INSIGHTS INTO A RESEARCHER’S ATTEMPT TO STUDY THE
MENTORING NEEDS OF FIRST-YEAR, WHITE, FEMALE TEACHERS IN
DIVERSE SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

by

KATHY ANN ATTAWAY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2007

Major Subject: Educational Administration
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December 2007

Major Subject: Educational Administration
ABSTRACT

Insights into a Researcher’s Attempt to Study the Mentoring Needs of First-Year, White, Female Teachers in Diverse Schools. (December 2007)

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While schools in America are becoming more culturally diverse, the majority of first-year teachers continue to be white females. Although mentoring has proven to be an effective means of supporting first-year teachers, little research has been done that specifically addresses the first-year, white, female teacher’s perceptions of her mentoring needs in teaching students of color. This qualitative research study examined the experiences of eight, first-year, white, female teachers teaching students of color in a large culturally diverse school district in Texas. Data were gathered over a period of 12 weeks. The participants’ responses were collected through individual interviews, focused group interviews, and journal responses to five open-ended sentence stems. This research is an “attempt” to examine these participants’ experiences because although multiple attempts were made to engage the participants in substantial discussion about their mentoring needs specifically related to being white teachers working with students of color, the participants would not participate at depth in conversations about race or culture. They did, though, discuss some of their mentoring needs, which were consistent with the already existing literature on first-year teachers and their mentoring needs.
Three themes however, emerged. They were the context of mentoring, evident mentoring needs, and critical unrecognized mentoring needs. In the context of mentoring, the participants’ mentoring experiences were examined. In the second theme, the participants’ recognized mentoring needs were discussed. These included the participants’ need for support in basic teaching skills and in managing their many emotions during this time. The third theme highlighted the critical and unrecognized needs of these first-year teachers to have an understanding of their own racial identity and how this affects their responsiveness to the cultures of their students.

Recommendations were made for policy and practice so that pre-service teachers are fully prepared to think and behave in ways that will meet the needs of a diverse population of learners. These recommendations should be considered by all teachers. Here, I specifically made recommendations that would benefit the population that was the focus of this study, that of white first-year teachers who teach in culturally diverse classrooms.
DEDICATION

To my husband, Dale,

who always knows just the right thing to say
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Kathryn Bell-McKenzie who saw value in this work. Dr. McKenzie has the incredible ability to polish stones and spin plates all at the same time. I appreciate your support and expertise in making this dream come true.

Committee members Dr. Norvella Carter, Dr. Elizabeth Foster, and Dr. Linda Skrla provided knowledge, patience and encouragement throughout this doctoral experience at Texas A&M University. You are amazing women who promote and inspire others to succeed. I am honored that you would serve on my committee.

I would like to thank the first-year teachers who participated in this study. Their shared experiences changed my life forever. Dr. Ashley must be thanked because this endeavor would not have begun without her friendship. The encouragement of friends, cohort members, and neighbors who continued to ask how the work was progressing over the course of these many years was invaluable. Charlotte Mann was also a great encourager. My life-long mentor, Elaine Matthews provided loving support from start to finish, not only in the writing of this dissertation but in all chapters of my career and life. This endeavor, of course, would not have been possible without my devoted husband, Dale. Although he has always shown love and support in my various endeavors, hanging in there through all phases of this process was a mammoth effort. Finally, I must mention that throughout the twists and turns of my faith journey I can clearly see that God was indeed ever-present and ever loving. I am truly thankful for His blessings.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Tough Beginning, Never Forgotten</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring: A Clarification of the Term and Role</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology Overview</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Attrition and Migration</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction and Overview of Mentoring Programs</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Mentoring Support</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Oriented Support</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Impact Support</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for First-Year Teachers in Culturally Diverse Schools</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Selection</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE       Page

1        The phases of a first-year teacher’s attitude toward teaching ............  42
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

No challenge has been more daunting than that of improving
the academic achievement of African American students.

Gloria Ladson-Billings

The majority of first-year teachers entering today’s classrooms continue to be white, female, and from middle income homes (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1993). In contrast to the profile of new teachers are the students they serve who are increasingly students of color from homes representing diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status (Irvine, 2003; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF), 2003). Though teachers from any background can be trained to serve students from diverse backgrounds, first-year, white, female teachers often enter the field without this training or adequate preparation necessary to provide educational excellence and equity to all students, particularly referring here to students of color, and those living in poverty (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paley, 2002; Porter & Soper, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). This lack of training in meeting the needs of students from cultures and backgrounds differing from their own is combined with the fact that many first-year teachers find themselves struggling with problems such as managing classroom discipline, organizing work, and obtaining sufficient teaching

The style and format of this dissertation follows that of the Journal of Educational Research.
materials (Veenman, 1984). These teachers spend much of their time during their first year of teaching focused on their organizational and managerial needs rather than focused on the specific academic needs of their students (Fuller, 1969; Moir, 1999). Quite often, schools serving large populations of students of color and those living in poverty hire the greatest number of first-year, white teachers (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996; NCTAF, 2003), making these students more vulnerable to failure. Schools serving large numbers of students of color and those living in poverty moreover, often have the highest teacher attrition, which means that students in these schools may continue to be assigned to first-year, white, female teachers in subsequent years (Lippman et al., 1996; NCTAF, 2003). This may result in a learning environment that is less than equitable.

In order to offer students of color and those living in poverty learning environments that promote high student achievement, equal to or better than that of their white counterparts, it is critical to provide first-year, white, female teachers with support that enables them to move from a focus on the mechanical issues of teaching, such as classroom management, gathering resources, and scheduling, to a focus on students. This focus on students would include respecting the students’ racial and cultural assets and meeting their individual academic needs. First-year, white, female teachers of students of color may benefit from a well-planned, sustained system of support that moves the new teacher more quickly through the beginning stages of teacher development to the last stage of development which focuses on student achievement (Fuller, 1969). The first stage of development has often been referred to as a survival stage (Moir, 1999). In this
Stage new teachers are concerned with adequacy issues such as class control, being liked, and being evaluated. The second phase involves concerns about mastering the skills of teaching and acquiring materials and resources. The third and last phase of development is one that not all teachers reach during the first year of their careers (Fuller, 1969). In this phase, teachers are concerned with meeting the learning, social, and emotional needs of students (Fuller, 1969; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Veenman, 1984). First-year, white, female teachers of students of color reaching this stage of teacher development early in the school year may be able to make a discernable difference in closing the gap in test scores that continues to exist between white students and students of color.

Researchers have found that the most powerful tool available to support new teachers is that of mentoring (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Frykholm & Meyer, 1999; Odell & Huling, 2000; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Villani, 2002). Fortifying first-year, white, female teachers who teach students of color with mentoring that moves teachers through the phases of teacher development while utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy may help to create and maintain effective academic learning environments for students of color. This more complex form of mentoring support for first-year, white, female teachers may help academically underserved students of color meet with greater success in school, thereby closing the achievement gap. From my experience as a first year-white teacher of students of color, I realized early on that I was not fully prepared for my teaching assignment. In future years, I honed my teaching skills with the help of an experienced teacher who mentored me through example and concern. Later I became a principal serving four different schools with large populations of culturally diverse...
students. Year after year I could see that first-year, white, female teachers were not meeting the academic, social, or emotional needs of their students of color. I also noted that some teachers were more effective than others in mentoring first-year teachers of students of color. This, combined with my own memories, prompted my research in mentoring first-year, white, female teachers of students of color.

**A Tough Beginning, Never Forgotten**

I can still hear the words of the school district’s personnel director when he told me that I was being offered employment as a first-year teacher at an elementary school located on the west side of town. He added that because I was from the community, he felt I could meet with success at this particular school. I readily accepted the job. I had always dreamed of being a kindergarten teacher. My parents were excited that I would be working across the street from the first house they had owned and just blocks from where my fraternal grandparents had once owned and operated a grocery store. My father’s parents emigrated from Italy when they were teenagers. After selling vegetables from wagons for many years, my grandfather opened a grocery store. The neighborhood was culturally diverse at the time, but as the years passed, it became predominately an African American neighborhood. As a young child, I had gone to the grocery store each day with my mother. While my mother worked in the grocery store I played with the neighborhood children, who were all African American. This was my social world until I entered elementary school at another location across town where we lived. My school friends were children who were white like me. Soon after I entered elementary school,
my grandparent’s grocery store was bought by the government and torn down during an Urban Renewal project in the 1960s. I had not returned to the old neighborhood until I began my teaching assignment. My friends were concerned that I had accepted a job “over there” where few if any white people lived, but I felt comfortable about going to work in the area I once roamed as a child.

When I went to introduce myself to the principal of the school, I noticed that the neighborhood I had visited so often as a child had changed. Federal housing apartments had been constructed and surrounded the school. Also surrounding the school was an eight-foot fence with regular barbed-wire, and then razor-blade barbed-wire stretched across the top. This no longer looked or felt like the community that I so fondly remembered. When the school bell rang on the first day of school, I remembered the personnel director’s words when he said that I was from “this” community. He was wrong. I was standing in a classroom with 25 African American children staring at my brown eyes just as intently as I was staring back at theirs. I was not in a community that I knew at all. School began, and I had just as much to learn as the students.

I recognized immediately that I had not learned enough about managing a kindergarten classroom during my student teaching experience. I had completed the first half of my student teaching experience in a kindergarten classroom serving African American students in a school just down the road from this one under the direction of an experienced African American teacher. I observed the experienced teacher for two weeks before I was given the task of planning and presenting lessons on my own. The experienced teacher, however, was always near. If any child misbehaved, she
immediately put a stop to the inappropriate behavior, quite often using her hand to pop the back of the child’s head or using a yardstick to swat the student’s bottom. Corporal punishment was allowed in the school district where I was being trained. I had not realized at the time that I was not learning how to prevent misbehavior or manage the students myself. During the last half of my student teaching experience, I worked with predominantly white second grade students under the direction of an experienced white teacher. Few children seemed to misbehave, and simply announcing that the student’s name would be written on a clipboard usually squelched any problems. It was not until I was working in my own classroom that I realized I was lacking in classroom management skills.

Day after day for months on end I felt less than successful, due for the most part to my deficit management skills. I would for example, begin work with one group of students while sending the others to work stations. The students at the work centers would soon begin to wander around the room or perhaps burst into uncontrollable fighting. I blamed the children for being unable to work in small groups rather than recognizing that I had yet to teach them the skills of working in centers. Whole group instruction was somewhat easier to manage; however, I could not focus on individual student needs. I did not feel as though I was teaching the students the skills they would need to be ready for first grade. I thought that the students’ behavior was at fault instead of acknowledging my own lack of skills. I wondered if I had made the right career decision in becoming a teacher. I desperately needed help if any of us were to survive my first year in the classroom.
One fall morning I asked two teachers down the hallway to give me some discipline advice. These teachers were African American, and I had noticed that their students always seemed well-behaved when I passed their classrooms. They laughed and said that first I needed to get the students’ attention, and that a leather strap worked really well for them. Again, corporal punishment was being used. This advice did not help me. Even if I wanted to spank the students, it was well-known that the principal, who was white, did not allow this practice in the classroom by white teachers. I remained without help. The sad thing was that I was beginning to recognize that the one student who misbehaved the most was probably the most intelligent child in the class. I knew I was failing him miserably, and my desire to leave this job was increasing. I was disillusioned, and the first half of the school year was coming to an end.

It was December at this point. I found a discipline strategy that worked; I could hold attendance at the Christmas party over the heads of the misbehaving children. Christmas parties were an acceptable practice in public schools during that time period. Three of the 25 parents I telephoned agreed to help me by providing refreshments for the party. I was expecting the refreshments to resemble those from the parties of my youth. They included peppermint sticks, homemade sugar cookies, cupcakes, and punch. The parents brought potato chips, dips, packaged cookies, and orange soda water. The parents also brought a radio to play, and the students laughed and danced. This was not at all what I had envisioned as a Christmas party. I remember feeling out of place in my own classroom. During the holidays I began to reflect upon my teaching and admitted to myself that I was not being successful teaching students from a culture other than my
own. I did not want to give up on my dream of being a teacher. I knew I needed help from an expert. This was prior to the Texas state government’s educational mandate requiring that first-year teachers be provided with a mentor.

Upon returning to school in January, I shared my concerns about my inability to manage the classroom with a district-level supervisor of curriculum and instruction who was visiting the school. Although she did not feel my struggles were as great as I perceived them to be, she provided suggestions on scheduling and the timing of instructional activities throughout the day that better matched the energy levels and attention spans of five-year-old students. She told me to incorporate more movement, dance, rhythm, rhyme, and games into my teaching. These activities were developmentally appropriate for five-year-old children. The students responded well to the changes I implemented. I began to experience success with classroom management, and, soon after, I could see great progress in the students’ readiness skills for first grade. I wondered how much better the first half of the year would have gone if I had received this type of help and encouragement earlier. She began to check on me each time she visited the building. We were both proud of my progress and that of the students. The year ended on a more positive note, and I was selected to begin a summer program to teach students who needed English language development.

My first year teaching kindergarten introduced me to students who were culturally different from me. My summer school class introduced me to students of a culture different from my own and who did not speak the English language. The class consisted of 22 children ranging in age from 5 to 11 years. All of the students were of
either Vietnamese or Mexican decent. In short, we spent a wonderful summer filling the day with art activities, games, and stories in English using simple books with many pictures. During this time I was observed by the principal of the school in which I had completed the second half of my student teaching experience that was in a second grade classroom in a school different from where I had completed the first half of my student-teaching assignment in kindergarten. He was in need of a kindergarten teacher and offered me the position. I accepted.

This transfer came with a fortunate turn of events. I was partnered with a veteran teacher who was well-respected and extremely skilled. She was white, like me, and I knew her daughter who had attended and graduated from high school with me. This provided us with common ground on which to begin building a relationship. She accepted me as her new protégé and became a mentor to me in the true sense of the word. One of the best guidance lessons from her was about my discipline practices. She said that I allowed the students to treat me like a doormat. They were indeed walking all over me. Here I was having the same classroom management problems as before, and my new students were predominately white. This reaffirmed to me that I was the deficient one, not the students whom I had earlier blamed. My mentor gave me specific suggestions for managing student behavior. For example, she said that when a student broke a rule in my class, it was a choice the student was making. The student knew the rule when he broke it, and a reasonable consequence had to follow. She also helped me choose consequences that were appropriate for five-year-olds, none of which included corporal punishment. I watched this master teacher and wanted to be just like her. I was
able to quickly hone my skills under her guidance. As the years passed, the school grew in cultural diversity. I continued to watch this teacher work with the changing student and parent population. Her respect and concern for students and parents from all cultures were apparent as was their respect and concern for her.

After nine years as a kindergarten teacher, I left the classroom to work as a supervisor of curriculum and instruction. My relationship with this mentor has continued, both personally and professionally. At 70 plus years of age, she continues to bridge cultures by teaching English language classes to others in her church. I worked as a supervisor of curriculum and instruction for two years. I was particularly interested in helping first-year, white, female teachers of students of color just as the supervisor of curriculum and instruction had once helped me when I was struggling to survive my first year of teaching. I spent the remaining years of my first career as a public school principal, serving four elementary schools before my retirement. Oddly enough, my favorite memories as a principal were when I was the principal of the same elementary school where I began my career as a first-year, white, female kindergarten teacher of students of color, struggling with classroom management. Initially, as principal, my efforts focused on establishing a school-wide discipline program, which was effective and adopted by other schools. And, although I was always concerned about student achievement, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 increased the emphasis on student achievement and academic testing in schools, highlighting the achievement gap between white students and students of color. As a school principal, I continued to see a lack of preparation and mentoring support of first-year, white, female teachers of students of
color. I never forgot my first-year of teaching and have always believed that ensuring the success of first year teachers would result in years of success for future students. My continued concern for first-year teachers, and more importantly for their students of color, became the impetus for this research.

**Mentoring: A Clarification of the Term and Role**

I began to improve as a teacher when someone stepped in to provide targeted guidance to me that was focused on student needs and how my behavior affected their achievement. I realized the power of teacher mentoring. Teacher mentoring can be viewed as the professional practice that occurs in the context of teaching whenever an experienced teacher supports, challenges, and guides preservice or beginning teachers in their teaching practice (Odell & Huling, 2000). Mentors are key players in teacher preparation. They are those experienced teachers who have as a part of their professional assignment an important role in developing beginning teachers as they learn to teach (Frykholm & Meyer, 1999; Odell & Huling, 2000). The purpose of mentoring is to provide guidance and support, promote professional development, and to increase teacher retention (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). In most preservice teacher-preparation programs, students are mentored by cooperating teachers during their practice teaching assignment (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999; Odell & Huling, 2000).

Once a teacher has accepted a teaching assignment, mentoring may occur formally for an official period of time, such as the teacher’s first year, or for a longer period of time as dictated by the school district (Rudney & Guillaume, 2003). Some
school district mentoring programs will include teachers who are not new to teaching but who are in their first year of teaching in the school district. Baltimore County Public Schools, in Maryland, includes teachers new to their district who have up to five years of experience (Ganser, Marchione, & Fleischmann, 1999). Experienced teachers may also benefit from mentoring when they have specific areas of need (Rudney & Guillaume, 2003). Informal teacher mentoring can occur when one teacher seeks out another coworker for support. “Every teacher needs a critical friend, and that is a mentor” (Heller, 2004, p. 29).

Mentors serve as confidants and are a main source of support to the new teacher. In a successful relationship, the mentee feels “free to ask for help, expose insecurities, take risks, and celebrate successes. It allows both mentor and mentee to discuss, accept, and work through teaching dilemmas with the ultimate shared goal of improving learning experiences for students” (Udelhofen & Larson, 2003, p. xxxi). Mentoring from an experienced master teacher can help ensure that a new teacher moves quickly through the typical phases of a first-year teacher, reaching the ultimate goal of meeting the needs of all students in her care (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). Without support from a mentor, first-year teachers may have difficulty meeting with success, thereby affecting the success of their students. Though this would be unfortunate for the first-year, white, female teacher, it would be even more tragic for her students of color who ultimately would fall victim to the teacher’s ineffectiveness. This study focused on the mentoring of first-year, white, female teachers of students of color.
Statement of the Problem

Mentoring is considered to be an effective form of support offered to first-year teachers (Frykholm & Meyer, 1999; Heller, 2004; Odell & Huling, 2000; Portner, 2003; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). In fact, more than 30 states have mandated beginning teacher support, recognizing the important role of mentoring (Portner, 2003). Though many books and articles have been written on the subject of mentoring, much of the literature targets the rudiments of teaching such as how to set-up and manage a classroom, how to manage a grade book, and schedule the day. Additionally, the literature on mentoring seems to offer little information on culturally responsive pedagogy. For the most part, the literature seems to be written in generic terms with the race, sex, and background of the mentor, the first-year teacher or that of her students rarely, if at all, mentioned. The mentoring literature rarely addresses culturally responsive teaching techniques, “an approach based on using students’ identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources of their education” (Nieto, 2004, p. 402).

