


Chapter 10

The Influence of Mentors on Instruction and Reflection: A Novice Adult ESOL Teacher's Diary Study

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ABSTRACT

This chapter uses a qualitative, single researcher-participant diary study to detail how a novice ESOL teacher in a community-based adult basic education program used the advice of mentors to plan and reflect on instruction. A thematic analysis revealed three instructional areas where mentors influenced the novice teacher: implementing guided small group instruction, distinguishing obligation language (i.e., modality) and formality, and giving advice in authentic contexts. Each instructional theme moved through similar stages. The novice teacher identified an issue in his instruction, consulted his mentors for guidance, and reflected on the results of his instruction. The findings illustrate the importance of mentoring and reflection to the novice teacher's instruction and his perspective on the language needs of adult ESOL students.

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INTRODUCTION

Given the challenges that novice teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) face, working with mentors can provide critical support that is needed to begin and sustain a teaching career. Mentor programs have been created around the world, from K-12 to college, to support novice ESOL teachers (Aktaş, 2019; Maruca & Zapata, 2022; Pogodzinski, 2015; Whalen, et al., 2019). When formal mentoring is not available, novice teachers – those with three years of licensed teaching experience or less – may need to find mentors on their own to support their teaching development (Alemdar, et al., 2022; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Farrell, 2012). Whether the mentoring happens formally or informally, a mentor relationship can be viewed as a collegial partnership that can benefit both the mentor and the novice teacher (Huling & Resta, 2001).

This chapter uses a single participant-researcher case study to investigate the influence of informal mentoring on the instructional decisions of a novice ESOL teacher teaching English learners (ELs) in adult basic education. The eight-week diary study took place at an urban, community-based adult basic education site in the United States as part of the novice teacher's master's thesis. The novice teacher (hereafter, *Steve*) taught English using content from work, life, and digital literacy to adults with high-beginning to high-intermediate levels of English literacy, as measured by the CASAS assessment for Life and Work (CASAS, n.d.). Steve recorded diary entries after each three-hour class session, and emailed these entries to two mentors after each week for comments. The mentors and Steve met for roughly one hour every two weeks via Skype to discuss their respective work in ESOL. One mentor was a professor in Steve's teacher education coursework, and the other mentor was a former student of the professor.

This chapter investigates the following research questions:

- How does a novice adult ESOL teacher use advice from mentors to plan instruction?
- How does a novice adult ESOL teacher use advice from mentors to reflect on instruction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on novice teachers and mentoring practices has explored several aspects that may influence the novice teacher's development, including the relationship between mentors and novices, situational factors that can lead to varying novice experiences with mentors, and the interaction between novices and mentors about instruction.

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