11-6-2024

Mentorship of New(er) School-Based Speech-Language Pathologists Beyond the Clinical Fellowship: A Pilot Study

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Purpose: The purpose of this pilot study was to explore the perspectives of school-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) with varying levels of experience to identify the components of a post-Clinical Fellow (CF) school-based SLP mentorship program, barriers to implementation, and potential solutions.

Method: After seeking feedback from school-based SLPs, a survey was created and distributed via email and national social media sites. Topics included gathering perspectives about experiences with school-based SLP mentorship, components of a possible post-CF mentorship program, barriers to implementation, and potential solutions.

Results: Sixty-five school-based SLPs with varying years of experience responded to the survey. Results suggested that respondents felt a setting-specific post-CF school-based SLP mentorship program may be valuable. Time, compensation, and filling knowledge gaps were identified as both important components of a mentor program but also potential challenges to implementation.

Conclusions: A post-CF school-based SLP mentorship program has the potential to be beneficial to both parties in tangible and intangible ways. SLPs appear to be interested in mentorship not only as a way to support future generations of SLPs but also for a sense of self-fulfillment and professional development. A formal mentorship program may operationalize support related to decision making, advocacy, paperwork, scheduling, and working through challenging cases.

Key Words: school-based speech-language pathologists, mentorship, early career

Introduction

Mentorship has been identified as an important function of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) that work in school settings throughout all stages of their career (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2010). While the clinical fellowship (CF) obligates a well-structured mentorship experience (ASHA, 2020a; Hudson, 2016), there are fewer examples of mentorship programs once the CF concludes. However, the value of mentorship beyond the CF has been documented in the research literature (Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007) to create opportunities to cultivate relationships and provide support amongst SLPs. In addition, mentorship has the potential to give more experienced SLPs leadership opportunities in settings where there often are few. Continued mentorship provides a time to share challenging cases and situations, best practice, as well as local, state, and federal policy and procedural information (Farquharson, et al., 2022).

Structured mentorship programs, defined as initiatives that are well-defined, formalized, and supported by school administrators, have been positively associated with SLP retention as they have the potential to reduce job stress (Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007). Job stress is particularly common among school personnel and often linked to feeling overwhelmed and dissatisfied which has been associated with leaving a job (Travers & Cooper, 1996). Studies have reported increasing stress for school-based SLPs for many years related to rising caseloads, lack of time to prepare, paperwork, meetings, and expanding scope of practice (Farquharson et al., 2022). Since more than half of all SLPs work in school-based settings (ASHA, 2018) and demands related to workload only continue to increase, it follows that they may benefit from a structured mentorship program.

Retention of school-based SLPs is particularly important at this point in time given that the perpetual shortage of qualified SLPs to work in schools is predicted to not only persist but increase by 27% in regard to job openings by 2028 (ASHA, 2020b; Farquharson et al., 2022; US Bureau of Labor Statistics). New graduates from SLP programs often work in schools (ASHA, 2020b) and report particularly low job satisfaction and high turnover rate (Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007; Farquharson et al., 2022). Job satisfaction has not only been associated with SLP retention, but also with better quality speech-language therapy and in turn improved student outcomes (Biancone et al., 2014; Farquharson et al., 2022). Consequently, stakeholders involved in schools may be interested in programs which support mitigation of job stress and in turn retention of staff.

While the research literature often suggests mentorship may be valuable to mitigate job stress and staff retention (Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007), few studies have examined what a formalized and structured mentorship program may look like in practice. Considering both potential mentors and mentees perspectives, the purpose of this study is to collect data from stakeholders, school-based SLPs themselves, to identify the possible components of a post-CF school-based SLP mentorship program, barriers to implementation, and potential solutions.

An implementation science framework can be used to examine stakeholder perspectives. The Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) is a determinant framework that can be used to guide studies that investigate factors that may affect the integration of information recommended in the literature from being put into practice. Its domains include details of the intervention, outer setting, inner setting, characteristics of the individuals involved, and the process of implementation (Damschroder et al., 2009). By examining school-based SLPs' perspectives, the characteristics domain of the framework provides a lens to examine their

feedback. The CFIR characteristics domain acknowledges that the traits and experiences of the participants have influence on the success of implementing any new innovation or program just as much as institutional and systemic barriers. Since little has been written about what may comprise an effective mentorship program for post-CF school-based SLPs, we first sought to define the term "mentor" and then explored what has been written about the value of mentorship to help inform the design and purpose of this study.

