently addressed in the literature (Little, 1990b; Smylie, 1995). NTIP mentor-reported practices provide an indication of the dynamics and impact on mentors as teacher leaders and as participants in this educational change.

Research question #3 - How do mentor experiences with new teachers and other key stakeholders shape their sense of the mentor role and their subsequent practices over time?

Mentors’ experiences with novice teacher colleagues influence the way they understand and enact the role over time. They make sense of and co-construct their understanding (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002) and evolve their enactment, learning from their interactions. Mentors believe they are professional guides, supporting new teachers by bridging the conceptual with the practical aspects of being a teacher. Their work is governed by a strong desire to model on-going professional learning and by a moral purpose to
perpetuate a cycle of mentoring with their “pay it forward” mindset. As a result of doing this work over time, mentors come to view their role as less fixed, and they have developed a more flexible mindset about their mentoring. As NTIP mentors in this study engage in on-going mentoring experiences, they recount the ways in which their understanding of the role has been shaped by this interaction as they socially construct their role. These study findings parallel the notion that educative mentoring “is a practice that must be learned, similar to other professional practices, through engaging in and reflection on the work” (Schwille, 2008, p. 143). Amplified here is her position that mentoring is a learned practice and that “Good teachers do not automatically become good mentors.” (Schwille, 2008, p. 165) Similarly, it reinforces that “the mere presence of a mentor is not enough. Knowledge and skill in mentoring is also necessary.” (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005, p. 680) Data in this study confirm and inform about how ongoing mentoring experiences shape mentor understanding and enactment of their role. Study findings reveal the ways in which mentoring is a dynamic, symbiotic enterprise that leads to new teacher support as well as changes in mentor understanding and practices and professional growth.

Study findings confirm and amplify components of Feiman-Nemser’s (1990) framework of five conceptions of teacher education that describe the goals of teacher preparation and a theory of learning to teach. Her framework, although being used to describe the orientation of educators with respect to initial teacher preparation programs, is useful in examining how mentors are coming to understand their role. Feiman-Nemser identifies five orientations: 1) the academic orientation which focuses on transmission of information and development of knowledge as subject specialist; 2) the practical orientation which focuses on craft, technique, and artistry of teaching and on helping prospective teachers think through teaching situations; 2) the technological orientation which emphasizes learning about a strategy, seeing it in action, practice, and receiving feedback; 4) the personal orientation which deals with guided risk-taking to develop the teacher as a professional, and 5) the critical/social orientation which views the teacher as educator and political activist. With respect to Feiman-Nemser’s orientations of teacher education, findings from this study depart from, parallel, and augment this framework.

As for departures, none of the mentors identified knowledge of the academic subject matter and pedagogy as areas of focus with their mentees. They did not subscribe to a subject specialist orientation, focusing more generally on instructional, classroom management, and
assessment practices. Perhaps mentors engaged in subject-related discussions in the context of their mentoring, but mentors in this study do not identify with the academic orientation. The transmission of knowledge and teaching of the subject are not the primary foci of secondary NTIP mentors who participated in this study.

Instead of focusing upon developing subject-specific academic content and how student knowledge is developed in subject areas, much of the mentor work focuses on the practical orientation of teaching and assessing, viewing learning to teach as a process of learning to understand (Feiman-Nemser, 1990) as facilitators of mentee learning. Within the Feiman-Nemser orientations, NTIP mentors adopt a practical orientation in their apprentice-like support, guiding mentees to arrive at solutions to instructional problems of practice. In this practical orientation, mentors focus on the elements of craft, technique and artistry. Mentors spoke about how they break down lessons and school-based practices as decoders of instruction and analyze instructional options. In this orientation, mentors support teachers in thinking “through situations where there are no “right’ answers” (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 27). The notion that there are uncertainties in education and that instructional challenges need to be puzzled out is a component of their work. NTIP mentors adopted aspects of the practical stance as they provided feedback and conducted conversations that probe teacher practices. Mentors appear to function as decoders of instructional practice within this practical orientation.

The personal orientation focuses upon the novice teacher who is being guided by advisors to take risks and to develop as a teacher professional. Mentors illustrate tendencies in this orientation as well, as they often recounted the importance of creating safe spaces for risk taking and professional growth, and about how they work with new teachers on a “case-by-case” basis, differentiating where required. Many of their expressed activities illustrate this tendency to guide mentees as they transition from the pre-service to the professional domain.

Study findings do not allow for an exploration of the technological orientation. Some of the mentors identified lesson observation as part of their practice; however, findings do not reveal whether the nature and content of those observations constitutes the essence of the technical orientation. Mentors did not discuss the explicit isolation of instructional practice, observation, and debrief of the strategy. Further exploration into whether or how the technical orientation is present in the work of mentors would enhance knowledge about the depth of their focus in this area.
The critical/social orientation views the teacher as educator and as political activist. In their role as supporters of new teachers beyond the pre-service experience, mentors do not convey an urgent, political agenda; however, they do unintentionally play a role as potential change agents, contributing to the cycle of support for new teachers. Mentors’ view of mentoring as a practice also illustrates traces of the critical/social orientation in that mentors view their role as perpetuating a culture of support and fostering collaboration. They appear to communicate a belief that mentoring can support a “new social order” of support for teachers who fulfill two jobs as mentees: teaching and learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a). Mentors in this study confirm the agent of re-culturing stance advanced by Cochran-Smith and Paris (1995) and Feiman-Nemser (2001a) that offers a vision of mentors as agents of change by working jointly with novice teachers on shared inquiry and learning about teaching in reciprocal, inquiring ways. Mentors communicated an understanding of the requirement to foster confidential, trusting, non-evaluative relationships that enable movement beyond the traditional isolationist culture of teaching. The majority of mentors in this study collaborate beyond providing aid (Little, 1992) and focus on being collaborative colleagues making instructional practice transparent. They also hope to inspire novice teachers to assume the responsibility of mentoring their future colleagues. A few mentors presented explicit views as advocates for students.