Specifically, information that addresses the mentoring needs first-year, white, female teachers may have when teaching students of color seems to be lacking.

It may be important to consider the mentoring needs of first-year, white, female teachers teaching students of color because white, female teachers continue to make up the largest percentage of new teacher graduates, while students of color continue to grow in number each year (Banks & Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994). It was estimated that students of color represent over 70% of the total school enrollment in the nation’s 20 largest school districts (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It was predicted that in 2020, 46% of the
nation’s school-age children will be students of color (Banks & Banks, 2004). First-year white teachers may have had little or no prior experiences interacting with people of color yet first-year, white, female teachers of today are more likely to be assigned to classrooms with students of color (NCTAF, 2003). Further, these teachers may have been lacking in knowledge and skills of culturally responsive teaching, a technique that some experts said is effective in educating students of color (Gay, 2004; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004; Paley, 1995, 2002). “The absence of these cultural connections in routine classroom instruction for students of color places them at a learning disadvantage” (Gay, 2004, p. 228). In addition to a lack in culturally responsive teaching techniques and a lack of interaction with people of color, many first-year teachers spent much of their time in the beginning of the school year learning to manage the mechanics of the classroom such as classroom management, planning, and acquiring resources rather than identifying and focusing on specific student academic needs (Fuller, 1969; Veenman, 1984). Because of these factors, students of color may be the most vulnerable when assigned to first-year, white, female teachers.

Another factor that may affect the educational equity of students of color is teacher attrition. Many new teachers serving students of color do not remain in teaching (Huling-Austin, 1986; Ingersoll, 1997; NCTAF, 2003). First-year teachers are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession than veteran teachers, with an estimated 50% of beginning teachers leaving the profession within the first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Huberman, 1989; Ingersoll, 1997; NCTAF, 2003; Scott, 1999). Larger numbers of inexperienced teachers and high turnover rates among teachers are two factors that “can
have negative effects on the educational opportunities and outcomes of students of color” (Gay, 2004, p. 213). Some of the negative outcomes for students of color have been manifested by high dropout rates, lower academic achievement test results, and a disproportionate number of students of color labeled as those with special needs (Lippman et al., 1996; NCTAF, 2003). Decreasing negative outcomes for students of color may, therefore, be affected by providing better support for inexperienced teachers such as first-year, white, female teachers. However to provide better support for these teachers requires an understanding of their needs, specifically, their mentoring needs. This study was an attempt to determine the perceived mentoring needs of a select group of first-year, white, female teachers teaching in culturally diverse schools from low-income households. The findings were intended to add to the literature on mentoring and teacher preparation. Ultimately this study would determine the mentoring support necessary to ensure that the performance of first-year, white, female teachers teaching students in culturally diverse schools would result in better educational outcomes for students.

**Methodology Overview**

In this research, I documented the mentoring experiences of eight, first-year, white, female teachers teaching in diverse schools. Originally, I assumed that I would be studying teachers who had entered the profession through the traditional university teacher education program. It must be noted, however, that all of the teachers I studied were first-year teachers who were participating in alternative teacher certification
programs. Indeed, there were no first-teachers in these schools, which were selected for me by the school district, that had entered the profession through the traditional university teacher education program.

In seeking to understand the participants’ perceptions of their mentoring needs, a basic interpretive qualitative approach was used (Merriam, 2002). A basic interpretive qualitative approach is typically used when the goal of the researcher is to understand what it means for participants to be in a particular setting and what their lives are like in the context of their world (Merriam, 2002). In this type of study, the researcher is able to act as a filter using an inductive process to interpret the experiences of the participants and derive concepts or themes about the phenomenon that was studied. The findings are then reported descriptively using the data gathered in the study (Merriam, 2002). Using a basic interpretive qualitative methodology allowed me to hear the stories of eight, white, female teachers of students of color in the context of their first year of teaching (Merriam, 2002). From this I hoped to understand how these teachers interpreted their experiences of mentoring to determine what they perceived their mentoring needs to be in teaching students of color during their first year of teaching.

I served as the primary researcher. Because I wanted to study first-year teachers of students of color, I selected a culturally diverse school district in Texas that serves a large population of students of color. District personnel assisted me in identifying school sites where first-year, white, female teachers were employed. I secured permission for participation in the study from eight, first-year, white, female teachers who were teaching students of color. I explained to the participants that I was interested in learning
their perceptions of their mentoring needs. I shared with them five open-ended sentence stems that would be the basis for the data collection. At this time I gave the participants journal pages with one of the open-ended sentence stems on each page. I told them that I would be asking for their responses to these sentences stems periodically throughout the duration of the study. They would have the choice of responding in writing on the journal pages that I had provided or submitting their responses to me utilizing the Internet electronic mail system (e-mail). These open-ended sentence stems were also the basis for the semi-structured questions asked during the individual interview sessions and during the group discussions. The opened-ended sentence stems were (1) My major challenge(s) during the first three months have been… (2) My mentor has helped me or could have helped me by… (3) I have addressed my students’ individual academic needs by… (4) In reviewing my mentoring needs throughout the first semester, it would have been most helpful to have had more information on … (5) I consider my most successful experience this year so far to be _____ because…

The introductory meeting took place in the fourth month of the first semester of the participants first year of teaching. I waited until this time to begin the research so that the participants would have gained experience in teaching that they could draw upon for the study. I met the teachers on the school campus for individual interview sessions. Three individual sessions per participant were planned. This would be adjusted depending on the information gathered at each session, with each session lasting about an hour. We met off-campus at a local restaurant for the group discussions. These sessions generally lasted about two and a half hours. I used semi-structured questions
based on the five open-ended sentence stems to elicit data. The interviews and group sessions were audiotaped. I transcribed the audiotapes myself after each session. This helped me begin my understanding of each participant’s perception of their experiences. Transcribing the taped sessions also allowed me to bring the participant’s dialogue with me to subsequent meetings to review and substantiate responses with each participant. Having the words of the participants on paper also helped me in my search for themes and commonalities during data analysis (Merriam, 2002). The teachers’ written journal responses provided additional insight into the participants’ feelings, thoughts, and reflections (Merriam, 1998). Thus, multiple sources of data were collected. Data collection ended after one month into the second semester of the same school year because it seemed that I had captured the participants’ mentoring experiences and had exhausted the inquiry.

While collecting data, I began to hear similar thoughts, concerns, and experiences among the participants. I began processing the data by first looking through the participants’ journal pages or transcriptions of individual interviews and group discussions for those similarities I had recognized in the participants’ responses. I highlighted similarities in the data as suggested by Wolcott (1994) and thus began to break down the information I had gathered. At the suggestion of Merriam (2002), I began to assign code words and then form units of information, which I categorized as in the constant comparative method which was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Themes began to emerge, however, I realized the themes did not directly relate to my research question. In other words, I was not coming to understand the perceptions of
these white teachers’ mentoring needs regarding their work within a diverse school. Issues of diversity, be these racial, economic, or linguistic, were not discussed or possibly even realized by the teachers. Therefore, the result of this study was not an understanding of the perceptions of first-year white teachers’ mentoring needs but rather my attempts at studying the perceptions of these teachers and their mentoring needs working in diverse schools.

Significance of the Study

A description of today’s first-year teachers highlights the fact that most new teachers are white and female; however, most students are students of color. Furthermore, first-year, white, female teachers may bring little cross-cultural knowledge, experience, and understanding to teaching students of color (Irvine, 2003). This lack of training in meeting the needs of students of color may leave first-year, white, female teacher less prepared than necessary to offer students of color a learning environment that will result in positive learning outcomes. In addition, a first-year teacher often spends much of her time in the beginning of the school year struggling with problems such as managing classroom discipline, organizing work, and obtaining sufficient teaching materials rather than focusing on student academic needs (Fuller, 1969; Moir, 1999; Veenman, 1984). Mentoring is a form of support that may be provided to first-year teachers (Frykholm & Meyer, 1999; Heller, 2004; Odell & Huling, 2000; Portner, 2003; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Rudney & Guillaume, 2003; Udelhofen & Larson, 2003). This study contributed to the literature on mentoring the first-year white
teacher working in diverse classrooms. The findings of this study can be utilized by institutions that offer preparation and training to future teachers and staff development to practicing teachers and administrators. School districts that offer mentoring programs should find this research of use in designing, implementing, or modifying their programs. This study may also be used to highlight problems faced by students of color in today’s classrooms such as teacher attrition, the need for teacher training in culturally responsive teaching techniques, and the need for educators to openly discuss issues of race and culture in schools.

**Conclusion**

In Chapter I, I shared my personal reasons for selecting this topic of study. I then clarified the term of mentoring and the role mentoring plays as one form of support for first-year teachers. I then stated the problem studied in this research, and described the methodology utilized in my attempts to study the perceptions of eight, first-year, white, female teachers. Finally, the significance of the study is presented, and the ways in which this study might be further utilized.

Chapter II is a review of the literature. Reviewed are teacher attrition and migration, induction and mentoring, types of support for first-year teachers, and types of support for first-year teachers in culturally diverse schools. The first section discussed problems first-year teachers face, teacher turnover, and its affects on students in culturally diverse schools. Teacher efficacy and the emotional phases of first-year teachers were addressed because these sections highlight important factors that may
affect a first-year, white, female teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession at schools in which high numbers of students of color are served (Bandura, 1982, 1994, 1997; Ebmeier, 2003; Moir, 1999; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Veenman, 1984). These factors are important to consider in supporting the first-year, white, female teacher in teaching students of color. Finally, induction and mentoring are addressed as one vehicle that can be utilized to support first-year, white, female teacher in teaching students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Odell & Huling, 2000; Portner, 2003; Villani, 2002).

A detailed description of the methodology used to conduct the study is included in Chapter III. The research design is presented along with information about site and participant selection for the study. The procedures for data collection were detailed and analysis of the data was explained.

Chapter IV is a complete description of the data collection and analysis of the data. I carefully analyzed the teachers’ stories to inductively reveal themes about the teachers’ perceptions of their mentoring needs. I provided a multitude of excerpts from individual teacher interviews and from group discussions, along with excerpts from the teachers’ journal responses to support the themes.

Chapter V is a presentation of findings, conclusions resulting from the study. A personal reflection is included. Recommendations are made for universities, educational service centers, school districts, state organizations and agencies, and agencies offering alternative certification programs so that preservice teachers and mentors will think and
behave in ways that will prepare them to work in schools with culturally diverse student populations.

One final note is my desire to write this dissertation in a manner that will be fairly simple to read. An easy-to-read format may increase the reader’s desire to think about the findings in this study and further utilize this research in their own work. In this way perhaps, this study will somehow make a difference for future first-year, white, female teachers and their students of color.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Support is essential to retaining new teachers, but the ultimate goal of beginning teacher induction must be the development of professionals who can help complex learning happen for students.

-Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Cynthia Carver, Sharon Schwille, and Brian Yusko

In the world of teacher education and professional development, mentoring promotes the learning and growth of teachers as professionals, allowing them to improve their effectiveness, thereby maximizing student achievement (Clark, 2001; Reiman & Thies-Sprungthall, 1998; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002). To support teachers, mentoring was introduced in the early 1980s (Marable & Raimondi, 2007). Since then the interest in mentoring has continued to grow. Currently mentoring is provided in school districts across 47 states in the United States as a means to support beginning teachers (Brown, 2003). “Mentoring is an ongoing process in which individuals in an organization provide support and guidance to others who can become effective contributors to the goals of the organization” (Daresh, 2003, p. 1). The mentor offers support while creating challenges that allow the teacher to learn and grow (Daloz, 1999; Daresh, 2003; Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Reiman & Thies-Sprungthall, 1998). Distinguishing between learning and growing, Alan Reiman and Lois Thies-Sprungthall (1998) stated those teachers who are in the process of learning are those who are becoming adept in their instructional strategies. This included “building positive relationships with students and parents, assessment, lesson-planning, classroom management and discipline, and instructional presentation
and evaluation” (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998, p. 2). Teachers who are in the process of growing are those who “are becoming more tolerant of ambiguity, more humane in their interactions with students, parents, and professional colleagues; more principled when facing ethical dilemmas; and more capable and flexible in their capacity to solve complex human-helping problems” (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998, p. 2). Thus, veteran and beginning teachers alike can benefit from mentoring, although first-year teachers have a more pressing need, because they are expected to perform essentially the same tasks as experienced veteran teachers as soon as the school year begins (Lipton & Wellman, 2001). The first-year teacher “is expected from the first day of the job to assume the full duties of an experienced teacher, including instructing, managing and caring for a full contingent of students, along with a multitude of attendant responsibilities” (Worthy, 2005, p. 380).

As a result of this demanding expectation, many first-year teachers have experienced great difficulties when beginning their new careers (Huberman, 1989; Huling-Austin, 1986; Kajs, 2002; Krull, 2005; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Veenman, 1984; Villani, 2002). “Practice worldwide has shown that novice teachers experience enormous difficulties when starting their working careers at schools and many of them fail the adaptation period” (Krull, 2005, p. 143). Those who fail often leave the field of education after their first year. In three years, the numbers greatly increase (Ingersoll, 2003). Teacher turnover affects beginning teachers more than others in the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).
Teacher Attrition and Migration

The teaching profession has a history of losing many new teachers early on in their careers with two components being identified as reasons for loss, that of attrition and migration. Teacher attrition occurs when teachers leave the teaching profession altogether, and teacher migration occurs when teachers move to jobs in other schools deemed more desirable (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Even when highly qualified teachers are hired, the problem continues to exist that these teachers either move to teaching jobs in schools other than the ones in which they were originally hired or they leave the profession altogether (Huling-Austin, 1986; Ingersoll, 1997; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; NCTAF, 2003). Since the early 1990s, the number of teachers exiting the profession has surpassed the number entering the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003). In fact, schools often lose as many teachers as they hire each year (NCTAF, 2003). First-year teachers are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession than veteran teachers. Alarmingly, 9.3% of first-year teachers leave before they complete their first year in the classroom (Certo & Fox, 2002). An additional 15% of beginning teachers will leave after their second year (Huling-Austin, 1986; Ingersoll, 1997; NCTAF, 2003). After three years, it is estimated that almost a third of the new entrants to teaching have left the field, and, after five years, almost half are gone (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Huberman, 1989; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kaplan & Owings, 2004; Minarik et al., 2003; NCTAF, 2003; Scott, 1999). “The data suggest that after just five years, between 40 and 50% of all beginning teachers have left the profession” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003, p. 32). In Texas,
37,000 teachers left the profession in 2004, and 45% of those teachers had 5 or fewer years of experience (Strayhorn, 2004).

Several factors were associated with the high rates of teacher turnover. They were: low salary, student discipline, difficulty with parents, lack of sufficient or appropriate teaching materials, lack of support from school administration, difficult assignments, and little faculty input into school decision-making (Ballinger, 2000; Certo & Fox, 2002; Fredericks, 2001; Ingersoll, 1997; Lucksinger, 2000; Ng, 2003; Scott, 1999). In addition, first-year teachers reported that they often carry the heaviest teacher loads, are assigned to the least desirable schools in a district, or are assigned to situations that reduce their chances of success (Ingersoll, 1997). These situations are those in which the first-year teachers find that they are unprepared to meet the realities of the classroom to which they are assigned and often receive little or no support (Croasmun et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 1997; Ng, 2003). As a result, first-year teachers who lack initial preparation and support are more likely to leave the profession (Certo & Fox, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003). Therefore, teacher attrition and retention have become serious educational issues facing our nation (Certo & Fox, 2002; NCTAF, 2003; Scott, 1999).

Of note, schools with the highest percentage of poor students and students of color also have the highest teacher turnover rates, the highest number of new teachers, and report the greatest teacher shortages (NCTAF, 2003). “Teacher turnover is 50 percent higher in high-poverty than in low-poverty schools, and new teachers in urban districts exit or transfer at higher rates than their suburban counterparts do” (Darling-
Hammond, 2003, p. 7). In addition, culturally diverse schools in large urban areas have resolved their shortage by filling some of their teaching positions with personnel who were uncertified or working out of their field of training (Croasmun et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 1999). These schools were then filled with teachers who lacked pedagogical training (Kajs, 2000). In these schools, district administrators may be unable to plan and carryout effective long-range staff development plans addressing the learning needs and instruction of students (Joftus, 2002; Kajs, 2002). For example, a school may invest a great deal of time and money for materials and training on culturally responsive teaching techniques targeting the needs of that particular school’s faculty and student population. Once the school year ends, teachers may leave the profession or transfer to teaching positions in more affluent communities, taking that training investment with them. The replacements for the teachers who leave may be first-year teachers who have not had the benefit of past staff development with the school faculty. As a result, staff development is fragmented, delaying curricular improvement and creating gaps in instruction for students of color and often in our most troubled schools (Joftus, 2002; Kajs, 2002). Impacted most are students in culturally diverse schools, particularly with students from low income families, who record the lowest levels of student achievement, the highest dropout rates, and a disproportionate percentage of students with special needs (Lippman et al., 1996). Therefore, the impact of high teacher turnover rates and teacher shortages falls most directly on students (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). Thus, it is imperative to reduce teacher turnover. “To reduce high teacher turnover rates that impose heavy costs on schools, we must improve working conditions, insist on effective
teacher preparation, and provide support for new teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 6). In support of their newly hired teachers, most states began mandating teacher induction programs based on the belief that mentoring improves the quality of a teacher’s performance and decreases teacher attrition (Kajs, 2002; Koki, 1997; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002).

**Introduction and Overview of Mentoring Programs**

Mentoring has proved to be the best tool for transitioning first-year teachers into their new roles and supporting them as they work to perfect their craft (Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Odell & Huling, 2000; Portner, 2003; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Villani, 2002). “An effective mentoring program can increase retention of novice teachers in the teaching profession, addressing the problems of teacher attrition” (Kajs, 2002, p. 57). Mentoring increased the retention of new teachers, improved teacher and student performance, promoted the personal and professional well-being of new teachers, and satisfied mandated requirements for induction and teacher licensure (Daresh, 2003; Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999; Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Odell & Huling, 2000; Papagiotas & Oakley, 1999; Portner, 2003; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Rowley, 1999; Rudney & Guillaume, 2003; Skinner, 2002; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002; Villani, 2002).

An abundance of books and articles were published offering suggestions on the creation of mentoring programs and on the process of induction and mentoring (Breaux, 1999; Brooks, 1999; Clark, 2001; Ganser et al., 1999; Martin & Robbins, 1999; Odell &
This literature indicated that induction and mentoring results in positive outcomes for students when teachers are effectively supported during their first year in the profession (Certo & Fox, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Moir, 1999; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). Further, first-year teachers who have had the benefit of mentoring tended to become competent more quickly than those who must learn on their own (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Heller, 2004; Kjas, 2002). Effective programs were found to ease the concerns of first-year teachers thereby allowing them to focus on student learning (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). However, if mentoring programs are not well designed and implemented, they often offered only short-term support to help first-year teachers survive their first year on the job (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Mentors should be trained in the role of a mentor, learning the needs, problems, and developmental phases of beginning teachers, observation and feedback strategies, and effective teaching strategies (Brooks, 1999; Daresh, 2003; Portner, 2003; Udelhofen & Larson, 2003). “Offering support to new teachers is a humane response to the very real challenges of beginning teaching” (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999).