What is mentorship?

While the word "mentor" dates back to Greek mythology, it is difficult to operationalize as its definition varies widely in the research literature (Roos & Schreck, 2021). Crisp and Cruz (2009) found more than 50 definitions of the term "mentoring" in their 2009 literature review varying in breadth and scope. Robertson (1992) defined mentorship as a relationship in which a mentor provides support to foster professional and personal growth of another person (mentee). Jacobi (1991) shared functions of mentors (e.g., role model, protector, advisor, supporter, information provider) which aligned with 3 main categories: role model, emotional support, and career support.

While the terms supervision and mentorship are frequently used interchangeably and there may be overlap, they are distinct constructs (Urish, 2004). While supervisors may serve as mentors, not all mentors are supervisors. Supervision usually refers to the process whereby an individual's performance is evaluated by their supervisor. This may be in the form of completing performance evaluations or submitting grades. In contrast, mentors build relationships with their mentees which serve to support professional and personal development. This may involve sharing tips, strategies, or advice based on the experiences of the mentor (ASHA, 2008).

Value of mentorship

Early career school-based SLPs report that they often devote time, energy, and resources to professional responsibilities that they may not have received instruction about in their academic coursework such as service delivery, caseload management, prevention oriented work, and state/federal policies surrounding eligibility which are specific to the school setting (ASHA, 2020a). Mentorship may help to provide support for these unique responsibilities and roles specific to SLPs in the school setting as well as an opportunity for seasoned SLPs to assume leadership roles (ASHA, 2010; Grossman & Davis, 2012).

Several studies have demonstrated the value of mentorship for school-based SLPs. Katz et al. (2010) collected survey data from 717 school-based SLPs throughout the country and found that caseload size manageability was moderated by having SLPs available to offer support to each other which was attributed to overall increased job satisfaction. Edgar and Rosa-Lugo (2007) conducted a study of 382 school-based SLPs in Florida which ranked opportunity for mentorship as among the highest factors contributing to retention rates. Marante et al. (2023) identified school-based SLPs' access to mentorship throughout their career and beyond their entry into schools as a protective factor to mitigate burnout and in turn improve retention.

While the importance of mentorship throughout all stages of an SLP's career as a mechanism to mitigate the effects of work-related stress, burn-out, and turnover is often cited in the literature (Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007), we could find no studies that examine SLPs' perspectives about their desired components of a possible post-CF mentorship program and what this may look like in practice. Identified gaps in training for school-based SLPs can be used to guide the potential content of mentorship experiences. For example, Heilmann and Bertone (2021) found that while SLPs may feel they have strong skills in the area of assessment and treatment across a variety of disorders, they may benefit from support and feedback as it relates

to the specific school related administrative demands required for school-based settings. Further, new SLPs report that they are particularly in need of support with responsibilities within their daily operations including tasks such as service delivery models, caseload, and paperwork (Heilmann & Bertone, 2021). Despite the need to support early career professionals, Giess et al. (2021) found a disconnect between newer SLPs and more experienced SLPs in several key areas: billing, behavior management, and how well they felt their academic coursework prepared them for clinical practice. Understanding the experiences of multiple stakeholders within an organization may therefore be useful in designing and implementing mentorship opportunities for both young career professionals as well as those with experience who may be asked to support them.

This paper shares the results of a national pilot survey that explored opportunities and challenges as it relates to mentorship of early career school-based SLPs. Considering both potential mentors' and mentees' perspectives, the purpose of the study was to identify 1) components that may be beneficial to include in a potential post-CF mentorship experience for school-based SLPs, 2) barriers to implementation, and 3) possible solutions. The characteristics domain of the CFIR implementation science framework was used to support the investigation of how information recommended in the research literature could potentially be integrated into practice while considering the real-life constraints of the participants as well as local, state, and national factors (Damschroder et al., 2009). Research has demonstrated the potential value of mentorship to support job satisfaction, but the question remains as to what school-based SLPs feel as valuable components of a structured program and what they see as potential obstacles to implementation.