As mentors work with new teachers, their understanding about the role and how to enact it shifts with experience and new learning. As a result of working with new teachers over time, they socially construct and refine their role. Through their increasing differentiated and adaptive practice, they also understand themselves to be evolving or “becoming” (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 32) with experience and learning over time. As mentors continue to support mentees, their experience and professional learning causes shifts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), leading to an evolution in their understanding. They move beyond expert coach to collaborative facilitator. They focus less on “fixing novices’ problems” and more on “joint problem solving or shared inquiry” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a, p.1032) and joint work (Little, 1992). As well, they are able to reject certainty and operate within the necessary ambiguity that comes with the role, after deepening their understanding of their contribution in this role. With time and experience, they understand their role as being more complex, more fluid, more collaborative, and more reciprocal.
Such deepened understanding suggests that a new orientation surfaces in the study findings. Mentors describe an adaptive orientation, one that acknowledges that they do not have all of the answers, and one that requires flexibility, allowing for responses in a customized, differentiated way to address mentee needs. They adopt an *adaptive orientation* over time, understanding that they need to make fewer assumptions, to listen more to discern mentee needs, and to respond in a differentiated fashion. Clear to mentors is the evolving understanding that as part of their practice, the role requires them to adopt a flexible mindset as they personalize support that sometimes cannot be anticipated.

All mentors (Group 1 and Group 2) understand and enact their role with overlapping personal, practical, and adaptive orientations.

**Research question #4 - How is mentor understanding of their role shaped by school and district context?**

The opportunity for district influence in the form of mentor professional learning has been elucidated earlier in this discussion. Study findings confirm the important role that is played by districts to effect change (Anderson, 2006; Bird & Little, 1986; Oakes, 1989). Mentor comments confirm that the provision of release time and learning opportunities supports their work with mentees in their schools. In addition, contextual support in the form of administrative facilitation of release time access and encouragement of professional learning also surface as key to the work of mentors. Both district professional learning opportunities and administrative support combine to scaffold mentors in this role. This finding is consistent with those already established in the literature base (Anderson, 2006; Oakes, 1989).

Upon review, this study did not deeply investigate additional school-based factors that shape mentor understanding such as department context. As a result, it is not possible to explain fulsomely and robustly the impact of department and school context on mentor role understanding and enactment.

**Summary of Key Findings**

Study research points to a number of key conclusions in response to the overall research question, “How do secondary school mentors understand their role as informal teacher leaders in New Teacher Induction Program reform?” Below is a summary of these findings.
1. NTIP mentors’ role understanding is derived either from a learning-informed or independently-determined policy. Prior learning about the role influences mentors to be mentor-driven and intentional or mentee-driven and improvisational in their stance towards the role.

2. Compared to associate teachers, mentors explain their role as transitional guides and professional interpreters, helping new teachers to ease into the responsibilities of their new role as educator following the pre-service program. The difference is largely due to contextual factors involving their relationship, responsibilities, and intentions as mentors.

3. Mentors unanimously understand themselves to be performing a dual teacher leadership role with a hybrid sense of teacher leadership. They straddle two leadership worlds: the world of formal leadership, and the world of informal leadership. They describe their leadership role as one of influence and professional obligation guided by moral purpose.

4. Mentors who receive prior learning about the role identify specific tensions not reported by mentors who operate with independently-determined role definition. Tensions in the area of time, communication, collegial relationships, accountability, and intellectual challenges are embedded in the mentoring role.

5. Mentors who participate in prior learning perform their role with reciprocal benefits in the following areas: confidence and reflection, professional learning of transferrable mentoring skills, and networking.

6. In performing their roles, NTIP mentors provide informal supports to ease new teachers into the profession as transitional guides and professional interpreters. Although they provide informal support to facilitate the socialization of new teachers, they also function as educative colleagues, engaging novice teachers in transparent, collaborative exploration of assessment and instruction practices. They operate as models of professional collaboration and moral purpose as agents of change.
7. Over time, mentors report an evolution in their understanding and practices in enacting the role. Mentors move from an expert, mentor-centric stance to a mentee-supportive stance and enact their roles with adaptive flexibility and responsiveness. Adaptive practice for mentors who experience prior professional learning is two-dimensional as their mentor-driven policy understanding drives them to be adaptive with intention. Mentors who independently determine their roles are also adaptive, but this adaptation is confined to mentee-driven support in their policy understanding and intention.

8. Mentors enact their role as change agents who focus on educative practice focusing on collaboration and transparency around instructional and assessment practices.

9. In their role as transitional guides and professional interpreters, mentors support beginning teachers in the workplace context beyond the pre-service program.

10. Administrative support is instrumental in mentor role enactment.

11. District support in the form of professional learning enables mentors to understand and enact the role with increased intentionality.
Chapter 9: Conclusions and Implications (How do secondary school mentors understand their role as informal teacher leaders in NTIP reform?)

Introduction

This chapter presents overall conclusions and implications resulting from this investigation. It synthesizes conclusions by organising them into themes, in response to the overall research question “How do secondary school mentors understand their role as informal teacher leaders in New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) reform?”. This chapter provides a discussion of key themes as they relate to the conceptual framework and to the review of literature anchoring this study.

In this chapter, I also discuss how findings in this study may have implications for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. This chapter concludes with my reflections as a researcher and educator.

Policy Impact on Mentor Role Enactment

This study reveals that policy sources influence mentor priorities, conceptions, and enactment. Different policy sources influence mentors to understand their role with differing intentionality and stance within the relationship. These variable conceptions of the role produce differences in role enactment. Group 1 mentors report focusing intentionally on relationship-building, collegial communication, and guidance. As such, they explain their function as collaborative guides and “educational companions” with “personal orientation” (Feiman-Nemser, 1990) to supporting novice teachers. Group 2 mentors report focusing upon responding to mentee questions, orientation, and providing feedback information. Their focus tends to be more improvisational. They serve as “local guides” with a “practical orientation.”

These findings underscore the influence of mentor prior professional learning in contributing to mentor role understanding and potential enactment. With enhanced sensitivity to mentoring as a role, mentors operationalize a set of intentions and skills, offering a more intentional mentor-driven approach to their role.
Mentor Role Conception as Teacher Leadership.

This study introduces a new perspective on informal teacher leadership as articulated by this group of participants. As unofficially sanctioned teacher leaders whose role was created by the Ontario Ministry of Education policy mandate, NTIP mentors conceptualize their role as informal teacher leaders with a hybrid definition of teacher leadership. As un-appointed leaders, their leadership is teacher-initiated, unofficial, and without formal status within the school. They perform this role without interrupting the status of formal leaders and without requiring acknowledgment, affirmation, or formal recognition.