Induction and mentoring programs may include, in part, orientation activities for teachers who are new to teaching or who are new their school district, opportunities for classroom observation and conferencing, peer group meetings, and preparation for performance assessment. Successful induction programs provided mentoring support utilizing the skills of trained teachers who specialize in coaching and supervision. An
effective mentor was the key component in the mentoring program because he or she provides encouragement and support along with professional guidance that provided assistance in curriculum matters, helped first-year teachers develop teaching skills and classroom management strategies, and helped them understand and benefit from the unique history, customs, and cultures of a school (Odell & Huling, 2000; Papagiotas & Oakley, 1999; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Villani, 2002). In addition, an effective mentor was trustworthy, listened patiently, challenged mentees to think about their performance, and helped beginning educators become reflective practitioners (Odell & Huling, 2000; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Udelhofen & Larson, 2003; Wood, 1999). The mentor must be willing to commit time and effort in developing the first-year teacher. Regular interaction with the first-year teacher enabled the mentor to know when and how to address the teacher’s strengths and needs (Clark, 2001). The mentor also provided the human connection and support that is the key to training and retaining first-year teachers (Rowley, 1999).

For mentoring to be effective, principals and program coordinators must select mentors on the basis of their interest in forming relationships with first-year teachers, not on seniority (Wood, 1999). Mentors do not necessarily have to be older than their protégés even though the image of a mentor is generally thought to be of an older, wiser, sage. Mentors are generally assigned prior to the start of the school. This may preclude the principal or program coordinator from gathering enough information about the new teacher prior to pairing her with a mentor. One way to match a mentor to a mentee without prior knowledge of the new teacher is to match the learning style of the new
teacher as a basis for mentor assignment. An example would be to pair concrete sequential learners together. Some useful tools to determine learning styles are David Kolb’s *Adult Learning Style Inventory*, *The Dunn, Dunn, and Price Learning Styles Inventory*, and Gregorc’s *ORGANON* (Portner, 2003). It is important that the two have common philosophies and educational platforms. Reviewing the mentor and new teachers’ written philosophy statements can be of benefit. It should also be noted that even if the two are matched using the above criteria, there may be times when the mentor may not be committed or whose personality may clash with the first-year teacher. In this case, it was best for all if the first-year teacher was assigned a new mentor (Udelhofen & Larson, 2003).

Additionally, consideration should be given to campus assignment, grade-level experience, curriculum expertise, and areas of specialization such as bilingual education or special education (Wood, 1999). Mentoring in the same grade level or subject matter is often preferred by first-year teachers although this is not essential to the mentor being able to provide specificity of content would be helpful. Working in the same content may also be helpful with issues pertaining to effective instructional techniques or effective conferencing with parents. Finally, the thought that the mentor and first-year must have geographical proximity was not as important as the likelihood that the partners can and will seek out the other whenever they needed to do so (Daresh, 2003). While a good mentor can help ensure that the year is successful for both the first-year teacher and her students, conversely, a poor mentor can add additional stress to a first-year teacher who may already be struggling. Putting the wrong people together could
cause the hard work of a mentoring program to be ineffective (Daresh, 2003). Once the mentor and first-year teacher are paired, the work of the mentor can begin.

In providing this support for first year teachers, Portner (2003) stated that the four main functions of a mentor were: relating, assessing, coaching, and guiding. Relating was the building of a relationship based on mutual trust, respect, and professionalism. This allowed a mentor to understand the first-year teacher’s ideas and needs and creates an environment in which the first-year teacher will honestly share and reflect upon her experiences with the mentor. Assessing occurred when the mentor was able to ascertain the professional needs of the first-year teacher, both in the classroom and as a part of the school community. Coaching allowed the first-year teacher to fine tune their skills through reflection and practice. The mentor could also model for the first-year teacher. Guiding, rather than managing allowed the first-year teacher to become more independent and helped the first-year teacher make appropriate decisions and take appropriate actions (Portner, 2003). Guidance also allowed first-year teachers to sharpen their instructional skills and helped them shape their attitudes toward teaching and their students (Clark, 2001).

The most effective form of mentoring involved in-depth reflection on the part of the first-year teacher (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). In developmental supervision and mentoring, the new teacher’s moral reasoning and ability to make ethical judgments were as important to their development as their ability to deliver instruction. The mentor varied input to the new teacher according to the teacher’s stages of cognitive development affecting the teacher’s ability to reflect on her practice, ability to solve
problems, and present instruction that met the needs of the learner. Knowing the stage of concern of a mentee was important to appropriately address the concerns of the first-year teacher (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). “The supervisor’s goal is promoting teacher growth to more conceptual levels and to impact concerns” (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998, p. 91).

An example of a mentoring model can be found in Aurora, Colorado, a district considered urban with over 50% of its population made up of students of color. Serving students of color is a key focus in the staff development experiences for new teachers in the program in Aurora, Colorado. Though knowledge of content and learning is a focus in the training, first-year teachers are taught skills that will allow them to provide a variety of approaches for teaching and assessing the needs of all students. This program specifically addresses the need for an “appreciation and skills to work with the diversity of our population” and “skills to communicate with students, parents, and colleagues in a professional manner” (Villani, 2002, p. 35). First-year teachers are provided with a mentor who is trained in coaching allowing the mentor to consider the personal needs and comfort levels of the first-year teacher as they work together throughout their first year to develop positive learning environments for all students served.

Though mentoring is generally a one-on-one activity involving the master teacher mentoring the first-year teacher, a project in California approached mentoring in one culturally diverse school in a different manner. In this project, the Los Angeles Unified School District collaborated with California State University, Dominguez Hills, with the goal of retaining as many first-year teachers as possible. Historically, the
culturally diverse schools selected for the program had an annual teacher turn-over higher than 50%. Teams were formed with two to four first-year teachers and one lead teacher. The teams met weekly for cooperative planning, problem-solving, and assistance. A journal was kept documenting meeting dates, times, and topics of discussion. The topics of the meetings included, but were not limited to, cooperative lesson planning, instructional materials, material preparation, classroom observations and coaching, instructional problem-solving, and planning strategies for classroom management. Other topics covered were those such as parent conferencing and standardized testing. The lead teachers were trained in methods of classroom observation and coaching. Lead teachers and first-year teachers attended staff development together ensuring that instructional strategies from the seminars were implemented in the first-year teachers’ classrooms. Second-year teachers also provided support to first-year teachers by serving as instructional models and as teacher buddies. This helped defray new teachers’ feelings of isolation. Stipends were given to both the first-year teachers and the lead teacher to help compensate for the extra time they spent together after hours since release time during the day was not provided. Data from the project revealed that first-year teachers practicing in culturally diverse schools needed structured, intensive, and ongoing support. After three years, 95% of the beginning teachers in the project continued to teach in culturally diverse schools (Colbert & Wolff, 1992). This is significant because teacher attrition is particularly common in culturally diverse schools (Croasmun et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 1997; NCTAF, 2003). In each of the examples sited,
the first-year teacher is supported emotionally and instructionally through well-planned and executed induction and mentoring programs.

**Types of Mentoring Support**

Supporting teachers as they develop both emotionally and instructionally is important to effective mentoring (Fuller, 1969; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) stated:

> Beginning teacher support should be looked at as a continuum, starting with personal and emotional support, expanding to include specific task- or problem-related support, and in the ideal, expanding to further help the newcomer develop a capacity for critical self-reflection in teaching practice. (p. 4)

Frances Fuller’s (1969) empirical research determined that beginning teachers move through basically three phases of concern. The first concern was referred to as one of survival. These concerns included thoughts about one’s adequacy as a teacher, class control, being liked, and being evaluated. The second phase included teaching situational concerns such as mastery of the skills of teaching and acquiring materials and resources. The third phase was a reflection of concerns about pedagogy. This included meeting the learning, social and emotional needs of students (Fuller, 1969). Many new teachers did not reach the third level during their first year and instead remain at the level of survival (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). Thus, first-year teachers required emotional support, “building the protégé’s sense of self and ability to handle stress,” and instruction-related support that included “assisting the novice with the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to be successful in the classroom and school” (Gold, 1996, p. 561).
Emotional Support

First-year teachers face many emotional challenges (Friedman, 2000; Fuller, 1969; Huberman, 1989; Moir, 1999; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000; Veenman, 1984). Veenman (1984) in writing about the perceived problems of beginning teachers described the first phase as “reality shock” (Veenman, 1984, p. 143). He said, “In general, this concept is used to indicate the collapse of missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life” (Veenman, 1984, p. 143). Huberman (1989) in referring to the phases or stages in teaching stated that there are trends that recur across studies. In his research on the professional life-cycle of teachers Huberman (1989) also described the beginning stage for first-year teachers as one of reality-shock. He said:

The survival theme has to do with reality-shock, especially for teachers with no prior teaching experience, in confronting the complexity and simultaneity of instructional management: the preoccupation with self (“Am I up to this challenge?”), the gulf between professional ideals and the daily grind of classroom life, the fragmentation of tasks, the oscillation between the intimacy and distance with one’s pupils, the apparent inadequacy of instructional materials given the diversity of pupil characteristics- the list goes on. (p. 33)

Surviving the survival stage seemed to be critical to the first-year teacher making the decision of whether or not to remain in the teaching profession. Isaac A. Friedman of the Henrietta Szold Institute, the National Institute for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, completed a study on teacher burnout. In this study, first-year teachers who were not properly supported during the survival phase of their first year were subject to a work-related syndrome known as burn-out (Friedman, 2000). “Burnout commonly is conceptualized as a three-dimensional phenomenon consisting of exhaustion,
depersonalization, and unaccomplishment” (Freidman, 2000, p. 595). All of the first-year teachers in Friedman study considered leaving after the first year or shortly thereafter. Friedman said that experiences during the first year of teaching can be divided into three stages: the slump, fatigue and exhaustion, and adjustment. In “the slump,” six of the eight teachers in Friedman’s study used words such as “shock,” “nightmare,” “suffering,” “catastrophe,” “collapse,” “crisis,” and “pressure” (Friedman, 2000, p. 598) during their first few weeks in teaching. This period of crisis diminished after a few weeks as teachers began to adapt to the system. All eight of the teachers stated they had felt a sense of despair. The next phase, “fatigue and exhaustion” (Friedman, 2000, p. 598), was one in which the new teachers expressed concerns about discipline, work overload, criticism, lack of recognition and reward, isolation, lack of support by administration, and inadequate preparation during their pre-service training for the realities of teaching. Although the third phase was called the “adjustment” phase, it was mostly considered a period of survival. This was a time when the new teacher was working to master tasks pertaining to student instruction, tasks pertaining to student relationships and discipline, tasks pertaining to the school as an organization, and developing relationships with colleagues and administrators. Friedman said that first-year teachers should be made fully aware of the issues of stress and burnout early on. He recommended that expectations for performance be realistic and that first-year teachers should receive help in setting goals that are attainable. His conclusion at the end of his study was that a well-established sense of self-efficacy was needed for professionals to perform successfully under adverse, challenging circumstances (Friedman, 2000).
Throughout the first year of teaching, the self-efficacy of the teacher will be tested as a first-year teacher moves through the many emotional phases commonly experienced. A strong sense of efficacy will enhance a person’s performance and strengthen personal well being (Bandura, 1994). Albert Bandura provided landmark research on self-efficacy and human agency (Bandura 1977, 1982, 1994, 1997, 2000). Bandura stated that efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency, the actions of people that are done intentionally (Bandura, 2000). He defines self-efficacy as the belief in one’s ability to achieve success in a given situation (Bandura 1977, 1982, 1994, 1997). Self-efficacy, to a great extent, involves a person’s beliefs about the amount of control that person has over events that affect his or her life. The emotions felt by a first-year teacher when facing challenges can be affected by the teacher’s self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Pajares, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk, & Hoy, 1998). Self-efficacy affects how a person feels, thinks, and behaves in a given situation.

There are four major psychological processes that are affected by a sense of efficacy. They are cognitive processes, motivational processes, affective processes, and selection processes (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1997). High self-efficacy beliefs affect cognitive processes by allowing a person to set high aspirations and commit firmly to meeting goals even when faced with challenges. Those with a strong sense of self-efficacy are able to visualize success scenarios and positive outcomes whereas those with lower self-efficacy visualize failure scenarios and dwell on personal deficiencies and what could go wrong. It requires a strong sense of efficacy to remain on task when
faced with difficulties, failures, and set-backs (Bandura, 1993, 1994). This is true for
students of color and for the first-year white teacher.

The cognitive skill of motivation occurs when people anticipate outcomes of
future events. They form beliefs about what they can do. They set goals for themselves
and work toward the realization of those goals. Self-efficacy beliefs help determine these
goals, how much efforts will be expended, how long they will persevere, and how
resilient they will be when facing failure and setbacks. Many times people will not
pursue options because they do not believe they will ultimately meet with success
(Bandura, 1982, 1994, 1997). This can be said for both first-year, white, female teachers
and for students of color if either is faced with feelings of failure. Feelings of confidence
and a positive sense of self-efficacy also helped determine how much stress a person can
endure. People with high efficacy are able to cope and better manipulate the
environment, making it less threatening. They are able to calm themselves, seek support
from others, and better tolerate anxiety and sadness (Bandura, 1997). People avoid
activities and situations that they believe are beyond their coping abilities. They more
readily participate in ventures in which they believe they are more capable of meeting
with success. This is the selection process (Bandura, 1993, 1994). Positive feedback and
growth in mastery of skills fosters efficient thinking and enhances performance
(Bandura, 1993).

The efficacy of a first-year, white, female teacher can be enhanced through
collegial support (Peterson, 1994). A new teacher will more readily attempt new
instructional strategies when a colleague or supervisor provides encouragement, thus
building efficacy (Ebmeier, 2003). People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master a given situation are more likely to be able to put forth greater effort and sustain this effort than if they harbor self-doubts (Bandura, 1994; Pajares, 2002; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Mentor teachers have the capacity to persuade a new teacher that they have what it takes to succeed which builds the new teacher’s feelings of self-efficacy (Rudney & Guillaume, 2003). This is important because first-year, white, female teachers with a strong sense of efficacy will have a positive impact on student learning (Peterson, 1994).

Mentor teachers can work to build a first-year, white, female teacher’s sense of efficacy by modeling desired competencies. This deflects self-doubt because competent models provide knowledge and demonstrate techniques that support the first-year teacher (Bandura, 1994). Vicarious experiences gained through observation of another’s performances or skills builds efficacy (Ebmeier, 2003). Modeling can be provided by the first-year teacher’s mentor. This contributes to the first-year teacher’s success. The first-year, white, female teacher’s success leads to the success of her students.

A successful first year of teaching provides the first-year teacher with a feeling of accomplishment. This sense of achievement provides the motivation to return to teaching each year. The successful first-year teacher has not only acquired knowledge and skills, but has been able to perform well even under taxing conditions. Bandura (1977, 1994, 1997) attributed this in part to the manner in which a person utilizes their self-efficacy thinking. A person with the same knowledge and skills may perform poorly or extraordinarily, depending on their self-efficacy thinking. Poor self-thinking can
impair performance, whereas performance can be enhanced with efficient thinking (Bandera, 1993). Teachers may have a high sense of efficacy in one situation, but not in another. They may feel efficacious in one subject or grade level, but not in another (Ebmeier, 2003).

Difficulties, failures, and setbacks can occur in many forms during the first year of teaching. Events such as parent conferences, performance evaluations, lack of materials or curricular knowledge can all result in a new teacher feeling ineffective. The first-year, white, female teacher must be prepared for various events that are potentially stressful. She must be positively supported through these events in order for self-efficacy beliefs to remain strong and ensure that the teacher returns the following year to their newly chosen profession (Ebmeier, 2003; Moir, 1999; Ryan, 1986, as cited in Bullough & Baughman, 1997).

Recognizing, understanding, and supporting first-year teachers through the developmental phases is critical to the support of first-year teachers (Moir, 1999). Ellen Moir, Director of the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, is renowned for her work in support of new teachers. She defined six phases of mental and emotional challenges that may occur during the teacher’s first year in the profession. Furthermore, the emotional phases were placed on a timeline throughout the teacher’s first year indicating what point in the school year the phase is most likely to occur. According to Moir (1999), the six phases were anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and then again to anticipation. (see Figure 1) With proper support for new teachers during this first year, they will transition
successfully through these stages and are more likely to return to teaching in subsequent years (Moir, 1999).

The Phases of a First-Year Teacher’s Attitude Toward Teaching

Anticipation

Survival

Disillusionment

Rejuvenation

Reflection

Aug Sept Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun July

FIGURE 1. The phases of a first-year teacher’s attitude toward teaching. © UCSC New Teacher Center. Reprinted with permission from Dr. Ellen Moir.

The anticipation phase begins during preservice preparation and grows while the new teacher is student teaching. The closer student teachers get to graduation, the more excited and anxious they become (Moir, 1999). The anticipation phase has also been referred to as a fantasy stage, because this is when the beginning teacher imagines what teaching will be like and remembers the wonderful teachers of their past (Ryan, 1986, as cited in Bullough & Baughman, 1997). Although they enter their new classroom
committed to making a difference, they often have a romanticized or idealistic view of how to reach their goals (Moir, 1999). Some of the first major concerns of the new teacher in reaching her goals concern issues such as setting up the classroom, acquiring materials, establishing relationships with new colleagues, administrators, parents, and students. The term discovery (Huberman, 1989, p. 33) has also been used to describe this early stage of a teacher’s career. The discovery theme involves the enthusiasm new teachers feel for having their own classroom, materials, and new relationships with colleagues as they determine consciously or not, whether teaching will become their chosen career. The many activities of the initial weeks carry the new teacher through the first few weeks on the job (Lipton & Wellman, 2001). The anticipation phase continues from August through about the beginning of October (Moir, 1999).

For about the next six weeks, teachers move into a survival phase. It is not uncommon for first-year teachers to spend up to 70 hours per week on schoolwork trying to learn curriculum, develop instructional plans, develop and utilize assessment instruments, grade papers, and develop and gather materials (Moir, 1999). The survival phase involves learning how to meet the many needs of students utilizing limited instructional materials and limited expertise. First-year teachers are also dealing with the intensity of relationship issues with students such as how to gain the favor of the students yet still be considered the authority figure in the classroom. Classroom routines and discipline are not yet firmly established. This phase has been described as a fight for one’s professional life as the new teacher faces problems of discipline and management (Huberman, 1989; Moir, 1999; Ryan, 1986, as cited in Bullough & Baughman, 1997).
This soon leads to the disillusionment phase which generally occurs after six or eight weeks of nonstop work and stress. Teachers begin questioning their capabilities, commitment, and self-worth. The intensity and length of this phase varies among new teachers. Many new teachers fall ill during this stressful time. In addition, they are facing many of the additional realities of teaching such as holding parent conferences and being evaluated by their supervisor. This adds to their stress. During this time, accumulated stress, months of overwork and complaints from family members and friends leave new teachers with self-doubt, lower self-esteem, and questions about their professional commitment. Getting through this phase may be the most difficult challenge facing a new teacher (Moir, 1999). The level of a teacher’s commitment to teaching as a profession also affects their level of stress and movement through the phases of teaching. Once a commitment is made to the profession of teaching, teachers begin to feel a greater sense of security and stabilization (Huberman, 1989).