Method

Survey Development

The CHERRIES (Checklist for Reporting Results of Internet E-Surveys) was used to organize the components that guided creation of the survey items (Eysenbach, 2004). This framework contains a checklist to guide design, approval, development, recruitment, administration, and analysis of electronic surveys. In alignment with the checklist, Montclair State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained (IRB-FY23-24-3090). Informed consent was embedded within the first question of the survey. Data was collected and protected in a secure online Qualtrics platform. The survey was voluntary, anonymous and no incentives were provided for completion.

The survey was developed to align with best practice in survey development by first considering both the study population and previous surveys completed on similar topics. Since no surveys related to post-CF SLP mentorship program components and challenges to implementation existed in the literature, question types and topics discussed were created by adapting existing surveys as well as addressing gaps found in the literature. Using the characteristics domain of CFIR, possible survey questions were circulated to school-based SLPs known to the researcher. This survey piloting was intended to consider the perspectives of school-based SLPs who may potentially participate in a post-CF SLP mentorship program. This feedback was requested to confirm that the areas addressed were appropriate and useful. For example, areas identified as needing elaboration were expanded (e.g., it was suggested that the open-ended question "areas to be mentored in/areas to provide mentorship" be separated into two two questions). This process also served as a validation check to support the clarity and conciseness of each question.

The survey was felt to be theoretically valid as it was adapted from Heilmann and

Bertone (2021) as well as Geiss et al. (2021) to fit the research purpose of this study. It included

13 questions about participant demographics, overall mentorship experiences, important

components of a potential mentorship program, benefits, and barriers using multiple choice,

Likert scale, rank order and open-ended formats (Table 1). The Likert scale question included

seven statements with which to rate their level of agreement ranging from 1 being the least to 5

being the most. The rank order question consisted of six factors to rank in terms of importance

ranging from 1 (most important) and 6 (least important). There were three open-ended questions

which had a text box to respond. With the exception of the consent item, responses to survey

questions were optional so that participants had the ability to choose to not answer questions they

preferred to skip. This resulted in a different number of responses per question.

Procedure

Convenience sampling was used to recruit school-based SLPs with varying years of

experience. Fifty SLPs were contacted via email plea and the survey was also posted in

Facebook groups in order to maximize response rates (e.g., School-based SLPs: For

professionals only; SLPs for evidence based practice). The email list was a compilation of

professional contacts known to the author. Participant consent was obtained. Inclusionary criteria

included respondents' self-reporting that they were over the age of 18, certified SLPs who

reported working in schools at least 50% of their week, completed a master's degree in

speech-language pathology, and beyond their CF. A follow up invitation to participate was sent

via email and reposted on social media two weeks after the initial request. The survey was

available for two months before it was closed. Since the survey was anonymous and posted to

social media, response rate was unable to be calculated. The survey security permissions were set to prevent multiple submissions per participant.

Each research participant was anonymous and there was no identifying information of participants stored with the data. A separate document within a University based drive was used to store the names and email addresses of those recruited via email. The research team consisted of the author and a graduate research assistant. The author is a University professor who has been a certified speech-language pathologist for 29 years and worked as a school-based SLP for 17 years. The graduate research assistant completed online training in data collection and analysis using the Qualtrics platform embedded videos and articles.

Data analysis

Qualtrics was used to collect demographic data including years of experience as an SLP, type of work setting(s), and CF mentor or mentee experiences. Qualtrics was also used to capture data from the Likert scale question which included statements asking participants to rate (1-5) how strongly they agreed, and the rank order question which included factors which participants ranked (1-6) based on importance. For Likert scale and rank order questions, percentages of responses were calculated.