Informal teacher leadership as influence and service.

Mentors in this study position themselves in a unique teacher leadership role without rank or formal position and unanimously understand their leadership role as influence and professional obligation. While they demonstrate recognition of traditional formal leadership definitions, they operate with a complementary, non-hierarchical, hybrid leadership sense. Role duality permeates their work. Governed by a sense of responsibility, moral purpose, and accountability to novice teachers, they unassumingly and inconspicuously, straddle two leadership worlds as guides and role models of collegial support and professional learning. They adopt a service-minded stance about the role, identifying with a professional responsibility and obligation to engage in the work of supporting novice teachers. As informal teacher leaders, some mentors in this study operate with a sense of accountability to their profession and to their mentees. As free agents unattached to the hierarchical structure in the school, mentors’ sense of accountability to the profession and to emerging colleagues offers a new dimension for understanding informal teacher leadership as influence and service, as distinct from curriculum leadership.

Informal teacher leadership as reciprocal collaboration.

This study confirms and elucidates the contention that mentoring in this capacity is reciprocal. It augments previous research by engaging mentor voices about how their role in new teacher induction is benefitting them as experienced practitioners, voices
previously not prevalent in existing literature. Mentors who participate with an informed sense of the role acquired through professional learning convey specific reciprocal outcomes for them including confidence, reflection on practice, acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and networking and relationship building. Through their participation in supporting new teachers, mentors derive professional knowledge, skills, and experiences. This study underscores the importance of mentor preparation and surfaces understanding about mentor outcomes of induction. Preparation provides mentors with knowledge, skills, and opportunities for connection in addition to a mentor-driven orientation and fulsome sense of reciprocity.

**Informal teacher leadership as change agentry.**

Embedded in this definition of teacher leadership as influence is an ethic of professional generosity; mentors undertake multiple functions as tacit agents of change in fostering a culture of mentoring and support. They are not positioned as intentional agents of reform in the policy; neither are they advancing a school-based agenda. Their motivation is not organizationally driven. By modelling professional support, instructional scrutiny, collaboration, and transparency, they act as agents of change (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992). This inquiry-versus-transmission-oriented role enactment (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995) echoes the change agent role previously identified in the conceptual framework and in the literature. As participants in this educational change, NTIP mentors function as “educative colleagues” (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Schwille, 2008) and “educational companions” (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992) focusing the lens on instructional and assessment practices in a collaborative and transparent manner. For most participants, their moral imperative and the desire to “pay it forward” overrides some of the departmental tensions previously identified in the literature. For most, their leadership is guided by a sense of moral purpose and implicit change agentry.
Mentor Role Understanding and Practices.

This study provides emerging understanding into the dynamics and consequences of mentoring as described by the candidates who participated in this study. Study findings provide an indication of the content and consequences of mentoring previously found lacking (Little, 1990b) in the literature as described below.

Mentoring as a practice learned over time.

Mentors perceive an evolution in their practices, confirming that role understanding and practices are co-constructed over time as a result of learning and experience. With time, professional learning about the role, and interaction in supporting teachers, mentors note a shift in their understanding and practices from making assumptions and providing advice toward a more flexible stance. Experience allows them to become more responsive, adaptive, and flexible as they abandon the mentor-as-expert stance.

Mentor tensions and challenges.

Like formal teacher leaders in the literature, Group 1 NTIP mentors perform this role at a cost. As informal teacher leaders, mentors appear to be able to navigate formal and informal leadership plains without encountering collegial tensions of the kind that are usually described in the literature. Instead of encountering tensions of role ambiguity and interfering with contested ground of subject leadership, tensions identified by NTIP Group 1 mentors are primarily self-imposed. Emotional tension is embedded in this policy as NTIP mentors struggle to preserve relationships, communicate non-judgmentally, and carry out the role with accountability to their emerging colleagues.

Tensions in carrying out the role were more prevalent in the minds of mentors who had participated in formal professional learning about the role. This finding suggests that prior learning about the role influenced mentor awareness of expectations for intentionally fulfilling it, therefore making them more conscious of obstacles and tensions. Their struggle with collegial tensions and cognitive challenges parallel socio-emotional, sociopolitical, and intellectual challenges previously identified in the literature (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000). Such concerns expressed by Group 1 mentors emerge as a
result of their collegial sensitivities, including their accountability to the mentee and providing adequate advice and support. Mentors who self-defined their role were less burdened by expectation awareness and operated with minimal challenges beyond the shortage of time. Mentors left to derive their own definitions of the role were less encumbered by awareness of expectation other than those that they set for themselves. In their self-defined role, they reported minimal tensions.

Mentor described tensions confirm the notion that teacher policy implementation, like educational practice “is simultaneously and intellectually, socioemotional, and sociopolitical as well as a technical enterprise.” (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000, p. 18) This study makes explicit the tensions that mentors navigate in their role.

**Mentoring as an educative practice.**

Emerging in this study is an insight into the potential for mentors to serve as educative colleagues who move beyond socialization support into the realm of genuine collaboration. Mentoring is a collaborative, dynamic process. Educative mentoring involves the commitment of time as well as emotional and cognitive investment. Not only do mentors think through instructional challenges with their mentees, but they also self-coach and self-evaluate. This study also confirms the notion that mentoring is a learned practice.

Mentor insights provide a valuable understanding of their role as motivational confidants, local guides, educational companions, and collaborative learners through their described practices. They model norms of collaboration and instructional exploration with their mentees, who experience first-hand transparency of practice and collaborative endeavours as new entrants into the profession.

**Mentoring as job-embedded professional learning.**

This study reveals the ways in which mentoring can be a viable source of professional learning for mentors. Surfacing resoundingly for Group 1 mentors is the notion of reciprocity that mentors understand to be part of the dynamic of mentoring. Emerging from this study is a glimpse into how, for mentors with prior learning, mentoring enhances learning outcomes for mentors. Professional learning appears to have
the most impact on mentor practices and provides a high degree of support for their understanding and enactment of the role. Where mentors have had opportunities to learn formally about the role, they report learning new skills of professional communication that they apply in collegial situations within and beyond the mentoring role. Findings from this study amplify the notion that mentoring, like other practices, is a practice that needs to be learned (Schwille, 2008). As educative colleagues, through joint work (Little, 1992; Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995), mentors facilitated transparency of practice, not reflective of a transmission model of learning to teach.