The rejuvenation phase begins generally in January after the winter break. New teachers have rested and reorganized their thoughts and perspectives. There is greater understanding of the realities of the classroom and the system in which they work. They feel a sense of accomplishment knowing that half of the year is behind them. They have better coping skills and can better manage any problems encountered. They are able to focus on curriculum and teaching strategies. This period lasts until spring with some concerns about getting all subject matter covered and whether or not their students are progressing. At this stage, new teachers worry about their students’ performance on-end-of-the-year tests. Again they question their effectiveness as a teacher (Moir, 1999).
Finally, the first-year teacher begins to learn the craft of teaching and is able to focus on instructional skills and on curriculum issues. At this stage, achieving improved student learning replaces achieving good student behavior. In the last six weeks of school, the teacher begins to reflect back over the year, highlighting successes and events that were not successful. The teacher begins to make plans about changes for the next school year. This brings the teacher back into the anticipation stage awaiting their second year of teaching.

*Task-Oriented Support*

Gaining practical information and skills is foremost on the agenda of the beginning teacher. One mentor stated that in the first weeks of the school year, none of the first-year teachers he mentored wished they had more information on how to align the state curriculum or understand how to analyze standardized test scores. Instead, they wanted to know how to physically arrange their classroom, what to put on bulletin boards, how to acquire books and supplies, who to go to for help in discipline, and how to prepare for the first weeks of school including giving homework and tests (Mandel, 2006). First-year teachers must be supported in approaching and mastering the most basic teaching tasks such as “developing lesson plans, planning what to say at back-to-school night, deciding what goes in the gradebook…and structuring parent-teacher conferences” (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 4). Simple routines in classroom management and discipline must be established, including making a daily schedule and establishing daily procedures (Martín & Robbins, 1999; Rudney & Guillaume, 2003).
Acquiring materials and resources, learning to utilize the curriculum guide to write lesson plans, and learning the climate and culture of the school are also essential tasks for the first-year teacher to master early in the school year (Rudney & Guillaume, 2003; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Mentors can guide the first-year teacher in “accomplishing these tasks effectively” so that “the beginner doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel for such standard activities” (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 4).

Fuller and Bown (1975) identified situational concerns of first-year teachers. Situational concerns were described as performance concerns that could evoke frustration in the teacher. “These are concerns about having to work with too many students or having too many non-instructional duties, about time pressures, about inflexible situations, lack of instructional materials, and so on” (Fuller & Bown, 1975, p. 37). Teachers also have concerns about keeping students interested and maintaining class control while covering the required curriculum. It is during this time that first-year teachers realize they are already behind in teaching the curriculum. Feeling pressure to cover the required curriculum in any possible way teachers may cut out creative ideas they had planned to try. Deleting creativity often leads to student boredom and discipline problems” (Mandel, 2006, p. 67).

It is the role of the mentor to help first-year teachers identify possible solutions for these practical classroom challenges (Mandel, 2006; Rudney & Guillaume, 2003; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). “This type of problem-specific support can improve teaching performance in specific instances and, as a by-product, reduce new teachers’ stress levels” (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 5) Failure to manage these task-
oriented concerns will prevent the first-year teacher from progressing through to the more advanced stages of teacher development that involves critically reflecting on teaching practices and identifying and addressing the learning problems of students (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

Instructional Impact Support

The final stage of development of a first-year teacher concerns recognition of the social and emotional needs of students, including “the inappropriateness of some curriculum material for certain students, about being fair to pupils, about tailoring content to individual students, and so on” (Fuller & Bown, 1975, pp. 37-38). The teacher “may be unable to act on these concerns” and “may have to lay aside these concerns until they have learned to cope with more urgent tasks” (Fuller & Bown, 1975, p. 39). Many teachers do not achieve this level of development that most impacts student achievement during their first year in the profession (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). Ultimately, it is the goal of the mentor to enhance the effectiveness of the first-year teacher thereby increasing student achievement. This is a critical task because “the achievement gap between low-income students of color and their White, middle-class peers is heightening the urgency to adequately prepare teachers who possess the competency to effectively work with diverse students” (Ukpokodu, 2003, p. 18).
Support for First-Year Teachers in Culturally Diverse Schools

With students of color making up the fastest growing population of school-age children in the nation, this may be a compelling time to further address the needs of first-year teachers of students of color. In further examining school demographics, since 1990 students of color have represented over 70% of the total school enrollment in the nation’s 20 largest school districts (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In 2003 about 35% of the nation’s school-age students were students of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2003a). It is predicted that in 2020, 46% of the nation’s school-age children will be students of color (Banks & Banks, 2004). While classrooms are becoming more culturally diverse, first-year, white, female teachers continue to make up the largest percentage of new teacher graduates (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Preparing first-year teachers to meet the needs of students in culturally diverse schools has become a “demographic imperative” (Zeichner, 2003, p. 491)

Taking a closer look at first-year teachers of today, most are white (87%), female (74%), middle-class and monolingual (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), 1987; 1989; Banks & Banks, 2004; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1993). Further, most first-year teachers grew up in rural, small towns or suburban communities where they had few experiences with people of color (AACTE, 1987; 1989; Ng, 2003; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1993). Most often, they anticipate teaching in a small town or suburban schools similar to those in which they attended (Ng, 2003). In fact, research suggests that preservice teachers may have difficulty envisioning themselves as teachers of students of color (Groulx, 2001). First-year, white, female
teachers may bring very little cross-cultural experience, knowledge, and understanding to teaching and they may possess stereotypical beliefs about students of color and may have misconceptions about racism, discrimination, and structural aspects of inequality (Gay, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Ng, 2003; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1993). A lack of preparedness of first-year, white, female teachers may result in negative ramifications for students of color such as an overrepresentation of students of color in low-track, nonacademic, and special education programs, high drop-out rates, high grade-level retention rates, a highly disproportionate rate of disciplinary actions and suspensions in schools, and under identification for advanced coursework and gifted and talented programs (Banks, 2004a; Gay, 2004).

Issues of diversity may be one of the greatest challenges in preparing teachers to be effective in the workplace (Delpit, 1995). It is clear therefore, that first-year, white, female teachers may need specialized training and guidance in order to work effectively with students of color. A lack of training and preparation may in turn affect the first-year, white, female teacher’s ability to effectively teach students of color (Melnick & Zeichner, 1998). The first-year, white, female teacher, who has not had the benefit of training that specifically addresses learning techniques proven effective for students of color, may teach students of color in ways that may be effective for white students, but not effective for students of color (Gay, 2004; Ukpokodu, 2003; Zeichner, 2003). Gay (2004) stated:

Because most teachers’ cultural backgrounds and value orientations are highly compatible with middle-class and European American culture, they can use these cultural connections and shared frames of reference to facilitate the learning of
White students. The absence of these cultural connections in routine classroom instruction for students of color places them at a learning disadvantage. (p. 228)

Some experts in multicultural education consider the utilization of culturally responsive teaching techniques as a means to promote positive learning outcomes for students of color (Banks, 2004a; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Neito, 2004).

Culturally responsive teaching is a term used to describe a variety of effective teaching approaches in multi-cultural classrooms in which teachers respond to their students by incorporating elements of the student’s culture into their teaching (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teaching has been defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective” for students of color (Gay, 2002, p. 29). Other terms often used are “culturally appropriate,” “culturally congruent,” “culturally compatible,” and “culturally relevant” (Irvine, 2003 p. 73). Culturally responsive teaching has many characteristics that enable the teacher to build bridges between the home and school. Multicultural information, resources, and materials that acknowledge the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups are utilized. Curriculum is presented in ways that utilize a wide variety of instructional strategies appealing to different learning styles (Callins, 2006; Hale, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003). Culturally responsive teachers provide time for students to respond to discussions using hands-on learning, interactive techniques, manipulative objects (Callins, 2006; Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2003). They keep the pace of the lesson brisk and the activities varied using
techniques such as frequent feedback, rephrasing, reviews, drills, and recitations (Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2003).

Utilizing culturally responsive teaching techniques is a means to maximize the learning potential of students of color by developing their academic capabilities while nurturing them socially and emotionally (Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paley, 2002). Culturally responsive teachers care about their students and develop personal relationships with them (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Paley, 2002). They frequently use instructional techniques that provide relationship-building experiences. Culturally responsive teachers are patient and non-judgmental, allowing the students to share personal stories and also share stories about their own personal lives with students (Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2003). Culturally responsive teaching results in the development of an inclusive environment in which students feel part of a collective effort. Students assist, support, and encourage each other. The efforts of the entire group are highlighted as opposed to individual achievement. The culturally responsive teacher uses frequent praise and encouragement to develop the student’s sense of self-worth (Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Utilizing instructional techniques that are consistent with the cultural orientations, experiences and learning styles of students of color may significantly improve their school achievement (Gay, 2000). Mentoring support that focuses on helping beginning teachers in diverse schools is recommended as an effective model for cross-cultural education (Irvine, 2003).
Conclusion

Although the literature was replete with information on mentoring and mentoring programs as a practice that has grown throughout the United States, there was a gap in the literature that specifically presents the viewpoint of the first-year, white, female teacher in culturally diverse schools as to what she perceives her mentoring needs to be in teaching students of color. Given that the majority of first-year teachers are white and female while the majority of students from culturally diverse homes are increasing, it was essential to understand the perception of the first-year white teacher of her mentoring needs so that impact instruction can be a focus early on in the beginning teacher’s first year in the profession. The literature was replete with information concerning what constituted a mentoring program but continued to lack information on mentoring specifically tailored to coincide with the first-year teacher’s ability to move through the stages of teacher development while focusing early in the school year on her role in increasing student achievement. The dimensions of the achievement gap demands that attention be given to the quality of mentoring support provided to the first-year teacher so that students of color will not only survive, but will thrive in the classrooms of the first-year, white, female teacher.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Children from non-European lower socio-economic status cultural groups are at a disadvantage in the schools because the American educational system has evolved out of a European philosophical, theoretical, and pedagogical context.

Hakim Rashid

The purpose of this study was to document the perceptions first-year, white, female teachers have about their mentoring needs in teaching students of color. This chapter is a description of the approach I took in seeking to understand what first-year, white, female teachers of students of color believe to be their challenges and needs for mentoring support during their first semester of teaching in a culturally diverse school. In discovering the perceived mentoring needs of first-year, white, female teachers of students of color it is hoped that the findings can be utilized to improve the preparation and support system of future first-year, white, female teachers so that they in turn can provide a more equitable learning environment for all students of color.

In seeking to understand the participants’ perceptions, an interpretive epistemology was used. Interpretive epistemology focuses on human actions and interaction (Merriam, 2002). Moreover, the interpretivist researcher generally utilizes qualitative research methods. Qualitative research involves documenting human action through observing, recording, describing, and analyzing how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2002; Mishler, 1979).
Using the data collected during the study, the researcher employs an inductive approach to find meaning and understanding of the phenomenon under study. Patterns and themes that emerge from the analysis of the data are presented through a rich, descriptive account of the findings. Therefore, the methodology for this study used a basic interpretive qualitative research design (Merriam, 2002).

I became interested in the premise for this study over thirty years ago when I found myself in need of mentoring as a first-year, white, female teacher of students of color. Throughout my career as an administrator I continued to see a lack in preparation of first-year, white, female teachers in teaching students of color. As classrooms of today continue to see more cultural diversity among students while first-year teachers remain predominately white and female, it may be important to find better ways of preparing and supporting first-year, white, female teachers of students of color. The achievement gap, promulgated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), supports the assumption that many first-year white teachers of today may be no more prepared to meet the needs of students of color than I was many years ago.

Site Selection

I originally met with difficulties in obtaining a site for the study. First I approached the school district in which I had experienced my first year of teaching. I continue to feel loyalty to the district where I worked for the first 20 years of my career and felt that any insight gained from this study might be used in a positive manner to better support teachers in raising the academic achievement of students of color. This
school district is culturally diverse, serving over 93% students of color. Although permission to conduct research was attained, there were only two first-year, white, female teachers working in the district at that time. Two would not be a large enough number of participants to make up a significant group for the study.

I then sought other large culturally diverse school districts in Texas where this study could be conducted. As an aside, I applied for permission to do research in three different school districts before my study was accepted. Although the first two school districts in which I submitted requests to conduct research gave no specific reason to me for denying my request after weeks of reviewing the proposal. I was, however, able to obtain permission to conduct research in a large culturally diverse school district in Texas and one in which there is also a large population of first-year, white, female teachers.

The district that granted me access for the study is a large culturally diverse district in Texas. This district serves over 50,000 students, and over 80% of the student population is comprised of students of color. There were five schools selected as sites for the study by district personnel. The individual school sites varied in population from about 300 students to about 700 students. All of the schools are classified by the Texas Education Agency as 100% Title I schools. Ethnicity ranged from 93% to 98% Hispanic with the remaining students African American, Asian, and White. The schools serve high numbers of students participating in the free or reduced lunch program with between 89% of the students and 95% of the students being classified as economically disadvantaged. These schools are all rated as Academically Acceptable by the Texas
Education Agency based on the state testing standards. Because of my familiarity with
the elementary school setting, I selected schools at the serving students in pre-
kindergarten through fifth grade. The district’s personnel assisted me in making contacts
with elementary sites that were close in proximity, served a majority of students of color,
and had first-year, white, female teachers on their faculties.

Participants

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) highlights the achievement gap
phenomenon that continues to persist between white students and students of color.
Because the majority of teachers entering the profession today are white and female and
students of color make up the fastest growing population of students in schools across
the nation, I selected first-year, white, female teachers of students of color for the study.
In addition, my interest in this topic began when I was a first-year, white, female teacher
of students of color who recognized that I was ill-prepared to teach students of color. It
is important to select information-rich cases for study from which to learn the most
about the issues involved in this research (Patton, 1990 as cited in Merriam, 2002).
Therefore, this purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990 as cited in Merriam, 2002) included
eight, first-year, white, female teachers of students of color in culturally diverse school
settings. I chose eight as the number of participants in the sample so that I could hear a
variety of perspectives in order to ensure that I was capturing a full picture of the
situation being studied. Also, I wanted to select enough participants in the beginning of
the study in case any participants dropped out of the study before I reached a saturation point in the data collection phase of the study (Merriam, 2002).

District personnel assisted me in identifying schools that had teachers who met the criteria for the participant sampling. I verified the criteria information with the office personnel at each of the schools I visited. I wanted to make certain that the school was culturally diverse and that there were first-year, white, female teachers of students of color on the faculty of each of the school sites selected. Of special note, I had not made any stipulations about the type of preservice training the teachers should have in obtaining their teacher certification. I had expected that the teachers would have completed their preservice training through the traditional college teacher preparation route. It was only after the subjects’ consent was obtained for participation in this research and the interviews had begun that I realized all of the participants were working through alternative certification programs, and none had attained a traditional elementary school teaching degree from a university. As a researcher, I was at first concerned when I discovered that the participants had not entered the profession through a more traditional route, and wondered how this would affect the outcomes of this study. Because these were the teachers identified by the district for the study and because of the eagerness of the subjects to participate in the study, I decided to go forward with these subjects rather than search for a new set of participants. In all other regards, these teachers did, in fact, meet the criteria set forth in the proposal in that they were first-year, white, female teachers of students of color working in a culturally diverse school in a large school district in Texas. In addition, I had begun to interview more and more
teacher applicants in my job as school principal who were alternatively certified and knew that once in the classroom, their needs most often paralleled those of other first-year teachers who had been more trained in the more traditional university teacher education programs. I felt that the lived experiences of these eight participants would greatly enlighten me on the perceived mentoring needs of first-year, white, female teachers of students of color and benefit this study. I was unaware if there were any first-year, white, female teachers working in culturally diverse schools in this district that may have graduated from a traditional university teacher preparation program. The fact that all of the participants were receiving their elementary education certificates through alternative certification programs did add another commonality among the participants other than the original participant selection criteria set forth in the study.

The identities of the participants, the schools, and district in which they work have remained anonymous so that the participants would feel free to share their perceptions without worry of repercussion (Yin, 1994). The teachers and their schools were identified by fictitious names. Students of color made up 94% or more of the student population in each of the elementary schools studied.

All of the participants were first-year, white, female teachers, teaching in culturally diverse elementary schools in Texas serving predominately students of color from low-income homes. Five of the participants moved to Texas as a result of acceptance in a national teacher recruiting program. This national teacher recruiting program places top graduates from select universities into teaching positions in K-12 schools that serve low income students, most of which are students of color. The goal of
this program is for the recruitees to obtain alternative certification in teaching and seek careers in schools considered to be of high need. The remaining three teachers obtained their teacher certification through a program serving teachers in Texas. All of the participants, Ann, Betty, Charlotte, Diane, Elaine, Jean, Peggy and Roberta, self-identified as being white females from middle to upper-middle incomes and expressed a desire to work with culturally diverse students.

Ann

Ann teaches first grade at Hickory Elementary. She is originally from California but was raised and attended college in upstate New York. According to Ann, she recognized her desire to become a teacher at age 14. At that time, she was working at a summer camp and discovered she enjoyed working with young children. This experience, working with young children, was not the only motivation Ann had for becoming a teacher, however. She was also influenced by her parents, who are both educators. Ann, however, did not follow a traditional route into the teaching field in that her degree is in Near Eastern Studies, which she describes as a study of the Middle East and government. It was when Ann learned prior to graduation that there were few job prospects that appealed to her in her field of study that she turned her interest toward teaching. While at the university, she learned of the national teacher recruiting program and decided to apply because the goals of the program appealed to her. She said that she wanted to “do something tangible that can help.”
Betty

Betty is originally from Ohio. She works as a special education teacher at Hickory Elementary. While in college, she completed all of the education coursework to become a teacher of foreign language. However, Betty stated that prior to graduation she no longer envisioned herself as a foreign language teacher. She chose not to participate in student teaching or complete her degree in teaching, because of her change in goals. Instead, Betty completed a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis in Bilingual Education. Soon after graduation, Betty returned to her desire to teach. She said that the national teacher recruitment program provided her with an opportunity to complete her teacher certification and enter the field of teaching. It was moreover the mission of the program that greatly appealed to her.

