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Mentor Educators' Understandings of Mentoring Preservice Primary Teachers

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Abstract: Mentors are significant in shaping a preservice teacher's practices. Developing common understandings about effective mentoring practices can assist the mentoring process. What are mentor educators' practical ideas towards implementing a mentoring program? This mixed-method study involves surveys, questionnaires, and audio-taped focus group meetings on 14 mentor educators' views on mentoring preservice primary teachers. This research aims to understand mentor educators' motivations for mentoring, their views about what makes a good mentor, benefits for mentors, and issues or concerns for mentors and the mentoring process. It also focuses on determining professional development for mentors and troubleshooting potential problems. Findings revealed that these mentor educators were motivated into developing mentoring programs as a way to: (1) influence the quality of preservice teacher education (2) provide personal and professional development in mentoring, and (3) support mentors and the mentoring process within school settings. Outlining what makes a good mentor and benefits for mentors were consistent with the literature. However, these expert mentors also provided potential solutions (e.g., university support and professional development ideas) on issues such as knowing the mentee's level of development and expectations, building a professional relationship prior to placement and the mentor's dual role as confidant and assessor.

Keywords: Mentor, Mentoring, Preservice Teachers, Mentoring Programs

Introduction

THE QUALITY OF preservice teacher education has been an issue in Australia. Cooperating classroom teachers (mentors) and preservice teachers in the school context (mentees) are pivotal to education advancements. Mentoring appears as a way to enhance preservice teacher education. Devising mentoring programs that facilitates the process will be crucial for ensuring more efficient and effective mentoring practices. Devising such programs requires a strong partnership between universities and schools to deliberate on mentoring practices determined by empirical evidence and theory. The intention of this paper is to explore mentor educators' practical ideas towards implementing a mentoring program in schools. In particular, this study investigates mentor educators' motivations for mentoring, their views about what makes a good mentor, issues and potential solutions for mentors, and the mentoring process.

Literature Review

For decades, educators have claimed the preparation of teacher education is a concern and requires reformation (e.g., Nelson, 2002). Many of the 102 reviews of teacher education in Australia between 1979 and 2006 highlight the importance of the school experience as pivotal to a teaching degree (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Educational and Vocational Training [HRSCEVT], 2007). As a result, there now appears to be an abundance of education reform recommendations (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Haney, Lumpe, Czerniak, & Egan, 2002; HRSCEVT, 2007). However, change in teaching practices does not seem to be apparent in Australia (Masters, 2009) and may well be a slower than expected process. Part of this problem, and solution, is that teachers are paramount for implementing reform recommendations. Indeed, educators and researchers may make reform recommendations but may not succeed unless teachers see value in implementing such reform, which requires professional development to implement reform measures as intended. This is the centre of the problem, that is, teachers are not implementing reform as intended (Goodrum, Hackling, & Rennie, 2001). The main reason appears to be inadequate support including provision of quality professional development programs and clear guidelines with practical resources that aid implementation.

Preservice teachers are also potential implementers of education reform. These future teachers implementation of reform measures will depend on two key educative processes, namely, university education and field experiences (practicum). Mentoring is considered a way to reform education commencing at the foundational level, that is, the preservice teacher level (Briscoe & Peters, 1997). Mentoring can lead towards improving both mentoring practices and classroom teaching practices (Hudson & McRobbie, 2004). For years, researchers (Galbraith & Cohen, 1995) have advocated mentoring as professional development, as mentoring provides opportunities for experienced teachers to improve on their primary teaching practices. Young (1995, p. 105) states that mentoring can lead:

teachers to recognise their considerable expertise in teaching, to question their existing classroom practice, to attempt new arrangements which foster improved practice, and to acquire a more informed understanding of what they do, as well as the effects their decisions and actions have on pupils' learning.