**Mentoring as a bridge from pre-service to teacher professional.**

This study provides a new finding about how mentoring, as part of new teacher induction, serves as a bridge from pre-service education to the novice teacher workplace. In discussing how their role connects with faculties of education and the policy intention of the NTIP as a “second step” on the novice teacher to professional learning continuum, mentor-identified support provides an indication of the role they implicitly play by complementing pre-service education. As they describe their function as transitional guides and professional interpreters with a practical orientation towards supporting pre-service candidates embarking on their professional careers, they provide insights into how novice teachers are being supported in the workplace context.

Regardless of their policy understanding, both Group 1 and Group 2 mentors support novice teachers. Whether they enact their role with the “personal orientation” or the “practical orientation,” they serve as transitional guides who provide on-the-job, practical support with the realities of day-to-day teaching for new teachers. They also operate with a view of themselves as professional interpreters as they build relationships, communicate collegially, or answer mentee questions. These findings suggest that mentors are indeed fulfilling a role intended by the policy in that they are extending the foundational preparation provided by faculties of education and bridging teacher preparation programs during this additional year of support. In that sense, mentoring does provide a “second step” for continued learning as an extension of the pre-service year.
Mentors in this study understand themselves to be performing a unique role that serves novice teachers beyond the pre-service year. Their role affords them with more opportunities to engage collegially than in the associate teacher role, as they help novice teachers assume responsibilities that come with being a professional. In this role, they serve as transitional guides and as professional interpreters, roles not present in the Feiman-Nemser framework of conceptions of teacher education.

The bridging that mentors describe as transitional guides and professional interpreters for beginning teachers between faculty and the first teaching assignment was a surprise insight. The role that mentors play as a follow-up to pre-service education gave me a wider perspective on this NTIP mentoring policy and its place in new teachers’ ongoing development. I am intrigued by potentially yet-unexplored avenues and partnerships, given this continuum of support, for aligning mentor work to associate teacher contributions, particularly since future roles for both might be reconfigured with the impending extension to the current pre-service year in 2015. Study findings suggest the potential for strengthening ties and coherence between the pre-service and in-service professionals.

**Study Implications**

The following discussion presents implications that emerge as a result of the findings under the umbrella areas provided below. Within this discussion, I also raise additional questions which might serve as next steps for future research in this area.

- Implications for Policymakers
- Implications for Pre-Service Teacher Education
- Implications for Teacher Leadership
- Implications for School and District Leaders
- Implications for Further Research

**Implications for policymakers.**

Study findings about mentor conceptualizations of their roles provide policy makers with two significant insights. Firstly, participants provide an indication of how novice teachers are being supported beyond the pre-service experience and how
mentoring is, practically speaking, a “second step” to the pre-service program. Given this finding, policy makers could build on this awareness to explore more fully to streamline new teacher induction supports. Secondly, insights into mentor dynamics, including benefits, tensions and challenges, suggest how ongoing mentoring supports can be strategically considered. Evident in this research is an indication of the inherent tensions and challenges that are being borne by mentors as a result of the professional will of well-intentioned, professionally generous colleagues. Implementation of this policy is not without emotional and sociopolitical cost, factors not considered in the fiscal calculation. Therefore, ongoing supports for mentor preparation for conducting the role emerges as a continuing priority. Study findings also confirm that investment in mentor preparation produces gains for both new teachers and mentors. Implied in these findings is a need for continued investment in mentor professional learning about the role given its complexity.

**Implications for pre-service teacher education.**

For faculties of education, the described mentor view of their role as compared to the role of associate teachers informs, in microcosm, how student teacher candidates are potentially being supported beyond the pre-service year. NTIP mentors appear to complement the work of associate teachers in the pre-service year, serving as a component of “an important bridge between initial training and broader professional support” (Rolheiser-Bennett, 1991, p 22). In these supportive, non-judgmental relationships, mentors, as transitional guides and professional interpreters, help new teachers to learn the practicalities associated with their new roles through guidance or improvisational resource provision extending new teacher learning beyond the pre-service component. In addition, mentor understanding about their role provides a foundation for understanding the dynamics of the mentoring relationships that new teachers experience with mentors.

These study findings invite further discussion about how the NTIP can serve as a potential bridge in understanding for faculties of education given the extension of support provided by NTIP mentors. Knowing what mentors emphasize and what they notice as new teachers needs, faculties of education may have a better understanding of the supports provided at the NTIP end of the continuum. Also, given that the pre-service
program will become a two-year commitment in 2015, these findings may serve to inform planning about how to support teachers in the second year of the accreditation program and the type of mentoring support that might be provided. Depending on how the pre-service program is re-configured, mentors may have an important role to play. Perhaps mentors and associate teachers could somehow be brought together to define and make explicit the continuum of support for novice teachers. As Feiman-Nemser (2001a) speculates:

New teachers would experience greater coherence and continuity in learning to teach if their induction into teaching were in the hands of school-based educators who understood and valued what pre-service programs were trying to accomplish because they were part of its design and delivery. (p.1037)

Mentor-described role understanding and enactment might be useful in creating alignment of pre-service and novice teacher learning content and experiences. Further intentional investigation into the transitional support that mentors provide could inform pre-service teacher education programs to refine seamless support for pre-service teachers. In addition, study findings might serve to inform how NTIP mentors can continue to contribute to the new pre-service configuration about to emerge in 2015.

**Implications for teacher leadership.**

Mentors in this study provide evidence that informal teacher leadership is an existing dynamic within this NTIP policy. Mentors enact a form of leadership that is defined by influence, and by genuine, uncontrived collaboration. They do not consider themselves as transmitters of knowledge, adopting instead, practices that are collaborative and exploratory. Given the type of leadership being enacted by NTIP mentors, this study of teacher leadership in microcosm invites a number of potential areas of further research through questions for additional consideration:

- How might mentors be supported navigating their expressed tensions as they continue their work with new teachers?
- What impact are NTIP mentor teacher leaders having on beginning teacher professional norm development through their collaborative work?
• What role might subject department heads, as formal leaders, play in developing or sustaining these collaborative mentoring relationships that illustrate reculturing tendencies and teacher leadership?