Charlotte

Charlotte teaches a split-grade level class serving both kindergarten and first grade students. She teaches at Hickory Elementary. She was born in Texas. When Charlotte was very young, her family moved to Indiana. Her mother, aunt, and grandmother are practicing teachers. Charlotte said she enjoyed pretending that she was a teacher, and knew early on that she wanted to also become a teacher. She attended an all-women’s university in Massachusetts where she majored in History and minored in Education. She received a degree in Secondary Education. After graduating from the university, Charlotte found that it was difficult to secure a teaching position in the suburban areas where she had first applied. She decided that she might have a better
chance of obtaining a job if she applied for positions in major cities at more culturally diverse schools. Because she knew that the national teacher recruiting program would offer her that opportunity, she applied for a position and was accepted.

**Diane**

Diane is a first grade teacher at Pin Oak Elementary. She is from Texas and attended college at a university within the city in which the study took place. After 10 years of attending college, she graduated with a major in Psychology. Upon graduation, she found it difficult to secure a job in her field of study, so she accepted a position as a loan officer at a mortgage company. She was not happy as a loan officer and admitted that she was not sure what she wanted to do at that point in her life. It was then that a friend told her about the alternative certification program for teaching. After giving this some thought, Diane decided that teaching would be a good way for her to move back toward her original career goal of counseling students. Diane says that for her, teaching is a means to an end.

**Elaine**

Elaine is a fourth grade teacher at Pin Oak Elementary. Born in Mississippi, she considers herself to be a Texan because she has lived in Texas longer than any of the other areas she has resided. Although she was interested in teaching as a high school student, she chose instead to receive a degree in Sociology. She graduated from a major university in Texas. She worked one year with Children’s Protective Services and
realized that she wanted more interaction with children. This prompted her to obtain an alternative certification in teaching. It was Diane who told Elaine about a teaching position that was available at Pin Oak Elementary. Elaine applied and was hired less than a week before school started.

Jean

Jean teaches a mixed-grade level classroom, serving both third and fourth grade students at Holly Elementary. She is from North Carolina. Even as a young child, Jean was interested in teaching because her mother was at one time a teacher. Her mother, however, encouraged her to pursue a career other than teaching because teaching is not a “lucrative business.” Jean’s degree is in Psychology and Communications. While in college a friend told Jean about the national teacher recruitment program. She was particularly interested in the opportunity to work with students in culturally diverse schools. Jean decided to apply. Jean returned therefore, to her original dream of becoming a teacher. Regarding her future plans, Jean wants to eventually earn a doctorate degree and open a practice as a psychologist.

Peggy

Peggy is a first grade teacher at Palm Elementary. She is from Texas and says that she went back and forth deciding between becoming a teacher and becoming an artist while in college. Though she graduated with a degree in Art, during volunteer work with children in her senior year of college, she realized that she wanted to be a
teacher. She completed her alternative certification coursework prior to her first year of teaching and was teaching to fulfill the requirements of her probationary certification. For two years prior to becoming a teacher, she worked as a substitute teacher in a neighboring district and believed substitute teaching was helpful in preparing her for a classroom of her own.

Roberta

Roberta teaches pre-kindergarten in a bilingual program at Beech Elementary. She also tutors the fourth grade students after school. Roberta was raised in Pennsylvania and graduated from a major state university with a degree in International Politics. She is unlike the other teachers in that she speaks Spanish fluently and has lived out of the country for brief periods of time in the Dominican Republic and in France. She greatly treasures her experience in the Dominican Republic where she learned about children who live on the streets. These children had been abandoned by their families for one reason or another. It was during this time that she honed her Spanish-speaking skills.

Data Collection

I served as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 2002). In order to learn as much as possible from the eight participants and to fully understand their experience as first-year, white, female teachers of students of color, I developed multiple methods of collecting data (Merriam, 2002). I began by developing a set of five open-ended sentence stems to serve as a basis for data
collection. The opened-ended sentence stems were (1) My major challenge(s) during the first three months have been…(2) My mentor has helped me or could have helped me by… (3) I have addressed my students’ individual academic needs by…(4) In reviewing my mentoring needs throughout the first semester, it would have been most helpful to have had more information on … (5) I consider my most successful experience this year so far to be ___ because…

I presented these open-ended sentence stems to the participants in the form of semi-structured interview questions asked during individual interview sessions and as discussion points during focus group sessions. The open-ended sentence stems were also presented to the participants in the form of journal reflections that the participants could respond to either by e-mail or by handwriting their responses directly on the journal page and submitting them to me at different times throughout the engagement period. Each journal reflection ended with the open statement, I am concerned about… so that the participants could add additional comments. This allowed me to have insight into each participant’s affective and behavioral level of development (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). Data collected in these three formats, individual interview session, focus group sessions, and journal reflections, would be triangulated as a means to validate the emerging findings. The individual interview sessions were held either before school, during the teacher’s conference period, or after school. There were three individual sessions each lasting about one hour. There were three focus group sessions planned. These were held off campus at a local restaurant and lasted between two and one-half hours to three hours. The journal reflection pages were presented to the teachers during
the introductory session but they were not asked to respond to the open-ended sentence stems until I specifically sent them one of the stems via electronic mail (e-mail). The participants were then given the option of responding back to the sentence stem on e-mail or write out their reflection in long-hand on the reflection pages that were provided.

Gathering data through individual interview sessions, focus group sessions, and through journal reflection provided multiple sources of data collection from which I gathered multiple perspectives and concerns of the participants. The interviews were audiotaped. I transcribed the audiotapes after each interview session. In doing so, I was able to develop additional questions for subsequent sessions with the participants that would enable me to clarify any information I had gathered in previous sessions, check their responses for accuracy, or delve more deeply into an area of questioning from previous sessions. As I transcribed the tapes, I also began listening to the teachers’ responses in search of common themes or patterns that might have begun to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I collected data beginning in the fourth month of the first semester of their first year of teaching and ending after a month into the second semester of the same school year. By the end of this time, saturation had occurred (Merriam, 2002). The first-year teachers had thoroughly responded to my questions about their perceptions of their mentoring needs in teaching students of color. I knew that saturation had occurred because I was hearing the same comments repeatedly from the participants (Merriam, 2002). No new information was surfacing in any of the data collection formats.
Focus Group Sessions

Focus group session one. The goals of the first group meeting were to explain the purpose of the study; review the format of the study, which would be focus group sessions, individual interview sessions, and journaling; share the open-ended sentence stems; begin to establish rapport; and obtain consent for participation from the eight first-year, white, female teachers. Because the identification of the school sites and participants took longer than expected and in order to stay on the timeline I had projected to the district, my first contact with the teachers was held in small groups or with individual teachers. During the first meeting, a letter of introduction was shared with the teachers that contained information about me, the dissertation study, and expectations of the participant that included interviews and response to e-mail journal reflections. A copy of the open-ended sentence stems that made up the journal reflection pages was shared to help the participants understand the type of information that would be collected and to also ensure them that although this would take place over a period of about twelve weeks, it was not going to be cumbersome on their part. The consent form for participation in the study was reviewed with the teachers, and their permission was acquired. In addition, I shared photographs of myself in an effort to begin establishing rapport with the participants. These photographs depicted me participating in some of my favorite hobbies and also some photographs of me at school in my role as an elementary school principal. The first meeting concluded with setting dates for future focus group meetings and scheduling individual interview sessions.
**Focus group session two.** The second focus group session was held at the end of the first semester, prior to the mid-winter break in December. The two main purposes of this focus group session were to share commonalities that had begun to emerge from the group’s individual interview sessions and to discuss these, and continue to establish rapport among the group members and with me. The meeting began with an icebreaker activity in which each teacher shared their results from an on-line questionnaire in which your job in the Middle Ages would be revealed after answering a series of questions. This activity stimulated much conversation. In addition the teachers shared information about themselves such as where each was born and raised, what university they attended, and what degree was attained. They discussed their alternative certification programs since there were two different programs through which they working to attain certification.

I then began to share examples of the challenges that had been stated to me in prior individual interview sessions and in journal reflection entries. I also shared with the teachers their comments thus far about their mentoring experiences during the first semester of their jobs as first-year, white, female teachers of students of color. In this focus group session, I asked them collectively what they believed their mentoring needs to be in teaching students of color.

**Focus group session three.** This session took place in late January. I began the third focus group session by sharing a chart that reflected the emotional phases of the first-year teacher (Moir, 1999) and asked them if they could relate to the timeline and emotional phases on the chart (see Figure 1). This served as an icebreaker and to re-
establish the group’s rapport. Then I shared a general list of comments and concerns about their experiences as first-year teachers and related to their mentoring needs that I had generated from their responses shared in individual interview sessions, the previous focus group session, and from their comments shared in journal reflections. The teachers validated the statements on the list as to whether or not the statements did or did not pertain to their experiences as first-year, white, female teachers of students of color. This activity served as an additional “member check” and helped me check my interpretation of the data that had been presented throughout the duration of the study thus far (Merriam, 2002, p. 26). They were also given the opportunity to add additional comments or concerns that had not been captured. The group provided final comments about the study. I thanked each of them for spending this year, and hopefully additional years, in education working with students of color. One important note here is that it had appeared from the validation of the participants’ comments, their statements that they could add not further information, and a review of the transcription of the audiotape of this session validating the fact that no new information was being generated about the participant’s perceptions of their mentoring needs I felt that I had exhausted the topic and established saturation. This occurred after 12 weeks into the study.

*Individual Interview Sessions*

*Individual interview session one.* The goal of the first individual interview session was to further establish rapport and to become acquainted with the participant. I asked each participant broad general questions about her background and preparation for
teaching. It was at this point that I discovered that each participant was working to acquire their alternative certification. I then asked what their original degrees were in and when it was that they realized they wanted to become teachers. These questions were intended to help me become better acquainted with the teachers and begin understanding their worldviews and opinions. My focus then turned to their experiences as a first-year teacher. I asked them how it was that they were assigned to the school in which they were working and what they knew about their students prior to the beginning of school. Referring to the open-ended sentence stems I asked what the participants considered their challenges to be thus far. I then began asking questions that helped me acquire knowledge about their mentor and mentoring experiences. I reminded each participant to complete the first and second journal reflections if they had not done so, reminded them about the focus group session date and set dates for the next individual sessions. I also invited each participant to complete a questionnaire that would result in telling them what their job would be if they lived in the Middle Ages and bring it to the next focus group session to be used as an activity to become further acquainted with the other participants in the study.

*Individual interview session two.* The second individual interview session began with a member check to allow the participants to comment on my interpretation of the information shared at the first individual session. The goal of this session was to learn more about the perceptions of the participants about their students of color, what the participants believed were the academic and social needs of the participants, and beliefs about their ability to successfully teach their students. Because I saw that each school
was decorated with symbols of Christmas and I noticed activities in the school related to Christmas celebrations, we discussed their perceptions of the culture and religious backgrounds of the students. The participants also shared information about any diversity training they may have had through their certification program and their perceptions the fact that Christmas was being celebrated in each of the school sites involved in this study. This led to questions concerning their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching techniques and their perceptions of whether or not culturally responsive teaching was necessary for the students to achieve. I asked them if they were provided with any training thus far during the school year that prepared them to specifically address the learning styles and needs of students of color. This information may or may not have been revealed in earlier conversations or journaling. The session ended with a reminder about the upcoming focus group session.

*Individual interview session three.* The last individual interview session took place after the mid-winter break. The main goal of this individual interview session was to capture the participants’ reflective thoughts about their personal and professional needs and mentoring support during the first half of the school year. In this session, I wanted to once again address the guiding questions about challenges and mentoring support to see whether or not the participants’ interpretations of their mentoring needs had changed over the time that had passed since the study began. I began with a member check. I reviewed my interpretation of the participant’s perceptions about personal and professional challenges they had faced during the first semester, their emotional state during that time, and how their needs had been addressed by their mentors. I provided an
opportunity for the participants to add any other challenges they had faced and other comments about their mentoring experience. Responses to their journal reflections were referenced if I needed clarification of the meaning of any responses the participants had given to the open-ended sentence stems. I asked about the participants’ perceptions of their overall experience during the first semester including relationships with students, parents, other teachers, and administrators. Each was asked to tell of something they had done that they felt was effective in meeting the academic needs of their students of color. They were also asked whether or not they considered themselves to be of lower-, middle-, or upper-income backgrounds and if they perceived their ethnicity to be white. This led to discussion about the student’s income status and whether or not they perceived this to affect the students’ educational achievement. I was able to delve deeper into the participants’ perceptions about their students of color as well as the viewpoints of the participants about teaching strategies that they used to meet the academic needs of their students of color.

Journal Reflections

The participants were asked to reflect on their experiences by responding to five open-ended sentence stems. The sentence stems had been stylized into the form of journal pages with one sentence stem on each page. The collection of journal pages was presented to the participants in a folder containing introductory information provided during our first meeting together. The participants were asked to respond to the open-ended sentence stems after I had specifically sent the stems to them via electronic mail
The participants were then given the option of responding to each sentence stem utilizing e-mail or writing out their reflections in long-hand on the journal pages that were provided. Each journal page also contained an additional open-ended sentence stem, “I am concerned about …” This provided an opportunity for the participants to express any other feelings they were having during the time they wrote their responses or to respond more in depth to anything we may have discussed during an interview session. There were no parameters for this portion of the journal stem. Having an open-ended stem about their concerns was intended to increase the participants comfort level and to encourage the participants to address any topics that were of concern to them. This also enabled me to determine whether or not the feelings or perceptions of the participants were changing as they experienced growth and development as a teacher.

**Data Analysis**

As the data were gathered I began both informal and formal analyses of the information. As I listened to the responses of the participants, I jotted notes in my notebook and began formulating mental connections from the information they were sharing. Thus the data analysis began simultaneously with the data collection (Merriam, 2002). I also began highlighting sections or comments on the pages of the audiotape transcriptions (Wolcott, 1994). This early analysis and thinking about the data provided me opportunities to adjust my questioning as need during the data collection process (Merriam, 2002). Using an inductive approach to the data, I began to extract words and phrases from the data to begin developing concepts and look for patterns across the data.
gathered from the multiple sources of information (Merriam, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 1994). The data collected from journal reflections, individual interview sessions, and focus session groups were analyzed overall by using a form of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I gave code words to main points, ideas, sentences, and paragraphs to represent concepts that were beginning to form from the data. I then began to categorize the code words into concepts. Once concepts were identified, I then looked for pattern or themes. Once I found patterns and themes, I went back to the data to connect the exact words of the participants to the themes weighing the documentation to determine whether or not my interpretation of the participants’ words supported the themes I had identified. If I believed that I had indeed supported the theme with documentation, I again searched through the data to make certain that the themes occurred across the data. Finally, I went back to the published literature to discover whether or not my findings were consistent with previous research. Once this task was complete, I began writing the findings using the words of the participants to support my interpretation of the data. In this way I hoped to accurately and richly portray the stories of the eight participants and thereby present the first-year, white, female teachers’ perceptions of their mentoring needs in teaching students of color.

**Trustworthiness**

Multiple methods of data collection were used to capture the stories and views of eight first-year, white, female teachers of students of color. I used journal responses, individual interview sessions, focus group sessions, and opportunities to provide
additional information via e-mail for the basis of the data collection. I audiotaped each individual interview session and the focus group sessions so that I could review the words of the participants. I transcribed the tapes myself so that I would be able to hear the words and voices of the participants and see the participants’ words on paper. Hearing the actual words of the participants and the feelings portrayed in their expressions helped bring back the faces of the participants and allow me to sense the sincerity and compassion in their voices. I worked to build rapport with the participants both collectively and individually so that they would feel comfortable enough with me to share their stories and innermost feelings with me about their experiences as first-year teachers of students of color. I met with the teachers on a frequent basis to maintain our relationship and to show a commitment to telling the stories of their experiences. I also e-mailed the teachers between visits to either as for them to submit a response to one of the open-ended questions, or to check with them just to see how they were doing that week. This not only kept the teachers focused on the study, but I had begun to care about the feelings and experiences of each teacher and genuinely wanted to know how their week was going. Because I began to feel concern for the teachers, it became especially important to me to accurately interpret their experiences as I worked to determine their perceptions of their mentoring needs. I also visited the teachers in person or virtually using the Internet to prolong engagement in the study. Saturation of data collection resulted after 11 weeks of prolonged contact and engagement. I checked on the accuracy of my interpretation using member checks and using a compilation of their responses to verify that I was capturing the data accurately.
Conclusion

This was a basic interpretive qualitative study. The impetus for this study was shared. The method for site selection and participant selection was described. The participants were briefly introduced. Data collection was described and data were collected until saturation occurred to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the data collected. An inductive approach was used to analyze the data. These findings may not be generalized and are only applicable to this particular study. In Chapter IV, the themes were presented that emerged as a result of data collection and analysis. The participants’ experiences were shared to support the themes that emerged.
CHAPTER IV
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To close the achievement gap, students must have exceptionally well-qualified teachers who are certified to teach the subject or grade level they have been assigned and who are compassionate about teaching children to reach their maximum potential.

Mary Hatwood Futrell and Joel Gómez

From the participants’ responses to the open-ended sentence stems in focus group sessions, individual interviews, and journal responses, three main themes emerged. These themes are the context of mentoring, the recognized mentoring needs of the participants, and the unperceived mentoring needs of the participants. Subsumed in each of these major themes are sub-themes. The sub-themes highlight specific areas of mentoring needs and detail the experiences of these first-year teachers in culturally diverse schools.

In reviewing the first theme, context of mentoring, I begin with a brief review of mentoring. The ideal of mentoring is to ensure first-year teachers are provided a smooth entry into the teaching profession and to improve their level of effectiveness in the classroom. The assignment of mentor to their first-year teacher is critical to the formation of a working relationship. Methods of assignment were examined. It was also necessary to formulate a basis for comparison of ideal mentoring and the actual mentoring received by the participants. The data are a description of the wide-range of
mentoring support of the participants. The manner in which the participants responded to the mentoring they received is also explored.

The second theme, evident mentoring needs, presents those needs that the participants were able to identify and clearly articulate as areas in which the participants perceived themselves to be in need of mentoring support. There were however, emotional needs of the participants that were evidenced but not clearly recognized as a mentoring need by the participants. Thus, two sub-themes emerged here. They are: (1) the need to acquire mastery of basic teaching skills and (2) the need for emotional support. The data indicated that participants clearly articulated a need to master basic teaching skills such as devising a workable class schedule, grading papers, and recording grades on the computerized software system. Other basic skills that were expressed as needs were implementing discipline strategies and understanding how to address instructional issues such as utilizing the curriculum guide. Next, examples were presented that illustrated the participants’ need for emotional support as they mastered the basic teaching skills. Helping the participants manage their various feelings such as frustration, anger, and disillusionment was clearly evidenced in what the participants said; however the need for emotional support was not readily identified by the participants as a specific mentoring need.