The open-ended questions were used to generate themes and were qualitatively analyzed using the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) for guidance. They frame the steps of thematic analysis as transcribing, coding, analysis, overall, and written report. The open-ended responses served as the transcription which were subsequently coded and analyzed. The author first read through each response to gain overall familiarity with the responses. Using a grounded theory approach, the data was used to create themes that were generated as a result of the information collected rather than having preconceived notions about the categories the data would yield

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The responses were transferred from Qualtrics to be methodologically coded by members of the research team using a text-coding platform. To begin the coding process, the research team compiled responses to open-ended questions and proceeded to group responses according to general concepts. Based on these categorized response groups, more specific themes were derived to serve as distinct codes. Codes were adjusted by the research team throughout the process to accurately represent response areas. To serve as an reliability check, the team independently reviewed the themes and then discussed any discrepancies in the response areas to achieve consensus. For example, the theme "insight about specialized clinical populations" that was initially suggested by one member of the research team was changed from "insight about service delivery and treatment strategies" to better represent the comments under this theme. Finalized codes were then inputted into the qualitative analysis platform, and the research team reviewed and "tagged" all open-ended responses according to the code they were associated with. Once coded in the qualitative analysis platform, the number of responses associated with each theme was derived. The response count for each theme was divided by the total number of responses to calculate the percentage of frequency for each theme within the open-ended responses.

Consistent with the purpose of the study, data analysis had two primary goals: 1) to identify potential elements that may be beneficial to include in a potential post-CF mentorship experience for school-based SLPs and 2) to determine potential barriers to implementation and possible solutions.

Results

Sixty-five school-based SLPs responded to the survey with a range of years of experience (Table 2) and experiences about mentorship (Table 3). Approximately 46.15% of participants

indicated interest in becoming a mentor, with 9.62% of participants interested in becoming a mentee.

Important components to mentorship

A rank order question was used to investigate the components of mentorship programs that were perceived to be the most valuable to the participants. Items were ranked ranging from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important) (Table 4). The component ranked with the highest importance (48.08%) was being given adequate time to be a mentor. The second most important factor was compensation related to mentorship (25.00%).

Benefits and barriers to mentorship

Participants were asked in multiple-choice format (select all that apply) to determine what factors they consider to be the largest benefits and barriers to mentorship (Table 5). Staff retention, increased productivity, and improved student outcomes were identified as the largest benefits to mentorship.

The biggest barrier to mentorship was lack of time and compensation. The majority of participants (54.43%) responded that they felt the most significant barrier to mentorship was lack of time. This barrier was also mentioned in open-ended responses as participants indicated that designated time for mentorship was crucial due to large caseloads and increased paperwork. Similarly, many participants (34.18%) indicated that lack of compensation was another barrier to mentorship.

Open-ended responses

Participants were asked in an open-ended format about their personal experiences with mentorship programs, potential solutions to the identified barriers, and their perspectives on currently available mentorship programs (Table 6). The themes derived from responses to

open-ended questions served to corroborate the findings in the Likert and rank order questions and in order of frequency were: collaboration with SLPs, support and advocacy, advice on school processes, evaluation processes, insight about specialized clinical populations, and setting specific resources.

The SLPs in this study most often talked about the opportunity to collaborate with other (more experienced) SLPs (20.75% of responses) in their open-ended responses related to the benefits of a mentorship program. Participants stated that they felt the ability to "ask for input and bounce ideas off more experienced clinicians to get wording correct before formally replying to admin/parents/etc." and that having "opportunities to observe my supervising SLP, input on logistical/organization strategies for case management (meetings, parent contact, etc.)" was valuable. Time constraints being an important consideration for collaboration was mentioned within this theme as well in responses like "reduced time due to increased caseloads and workloads as well as increased amounts of paperwork and extra duties makes it exceptionally difficult for SLPs to support and mentor each other."