**Implications for school and district leaders.**

Findings from this study indicate that the NTIP professionally impacts both new teachers and mentors. Data suggest that both parties derive benefits. Through the opportunities that the NTIP policy has created for new teachers, mentors are also growing professionally. Investing in mentor professional learning results in system gains for new teacher induction and for mentor revitalization; investment in mentors through release time and professional learning produces beneficial professional outcomes for both new teachers and for mentors in terms of teacher relationships and collaborative professional norms. Formal school and district leaders would be well served in acknowledging this existing capacity and professional will. They might also consider supporting this collaboration by recognizing the work of mentors and intentionally creating opportunities for it to flourish.

The following questions might inform next steps for administrators and district leaders:

• What type of ongoing professional development and networking might continue to support mentors as teacher leaders? What forms of professional learning would continue to sustain their growth and mitigate against the challenges they face?
• How can informal teacher leadership be nurtured by formal school leaders and by the district?
• How might mentoring be leveraged to increase organizational capacity and collaboration?

**Implications for further research.**

This study has examined an expanded teacher role in a changing workplace culture as a result of NTIP policy implementation. It illustrates how, in one particular context, mentors come to understand their role as informal teacher leaders. It also details how mentors view their work, their working relationships with new teachers, and their
connection with mentor colleagues; however it also suggests avenues of continued exploration.

Continued research into educative mentoring practices would provide deeper understanding about the content and dynamics of the mentor-mentee collaboration. Observations of mentors’ work with teachers would also expand understanding of the nature of this collaborative work and of the technological orientation that this study did not explore. Further investigation into mentor collaboration might reveal the degree of educative impact that mentors have on their novice teacher colleagues. Research into teacher experiences with NTIP mentors would enable researchers to discern whether and how mentors are leaving a “mark on teaching” and what new teachers inherit as a result of mentor-modelled norms of collaboration and support (Bird & Little, 1986, p. 495). Further research might also provide insight into whether or not mentees remain in the profession at a higher rate than new teachers who do not receive mentoring support.

Further research would also provide understanding about the ways in which mentors are supporting collaborative cultures within their school or department as agents of re-culturing.

A number of additional avenues of exploration with respect to teacher leadership and mentoring are possible. For instance, continued research in this area might also reveal insights into where this type of informal teacher leadership occurs along the path of teachers’ career trajectories. An investigation into when teachers become mentors might provide valuable insights into the connection between informal teacher leadership and teachers’ professional journeys. Secondly, given the tensions and complexity of mentoring, further research might provide insights into those relationships that do not prove successful or reciprocally rewarding. Lastly, exploration of the contributions of new teachers as teacher leaders would be educationally relevant. Although novice teachers are supported by mentors, research into whether and how mentoring provides opportunities for new teachers to participate as teacher leaders might reveal the role of novice teachers as informal teacher leaders in the mentoring relationship.
Limitations

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study contains inherent limitations. For one, the sample size in this district cannot be deemed representative of the entire group of secondary school NTIP mentors in the province. In this study, the voices of only 17 mentors inform this research. Given this reality, it is not possible to generalize to the larger provincial mentor population. As well, within this small sample, in the end, this group of 17 was subdivided into two smaller groups, diffusing my generalized findings to two subgroups: 12 (Group 1) and 5 (Group 2) of the total 17. Only wider scale replicated studies of a similar nature will strongly confirm or disconfirm this study’s findings.

This study surfaced what the NTIP policy implementation looks like in one particular setting in one large school district in the province. Not known is how broadly these views and experiences are shared by mentors in other jurisdictions operating with the same NTIP mandate in unique contexts in the province. In addition, this study focuses on mentor-mentee partnerships in single schools; findings may not readily transfer to those mentoring scenarios which involve mentor teams supporting new teachers in multiple schools.

Variable implementation of competing district and Ministry policies and initiatives is also a factor influencing these findings. At the time of this study, a number of school-based and secondary school Ministry initiatives funded with release time were being implemented in secondary schools simultaneously: Growing Success, Professional Learning Cycles, Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and Specialist High Skills Major, to name a few. Some of these initiatives which also focused on collaborative instructional inquiry may have had an impact on the mentor mindset or school context as part of NTIP implementation. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the extent to which NTIP implementation is a sole factor in initiating or supporting collaborative school or department mentoring relationships.

While this study revealed some interesting insights into mentor perceptions of their role as teacher leadership and into their role enactment through mentoring practices, findings with respect to the intended exploration about school context were not revealed. Although there was recognition on the part of the researcher of the potential impact of school context, it was not possible to obtain significant findings within the scope of this
study. Very little was ascertained about department cultures and the norms operating within them which could help to explain how mentoring is operating within secondary school departments.

Additionally, this study provides insight into mentor understanding and enactment of the role; however, it does not provide understanding with respect to whether or not mentoring influences teacher retention, which is one of the Ministry of Education’s primary motivations for this policy, and which was beyond the scope of this study.

Concluding Comments

This study has informed and will continue to inform my work as a district leader. I have learned a great deal about mentors’ leadership stance and commitment, their sense of the role, their practices, the importance of mentor preparation, and about how mentoring serves as a potential bridge for pre-service candidates entering the teaching profession.

Mentor stance and commitment.

While I have always held a deep respect for mentors who voluntarily support new teachers in this capacity, I come away with an enhanced understanding of mentor commitment, responsibility, and accountability as they invest in the future of the teaching profession. Mentors suggest that the same moral purpose that led them to teaching students also extends to supporting novice colleagues.

I previously surmised that a challenge for mentors would be finding time to mentor; however, I had no idea of the tensions arising from the delicate communication, collegial trepidation, and the intellectual demands of this role. There are tensions, costs, and emotional dynamics with which mentors contend. As a district leader, I will use this knowledge as a platform to discern further supports and advocate for them. I will also find respectful ways to acknowledge and celebrate their efforts and achievements. Mentors take this role very seriously, with the intention of guiding a colleague, and feel the weight of this responsibility. I will use this knowledge to communicate the deeply challenging, admirable, and generous work they do in their schools as informal teacher leaders.
Mentor sense of the role.

