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Kent Janikula
kjanikula@stkate.edu

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Effects of Mentorship on Teacher Classroom Preparedness at the Secondary Level

An Action Research Report
By Kent Janikula

Effects of Mentorship on Teacher Classroom Preparedness at the Secondary Level

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Kent Janikula

St. Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor: Cara Rieckenberg

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to see what effect a teacher mentorship program would have on teacher's classroom preparedness at a public Middle and High school in the rural Midwest. Twelve teachers participated in the six-week study; six were mentors, the other six mentees. All teachers completed a self-evaluation at the beginning of the study. In the first week, teachers were interviewed regarding aspects of the mentorship program and how it had affected their level of preparedness for the classroom. During the study, mentees filled out time sheets recording how much time they were spending outside of the school day preparing lessons. At the end of the six weeks, teachers completed another self-evaluation and interview. The study results suggest that teacher mentorship does have a small effect on preparing new teachers. Teachers in the study expressed that the program was helpful in their development as a teacher. The results of this study bring up other possibilities of research including, investigating the impact of the mentor-mentee relationship as well as, helping school districts develop better-structured mentorship programs to support the development of skilled teachers.

Keywords: mentorship, teacher, education, preparedness

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Student teachers spend days working with a cooperating teacher to hone their skills to become excellent educators. The student teacher-cooperating teacher relationship is vital for a new, learning teacher, so mentees have an idea of the qualities outstanding teachers possess. However, once the student teaching period ends, rookie teachers often are thrust into their first job with little to no formal guidance and are forced to learn on the fly.

Speaking from experience as someone who began his first teaching job without a formal mentor, stress levels were high, and my overall teaching quality struggled to gain solid footing. I cannot help but imagine how much smoother my first professional year of teaching could have gone had I had someone like the cooperating teachers I had during student teaching. Other new teachers besides me share the challenges of getting started in the field if only new teachers had a little more support.

Teacher burnout is becoming a bigger problem in America today, and new teachers often feel overwhelmed with the amount of work on their plate. First year teachers struggle to balance all of the tasks apart of the job. Perhaps, if districts implemented better mentorship programs which gave teachers more support and instilled more confidence in younger educators, teacher burnout could be solved.

After accepting and starting a teaching job in a new school district, I had the feeling of being a new teacher all over again even after having four years of experience in the field. It was nerve wracking, and stress levels were high as I was planning and preparing a new curriculum. After being part of the hiring process as both a person on a hiring committee and interviewing for jobs myself, I observed the impact switching jobs had on both my new school and old school I could not help but wonder how schools deal with teacher turnover. First of all, is it something that is simply built into the school culture? Or is it something that can be fixed

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with a few support pieces? These questions led me to start my study and the possible connections between greater support, and greater teacher success and confidence.

The setting for the study takes place in a small Midwestern town's middle and high school. The two buildings are connected and house around 120 students per grade level. Six new teachers were hired prior to the beginning of the school year, and as a district, a mentorship program was adopted. Veteran teachers were offered a financial incentive to serve as mentor teachers for any new staff hired by the district. Mentor teachers would guide new staff members helping them to feel more prepared in their new setting. In addition, the program strived for mentors to be in the same content area as the new teachers to provide guidance in curriculum and instruction.

Teacher turnover seems to be a major problem in many spots around the country. I was one of five new teachers in this middle school. One cannot help but wonder why that is? Is this a natural phenomenon? Or is this something that can be fixed with more teacher support? I hypothesize that with more support, new teachers will feel more comfortable in their new environments. This heightened sense of confidence will have a trickle-down effect to all parts of their work as an educator. When a teacher has more confidence, they feel more prepared in planning and delivering curriculum. They will possess better teacher skills across the board and bring more skills and abilities to the table for their students and to their districts as a whole.

At the middle and high school, six new full-time staff members were hired in the summer of 2016. These new teachers will be referred to as mentees throughout this study. Three of these staff members accepted their first full-time teaching job, while three were veteran teachers, just new to the district as they changed schools. All six of the new staff members were assigned mentor teachers, all of whom had achieved tenure at the school. The two new Language Arts

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teachers were assigned mentors within the same department as were the hires in Social Studies, Math, and Special Education. The only exception came for the new hire in Physical Education who was assigned a Math department mentor, since no other male Physical Education teacher worked in that building.