Support and advocacy related to mentorship was mentioned in 18.87% of open-ended responses. Participants made remarks such as how valuable it would be to know "someone had my back and could advise if situations went sideways" and that mentorship was helpful for "weekly meetings, option for additional meetings or emails, advocat[ing] for me, provid[ing] some resources." Another theme identified in 18.87% of responses was the importance of receiving advice on school-specific processes. One participant recalled "I was coached around the district's IEP (Individualized Education Program) processes and procedures as well as helpful tips around scheduling, navigating push-ins, paperwork, challenging students, etc." Participants expressed a desire for setting-specific resources via "organizing the information needed based on

the setting to have them be successful" and having "access to a bank of information by topic or resources."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the components of a post-CF school-based SLP mentorship program, explore potential barriers to implementation, and propose potential solutions with the goal of improving career satisfaction and student outcomes. By considering both potential mentors and mentees perspectives, school-based SLPs with varying years of experience completed a survey and data was analyzed for their perspectives related to mentorship. Results suggested that respondents were interested in setting-specific mentorship programs and felt they may be valuable to retain quality staff, improve student outcomes, and enhance productivity. Time, compensation, and filling knowledge gaps were identified as both important components of a mentor program but also potential challenges to implementation. Given the persistent shortage of SLPs, the high rate of burnout, and the resulting difficulty retaining qualified school-based SLPs, the SLPs in this study felt that operationalizing a mentorship program where SLPs can feel supported throughout their careers may mitigate some of these negative outcomes.

The characteristics domain of the CFIR implementation science framework was used to contextualize the findings and guide the exploration of stakeholder's perspectives and feedback while also considering local, state, and federal constraints (Damschroder et al., 2009). Specifically, while research has demonstrated the potential value of mentorship to support job satisfaction and in turn student outcomes, very little appears to be written from the perspectives of school-based SLPs about what they identify as valuable components of a structured program, potential obstacles to implementation, and possible solutions.

There were many areas of support that SLPs identified as beneficial ranging from decision making, advocacy, paperwork, scheduling, and working through evaluations/interventions surrounding challenging cases. The responses from the open questions and the themes that emerged reinforced the areas identified as important components to mentorship and barriers found in the rank order and Likert scale items. Results from this survey yielded several key findings that may be useful to design a setting specific mentorship program which may in turn improve job satisfaction and student outcomes (Figure 1).

Components of a mentorship program

In addition to having dedicated time to provide mentorship as well as being compensated to participate (see below under *Barriers and solutions*), other important components to a post-CF school-based SLP mentorship program included support/advocacy, school specific resources and processes, evaluation and treatment strategies, and placing value on bi-directional collaboration.

Creating a supportive culture that places value on providing support and advocacy

Beyond time and compensation, school-based SLPs in this study shared that they believed the most important component and benefit of a mentorship program was its contribution to creating a school culture that values support. This is reinforced in the research literature which suggests that mentorship programs have the potential to lower stress levels by creating a supportive environment (Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007). Support may be in the form of comments to contribute to emotional well-being and to create a shared sense of camaraderie. A consistent point of contact to share and alleviate concerns builds trust. Having someone who bolsters professional development and growth and recognizes and commends successes beyond knowledge building offers less tangible but equally important benefits (Hudson, 2016).

The importance of both being an advocate for less experienced SLPs in school districts as well as providing strategies to teach them how to speak up for themselves was another area highlighted in this study, especially in the open-ended comments. Identified within the speech-language pathology scope of practice as a key professional practice domain (ASHA, 2016), advocacy may refer to the ability to speak up on one's own behalf or others'. The participants in this study shared that mentors can model advocacy to not only provide support to novice SLPs but also to teach advocacy skills. There are many ways to advocate for SLP related issues in schools (e.g., caseloads, workloads, eligibility criteria, working conditions etc.). Advocacy may also involve elevating SLPs' voices by volunteering to be a union representative or sitting on the school district's contract negotiating committee. Attending board of education meetings, voting in local school district elections if able, and providing budgetary input when asked are additional means of advocacy that can be modeled by more experienced SLPs.