This study has informed my definition of teacher leadership. While I am aware that this role could potentially be conceived of as a leadership role, I was not aware of mentor felt and lived experience of this potentiality. My explorations into mentor practices arising from the conceptual framework are intriguing. Clear to me is the significant understanding of how professional learning supports mentor understanding of the role and enables an educative mentoring orientation that goes beyond aid. Discerning ways to foster this type of educative mentoring will guide my future work. Clear to me also is the notion that mentoring is a learned practice. With education and experience, mentoring understanding and practices deepen over time. This learning will allow me to confidently and strategically target funding for mentor preparation, which clearly is a valuable investment for both mentors and new teachers.

The multi-faceted world of policy implementation.

This study at the core unearths some of the complex dynamics of engagement with teacher policy implementation. Implementation nested in intellectual, socioemotional, sociopolitical and technical dynamics unfolds in unique, interesting, and varied ways. Policy implementation is a uniquely “constructive and adaptive” (Clune, 1990, p. 258) process. This study has piqued my interest and curiosity and will resonate in my work and study moving forward.
References


Barth, R.S. (2013). The time is ripe (again). *Educational Leadership, (71)*2, 10-16.


Kane, R., (2010). The evaluation of the new teacher induction program, Final phase three report to the Ontario Ministry of Education.


### List of Tables

#### Table 1. Table to Describe Alignment of Research Sub-Questions

**Alignment of Research Sub-Questions with Interview Questions and Conceptual Framework**

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<th>Conceptual Framework</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Mentor context and policy understanding underlying role enactment</td>
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<td>District Influence</td>
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<td>Mentor practices, experiences, evolved understanding of the role leading, mentor orientations to the role</td>
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<td>District and school context influence on mentor understanding of the role</td>
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Figure 1. Framework for Investigating Mentoring as Teacher Leadership in the Context of Educational Change

Figure 1: Framework for Investigating Mentoring as Teacher Leadership in the Context of Educational Change.
Figure 2: Policy Influence on Mentor Role Understanding and Enactment

District Influence - Professional Learning as Policy Basis for Understanding and Enactment (Group 1)

- Building professional relationship
- Conducting collegial conversations
- Providing professional guidance and supporting risk-taking (providing support, creating challenge, facilitating professional vision)
- Providing orientation to school
- Purposeful, intentional, conscious activity
- Perspective of Collegiality

Mentor-Driven

District Influence - Independent Interpretation of Orientation and Resources as Basis for Policy Understanding and Enactment (Group 2)

- Providing support
- Offering feedback and friendship
- Sharing resources
- Answering questions
- Providing orientation to school
- Improvisational, reactive, responsive activity
- Perspective of Aid
- Mentee-Driven

Beyond the Pre-Service Support Group 1 and Group 2 Role Understanding and Enactment

- Providing non-judgemental support
- Helping novices transition to the responsibilities of teaching

Personal Orientation
Transitional Guides
Professional Interpreters

Figure 2: Policy Influence on Mentor Role Understanding and Enactment.
Figure 3: Mentor Practices as Teacher Leaders, Roles, and Orientation to Teaching

Roles:
- Local guides
- Collegial guides
- Professional interpreters
- Motivational confidants

Informal School-Based Practical Support
Group 1 and Group 2
- Practical advice giving
- General school-based support

Role Models
Group 1 and Group 2
- Models of collaborative professional learning
- Models of Professional Moral Purpose

Roles:
- Educational Companions
- Decoders of instructional practice
- Pedagogical classroom coaches

Informal Instructional Support
Group 1 and Group 2
- Classroom lessons and management
- Assessment practices

Personal Orientation for Mentor Practices
Educative practices

Figure 3: Mentor Practices as Teacher Leaders, Roles, and Orientation to Teaching
### Figure 4: Evolved Mentor Role Understanding and Practices

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*Figure 4: Figure to show How Mentors Report Role Evolution Over Time*
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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A  Invitation for Side by Side Mentors to Participate in an OISE/UT Study

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
Tel No. (416) 923-641  Fax No. (416) 926-741
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario  M5S 1V6
Department of Theory & Policy Studies in Education

Invitation for Side by Side Mentors to Participate in an OISE/UT Study

You are invited to participate in an OISE/UT study being conducted by Suzanne Molitor, a student in the doctoral program working under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Anderson, professor at OISE/UT. You are being invited to participate in this study because you have mentored a new teacher during the period of September 2007 - September 2011, and because you have valuable knowledge and experience in the area of mentoring.

The Peel District School Board External Research Committee has approved this study. The purpose of this study is to explore what mentors are learning about their role as a result of repeated opportunities to mentor new teachers or new LTO teachers. Findings from this study will provide insights into the development of future mentor resources and supports.

If you wish to participate in this study, click on the link that follows to respond to a brief survey http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZP5QDTQ  The survey will take approximately 15 minutes. Information provided in this survey will act as a pre-screening device to determine 25 – 30 mentors who will be interviewed. Information provided in the survey will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with any individual. The survey also allows you to provide contact information so that the researcher can follow-up with you.

Click on the link to complete the survey only if the following are true for you:
You are in the secondary panel
You have a minimum of 7 years of teaching experience
You have been a mentor more than once since September 2007
You have attended PD as a mentor

If you have questions, please contact Suzanne Molitor, the researcher, or her thesis advisor, Stephen Anderson directly.

Suzanne Molitor  
Ph D Candidate, Theory and Policy Studies in Education - OISE/University of Toronto  
798 Lexicon Drive,  
Mississauga, ON L4Y 2P7  
Telephone: 905-276-4581  
E-mail: suzanne.molitor@utoronto.ca

Dr. Stephen Anderson  
Professor, Theory and Policy Studies in Education - OISE/University of Toronto  
OISE/UT, 9th Floor, 252 Bloor Street West,  
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6  
Telephone: 416-978-1156  
E-mail: sanderson@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix B: Letter Confirming Participation in the Study

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student in the Theory and Policy Studies Department at OISE/UT and am currently doing a research project that will involve teachers who are mentors to new teachers in secondary schools. The name of the study is: Understanding the Experience of Mentor Teachers as Teacher Leaders in a Secondary School Context. The data is being collected for the purposes of a PhD thesis and perhaps for subsequent academic research articles. This letter serves as a formal invitation to you to participate voluntarily in an interview contributing to this OISE/UT Doctoral thesis. You have been selected to participate in this study based on your responses to the electronic survey that you completed. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Anderson, professor in the department of Theory and Policy Studies at OISE/UT.