Yet mentors are not provided with adequate education to mentor effectively (e.g., Hudson, 2007; Jarvis McKeon, Coates, & Vause, 2001). Lieberman (1995) points out, "What everyone appears to want for students - a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems, using their own experiences, and working with others - is for some reason denied to teachers as learners" (p. 592). This continues to be the case with researchers calling for professional development programs for mentors in order to upskill (Jones & Pauley, 2003; McCann & Johannessen, 2009). Mentors require professional development to help mentees reflect effectively on their teaching (de Boo, 1997). Manthei (1992), Jones, Doveston, and Rose (2009) highlight that teachers are motivated to prepare for new formal mentor-teacher roles primarily because they seek an avenue for their own professional growth and stimulation by observing innovative practice from mentees. Nevertheless, there is inadequate education to prepare mentors on how to develop effective primary teachers. "Mentors need guidance and training as they develop the skills necessary

to become effective mentors” (Upson, Koballa, & Gerber, 2002, p. 4). It comes as no surprise “more high-level training needs to occur for the mentor” to develop expertise (Riggs & Sandlin, 2002).

Often at the heart of the mentees’ experiences is the relationship with their mentors. Indeed, mentoring “should be an intentional process” (Christensen, 1991, p. 12), with both the mentor and mentee wanting the mentoring process. Poor partnering may cost valuable career time (Hall, 2008), and can have negative outcomes (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006). Despite potential advantages for mentors and mentees, mentoring can be restricted by the lack of mentor education, and the limited selection of effective mentors, particularly with those who may be reluctant mentors (Hansman, 2003). A suitable mentor teacher must be considered a competent teacher as determined by an education system (Sosa, 1988). Kennedy (1992) concurs that mentors should be selected on their knowledge and ability to teach or interact with adults rather than just years of teaching experience and qualifications. However, not all practitioners are suited to mentoring, and at the same time there is a lack of suitably qualified mentors (Long, 1997). Becoming a mentor involves “making a transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator” (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987, p. 272). Suitable mentors must be prepared in their roles as preservice teacher educators by having particular knowledge to take deliberate action in their mentoring, and by developing the specific skills to critique constructively both their own teaching practices and their mentees’ practices.

Mentors generally spend their mentoring time on: management suggestions, private coaching, curriculum suggestions, and assessment of needs, however, mentees require more time on planning and how to instruct (e.g., Debolt, 1992). This current study argues that an experienced mentor equipped with specific mentoring strategies for teaching can mentor efficiently and effectively, which may reduce the number of potential concerns or problems experienced by mentors and mentees. It is also argued in this paper that the competent mentor can use personal and professional attributes to deliver a more effective mentoring program that address the specific concerns in mentoring for effective teaching. Mentors need to be provided with adequate scaffolding through a theoretical and empirical framework to aid the mentee’s development of effective teaching.

Key to specific mentoring is the facilitating of mentee’s reflective practices as this is considered “the main catalyst for the development of autonomy and expertise” (Veenman, de Laat, & Staring, 1998, p. 6), and reflection on practices can make sense of the situations (Schon, 1987). Mentees need to be reflective on their specific practices through professional inquiry and create “change in constructively critical ways” (Ovens, 2000, p. 219). To mentor effectively requires specific mentoring strategies that focus on practices and attributes (i.e., personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling, and feedback; Hudson, 2007; Hudson, Skamp, & Brooks, 2005). Experience and knowledge of primary teaching gives the mentor credibility. Formal mentoring programs are considered to be a “planned and intentional process” (Long, 1997, p. 115). Developing common understandings about effective mentoring practices can assist the mentoring process. The research question was: what are mentor educators practical ideas towards implementing a mentoring program?

Context

This study was located in a university campus within a fast growing and diverse Australian state (Caboolture Shire Council, 2006). In 2008, the campus received a substantial Federal

Government Diversity and Structural Reform Grant, which built upon work established previously at the campus. The main outcome of the grant was to increase the quality of graduates and better prepare them for the real world of the classroom through innovative school-based teaching and learning experiences. A second outcome was to co-design a professional development program for existing teachers to better support them in their roles as mentors. It was recognised that a collaborative partnership between school staff and university academics was necessary for constructing a professional development module. Principals or their nominees and academics with a background in mentoring were invited to this forum.