Provide information on school/setting specific resources and processes

A large portion of the participants in this study shared that they felt another important component to a mentorship program is to provide information on school specific resources and processes. This may also include innovative service delivery options such as shorter, more frequent sessions, push in, teacher collaboration, tiered levels of support, and using the curriculum to support lesson planning (Heilmann & Bertone, 2021). In school-based settings, studies discuss the importance of having mentors to share different service delivery options such as push in therapy to support generalization and carryover of skills (Hudson, 2016). Having a veteran SLP use their clinical experience to guide decision making about treatment strategies and interventions can ensure that entry-level SLPs have a foundational understanding about school-based processes and deliver the most effective therapy.

School-based SLPs have significant additional setting specific responsibilities related to case management and procedural information specific to schools (Farquharson et al., 2022). The school-based SLPs in this study discussed the importance of having mentors available to help with answering questions about processing paperwork and administrative procedures related to case management. This may be especially relevant to school-based SLPs where paperwork may be overwhelming due to high caseloads.

Comments on the open-ended questions suggested that it would be beneficial for mentors to provide strategies to enhance planning, organization, and time management. Suggestions included limiting email responses to work hours, refraining from adding work email accounts to personal cellular devices, and trying to limit taking work home. Additional ideas included improving streamlining and efficiency (e.g., adapting therapy materials for multiple purposes and populations). Mentors as a group could maintain a website with local, state, and federal processes and procedures. Lastly, the website could include a printable checklist to help track information shared and what information is still to be discussed tailored to specific work sites.

Evaluation and treatment strategies

The SLPs who participated in this study suggested that having a mentor to help with drawing conclusions from evaluations as well as identifying functional and academically appropriate goals would be an important component to a mentor program. This is reinforced in the literature that suggests that newer SLPs may value having support to interpret assessment data to analyze results and write school-based goals (Dobbs et al., 2006). Hudson (2016) discussed that newer SLPs may benefit from mentors to support their ability to have a better holistic understanding of what speech/language behaviors are significantly outside of expected ranges which guides decision making related to the evaluation process. Further, since eligibility

for school-based services is framed by state and federal mandates (ASHA, 2020a) and functional and academic impact guides eligibility as part of the evaluation process, newer SLPs have additional considerations beyond diagnosis and goal setting that is unique to schools (Farquharson et al., 2022). Navigating these decisions is often nuanced and having support is helpful.

The participants in this study shared that another important area to include in a mentorship program would be to provide ample opportunity to discuss challenging cases, situations, and evidenced-based therapy strategies, and interventions. This increases the likelihood of creating highly qualified clinicians who in turn provide better therapy to students which improves their learning outcomes (Farquharson et al., 2022). This finding was reinforced in the literature which suggests that newer SLPs value support in the area of integrating experiences with different clinical populations to guide decision making about intervention (Dobbs et al., 2006).

Consider bi-directional benefit of collaboration

Collaboration was mentioned by participants as another valuable component to a mentor program. Considering both the perspectives of potential mentors as well as mentees and highlighting the bi-directional benefit of collaboration is an important consideration that has not been widely highlighted in the literature. As newer clinicians transition from Anderson's (1988) direct/active/teaching style of supervision into a more collaborative relationship, not only do mentees benefit but so do the mentors (Cassidy, 2013). Having the opportunity to collaborate with other SLPs at all phases of career development has the potential to contribute to job satisfaction, retention, and improved student outcomes for all SLPs (Farquharson et al., 2022).

Opportunities for collaboration between SLPs promote mentorship by sharing best practices and also have the potential to help maintain consistency and continuity across schools in the same district (Farquharson et al., 2022). For example, while state and federal guidelines may frame eligibility and inform decision making, there may be variability in interpretation between individual schools in the same district. SLPs in the current study mentioned that mentorship opportunities have the potential to create dialogue among SLPs in a given school district to achieve consensus so that a student seen in one building has similar experiences with speech/language services as one who attends a different school in the same district.

Barriers and solutions

The biggest barriers to mentorship identified in this study were lack of time and compensation. SLPs mentioned that challenges to implementation are significant as they are asked to do more with less with each passing year as workloads increase and resources remain the same or decrease. Comments included that not only is time limited, but noted the genuine challenge to not be compensated to take on additional work responsibilities when many teachers in their work setting receive state-required stipends to provide the same kind of support to new educators (e.g., New Jersey; New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). Gaps in knowledge were also identified in this study as a potential challenge to implementation. This included not only supporting knowledge building among mentees but also placing value on lifelong learning and professional development for seasoned SLP mentors.