The purpose of this study is to gather information about how secondary teachers are coming to understand their role as mentors in the Side by Side NTIP program. Twenty-five teachers will participate in a face-to-face interview as part of this study. The interview is entirely voluntary. With your permission, the interview will last approximately 45 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked to comment upon your understanding and experiences as a mentor to new teachers. The interview will be tape-recorded with your permission. A detailed summary of the interview will be sent to participants and they will have full discretion to make any changes to the record. Any changes participants make will become the official version of the interview for research purposes and all other versions, including the original audiotapes, will be destroyed immediately. This is to ensure that the record of the interview is one that participants believe accurately reflects their views and ideas. Participants will not be judged or evaluated at any time.

The information collected will be kept in strict confidence. There is minimal risk to you as a participant. Your school district will not be identified; schools or individual people will also not be identified specifically. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools or school districts cannot be identified. Pseudonyms and fictitious names will be used in reporting procedures. Individual comments will be anonymously quoted in a Doctoral thesis for OISE/UT or in a follow-up article(s) for publication or presentation(s). All interview material will be kept secure by the researcher, Suzanne Molitor, at her home. Access to the revised interview records will be
limited to the researcher. Five years after the project is completed, all interview data will be destroyed.

Please know that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or to refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Please feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. This research has been approved by Dr. Stephen Anderson, Dr. Nina Bascia, and Dr. Mark Evans, professors and thesis advisors at OISE/UT, and by the Research Department at the Peel Distinct School Board. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at 905-276-4581 or at smolitor@oise.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Stephen Anderson at 416-978-1156 or at sanderson@oise.utoronto.ca. Finally, you may also contact the U of T Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or at 416-946-3273.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me at the phone number or email address below and I will arrange time for an interview at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your support and participation in this project.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Molitor
Appendix C: Informational/Consent Letter to Participants

From Researcher: Suzanne Molitor
Date: May, 2011

To the participants in this study,

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of secondary mentors in the Peel District School Board’s Side by Side New Teacher Induction Program to find out how repeated participation as mentors has impacted their understanding of their role and their mentoring practices. The twenty-five mentors participating in this study will be selected based on years of teaching experience and the number of repeated experiences as mentors in a variety of secondary schools in the district. In addition, a balance between male and female participants, department representation, and geographic distribution in the district will be sought.

This study will be carried out in the Peel District School Board under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Anderson, Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. I am currently enrolled in the Graduate Program the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am doing this research as part of the requirement for the completion of my degree. The data is being collected for the purposes of a PhD thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles which will provide information about mentoring practices and supports for mentors of new teachers.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing, and to decide whether or not you choose to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Participants will not be judged or evaluated at any time.

A pre-interview questionnaire will be carried out in the Peel District School Board to collect background information about potential mentor participants. With your permission, this will be followed up by a face-to-face interview of approximately 45 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your understanding of the role, your mentoring practices, and supports and challenges of performing this role. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for further clarification, but my primary role will be mainly to listen to you speak about your views, your experiences, and your
insights into being a mentor. After the interview, I will write brief notes that I will use to assist me in remembering the participants in this study.

It is the intention that each interview will be audio taped and later transcribed to paper. You have the choice of declining to have your interview taped. If you agree, you will be assigned a number that will correspond to your interview and transcriptions. This will provide anonymity. Your transcript will be sent to you to read in order for you to add any further information or to correct any misinterpretation. The information you provide in the interview will be kept in strict confidence and stored in a secure locked cabinet at the researcher’s home. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools or school districts cannot be identified. Pseudonyms and fictitious names will be used in reporting procedures. All data will be destroyed five years after the study.

You may at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process. You may request that any information, whether written or spoken in an audiotape, be withdrawn from the process. This is entirely up to you. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it, and you may request a summary of the findings of the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (905) 276-4581 or at smolitor@oise.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Doctor Stephen Anderson at 416-978-1156. Finally, you may also contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Thank you, in advance, for your participation.
I look forward to talking with you and to learning from you.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Molitor

Suzanne Molitor
PhD Candidate, Theory and Policy Studies in Education
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Telephone: 905-276-4581
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Dr. Stephen Anderson
Professor, Theory and Policy Studies in Education
OISE/University of Toronto
OISE/UT, 9th Floor,
252 Bloor Street West,
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Telephone: 416-978-1156
E-mail: sanderson@oise.utoronto.ca
Your signature below indicates your willingness to be interviewed as a participant in the study. You are also acknowledging that you have received a copy of this letter and that you are fully aware of the conditions outlined above.

Name:____________________________  School: ___________________________

Signed: __________________________  Date: _____________________________

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of this study upon completion:  

___

Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio taped: ____________

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.
Appendix D: Summary of Participants

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<th>Participant</th>
<th># of Years of Experience</th>
<th># of Mentoring Opportunities</th>
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<th>Professional Learning about Mentoring Role</th>
<th>District Resources</th>
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Appendix E: Mentor Interview Questions

Opening Questions:
1. How did you become involved as a mentor in the NTIP program? What is it that drew you to this kind of work as a mentor?
   **Prompt:** What prior experiences or knowledge have you had about mentoring that prompted you to do this work?

2. What’s keeping you in this role?
   **Prompt:** At the end of the day, what kinds of things would you like your mentee to be saying about your influence?

Primary Questions:
3. What is your understanding of your role as a mentor in NTIP policy?
   **Prompts:** Where does your understanding of the NTIP mentoring policy come from? Where do you get your information about the mentor role?

4. The Ministry views the NITP as a continuation of the pre-service, faculty year. How does that fit with your view of your role?
   **Prompt:** Where do you think your mentor role fits into the teacher education picture?
   Do you see your mentor role as being part of that continuum?