A Working Party was established to develop a mentoring module. The 14 members of the Working Party have diverse roles within their institutions with most in leadership positions. These members noted that they had mentored many preservice teachers in the past, however, most indicated they had not received any professional development in mentoring to support preservice teachers in the school context. These findings further emphasised a need for devising a professional development module. The module construction would be underpinned by a theoretical framework based on the five factor mentoring model (Hudson, 2007). This model substantiated the development of the mentoring program and provided a point of reference for Working Party discussions. However, information about constructing a professional development module needed to be explicated.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

This mixed-method study analyses 14 mentor educators' views on mentoring preservice primary teachers. All were in leadership roles (e.g., principal, deputy principal, lecturer) except two who were support teachers of learning difficulties. Among these 4 males and 10 females, all except one had mentored more than 6 mentees with 5 mentor educators mentoring more than 20 mentees during their careers. These mentoring experiences were extensive and intensive (i.e., these were mentoring experiences on their own classes where the mentors taught and involved a minimum of three-week practicum experiences). Not surprisingly, only four mentors had professional development about mentoring during their careers (two had a one-day workshop on mentoring, one had a series of short sessions, and the other informal forums only).

This qualitative study involved a questionnaire and audio-recorded focus group meetings to deliberate on mentoring strategies aligned with a mentor's articulation of pedagogical knowledge. The focus group consisted of 14 experienced mentors (i.e., 11 school representatives and 3 university representatives). This research aimed to understand mentor educators' motivations for mentoring, their views about what makes a good mentor, benefits for mentors, and issues or concerns for mentors and the mentoring process. It also aimed to determine professional development for mentors and troubleshooting potential problems.

The questionnaire was structured around the practices that theoretically underpinned the mentoring model. For example, one pedagogical knowledge consideration was the mentor's articulation of how to plan for teaching, which was indicated on the questionnaire. Written responses targeting the research aims were collated verbatim and presented to the focus group members four weeks later through emails for member checking (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). Two weeks after receiving the emails, the focus group gathered for about three hours and deliberated over their initial suggestions. This process continued once more with the refined suggestions collated and emailed to focus group members. Finally, comments were

collated for commonalities (Hittleman & Simon, 2006) and a third focus group meeting confirmed or refuted the refined suggestions to reach consensus. Their final comments are reported in the results and discussion.

Results and Discussion

Participants' responses to the questionnaire and audio-recorded focus group conversations indicated that their motivation for involvement in devising quality mentoring programs tended to fall into three categories, namely: (1) influencing the quality of preservice teacher education, (2) personal and professional development in mentoring, and (3) supporting mentors and the mentoring process within school settings. Influencing the quality of preservice teacher education appeared as an intrinsic reward for the mentor, requiring no financial or promotional gains. For example, one mentor educator stated, "To facilitate the development of preservice teachers so that they can transition into the profession more easily". Another claimed a motivation as "the opportunity to improve preservice teaching training and the capacity of teachers to maximise the practicum experience for preservice teachers".

These mentor educators articulated many personal and professional development opportunities as a motivation for mentoring. Personal development extended to working with another adult and learning how to build relationships more effectively, while professional development leant itself to learning more about new teaching practices that may assist the mentor in the role as teacher in the classroom. One mentor wrote that professional development in mentoring can help with "teacher development and there's a need to use mentoring skills regularly in my job. Hopefully, this professional development will allow me to learn new skills in the area of mentoring". Consensus was reached that involvement in developing mentoring practices will aide to support mentors and the mentoring process within school settings. These mentor educators discussed how they would have appreciated further guidance on mentoring preservice teachers. Indeed, many had learnt mentoring individually and without further education. This comment encapsulated the general consensus about providing training programs for mentors: "developing a mentoring framework to benefit preservice teacher education was noted as a way to make 'happier mentor teachers' and advance mentor's skills".