Time

Participants endorsed what the research has suggested, which is that the amount of time spent with mentees is a critical component of creating strong relationships and associated with more meaningful experiences with mentorship in general (Cassidy, 2013). While time was identified as a critical component, it was also noted to be the biggest barrier related to

implementation of a mentor program. High caseloads and workloads often result in limited available time for mentors to devote to mentorship. Potential solutions mentioned include garnering administrative support to put dedicated time in SLPs' schedules to mentor or proposing that a professional development day be set aside for SLP mentorship. Additionally, after school content area meetings that many school-based SLPs are contractually required to attend could be grouped by discipline to create a dedicated time to meet with other SLPs in the district.

Compensation

In the current study, compensation was identified as an important component to a school-based post-CF mentorship program as well as a significant barrier. Farquharson et al. (2022) appealed to school administrators by suggesting they consider providing compensation to CF mentors due to the additional responsibilities and workload required when they agree to mentor a CF. In their article, they highlight that once licensed, the CF will be able to bill for Medicaid services and thus add to the revenue generated by the mentorship. While fiscal constraints are a real challenge in many school districts, advocacy efforts may include first seeking a stipend for CF mentorship since it is required for certification (ASHA, 2020a), and then approaching administration regarding a post-CF mentorship stipend. Another potential solution could be through advocacy of state speech-language-hearing associations to extend stipends given to teachers in some states (e.g., New Jersey) [New Jersey Department of Education, 2015] for mentoring first year teachers to extend to SLPs. As pointed out by Farquharson et al. (2022), providing compensation for additional responsibilities would be likely to have downstream effects of positive regard for the school district which has the potential to improve job satisfaction, retention, and student outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is limited by a small sample size which may prevent adequate information saturation. While we thought it would be useful to gather perspectives from school-based clinicians with varying levels of experience, it may be beneficial to limit future studies to newer SLPs since they are the intended topic of study. We also used a novel survey to fit the purpose and needs of this study. However, as a result, the survey lacked psychometric properties as it was not validated or tested for reliability beyond seeking input and feedback about the survey questions from school-based SLPs. Since questions beyond consent were optional, it is unknown how participants' skipping questions influenced the findings. The qualitative analysis may have benefited from calculating interrater reliability after the negotiation process as well the inclusion of member checking and audit trails (Johnson, et al., 2020). This study is also limited by the anonymous nature of the survey and as such we were unable to control for adequate representation of geographic and cultural/linguistic backgrounds. Future studies should integrate these questions into the survey so that cross-sectional information can be taken into consideration. In addition, it may be valuable to examine generational differences as well as why more participants were interested in being a mentor (46.15%) than a mentee (9.62%).

Conclusion

This study considered perspectives of school-based SLPs with varying levels of experience about a post-CF mentorship experience. Participants shared potential components of a mentor program, barriers, and possible solutions. This study adds to the literature as very little has been written about how a school district may approach what to put into a post-CF-mentorship program, what obstacles may be faced when trying to implement them, and what potential solutions may exist to overcome them. Components ranged from support related

to evaluations, treatment strategies, paperwork, scheduling, advocacy, and working through decision making surrounding complex populations. Time, compensation, and filling knowledge gaps were identified as important components as well as barriers to implementation. Through first-person feedback, school-based SLPs offered solutions that included recruiting administrative support to advocating for change at the state level. SLPs appear to be interested in mentorship not only as a way to support future generations of SLPs but also for a sense of self-fulfillment and professional development. Mentorship relationships throughout all phases of a career have the potential to be beneficial to both parties in tangible and intangible ways.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Kate Bond-Nelson for her help with this study.

Data Availability Statement: All data generated for this study are included in this manuscript.

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Figure 1

Components, Barriers, and Solutions to Mentorship

Note. Identified components of mentorship, barriers to mentorship, and suggested solutions

based on school-based SLPs' perspectives. PLC = Professional Learning Community.