5. What are some examples of the kinds of things you do together with your mentee? What does your work together look like?
   **Prompt:** Do you observe each other? Plan lessons together? Examine student work together?

6. How has your interaction with your mentee shaped/influenced your understanding of your role as a mentor?
   **Prompt:** How are your experiences influencing your thinking about the mentor role? What are you learning about mentoring from your repeated opportunities to mentor a new teacher? What are some examples of that learning?

7. In what ways, if any, do your mentoring practices differ from teacher to teacher?
   **Prompt:** What are some examples of how you differentiate as a mentor?

8. As you engage with your mentee, in what ways, if any, does your mentoring work change over the course of the year?
   **Prompt:** What kinds of different support are you noticing?

9. Some people say that mentoring is challenging work. What do you say about that?
   **Prompt:** What are some risks/tensions/challenges that have surfaced for you as a mentor?
10. How has involvement in this mentor role affected your professional relationships in your department?
   **Prompt:** What impact is your mentoring work having on your professional relationships in the department? In the school?

11. Do you think your colleagues view you as a leader in the school?
    Do you see yourself as a leader? If so, how? If not, why not? In what ways might you be performing a leadership role as a mentor?
   **Prompt:** Do you have a sense about how your colleagues view your role as a mentor?

12. Some researchers say that mentoring can change the culture of schools, making teachers less isolated and less private about their work. Based on your experiences, what do you think?
   **Prompt:** To what extent do you feel that you are treading in new professional territory in your collaboration with your mentee? What are some specific illustrations?

13. What helps you at the school to be an effective mentor?
   **Prompt:** In what ways, if any, does the administrator impact your success as a mentor? What additional things (structures, time) might further support your work?

14. What are some of the supports you have experienced beyond the school level?
   **Prompt:** What district opportunities for professional learning, release time, resources, have you experienced?

15. What are you taking away from your mentoring experiences? What’s in it for you?
   **Prompt:** In what ways does being a mentor allow you to extend yourself as a professional? What are some examples? (with respect to instructional practice, professional development about self)

16. As you continue to work with new teachers over time, in what ways has your practice as a mentor evolved? What might be accounting for those changes?
   **Prompt:** What’s changed with time and with experience? What might be accounting for those changes?

17. In what ways has your vision of yourself as a mentor evolved over time?
   **Prompt:** What’s different about how you see the role?

18. In what ways have your practices evolved?
   **Prompt:** What do you do differently with experience?

19. If you were to advise another teacher about getting prepared for the mentor role, what advice would you give him or her?
Concluding Questions:
20. What are some guiding principles that you have developed as a result of working with novice teachers?

21. As you look ahead, what role do you see for mentors in the future?
Appendix F: Participant Questionnaire

1. Background Information

This section of the survey collects general background information about you and your teaching and mentoring experiences. Your responses to this survey will not be shared with members of your school or your board. Participant identity will be protected with pseudonyms.

Thank you for taking your time to complete this survey. The purpose of this survey is to collect information about mentoring practices. This survey will not be shared with members of your school or school board. This survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

* 1. Please select the answer that applies to you.
   ○ Female
   ○ Male

2. In which school board do you currently teach?

3. In which geographic area of your school board do you teach? (e.g. north, south, east, west)

4. In which department(s) do you teach?

5. Are you a department head?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

6. How many years have you been teaching?
   ○ 1 - 5 years
   ○ 5 - 10 years
   ○ 10 - 15 years
   ○ 15 - 20 years
   ○ 20 - 25 years
   ○ more than 25 years

7. How many times have you taken on the role as mentor for a new teacher or new LTO teacher?
   ○ 1 time
   ○ 2 times
   ○ 3 times
   ○ 4 times
   ○ 5 times
   ○ more than 5 times
8. How many new teachers or LTO teachers have you mentored in the past?

- One teacher
- Two teachers
- Three teachers
- Four teachers
- Five teachers
- More than 5 teachers

9. How did you become involved as an NTIP mentor?

- I volunteered.
- I was asked by a new teacher.
- Other (please specify)

10. Have you been mentored as a teacher in the past?

- Formally
- Informally
- Not at all

11. If you were mentored, please describe how that experience shapes how you mentor others?

- 

12. What supports have you been provided as a mentor?

- Professional development
- Books/Articles
- Mentor network
- Release time
- Administrative guidance
- Department Head support
- Board or Ministry sessions
- Other (please specify)
13. If you have attended professional development related to mentoring, who was the provider?

- School board professional development
- School based professional development
- Conference
- Not Applicable
- Other (please specify)

14. If you attended professional development related to mentoring, were you given release time?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable. (Never attended PD on mentoring.

15. How often do you meet with mentee(s) in the current year?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Other (please specify)

16. Do you have structure or a plan for these meetings with your mentee?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Always
- Other (please specify)

17. When do you do most of your mentoring?

- Release days
- After school
- Before school
- During the school day (e.g., lunch, prep period)
- Other (please specify)

18. What do you believe to be your role as a mentor?
25. What have been some of your challenges as a mentor?

26. What is it about mentoring that continues to draw you?

27. Would you be willing to participate in a confidential interview to talk more about your experiences as an NTIP mentor?
   - Yes
   - No

28. For the purposes of the interview, which of the following times would suit you?
   - During the school day on a prep period or lunch
   - After the school day
   - A weekday evening
   - A weekend day

29. Please provide contact information.
   - Name:
   - School:
   - Address:
   - City/Town:
   - Postal Code:
   - Email Address:
   - Phone Number:
19. How has your understanding of the mentor’s role changed since you first began mentoring?

20. As part of your work with your mentee, what types of mentoring activities have you participated in?

- Setting goals using the Individual Strategy Form
- Sharing instructional strategies
- Attending professional learning sessions with my mentee
- Co-developing lesson plans
- Looking at student work to change instructional practice
- Observing and debriefing lessons
- Developing assessment tasks
- Completing report cards

Other (please specify)

21. In your role as an NTTP mentor, have you had opportunities to support the learning of mentees beyond your school?

- Yes
- No

22. Do you view mentoring as a form of leadership? If so, please elaborate.

23. To what extent do you feel that your mentoring practices have evolved since you first began mentoring?

- To a minimal extent
- To some extent
- To a great extent
- To a high degree

24. What have been some of your successes as a mentor?