These mentor educators highlighted through focus group meetings that arriving at a common understanding of key definitions can assist educators to discuss key issues, as they will be able to use a common language. Terms associated with defining the mentor, for instance, generally include: an experienced teacher who supports, influences, encourages, and challenges a mentee towards teaching competence. These mentor educators stated that a mentor:

- Supports and encourages the mentee, opening them to new ideas and challenging them to always continue to learn and improve their practices.
- Has expertise and facilitates reflection... while building confidence and competence.
- Is an empathetic, tolerant person who uses active listening skills with a broad/deep base of applied knowledge. Who also values a mentor/mentee relationship and is capable of demonstrating/facilitating/leading an individual to make improved changes.
- Is aware of and responsive to the professional needs of the mentee.

Debating what makes an effective mentor drew out other qualities as distinct from only defining the term “mentor”. There was agreement that an effective mentor has high levels of expertise with personal and professional qualities that aid in building a two-way relationship, which may also be noted in the literature (e.g., Little, 1990). Verbatim comments from these mentor educators extended this notion with an emphasis on communicating with the mentee, and included:

- This relationship needs to be strong enough for the mentor to be able to provide feedback, both positive and constructive.
- A good mentor provides constructive and meaningful feedback at the point of improvement to the preservice teacher with scaffolding for development.
- Effective mentors take responsibility and are enthusiastic about teaching with deep curriculum knowledge. They are also effective communicators prepared to give their time and listen actively.
- An effective mentor identifies qualities in the mentee, and has the ability to reflect on own performance.

It was discussed that an effective mentor must have a “willingness to learn together” and model effective teaching practices. One mentor educator wrote that mentors need to “understand the importance of the role of the mentor for the future of education”. The following three written responses highlighted some of the qualities of an effective mentor:

- Well balanced in their ability to prioritise their class needs and also the needs of the preservice teacher. Professional, supportive, assertive and strong personal knowledge and skills base.
- a) active listener who shows empathy b) broad and deep level of applied knowledge relevant to mentees c) flexible thinker d) a tolerant person e) a relationship builder f) ability to critique/assess and give constructive feedback g) ability to give effective worthwhile feedback h) positive thinker i) enthusiastic.
- Someone who is patient, willing to be a co-learner, passionate about teaching and the future of the profession, can articulate their own practices, can act as a role model.

These mentor educators discussed current benefits for mentors. It was interesting that most of these benefits had been reported in the literature over the past 20 years (e.g., extra support in the classroom, increased or renewed enthusiasm for teaching, consolidation of knowledge, and self-fulfillment of helping someone; see Little, 1990). Other benefits have been described in keeping with the literature and current trends, such as (1) acknowledgement of the mentor’s expertise, presenting opportunities to develop leadership skills, (2) critiquing, reflecting and adopting desirable practices, and (3) engagement in professional learning. One mentor educator highlighted multiple benefits for the mentor as follows: “Teacher becomes learner becomes teacher in the mentoring relationship; increased self-esteem and refreshed approaches; pleasure of helping others for the benefit of students with the notion of making a difference”.

Important to the process of implementing a mentoring program is dealing with concerns and issues about the mentoring relationship. Allocating time for facilitating the mentoring process appeared as the most significant issue, particularly when the mentor is already operating in a full-time position as a teacher. However, mentors can also be stressed with the

mentor-mentee relationship, being effective as a mentor, and assessment of the mentee's practices (e.g., "tension between mentor-assessor"). Other concerns and issues focused on the mentoring relationship and included the following verbatim responses:

- Timetabling for purposeful mentor-mentee dialogue, particularly as the mentor is time poor with limited release from face-to-face teaching.
- Time to build a respectful professional relationship prior to placement. The quality of the relationship impacts on the quality of the two-way learning.
- Time to set the mentee up for success: criteria for focus and therefore feedback, sharing knowledge of the school's current agenda and having additional information of the university's focuses prior to the preservice teacher arriving on site.
- Limited knowledge of the mentee's level of development.
- The mentor's ability to communicate effectively and applying knowledge effectively.
- Delivering constructive feedback through a commonly-shared language.
- The sometimes conflicting dual role of the mentor as an assessor and confidant.