The third theme, critical unrecognized mentoring needs, highlights the participants’ failure to address the race and culture of the students even though this was the focus of the study as indicated by its title. The participants were aware that the perceptions of their mentoring needs in teaching students of color were the impetus for
the study; yet the data illuminated a lack of discussion about race and culture in the conversations of the participants once they began discussing their challenges and mentoring needs. Even after repeated probes specifically addressing race and culture, the participants failed to recognize a need for mentoring in areas that would assist them in meeting the needs of their students whose race and culture differed from their own. These needs were those that the participants were unable to recognize as skill sets that would enable the participants to develop as white, female teachers of students in culturally diverse schools. This concept was fundamental to the study. Each participant had expressed a desire to level the educational playing field for low-income students in culturally diverse schools; yet they were no longer having conversations about race and culture. Here, the first-year, white, female teachers’ perceptions of mentoring needs in culturally diverse schools is highlighted by the fact that what the participants did not say is as important as what they did say.

**Theme One: The Context of Mentoring**

Mentoring for first-year teachers is recognized as “a vehicle for educational reform” and “more than thirty states have mandated beginning teacher support as part of their teacher induction programs” (Portner, 2003, p. 3). Mentoring is considered an excellent method of introducing new teachers to the profession (Odell & Huling, 2000; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Villani, 2002). Villani (2002) stated that mentors can support new teachers by providing emotional support and encouragement and by providing information about the daily workings of the school and the cultural norms of
the community. Mentors can also help new teachers come to understand students and their families. Villani (2002) also stated that mentors can observe new teachers and ask thoughtful questions that promote reflection about their performance.

The intent of this study was not to critique the mentoring program of the district that was the host for data collection. However, the data were an indication that the mentoring experienced by the participants in this study was greatly varied in quality and quantity. These experiences formed the basis for the participants’ perceptions of their mentoring needs. Thus, the context of mentoring itself became the first overarching theme.

Mentoring Assignments

The mentoring assignments of the participants seemed to vary greatly from school to school. For example, the time frame in which the participants were assigned a mentor varied. Quality mentoring is maximized when mentors are assigned to the beginning teachers prior to the start of school (Odell & Huling, 2000). Some of these participants did not receive mentoring support from an assigned mentor until well after school had begun, and others basically had no mentors throughout the duration of the study. “The school did not assign a mentor for me until well into the second month of school. I really needed a mentor before school began. I felt very on my own until I had a mentor,” stated Diane. Even within schools in which more than one participant was teaching, the experiences greatly varied. Ann, Betty, and Charlotte worked in the same school. When I
asked Betty who had been assigned to her as her mentor she replied, “She’s the life skills teacher.” This was fortunate because Betty was also a special education teacher. I asked Betty when she found out who her mentor would be she said:

We were in staff development the summer before school started. The school really didn’t have mentors for us. She [the principal] had not figured out who she wanted for us yet so she just walked up to this woman. At first she told me my mentor was a second grade teacher which I really didn’t mind but the special education department was really upset because they wanted me to have a special education teacher [as a mentor] … she [the principal] changed her mind one day and told me that my mentor was this other woman. That was a couple of weeks later.

Although Betty eventually was eventually assigned a mentor who was working in the same field of education, it seems as though Betty perceived that her original mentor assignment was haphazard indicated by the comment that the principal walked up to a teacher to request that she mentor the participant. It also appears that intervention by the special education department at the district level resulted in a mentor change for Betty. This allowed Betty to be assigned a mentor who was more familiar with the teaching techniques and laws involved in providing special education instruction to students with disabilities.

Betty began with a mentor who was not a special education teacher like herself. She was later assigned a mentor who was familiar with the complexities of special education and who was currently a special education teacher. Through a change in assignment, therefore, Betty was assigned a mentor whose position was more closely related to hers. Ann had a similar experience with the assignment of her mentor. She was originally assigned a mentor whose work assignment was not closely related to hers. She
did not, however, receive intervention as Betty had earlier. She was assigned a mentor who was not even a classroom teacher.

Ann taught first grade. She was assigned the assistant principal as her mentor. She wrote in her journal, “I was assigned our vice principal as my mentor.” She went on to say during an individual interview:

I don’t know why he was picked [to be my mentor] because he is new to the campus [and] so he obviously doesn’t know the logistics of the campus. [For example] are we allowed to hang things on our door? How do I go about prepping for testing? I mean, he’s taught in the past, but not on this campus and not on this grade level so it’s a challenge.

Ann’s mentor was the assistant principal who was new to the building and new to his job. He had never taught at the first grade level. Therefore, unlike Betty whose mentor could help her with information relevant to her teaching field, Ann perceived her mentor to be less able to support her with classroom needs. She also did not feel he had the background to help her with her concerns.

The lack of coherence between the mentor work assignment and new teacher’s work assignment held true for other first-year teachers. Charlotte, who taught at the same school as Ann and Betty, was a split kindergarten and first grade teacher. She was assigned a mentor who was a second grade bilingual teacher whose classroom was located on the other side of the building down a long hallway. Charlotte said:

She’s at the other end of the hall. She teaches second grade bilingual and she’s been very helpful but unfortunately we don’t see each other as much as I’d like. It sounds silly because the school is small, but really with her being on the other end of the hall, makes a difference.

Charlotte felt that because her mentor was located some distance away from her that communication between her and her mentor was limited.
Another participant who was concerned about the proximity of her mentor to her classroom was Elaine. She said of her assigned mentor, “She was [located] in the building. I was in another building, and we weren’t able to connect.” As a result, Elaine sought mentoring from a teacher whose location in the building was more assessable to her.

Thus it seems that within this school district, the manner in which mentors were assigned to beginning teachers was inconsistent. The timeline in which the mentors were assigned also seems to have varied greatly from school to school. The grade level and proximity of the mentors in relation to the participants’ grade level assignments and building locations did not seem to have been a consideration when matching beginning teachers to mentors. The assignment of the participant to the mentor seemed to affect the relationship or manner in which the mentor and the participant were able to form a connection. In some cases, this resulted in the participants seeking support from persons other than in the school rather than from the mentor assigned by the school principal.

**Self-selected Versus Assigned Mentors**

Although each of the participants was assigned an official mentor, it seems as though some of the participants sought out mentoring support from other teachers or faculty members who were not their originally assigned as their mentors. The participants’ reasons for self-selecting an alternate mentor varied. For example, Elaine, a fourth grade teacher, wrote:

I had an extremely difficult time finding a mentor that would be able to give me the time I needed as a first year teacher, but that problem was solved relatively
quickly through a conference with my principal. I was fortunate enough to have [another] teacher offer to mentor me.

Elaine felt that she was not receiving the amount of interaction she needed from the mentor that had been originally assigned to her. I asked Elaine about this during one of our member checks. Elaine said that her originally assigned mentor was a third grade teacher who had volunteered for the job but was located in another building. This made it difficult for them to meet. Elaine said:

She was a third grade teacher and she had a lot on her plate … She was also in the building. I was in another building and we weren’t able to connect and get together. You know there’s things [problems] when you have this [need for help] and you’re about to pull your hair out and you need a teacher to [go to for immediate help] and ask, what do I do? I have this kid that’s doing this in my classroom. I couldn’t do that with her so we had to work that out and I talked to her and I talked to a lady who was willing to mentor me and we got together and we were able to work that out and make a better fit.

Elaine expressed a need to have someone more assessable to her. Having been assigned a mentor who taught at a lower grade level and who was located in another building was not meeting her needs. Elaine exhibited initiative and began to seek out another teacher who seemed to better accommodate Elaine’s mentoring needs. Elaine stated that her self-selected mentor was more readily available when she had questions or concerns. The new mentor had previously taught the fourth grade for about 20. Elaine said:

She’s given me so many resources. You know it’s not just the sitting down and having a long drawn out discussion about what I needed to be doing; it’s just having someone across the hall that I can run to and say hey, what do I do when this happens or how do you teach this?

Elaine acquired permission from her principal to make this a formal change in her mentor assignment.
Another participant, Jean, also had problems in the beginning of the school year with the manner in which her mentor had been assigned to her. She did not seem to have an official mentor when school started. When asked how and when she was assigned a mentor, Jean replied, “That was like a disaster.” She said her principal was new to the building and noticed that the mentor assigned to her was also mentoring another teacher. The principal wanted mentors to have only one first-year teacher assigned to each of them. Jean was therefore, assigned to a different mentor after school had begun. Jean said:

I was kind of assigned this other lady for a week who teaches fourth grade bilingual, and then there were just so many issues like nobody knew who my mentor was so like the first two weeks of school I was like I don’t know who it is because it kept changing so much and then finally I was assigned [another teacher]. She’s third bilingual and she kind of looks out for me and has model lessons ready for me and does all of my observations and stuff.

Jean seemed to perceive this mentor as supportive yet she found herself continually approaching the teacher who had previously taught the same split assignment that Jean was currently teaching. She felt confident that this person’s experiences provided her with more reliable information about managing her classroom. She said of this person:

I would call her my mentor because I go to her for everything. She’s had the three/four [grade level] split last year so she knows. She’s had all the same struggles that I’ve had like with classroom management. It’s just easier to talk to her because I don’t have to explain what I am going through first.

Jean considered this person to be more of a mentor to her than the mentor assigned by the principal. She had the initiative and capability to utilize both her assigned mentor as well as her self-selected mentor. Thus, there were some participants who did not feel that
their assigned mentors were meeting their needs and took the initiative to seek help from alternative mentors whom they perceived could better meet their mentoring needs.

_Variety Mentoring Support_

It appeared as though the participants experienced disparity in both the quality and quantity of mentoring support they received. Two of the participants reported that they received almost no mentoring support at all. They were Ann and Peggy. Peggy wrote in one of her journal reflections near the end of the first semester of teaching, “My mentor has not helped me at all. I have seen her twice.” In another journal reflection she wrote, “My mentor has not offered any help at all.” Peggy seemed to sum up her experience when she said, “...you are kind of thrown out there and you have to figure it out.”

Ann felt that she had little from her mentor who was the assistant principal of the school. She felt as though the assignment of the assistant principal as her mentor was a conflict of interest. She perceived him to be evaluating her rather than mentoring her. She said:

I’ve had my certification people discuss this with the principal and they [the principal and assistant principal] were like [assuring the certification people that] no, he’s not evaluating. But all of the things my principal has seen wrong in my classroom, seen, quote unquote, she hasn’t been in [my classroom] so it’s coming from him, out of his mouth so it’s clear that it’s [coming from him]. I learned very early on I’d better not tell him that anything was going wrong and ask for support because that was going straight to her that it was going wrong.

Ann believed that she could not go to the assistant principal who was her mentor because she believed he was reporting her areas of need to the principal. She stated:
My mentor has helped me or could have helped me by distancing himself from his position as an administrator. I was assigned the vice-principal as my mentor. In addition to being my superior, it is also his first year at our school. This dynamic meant that our relationship could not be one where I came to him openly about problems and spoke candidly about my fears and concerns for my classroom. I did do this in the beginning, and received disciplinary action from my principal afterwards, for a lack of classroom management she sensed in my classroom. She had not been in my classroom herself, so this meant her information came from my mentor.

Because Ann was assigned an administrator rather than a classroom teacher to be her mentor, she did not believe that she could go to him for help on her areas of need. She believed that he was reporting her areas of need to the principal who in turn perceived Ann to be deficient. This affected Ann’s ability to develop trust with her mentor. She said, “Without a trustworthy mentor who is my peer, I am at a loss for help and feel very vulnerable.” This lack of trust prevented her from seeking out her assigned mentor for support. She felt that she could not tell him her areas of difficulty such as her need for help with classroom management and organization. She felt that when she told him her needs he had reported them to the principal, and this resulted in her being placed on a growth plan. She feared that further confiding in her assigned mentor would result in her eventually not being certified as a teacher. Because she felt she could not go to her mentor to share problems and concerns, Ann received little if any support from her mentor.

Roberta also seemed to lack support from her mentor. She wrote in her journal, “My mentor is a difficult person to deal with. I am surprised, on reflection, about how well I handle her ridicule and remarks.” Roberta had not established a close relationship with her mentor. She also felt that her mentor was not providing her with information
that would support the academic achievement of the students. She wrote, “Her biggest pieces of advice have been put your kids down earlier for a nap, let them have recess a full half hour, etc.” Roberta explained that both nap time and recess were supposed to be brief periods of time in accordance with their schedule. She was concerned that her mentor was not advising her in ways that supported the goals of the principal, school, or school district. Roberta also stated that she had received little support in planning lessons for the students. She said, “She [her mentor] gives us all [the pre-kindergarten teachers] these photocopies and she’s like here do this [packet] this week. There’s no planning. It’s like, have the kids do this. Have the kids do that and it’s frustrating.” Roberta was concerned that the teachers on her team did not sit down together to discuss the learning objectives and share ideas about what activities could be presented to support student learning. Instead she felt the mentor had taken the same worksheets that the kindergarten teachers had previously used and modified them for pre-kindergarten. She said:

She [the mentor] is a veteran kindergarten teacher [of English speaking students]. She’s got all of her materials from kinder [kindergarten] so she’s like dumbing down, watering down [simplifying the information presented] and basically doing kinder with her kids.

Roberta said that there were other resources that the teachers could use other than the packets of worksheets. She was told, however, not to use these materials, because if the children mistreated the materials the participant would have to pay for replacement materials. She said:

I got this Scholastic box of stuff and when I got it they [the mentor and another coworker] told me to put this [the resource kit] in the closet and never take it out because you have to pay for it if something is lost or something is ripped. And they were like, just put them in your closet and never take them out.
Later Roberta learned from another teacher that the resource box of materials was appropriate for use. She said:

Two weeks ago I was talking to another friend. She has this Scholastic thing at her house and I was looking at it and she’s like this is my curriculum. This is what I follow. They have center ideas and everything in here.

Roberta was not pleased that her mentor had advised her not to use this resource.

On the other hand, there were participants who were more pleased with the support received from their mentors. Their sense of support ranged from somewhat supportive to very supportive. Charlotte’s mentor, located at the other end of the hallway, seemed to provide help to her when Charlotte sought her for help. Charlotte said, “I know I should seek her out more, and when I do ask her, she’s very, very helpful.” Charlotte received help from her mentor when she took the initiative to walk down the hallway to the mentor’s classroom. Timeliness of support was a problem for Charlotte, who on her own, had made mistakes. She would then seek out her mentor to help her correct her problems. It seems that had the mentor been helping her from the start, many mistakes could have been avoided. For example, Charlotte wrote:

My mentor was helpful with how to implement a new grading system. It would have been nice if she had told me how to grade from the very beginning. Instead, I first got told that I completed my grade book wrong and then I asked my mentor for help.

This was not an isolated incident for Charlotte. She also wrote:

I wish my mentor could have helped me more with creating a good schedule for my classroom. I was so confused early on about how to schedule my day. It was my fault I did not seek out my mentor, but I wish she could have helped me the first week of school. My mentor is incredibly kind and helpful, but the key is for me to seek out her help and I did not do that enough in the beginning of the year.
Charlotte believed her mentor to be supportive; however, support seemed to be given only when the participant went to the mentor and asked for help.

Other participants felt well-supported both in direction with learning the many tasks involved in the basics of teaching and with emotional support. For example, Diane, who had befriended her own mentor early in the year when she had not yet been assigned a mentor, wrote:

My mentor has helped me by answering all my questions in a timely manner. [She] has given me more information than I thought I needed; therefore I feel very prepared in what I need to do and how to do it. She has given me moral support by encouraging me when she knows I have done a good job.

Diane perceived her mentor as providing her with information that would help her develop her teaching skills and she also perceived her mentor as providing emotional support. Betty, too felt emotional support from her mentor. She said, “My mentor is great.... I really do trust her.” The participants who seemed to perceive their mentors as supportive described their support as that which helped them develop basic teaching skills and that which provided emotional support.

**Theme Two: Evident Mentoring Needs**

When asked what the first-year teachers perceived as their mentoring needs, the participants’ responses fell basically into two areas of concern. The first area of need was clearly articulated by the participants. Without a doubt the participants expressed the need for support in mastering the basic skills of teaching such as managing their classroom, creating schedules, and creating lesson plans utilizing the standards listed in their curriculum guides. The second area of concern was for emotional support to help
the participants work through the challenges of their first-year. This need seemed to be an outcome of their frustration mastering the basic skills involved in teaching. Some of the participants, moreover, expressed feeling physically drained as a result of the many hours they were putting into their days trying to be prepared and from concerns about their performance. This need was clearly evident in conversations with the participants and in their journal reflections; however, the participants did not specifically state that one of their mentoring needs was for emotional support. Therefore this need was evident but not articulated by the participants.

The Need to Acquire Mastery of Basic Skills

Much of the struggles experienced by first year teachers involve mastering the basic skills of being a classroom teacher (Veenman, 1984). For the participants, these struggles included classroom management issues such as devising a workable class schedule, grading papers, recording grades on the computerized software system, implementing discipline strategies, and understanding how to address instructional issues such as understanding how to utilize the curriculum guide to develop differentiated lessons that would meet the needs of diverse learners. Roberta wrote:

During the first three months I did not know I had a curriculum…. My schedule [changed] weekly, if not more often…. I had nothing with which to set up my classroom…. It was impossible to get lesson planning done and make it to class while also rearranging my room on a weekly basis. This made classroom management very rocky and, my students actually weren’t able to go to centers for a whole three weeks while I sorted things out.

Roberta reiterated her frustrations during one of her individual interviews by saying, “Classroom management is huge.” She later wrote about classroom management saying,
“This has been a constant challenge and a headache … as I have spent many days plotting a classroom management tool and then had to throw it out shortly after implementation.” Roberta recognized that her deficiencies in mastering these basic skills resulted in a loss of learning time for her students.

Ann expressed similar concerns. She recognized that her lack of ability to develop an effective schedule or lesson plans was affecting student learning. She wrote:

I initially did not know exactly what my daily schedule would look like or how to effectively teach the curriculum. This meant a lot of experimenting in the beginning for me and for my students, and unfortunately this resulted in unclear expectations for my students and thus difficulties with classroom management.

Both Roberta and Ann recognized that their lack of basic skills affected the students’ progress as well. These same concerns were expressed by other participants. Charlotte wrote:

One of my biggest challenges during the first three months was creating a schedule that would benefit me and my students. In the beginning, I really had no idea how to organize my day and even today I still think about changing my entire day so I can be more efficient.

Betty corroborated saying, “I’ve also been having a difficult time finding a solid routine that works well for me and my students.” Betty expressed concerns about scheduling, curriculum, materials, and resources. She stated, “I didn’t have materials given to me, like this is your reading program and this is your math…. I didn’t have any of that so I was just scrambling around to try to find things I am supposed to teach.” She went on to say, “This was a lot of work for a first-year teacher. I was also confused about how to set up my gradebook and lesson plans.” Betty’s perceived needs involved mastering basic skills.
Another participant, Diane, had similar concerns about acquiring basic teaching skills. She wrote:

My major challenges the first three months have been getting organized and knowing what all I was supposed to be doing…. Getting organized for the day is challenging in the beginning because I didn’t know everything my room had in it, and getting supplies from the office was not easy.