It is essential that mentors address concerns and issues once they have been identified. Mentor educators in this study brainstormed potential solutions that may address mentor issues. For instance, the issue of time may be addressed by "working to the framework guides communication" in order to capitalise on the mentor's limited time. Assisting in addressing the time issue may include developing the discourse so mentor-mentee discussions can be more poignant. It can be the case that a mentee does not understand the mentor's communication because the mentee has not developed pedagogical language sufficiently. It was strongly advocated that the mentee needs to take personal responsibility for learning about how to teach. This includes taking initiative to discuss with the mentor areas or issues that require further deliberation, particularly when pedagogical terms or general cultural discourse is not understood.

Findings highlighted that assessing the mentee can be an issue. Some claim there is tension between being a confidant and assessor. Ways to address these issues included self assessment for discussion purposes and focusing the discussion on specific practices. One mentor educator claimed that preservice teacher "self assessment using a framework on a daily or weekly basis and then at the end of practicum" would assist in providing information for purposeful mentor-mentee dialogue. "Taking those 'self-identified' strengths/needs and discussing these in each follow up session during the practicum", which could focus on "a pre-determined aim/concept of the lessons for mentor feedback". There was a sense that dividing "practicum into areas and reflecting on those areas (e.g., behavior management, curriculum, school events, and classroom management)" may assist the mentor for developing the mentee as a teacher and for assessment purposes. In addition, a mentor can assist the mentee's development even after the conclusion of practicum: "Mentor availability post practicum when decided between mentee/mentor to assist & support with on-going journey".

Mismatching mentors and mentees can present problems. Mentors do not usually receive information about a mentee, particularly about personalities that may clash. One suggestion was for the university to, "facilitate initial meetings with potential mentors & site coordinators meeting to establish processes". It was also suggested that mentoring needs to occur "before and after practicum to create a merging of learning communities". Another commented that mentees meet the school's site coordinator who through purposeful discussion determines

which mentees may be suited to the existing mentors in the school. The university's role was considered important for "devising frameworks and protocols", and presenting ways to "form professional relationships and deliver feedback with clear roles and guidelines".

It was acknowledged that mentors require time to establish the relationship and troubleshoot potential problems in the early stages: "Time to build a respectful professional relation prior to placement with mentor and site coordinator. So an initial visit with clear guidelines for the mentoring process and an exchange of email addresses". These suggested solutions may pave the way for ensuring a more fruitful mentoring relationship; however there are also issues about the mentoring process, which the mentors' said included:

- High demand for mentors creates a range of quality (mentoring framework may address).
- Matching mentor to mentee, what are the expectations, can the mentor model the practices, differences in experiences within schools and between schools.
- Need for consistency of mentoring language and program across schools; need for resourcing to support a mentoring program (i.e., teacher release; need for teacher to develop initiatives to develop and follow mentoring program).
- A consistent framework to focus classroom practice and therefore feedback, formal communication with the University prior during and post the practicum; an agreed framework of effective mentoring; a range of effective teaching practices are modelled for the preservice teacher.
- Clear communication between all parties of roles and responsibilities.
- Adequate professional development for the mentors in how to, what to, and when to mentor.
- Safeguarding teacher's time, energy and learning for students. Needs to be established as a cultural expectation for schools.