Concerns about understanding and implementing the curriculum were repeatedly expressed by the participants. Ann said, “I think my first challenges were having no idea what the curriculum was or how to translate it into a lesson.” Diane concurred when she wrote, “[The curriculum] is not very easy to read, at least for me, and I am not following it as closely as I should because it is just too vague for me.” This was also true for Peggy who wrote in her journal, “Interpreting [the curriculum] has also been a major issue for me. I don’t know how to teach what I am supposed to be teaching.” Elaine also expressed concerns writing, “I am concerned about lesson plans. I find that I spend up to 10 hours trying to get the plans written out the way they require.”

Even 18 weeks into the school year, Peggy continued to be concerned about her inability to develop lessons using the curriculum guide. Peggy shared her concerns in response to the open-ended sentence stem, “In reviewing my mentoring needs throughout the first semester, it would have been most helpful to have had more information on…” She wrote:

In reviewing my mentoring needs throughout the first semester, it would have been most helpful to have had more information on lesson plans! I am still struggling with what to do for lessons. The curriculum guide is a bad joke. I don’t know how to go from reading the curriculum guide to having an interesting lesson. My mentor has not helped me at all.
Problems with understanding how to translate the curriculum into lesson plans also affected the participant’s abilities to differentiate instruction. Jean wrote:

> My major challenges during the first three months have been aligning the two curriculums for both 3rd and 4th grade. Teaching a split class has been extremely difficult because the objectives are not the same for each grade…. For each objective that I teach it is really hard to plan activities that will challenge all of my students.

In sum, the participants expressed concerns about scheduling, classroom management, materials, resources, and utilizing the curriculum guide to develop instructional plans. Their concerns are consistent with the literature regarding rudimentary problems for first-year teachers (Huberman, 1989; Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Martin & Robbins, 1999; Moir, 1999; Udelhofen & Larson, 2003, Veenman, 1984). As Lipton & Wellman (2001) noted, “There is a constant need to learn the curriculum, develop instructional plans, learn and develop assessment systems, correct student work, and develop and gather materials” (p. 5). These participants clearly recognized and were able to express their needs for support in mastering the basic skills or tasks involved with managing and conducting a classroom. Additional needs, however, were present but were expressed less overtly by the participants. The need for support in the area of emotional well-being became evident.

*The Need for Emotional Support*

While the participants did not directly state that they needed emotional support and encouragement, this became evident as they expressed their feelings of frustration. Thoughts about personal and professional competence were shared by participants that
indicated a need for emotional support while they worked to develop the skills of teaching. Many emotions were expressed. Feelings of excitement and anticipation were mixed with expressions of anxiety when discussing their new jobs. Ann’s feelings of frustration were evident when she said, “I’m quickly losing sight of like why I chose to do this, but it’s easy to when there’s no positive reinforcement.” By this Ann seemed to say that because she received little positive reinforcement or support from her mentor or anyone else on the campus, she was becoming discouraged about her mission. This comment was indicative of the disillusionment Moir (1999) said is commonly seen in first-year teachers. “The extensive time commitment, the realization that things are probably not going as smoothly as they would like, and low morale contribute to this period of disenchantment” (Moir, 1999, p. 20 – 21).

Roberta expressed frustration in her inability to get a handle on teaching, and this frustration seemed exacerbated by the lack of support she felt she was receiving from her mentor. Roberta also expressed feelings of disenchantment. She talked about feeling uninformed and ill-prepared. Her emotional frustration became more evident through her use of capital letters when she wrote in her journal:

In reviewing my mentoring needs throughout the first semester, it would have been most helpful to have had more information on EVERYTHING. That said, I will narrow this answer to my most recent experience of feeling totally uninformed and ill-prepared. I have been struggling quite a bit to find things that work and work well for me, and have changed a hundred times my daily schedule, room set-up, centers procedure, tracking, and lesson plan format. Many of my lesson plans have been invented the morning of or the day before, as everything else I was doing kept me in hectic last-minute stage for a long time. Some I wrote in books, others typed, they are all over the place and many have been thrown away as I thought it was stupid to hold on to the ones that didn’t work well or that I wasn’t able to actually pull off. My biggest mentoring need, then, turns out to be: KNOWING THAT I HAD TO TURN IN A LESSON
PLAN FOR EVERY SINGLE DAY OF THE SCHOOL YEAR and also from the beginning up until now [to be] ready for my PDAS observation in February. I am SCREWED. I have just been nailing down some lesson plan templates that are tailored to the schedule that I am also starting to hammer out, and only now are my lessons getting really planned and am I drawing from curriculum resources that I had, but was told never to use. For being such a serious thing, I don’t understand why NO ONE told me that I would need them before now…. I think a little bit of support from my mentor on things like how to plan lessons with [curricular] objectives, how to document and track would be nice. But wait, my mentor is now backlogging her lesson plans as well, and I have yet to know how she tracks her students.

The use of capitalization in her writing seemed to punctuate her feelings of anger over not being aware that she would be required to submit her weekly lesson plans to the principal. She also seemed to be upset about many management issues. Her emotional upset was evident.

This frustration seemed particularly common among the participants who perceived their mentors as unsupportive in helping them master the basic skills of teaching. Roberta’s anxiety was apparent when she was asked what she was concerned about and she wrote, “Everything. My students’ learning. My own sanity. Lesson planning, centers, and tracking.” Clearly being concerned about her sanity exhibited a high state of emotions and need for support. In response to a question about her major challenges, Roberta wrote, “To manage this classroom takes an exorbitant amount of energy each and every day and that’s what I don’t always have is the energy to do it.” She later went on to say, “Personal toll is unbelievable. It’s very hard. Sometimes I stay here 15 hours.” Of this grueling schedule Roberta said, “It’s miserable.” Working an extreme amount of hours in the first year is often the case for new teachers. “It is not uncommon for new teachers to spend up to 70 hours a week on school work” (Moir,
Comments by Roberta seemed to indicate that she was spending a great amount of time and energy on her work and was feeling stressed from this level of commitment. She wrote, “The other teachers sometimes ‘kindly’ ‘tease’ me about how serious I am about teaching Pre-K well. It is not a supportive environment.” Roberta did not feel supported emotionally. In discussing the type of support she was receiving from her mentor during this time, she wrote that her mentor “does provide me with theme-based worksheet packets every week or two and I am expected to do with the children because we all have to be on the same page.” There was no mention of emotional support. She continued to write:

However, these usually do not go with the lessons I have already planned out and then I either push my kids to do both or my lessons have to suffer because my mentor and the other teacher are constantly asking [me] and checking [to see] if I’ve done them and making remarks like [Roberta] doesn’t think this is advanced enough or she isn’t a team player.

The participant seemed upset that her mentor did not see her as being in sync with the group. She felt taunted by her mentor. She further felt as though her mentor did not support her when other teachers ridiculed her. Roberta ended her first journal reflection by saying, “I am not sure how much of a success this first year is going to be, and after all the hard work I am putting into it that would be very upsetting.”

Other participants were feeling the emotional strain caused by a lack of rest. Diane reported waking up early one morning as a result of thinking about the work that needed to be done. When asked what caused these worries she said, “Getting my head around everything I had to do. At one point I woke up about 3:00 in the morning and couldn’t go back to sleep because I was thinking, ‘I don’t have my Teacher’s Edition
book. So I came up here. It was 4:00 a.m.” Diane seemed to be overwhelmed about preparing her lessons and needing materials that were not readily assessable to her.

“Particularly overwhelming is the constant need to develop curriculum” (Moir, 1999, p. 20). One possible cause for this participant’s stress could be related to the fact that she had not been assigned a mentor until after school had begun. The participant stated:

The problem, and it wasn’t her fault, with my mentor, is I didn’t get her until well into the second month into the year. She kind of befriended me, took me under her wing the first week of school, but it wasn’t anything official until the middle of the second month after I had been going crazy.

Diane summed up her emotions by saying, “I felt very on my own until I had a mentor.” Another participant seemed to agree with the feeling of isolation expressed by Diane. Peggy, said, “… you are kind of thrown out there and you have to figure it out.” This statement seemed to represent Peggy’s feelings of seclusion and her emotional feelings of just trying to survive. She summed up her feelings and perhaps those of some of the other first-year teachers when she said, “We’re just overwhelmed right now.”

Some of the participants used words such as “nervous,” “terrified,” and “vulnerable.” Charlotte, when talking about her fears of being evaluated admitted, “I’m kind of nervous about that.” And Betty in talking about her performance evaluation said, “It’s all [the feedback] very, very negative or just negative on paper but then she [the principal] doesn’t come through with that [feedback] when you actually go and talk with her. It is really hard to know what she [the principal] wants from us but we just feel like we are constantly doing something wrong.” Ann said, “You know I’ve been here a month and I’m terrified and I still have no idea if I’ll get certified.” These participants seemed to feel emotional distress and insecurity about their job performance. It did not seem as
though they were receiving mentoring support to help them with their need for emotional support.

Although Betty perceived her mentor as a good support system she expressed frustrations when her mentor would not help her communicate her desire to integrate more special education students into mainstream classes. She said, “It’s really frustrating…. I’ve asked her [the mentor] for help on this and she says ‘No, you don’t want to get into that. Just stay out of it.’” Although her mentor may have offered Betty unusual advice when telling Betty to “lay low and do as she was told” and to “stay out of it,” it seems that her mentor was trying to be supportive of Betty as a teacher by trying to keep Betty from upsetting the administration; however, Betty did not interpret this as supportive.

Another participant who expressed her feelings was Elaine. She wrote, “This is so frustrating” when sharing an experience about planning a field trip for students and learning her class had been bumped off the bus. She said, “Something about that went through me, and she [the teacher who told her about the change in plans] told me five minutes before I had [to pick up] my kids. It was like my blood pressure just went through the roof, and it just made me very angry.” Elaine felt that this was unfair. She turned to her mentor for support. Elaine believed that her mentor was always available to her for emotional support. She said:

She [the mentor] has always provided me not only with practical advice regarding my teaching, but with advice to keep my own sanity and how to take care of myself this year. She has been the most helpful to me by being completely honest about policies and also by sharing a wealth of resources and information. Most importantly, she has been an excellent sounding board who always listens when I have questions or gripes!
Although Elaine stated that her mentor provided advice on keeping her sanity and was a good sounding board, she did not generalize that first-year white teachers of students of color were in need of emotional support from their mentors.

While Elaine was able to clearly articulate her feelings of frustration and anger, other participants expressed concerns less overtly. For example, Roberta used capital letters to punctuate her feelings in the journal responses. All in all, there was an abundance of evidence indicating that the participants needed their mentors to provide emotional support even though the participants did not perceive this as a mentoring need. Thus, the need for mentors to provide emotional support was an evident but unrecognized mentoring need. There was another critical need that seemed to be unrecognized by the participants, the need for an understanding of race and culture. Although the study focused on the mentoring needs of first-year white teachers in teaching students of color, the participants failed to articulate needs related to the race and culture of their students.

**Theme Three: Critical Unrecognized Mentoring Needs**

The participants clearly perceived that they needed their mentors to help them acquire basic teaching skills such as classroom management issues, devising a workable class schedule, grading papers, recording grades on the computerized software system, implementing discipline strategies, and understanding how to address instructional issues such as understanding how to utilize the curriculum guide to develop lessons. There was no doubt that the participants recognized their need to acquire basic teaching
skills. Throughout the study the participants appeared frustrated and in need of support in managing their frustrations yet they did not articulate the need for emotional support as a mentoring need. This was an evident but unperceived need. Yet to emerge, however, was the participants perceptions of their mentoring needs in teaching students whose race and culture was different than their own. Here were new white teachers working in schools where the majority of the students were racially and culturally different from these teachers, yet race and culture almost never came up in our discussions about the participants’ teaching and mentoring needs. This was surprising to me, therefore toward the end of this project I began to more explicitly ask the teachers about their needs in regards to understanding the race and culture of their students. Although there were some comments related to the low income level of the students or the students’ language being Spanish, race and culture, specifically were never mentioned. Moreover, when income and language were discussed it was from a deficit thinking model (Valencia, 2002).

During one session I tried to find out more about the teachers’ perceptions of their students’ needs and how these needs might relate to the students’ culture. I said, “Culture. These kids are not of your culture. Are you seeing any need at this point to become more familiar with the Hispanic culture?” The overwhelming response was, “No.” Peggy said, “It doesn’t really play into my kids or day to day what we do.” Whereas Ann said, “I don’t know if it’s [not] the Southern culture.” Ann, like several of the participants, is from a northern state. She is also Jewish. She continued, “And the Christian culture is very weird to me.” Ann is Jewish. She continued, “The Catholics
[and the fact] that you are having a Christmas pageant at a public school. They would never have done that where I grew up.” Continuing on with culture being defined by region or religion, Roberta said, “I asked all of my parents if anyone of them were Jewish because I wanted someone to come in and talk and they said no, they were all Catholic.” The participants seemed unaware that most of their students, who were Hispanic, were also Catholic. They seemed to know very little about the culture of their students. Continuing the conversation about culture and whether the participants viewed it as important, Ann described how she felt different from her students and their families. It was one of the only times that race entered the conversation.

They see me as a white outsider. At parent meet-your-teacher [night] I had parents say you’re not from here are you? I was [thinking] what is that supposed to mean? So yeah [culture is important]. I think [it was also important that] the administration [had recognized that] I was a different faith [was important] and coming in [from a different area of the country] I mean I went to school in a different state, It’s not the same in this little community where everyone is from this [big town] and everyone’s the same nationality and I don’t know if it would be the same as if a Black teacher came into an all white school but I’m definitely feeling a little [different].

Roberta agreed saying, “Religion is bigger though. I think religion is even bigger than race. Especially for some people who are staunch [Catholics]. The participants all seemed to agree. At that point we had to end the session. I was happy to see that some conversation had begun about race and culture although we had not addressed mentoring needs in this context. Because I had directly asked the participants about the race and culture of their students, I felt the next journal responses might reflect the participants’ assimilation of the conversations we had about race and culture and their perceived mentoring needs as first-year white teachers of students of color. This did not occur.
Journal responses were not reflecting thoughts about race and culture. I decided to be more direct and asked the participants about culture and race. Specifically, since the study focus was on the mentoring needs of first-year white teachers in culturally and racially diverse schools, I wanted to know if they were being mentored in culturally responsive teaching. I also wanted to know what they had been taught in their preservice training that would help them in their current teaching context. I thought I could get at these issues by asking the teachers, “Is there any way or any need to utilize the culture of the kids in teaching?” Charlotte responded:

> I think using their culture is so important but I don’t think I have done enough of it. When we did Hispanic Awareness month we did projects of famous people… I want to bring more into it but it’s just hard, like my organization [is still a problem].

Charlotte seemed to feel that utilizing culture in her teaching was an “event.” That is, she seemed to think that having her students know about famous Hispanic people was enough. Moreover, after briefly mentioning this “cultural event,” she quickly returned to discussing her need to acquire the basic teaching skill of organization. In an attempt to redirect the question back to culturally responsive teaching, I asked if she had taken any classes in college that might help her in utilizing the culture of her students in her teaching. She said:

> No [classes were attended about diversity]. I was very privileged in my college. It was all women but it was extremely diverse other than the all women part. And I was in an international club because my roommate was from Korea so I joined with her. I knew people from all over the world and I don’t speak any other language fluently. I’ve taken language but just knowing those other people helped make me more aware. But I think I’ve actually only known one Mexican. The Mexican culture I really don’t know.
When Charlotte said “I was privileged in my college,” she seemed to say that she knew she was fortunate to be able to attend such an expensive and elite school. Her comment about privilege did not indicate to me that she was referring to the recognition of her white privilege. Although Charlotte indicated that “knowing” other people helps one become “more aware,” it did not appear that she had done anything as a teacher to get to know or become more aware of the culture of her students. In fact, she dismissed the topic with “The Mexican culture I really don’t know” and went back to discussing her immediate teaching concerns.

I guess I’m just worried about what needs to be done now so I always ask [my mentor] about grades or I need to have my calendar ready so I will ask her [my mentor] what does she have on it and I don’t think long-term.

Other participants responded to my question, “Is there any way or any need to utilize the culture of the kids in teaching?” by saying that they felt the income of the children affected their learning rather than their race or culture. For example, Jean said:

It’s not their race, it’s more their income…Reading support at home is [a] huge [problem] and I don’t think it has anything to do with race. I think it’s the low income. I mean I realize there are parents that I have in this room that aren’t all working eight to five jobs and if they are some are working the night shift. They aren’t home all of the time. They’re really busy because they have to work harder to get [ahead].

Here again, this participant denied the importance of race and culture. Whereas Charlotte felt the importance of race and culture was one of getting to know others, Jean dismissed the importance of race and culture and chose, rather, to frame the discussion around income.

Peggy, however, was raised in Corpus Christi and was essentially immersed in the Hispanic culture in the schools she attended. I asked her is she had ever thought of
integrating what she knew about the Hispanic culture into her teaching. Her response was, “I could but I would feel like they obviously know a lot more than I do so if I would try to get up and teach them something, well I would just feel silly.” Here, Peggy was dismissing the importance of being responsive to culture and race in her teaching by saying it would make her feel silly to try to teach the students about something they knew about and she did not.

Finally I asked Elaine what she thought she needed to know in order to teach children from a culture different from her own. She said, “Nothing could have prepared me for parents that don’t care as much. It still blows me away. Even after [working for] CPS it still blows me away.” This response surprised me greatly. I asked her if she thought she needed more training. She said, “I think personally for me, no. I think for somebody else, maybe.” I asked what she felt were the students’ greatest need and she replied, “Having somebody to push them.” Here Elaine was defining the culture of her students as a deficit one. Moreover, she did not feel she needed any training to work successfully with her students, in that she thought they just needed someone to “push them.”

After this group interview, I asked the participants to reflect in their journal about their greatest challenges during their entire first semester. After all of our conversations, there was not one response mentioning the race or culture of the students. There was no acknowledgment of the need to understand the race or culture of the students. Further, excerpts from their journals revealed that all of the participants reverted to their original needs of acquiring basic teaching skills.
Charlotte said, “I would have liked to know more about grading students … the importance of practicing for the Stanford test early on … about the school environment [climate of fear].” Almost all of the other participants mentioned a need to understand the curriculum guide and planning lessons. For example, Peggy said, “Lesson plans! I am STILL struggling.” Diane said, “It would have been most helpful to have more information on the [curriculum] and how to effectively follow it from the beginning.” Elaine said, “I found that it was difficult to get the things I needed to teach the curriculum the district requires.” Betty reflected the same saying, “It would have been most helpful to have more information on how to acquire materials and how to organize my records system.” Whereas Roberta responded, “It would have been most helpful to have more information on EVERYTHING.” She went on to discuss her need for help in planning lessons using the curriculum guide.

The responses of the participants concerned me. They seemed to lack any recognition of the importance of race and culture in the lives of their students. However, based on the participants’ comments during our initial interview and group sessions, they had entered teaching with the ideal of making a difference in the lives of students, particularly students living in poverty and those who had been historically marginalized, that is, students of color. Comments had been made that indicated the participants were aware of the inequities that faced the students they would be serving. For example, Jean said, “Basically [it’s] about the inequalities and they do exist. For me it wasn’t enough to know what I knew and not do anything about it.” Betty had said that the national recruiting program appealed to her “because of their mission and opportunity for all.
That’s something I am interested in and because education can level the playing field.”

Yet once the participants began teaching, the significance of race and culture and their need to understand and respond to the race and culture of their students to be a successful teacher did not seem to enter their minds.

In summary, the participants experienced a wide range of mentoring support. Some participants reported virtually no support, while others felt a high level of support but from mentors they had chosen rather than from the mentors assigned to them by their schools. The participants perceived a need to receive mentoring on the basic skills of teaching. The data also indicated that the participants were in need of emotional support. Most illuminating, however, was the participants’ complete lack of perception with regard to their needs to understand and respond to the race and culture of their students in order to be successful teachers in culturally diverse schools. In Chapter V the findings were reviewed in relation to the current literature on mentoring. Recommendations were then provided for consideration by those who affect policy, practice, and research regarding first-year white teachers who will play a critical role in the lives of their culturally diverse students.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

*By what sends the white kids I ain’t sent: I know I can’t be President.*

*What don’t bug them white kids sure bugs me: We know everybody ain’t free.*

*Lies written down for white folks ain’t for us a-tall:*

*Liberty And Justice- Huh!- For All?*

*Langston Hughes*

This study actually began thirty years ago when I was a first-year, white, female teacher teaching a class of five year old kindergarten students who were African-American and who lived in low-income households. I suspected then that I was missing something in my teacher preparation classes that would have helped me to better meet the needs of the students I taught. As I continued in my career, becoming a supervisor of curriculum and instruction and then principal of four elementary schools each serving a culturally diverse population, I continued to note the disparities in student achievement between white students and students of color. I wondered what factors were missing in the education of students who were not performing satisfactorily on various measures of academic achievement. Because I believe that the one most significant factor in the classroom is the teacher, examining teacher performance of the first-year teacher became the focus of my query. Thus, years later, these same questions became the foundation for this study. The findings in this study were based on the perceptions of eight, first-year, white, female teachers working in culturally diverse, low-income campuses. I will briefly review the themes and compare the findings from this study to the literature.
Next, I will summarize the findings. Then I will suggest recommendations for practitioners such as classroom teachers, school administrators, and university instructors.

Findings

The three themes that emerged in the study were: (1) the context of mentoring, (2) evident mentoring needs and (3) critical unrecognized mentoring needs. As suggested in the literature, mentoring is considered to be an effective form of support for first-year teachers (Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Odell & Huling, 2000; Portner, 2003; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Villani, 2002). The mentor should be carefully selected and assigned to the first-year teacher prior to the first day of school (Wood, 1999). “The success of establishing a system of peer mentors for new teachers lies in the selection and matching process” (Wood, 1999, p.119). The data from this study indicated early on that the assignment of mentor to first-year teacher varied from school to school and seemed random at best. In one case the mentor was also a school administrator. This greatly affected the participant’s feelings of trust. “New teachers need to know whether their candidly shared concerns will be kept confidential, as they decide how much to share with their mentors. Trust is a key component in the relationship” (Villani, 2002, p. 24).

The findings clearly indicated that there was a need to improve the current system used for matching mentors to first year teachers, if there was indeed a system in place at all. Perhaps as a result of the manner in which the mentors were paired with the
first-year teachers, some of the participants began to adopt new mentors whom they perceived as more capable of meeting their mentoring needs. Recognizing, understanding, and supporting first-year teachers is particularly important during the early part of the school year when first-year teachers are moving through several emotional phases (Moir, 1999). These phases in part include feelings of anticipation, survival, and disillusionment. This coincides during the period of time when first-year teachers are struggling with learning to plan lessons and gather teaching materials while trying to meet the needs of students (Huberman, 1989; Moir, 1999). The participants who self-selected their mentors seemed to be able to grasp the basic teaching skills more readily. Having their own needs met, these participants were then able to focus on the needs of the students.

There was one final discovery highlighted in the first theme. The type of mentoring and the frequency of mentoring varied greatly from participant to participant. This indicated that the mentors may not have been trained in the skills of mentoring and may not have received support or guidance themselves in the role of mentoring. Literature states that mentors should be trained in the role of mentoring, learning the needs, problems, and phases of beginning teachers. They should also be trained in observation and feedback strategies and effective teaching strategies (Brooks, 1999; Ganser et al., 1999; Daresh, 2003; Odell & Huling, 2000; Portner, 2003; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998).

The second theme was fully supported by the literature. The participants expressed need for support in mastering the basic skills of teaching such as managing
their classroom, creating schedules, and creating lesson plans utilizing the standards listed in their curriculum guides. Concerns such as these are addressed in the mentoring literature (Huberman, 1989; Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Martin & Robbins, 1999; Moir, 1999; Udelhofen & Larson, 2003, Veenman, 1984). The participants also indicated a need for emotional support as they worked through the challenges of their first year. The literature describes the many emotional needs teachers feel during their first year of teaching (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Friedman, 2000; Fuller, 1969; Huberman, 1989; Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Moir, 1999; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Veenman, 1984).

Furthermore, if these basic needs, including emotional needs, are not met, there is the risk that new teachers will leave the profession. According to the literature on teacher attrition teachers leave the profession due to stress; difficulties with classroom management; lack of materials, supplies, and other resources; perceived insufficient parental support; a lack of induction and mentoring; and a lack of administrative support (Ballinger, 2000; Certo & Fox, 2002; Fredericks, 2001; Ingersoll, 1997; Lucksinger, 2000; Ng, 2003; Scott, 1999). Although none of the participants in this study left her teaching position, all expressed concerns that concurred with the literature on teacher attrition.

Coinciding with the participants’ needs for support in mastering basic teaching skills and attaining support for their varied feelings is the research by Fuller (1969) that suggests teachers move through stages of concerns as they develop. These stages are self-concerns, task-concerns, and impact-concerns (Fuller, 1969). “Frances Fuller found
that almost all student teachers and beginning teachers experience a similar sequence of phases of personal growth” (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998, p. 87). This study supported these findings. The participants clearly experienced personal challenges that fell into the categories of self-concerns and task-concerns. Examples of self-concerns were those concerns about becoming sick due to their many hours of work without rest, meeting certification requirements, and about feeling overwhelmed due to the workload expectations and responsibilities that were new to them. The literature described these as feelings of first-year teachers in the survival stage of teaching (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Friedman, 2000; Fuller, 1969; Huberman, 1989; Lipton & Wellman, 2001; Moir, 1999; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998; Veenman, 1984).

The literature also stated that teachers must begin mastering self- and task-concerns before being able to fully move into the last phase of impact concerns that deal with student achievement (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). The findings repeatedly illustrated this. The participants were unable to focus on student learning needs until they were comfortable with their skills in classroom management and planning lessons. Some participants did not move far along the continuum such as Peggy who continually lamented about not being able to translate curriculum into usable lesson plans. A second participant, Ann, also remained in the second level of teacher development that of task concerns. These two participants received the least amount of mentoring support and were unable to advance through the stages of development to the stage in which the needs of the students are the focus of the teacher’s attention. The findings were consistent in that the continuum of mentor support corresponded to the
participants’ abilities to move through the stages of concern. Those participants who perceived their mentors as supportive and attentive to their needs were able to advance to the highest level of teacher development, that which addresses students’ instructional challenges. These participants felt free to talk to their mentors at all times and received both emotional support as well as task-related support. Consistent with the research by Fuller (1969) and Fuller and Bown (1975), when the participants’ needs were addressed at the lower stages of teacher development, they were able to advance through the stages of teacher concerns and focus on student achievement early on in the first semester. Elaine, Diane, and Jean all moved rapidly through the stages of teacher concern and focused on student achievement as demonstrated by their ability to analyze student performance and differentiate instruction to some extent.

The literature was clear that teachers move through stages of concern (Fuller, 1969). This study adds to this literature, in that it appears that although teachers move through the same stages of development, the rate at which the teachers in this study advanced was related to the teacher’s perception of her mentoring support. With many first-year teachers filling the classrooms in culturally diverse and low-income schools, it is critical to student achievement that the first-year teacher moves through to the stage of student impact as quickly as possible so that student learning can become the center of focus. Mentors must therefore, be trained in the stages of teacher development. Furthermore, they must know how to recognize the stages as the first-year teachers move through them and how to provide support that will move the teacher through the first two
stages rather than stalling out in the survival phases of self-concern. This finding may be
a strong factor to consider when designing and monitoring mentoring programs.

The third theme provided perhaps the most significant finding of the study with
respect to adding to the literature on mentoring, particularly the mentoring of white
teachers working in diverse classrooms. This literature stated that many white preservice
teachers come to teacher education programs unaware of the issues of social justice
(Gay, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ukpokdu, 2003; Zeichner, 2003). The participants in
this study, for the most part, entered the profession with dreams of improving the life
conditions for students of color, consciously aware of the educational inequalities that
exist in today’s educational system. Once the school year began however, the
participants moved away from their original goals that focused on social justice to that of
mastering the basic skills of teaching such as classroom management and organization.

The participants were aware of social justice issues, although one might contend that
their awareness was rather naïve, yet they quickly lost consciousness of this when they
became overwhelmed by self-concerns and task-concerns. Although these were white
teachers who for the most part had received explicit training on issues related to race and
culture, due to the fact that they would be placed in culturally diverse schools, the
participants never mentioned their students’ race and culture. There was a complete void
in the subject.

It was important that these teachers were not engaging in conversations about
race. It seems certain that they were aware of their students’ race and culture, at least in
the ways in which these differed from the teachers’ own race and culture. However, it
was a topic that they did not discuss. This is consistent with the literature on the taboo of discussing race and culture, particularly in schools (Pollock, 2004; Schofield, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2005; Sparks, 2002; Tatum, 1992). “In schools, race plays a primary role in sustaining if not widening the achievement gap. But educators have not been very good at talking about race and its impact on learning” (Singleton & Linton, 2005, p. xiv).

Encouraging these discussions to take place in the school setting seems essential to meet the needs of students in diverse school settings. However, race is the hardest topic to discuss in our society (Singleton & Linton, 2005). Certainly in settings, like some schools, where people may consider race a non-issue, it is discussions about race and racial attitudes is essential to reducing institutionalized racism in the classroom, school, and society (Aboud, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Schofield, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2005; Sparks, 2002; Tatum, 1992).

The findings in this study reflect much of what the current literature states about open discussions involving race. (Pollock, 2004; Schofield, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2005; Sparks, 2002; Tatum, 1992). It has been stated by Glenn Singleton, a noted author who writes about having conversations about race, that race is the hardest topic to discuss in our society (Sparks, 2002). In this study, the participants would not engage in conversations about race, racial identity, or about the cultures of their students. Researchers agreed that it is essential to talk about how race operates even in settings where people say that it is not important (Aboud, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Schofield, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2005; Sparks, 2002; Tatum, 1992). Overall, the literature on racial discourse supported the assumption that discussions about race and racial attitudes is
essential to reducing institutionalized racism in the classroom, school, and society (Aboud, 1999; Schofield, 2004; Sparks, 2002; Tatum, 1992). Even though the participants were aware that the focus of the study was their mentoring needs specifically related to the fact that they were teaching students from a culture and race different than their own, there were no substantive conversations about race or culture initiated by the participants.

What was even more significant was the fact that there were indicators pointing to their struggles with issues of race and culture. Although the teachers expressed concerns about teaching their students with limited English vocabularies to read or write, concerns about discipline, and concerns about parent involvement, the participants never perceived that race or culture, that is their race and culture and how it intersected with the race and culture of their students, were issues that needed to be addressed. When I followed up conversations that I initiated about race and culture with repeated questions about their mentoring needs, the participants continually returned to concerns about developing a workable schedule, or utilizing the curriculum guides, or meeting testing standards. They were not focused on becoming culturally responsive teachers who build rich learning environments based upon the cultural wealth of the students. Further, none of the participants expressed a belief that their mentoring needs included knowledge of culturally responsive teaching techniques. Throughout the study, moreover, there was no mention of their mentors providing support in culturally responsive teaching techniques. There was also no mention of the race of their mentors even though all of the mentors I had met were teachers of color. Summarily this study revealed immense voids in both
teacher and mentor preparation programs for teachers who plan to teach students from cultural or racial backgrounds different from their own.

Although the third theme highlighted the most critical finding of the study, there was another finding that was personal and important. This finding was one of self-revelation and growth. I began this study after 30 years in the public school system. During most of my career, I served as an elementary school principal. This position allowed me to affect the lives of thousands of students because I was ultimately responsible for the teachers’ in-service training and day to day instruction. Most of the students who passed through the doors of the schools in which I worked were of races and cultures different from my own. I worked hard to provide programs to increase achievement for students of color whose academic performance was greatly lagging. I realize now that much of my work was completely off center and while I thought I was working to improve the life circumstances for students of color, I was in fact harboring deep-seated preconceived notions about students of color, particularly those of low-income backgrounds. I did not understand or acknowledge my own whiteness and the privileges being white affords me. As a result, I never brought forth programs for teachers or teacher mentors that would focus on anti-racism or the racist system of education that exists in our schools today because I had not reached critical consciousness myself. In fact, when I began this study, it did not occur to me that issues of race and culture were significant. I recognize now that I did not have an understanding of whiteness or the privileges of being white. I certainly had not connected this to the deficiencies of first-year teachers or their mentors. I believe I now
readily recognize issues of race and culture although I continue to work toward gaining a level of critical consciousness that will allow me to better prepare future teachers and mentors to more effectively meet the needs of culturally diverse populations. This study was not an end to a research topic; it was a beginning for me.

Recommendations

The original intent of this study was to examine the perceived mentoring for a select group of first-year, white, female teachers with the hope that identifying these needs would inform us of ways to improve mentoring. Although I was able to determine the perceived mentoring needs in the foundation or basic teaching skills typically needed by first-year teachers, I was unable to ascertain the perceptions of the participants related to their mentoring needs in teaching students of color. Thus so, the findings clearly point to several recommendations and implications. Most importantly, future studies should be designed to contend with the complexity of the issues of the avoidance of discussing race and culture as highlighted in this study. One suggestion might be to change the open-ended stems to more incrementally address issues related to race and culture.

The following recommendations and implications are for policy and practice. The recommendations and implications are offered with respect to universities, educational service centers, school districts, state organizations and agencies, and agencies offering alternative certification programs. These organizations are those that may enable preservice teachers and mentors to think and behave in ways that will meet the needs of a diverse population of learners. These recommendations are for all
teachers. Here, however, I am specifically referring to the population that was the focus of this study, that of white first-year teachers who teach in culturally diverse classrooms.

Diversity training that delves deeply into issues such as racial identity and deficit thinking should be required in pre-service and in-service administrator and teacher education programs. Pre-service teachers, pre-service administrators, first-year teachers, and experienced teachers and administrators must examine their own philosophies and practices that result in creating a system that advantages some students and disadvantages other students. White teachers and administrators must recognize our contribution to perpetuating the current educational system and work to obliterate the oppression and inequities that continue to exist in today’s schools. Training should be prolonged and intensive. Professors and trainers should be well versed and sensitive in presenting topics related to diversity. Presentations should be developed and presented that not only cause all teachers to reflect upon their own culture, but on how their culture may be interpreted by others. Training must also result in a desire for teachers to utilize diversity in a positive way to promote and enrich learning opportunities for their students of color.

Culturally responsive pedagogy should be incorporated into pre-service education coursework, in-service professional development, school curriculum and instruction. “Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). The strengths of the students are utilized in ways that are
motivational and engaging. “Culturally responsive teaching makes academic success a non-negotiable mandate for all students and an accessible goal” (Gay, 2000, p. 34). Pre-service and in-service training for teachers should require coursework that transforms teachers into culturally responsive educators who in turn transform their campuses into culturally responsive schools.

Implement structured, intense induction, and mentoring programs that have accountability standards. School districts must provide structured, monitored, mentoring programs in which mentors are held accountable for their work. Mentoring programs as a whole could benefit from an elevated sense of importance in the role mentoring places in the success of its workforce. There should be a rigorous mentor selection process so that the best teachers are selected, trained, and assigned to newly-hired teachers so that a relationship can begin to develop prior to the start of school. Pre-service programs and induction programs should include information that ensures first-year teachers are able to meet with rudimentary success such as translating curriculum into instruction, building a daily schedule, setting up a grade book program, and developing objective-based learning centers.

Provide intensive training to mentors. The mentors should be well trained for the position of mentor teachers. Mentors should be well versed in the tenets of developmental coaching and mentoring to ensure that first-year teachers move through the developmental stages with ease and at an accelerated pace. Training should take place one year prior to the mentor being certified as an official mentor for the district. Mentor training should include intense training in issues related to race and culture.
Training should also include understanding the developmental stages and emotional phases of first-year teachers, how to guide and supervise new teachers, and most importantly learn about and practice culturally responsive teaching techniques so that they can plan with and guide the new teacher throughout the school year using these techniques. Training should include issues of race and culture. Without proper and effective training for mentors on issues of race and culture, the system will continue to exists as it is, and will continue to affect outcomes for future generations of students.

Provide intensive training to administrators. Administrators play a role in the success of the first-year teacher not only in providing support and encouragement to the new teacher but more importantly by assigning well-trained, experienced mentors to first-year teachers. The administrator should select mentors who are in a teaching position that is closely akin to the first-year teacher’s assignment. These mentors should be assigned and notified as soon as the teachers are hired so that contact can be made between the mentor and the new teacher. Principals must monitor the relationships between the mentor and the first-year teacher to ensure that the pairings were accurate and that first-year teachers feel comfortable working with their mentors. The administrators must ensure that mentors are accountable for providing consistent, effective support to the first-teachers. Principals must value the role of mentoring. Most importantly, principals must create culturally responsive schools.

Future research should be conducted to study the perceived mentoring needs of first-year, white, female teachers working in culturally diverse schools who have entered the profession through the traditional university preparation program rather than those...
who entered the profession through alternative certification. In addition, the sites in this study were those whose students were predominately Hispanic. Future studies should be conducted in schools reflecting greater diversity. Also, the open-ended sentence stems used to form the basis for data collection could be written so that issues of race and culture could be incrementally added allowing the researcher to delve more deeply into conversations about race and culture.

**Conclusion**

There is a gap in the literature concerning the preparation and mentoring of first-year, white teachers. The participants in this program perceived that their mentoring needs consisted almost exclusively of devising a workable class schedule, planning from the curriculum guide, and implementing classroom management strategies. The majority of mentoring literature does indeed addresses these basic skills of teaching. However, as this study revealed, what is missing from the literature is that white, first-year teachers need to have an understanding of their own racial identity and how this affects their responsiveness to the culture of their students.
REFERENCES


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