The above issues were viewed as pathways for solving potential problems. For instance, if clear communication is required between all parties about their roles and responsibilities then it would be strategic to present these roles and responsibilities more clearly in university-school communications. Similarly, limited professional development for mentors was considered an issue which could be addressed by universities coordinating such professional development. It was suggested by one principal that the problem of mismatching mentors and mentees could be addressed by having mentees visit prior to the commencement of their field experiences and then allow the school's site coordinator to make final adjustments in the matching of mentors and mentees according to feedback. Other participants agreed with the notion of ensuring more favourable partnership arrangements between mentors and mentees, particularly the employment of a site coordinator who could communicate with all parties concerned and submit a final match. However, a further problem may arise with this arrangement, namely, a mentee left without a mentor, if a "favourable" match was not found. Site coordinators could also present "expectations for selecting mentor – forum to provide 'open' discussions for mentoring, within an allocation of time before and after school". A mentor forum can assist mentors to share their learning about mentoring, and address issues and problems experienced. An impediment to this process may be identifying mentees and breaching confidentiality, particularly if mentors in the school know the matching arrangements.

One solution was heralded as a way to address a variety of problems and issues. All participants agreed that developing a culture of a professional learning community with clear communication would facilitate problem solving (see also Hall & Harris, 2008). They suggested this learning community includes mentors, mentees, site coordinators, university personnel, teachers and school executives playing a role in developing this culture of learning. Universities may have costs associated in deploying personnel to schools; however a collaborative partnership fails if universities are not actively engaged in the development of their students within field experiences. Complementary to the learning community would be resources that can assist in problem solving. It was suggested that such resources could involve the use of a “DVD opportunity to re-ignite the passion of sharing skills and self with a mentee”. Another includes “Teachers viewing and accessing a user-friendly mentoring kit to encourage new teachers into the program. This would assist to validate the skills teachers possess so they can volunteer to be part of the program”. The main notion is the “merging of learning communities” so the pedagogical dialogues can become richer and more thoughtful within the complexities of learning how to teach.

All agreed that professional development for mentors was paramount to the continued advancement of mentoring. As written by one mentor, this further education would involve:

Mentor responsibilities – what is the focus of conversations before/after school (pre-viewing lessons/feedback – aligned to specific criteria, explicit/non-personal. Protocols for active listening and feedback; provide mentees a framework for receiving feedback (particularly mature-aged university students). Feedback should be aligned to specific key areas – e.g., phase of learning, inclusivity, differentiation, literacy.

This mentor asked the question after writing the above statement: “How does this incremental developmentally across the field experience – when are university students ready for these conversations?” Nevertheless, this experienced mentors agreed that professional development would be valuable for mentors and needs to be made a mandatory requirement before taking a mentee. Though some argued it may then diminish the pool of available mentors making it more difficult to ensure preservice teachers have field experience places. It was also argued that mentors without adequate knowledge of mentoring may be detrimental the mentee’s development. These participants claimed that professional development would need to include a strong theoretical underpinning linked to evidence of effective mentoring practices. They all agreed that a mentoring kit with a DVD of effective mentoring practices would assist this development and include, for instance, “Discussion from current mentors – concerns, strengths, weaknesses, useful strategies”, “A set of expectations; roles and responsibilities and practical hands-on ideas” and “Some DVD footage of exemplar mentoring taking place in a real teaching environment”. They also claimed:

- Regular formal and informal networks for discussion; training around developing effective mentoring relationships, need support to release teachers for PD (professional development); online PD for mentors – in Blackboard via the Learning Place.
- Work shadowing opportunities with experienced mentors; readings – practical and easy to read.
- Communications (participant skills, working with adults); questioning skills; active listening body language.

- Learning how to deal with difficult students/mentees, and how to assist struggling mentees.

In summary, these mentor educators articulated the need for a common language to ensure the mentee and mentor can communicate effectively and efficiently, particularly as mentoring issues of time are a concern. It was noted that communicative competence can streamline discussions and feedback for enhancing teaching practices. The mentee's level of proximal development also appeared important in the discussions so that the mentor can adequately support and challenge the mentee to advance practices. The findings showed that, although mentor-mentee roles need to be defined clearly, the mentor needs to establish a mindset about "learning together" within a mentor-mentee partnership. A strong learning partnership will facilitate a way for the mentor and mentee to address issues as they arise in a collaborative environment. Importantly, the university's active partnership with schools by deploying university experts who understand the mentoring and teaching processes was indicated as essential for building relationships and a learning community. The university-school partnership means that each has an active role in the development of the preservice teacher within the field experiences. Finally, it was recognised that both mentors and mentees need to be involved in joint problem solving, along with the input from university personnel.

Conclusion

This study investigated: mentor educators' motivations for mentoring, their views about what makes a good mentor, issues and potential solutions for mentors, and the mentoring process. Mentor educators were motivated into developing mentoring programs by influencing preservice teacher education, providing personal and professional development in mentoring, and supporting mentors and the mentoring process. Identifying what makes a good mentor and benefits for mentors was consistent with the literature. The participants provided potential solutions (e.g., professional development ideas including more university support) on issues such as knowing mentee's level of development and expectations, building a professional relationship prior to placement and the mentor's dual role as confidant and assessor. The site coordinator and university adviser were noted as conduits for problem solving and could assist in ways where a mentor may be torn between the confidant and assessor role. Neither role can be discounted. Mentor as confidant allows the mentee to build confidence and experiment with practice (Ganser, 1996), while mentor as assessor can be used to guide the preservice teacher's learning (Tillema & Smith, 2009).

What became obvious in this study was the need for stronger university-school collaboration with high levels of communication. These participants highlighted the need for the university to interact with the schools and mentors prior to field experience placement and deliver a package that outlines roles and responsibilities. They also emphasised the need for mentor professional development with key stakeholders who can facilitate effective mentoring practices. It was highlighted that a collaborative partnership with an associated university requires active involvement in field experiences. These needs extended to accessing a "user-friendly" professional development kit with DVD or online source that presents mentoring practices for the real world and as a "toolkit" for both mentors and mentees.

Mentoring is pivotal to preservice teachers' development. Many mentees do not receive adequate mentoring (e.g., Hudson, 2007). Merging learning communities was noted as essential for all key stakeholders. Schools and universities must value mentoring as a way to

enact reform measures at the most fundamental levels, namely, preservice teacher education. Schools need to enlist site coordinators in larger schools to facilitate consistent and more uniform mentoring practices that aid preservice teacher development. In this critical partnership, universities must provide expertise and resources that help mentors and site coordinators. Universities must be more proactive in merging learning communities with high levels of communication and support for the benefit of all key stakeholders.

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About the Authors

Dr. Peter Hudson

My current work involves lecturing in science education, working with schools on federally-funded grants in science education, and working with international institutes. I currently have involvement with developing and implementing a new degree in Malaysia for Queensland University of Technology (QUT), and have taught and/or coordinated various international programs (e.g., Jiangsu physics education, HKIEd PDGE program, Aoyama Gakuin University program). As the principal representative for the Primary Practicum Committee over a five-year period, I had represented all NSW North Coast schools for developing internship and field experience programs at Southern Cross University. My PhD was in mentoring in science education, and currently I am working with the Joint Council of the Queensland Teachers' Associations on a variety of mentoring programs across the state. My aim is to facilitate quality programs for the development of primary teachers.

Suzanne Hudson

Suzanne Hudson has been involved in teaching and teacher education for 30 years, including classroom teacher, teacher of the arts, support teacher of children with learning difficulties and acting principal. She has an outstanding record of teaching practices at Southern Cross University where she had also coordinated multiple units including practicum across the four years of a BEd program. Suzanne is employed at QUT's Caboolture campus as the Academic Coordinator since 2005. She has worked to form partnerships with schools and businesses in the area to create real-world learning opportunities for preservice teachers in the Bachelor of Education (primary) program. Her innovations have incorporated school-based learning experiences, the Ed Start program, Physical Education and Health in schools, literacy in schools, and computers for nervous beginners. She has over 18 refereed publications at national and international levels.

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