For this research study, twelve total individuals participated. The study lasted over the course of the final six weeks of the second quarter grading period at the school. Participants filled out a self-assessment at the beginning and end of the study which measured a range of abilities such as classroom management and time management. All participants were interviewed twice during the data collection period. Mentees completed a weekly timesheet in which they logged the amount of time they had spent outside of the school day working on lesson planning. The data collected in this study is aimed to help understand if teacher mentorship programs can have an effect in the classroom. Data gathered during the survey helped to answer the question: Can a teacher mentorship program help teacher preparedness in the classroom?

Literature Review

Teachers often point to their first few years in the field as the most difficult. As more and more teachers leave the field early in their careers, districts are looking for ways to train teachers in a way that helps student learning, but also keep well-trained teachers in the field and the same school. New teachers and educators who are new to districts often feel apprehensive in starting their new role. Teacher mentorship programs, if properly implemented, make new teachers feel comfortable. Teachers are more successful in the classroom after gaining experience, and this experience often breeds further success for teacher and students. Teacher mentorship can help

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teachers develop essential skills which will give these teachers the tools to stay in the field and accomplish major gains in student achievement.

What is a teacher mentorship program and why should it happen

Teacher mentorship is a program in which more experienced educators work with younger or new faculty members (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009). The programs are designed to help newer teachers with communication and classroom skills (Hellsten et al., 2009). Programs are designed to help teachers mend the gap between preparing outside the classroom to actually putting skills to practice inside the classroom (Hellsten et al., 2009). Mentorship is designed to be an ongoing program that last a long period in which teachers learn on the fly (Hellsten et al., 2009). Mentorship can be a complicated task to pull off, but many current trends in teaching suggest that schools should look into implementing a program (Hellsten et al., 2009; Porumb, 2015; Harris and Sass, 2011).

Nationwide there is a teacher shortage, and teachers are leaving the field in alarming numbers according to current research (O'Connor, Malow, & Bisland 2011; Hellsten et al., 2009). The first few years in the professional lifespan of a teacher are critical to long-term success (Hellsten et al., 2009). In fact, 30% of new teachers leave the field altogether within the first three years (O'Connor et al., 2011). This number raises questions about what exactly goes wrong in these first years in the classroom. The primary reason why teachers left their field was a lack of support (O'Connor et al., 2011). Teachers often enter their new environment unsure of procedures and classroom routines (O'Connor et al., 2011). Early teacher confusion and struggles have led many districts to create teacher mentorship programs. Unfortunately, not all mentorship programs are successful.

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With teacher retention becoming a growing problem and many new teachers struggling to adjust early in their careers, districts are looking for ways to fight this problem (O'Connor et al., 2011). In general, mentorship training has been seen to have a positive effect on new teachers so many districts and schools are implementing mentorship programs (Porumb, 2015). Current research suggests that teacher mentorship can be effective and that is why more and more schools are creating teacher mentorship programs (Porumb, 2015; Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009).

Current state of teacher mentorship

Creating a teacher mentorship program for a school or district itself does not guarantee success for new teachers (Hellsten et al., 2009). In fact, current findings indicate that teacher mentorship programs are not always successful or positive (Hellsten et al., 2009). The start of good mentorship programs begins with the participation of the mentors. Teaching mentors must be engaged in helping out their mentee. Otherwise, the program can be a complete waste of time for all parties involved (Hellsten et al., 2009).

Mentors serve as a vital aspect of an active mentorship program (Fowler, 2012). Even with an active mentor in place, evaluating teacher mentorship programs can be a tall task (Harris & Sass, 2011). Rating the success of current mentorship programs is a challenge since it can be difficult to isolate productivity in a school setting (Harris & Sass, 2011). Teacher success is often linked with other teachers and that is what makes it a challenge to measure teacher improvement (Harris & Sass, 2011). Most of the feedback on teacher mentorship programs comes from conversations with current and former teachers (O'Connor et al., 2011). Teachers often report back that they wish mentorship programs had more hands-on training rather than merely theory-based training (O'Connor et al., 2011). New teachers are looking for support and

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ideas for how they can be successful. Putting new teachers in the right spot is one of the first steps to success.

Research available indicates that matching the skill set of mentor and mentee is vital for the program to be successful (Hellsten et al., 2009; Fowler, 2012). New teachers often enter a new job excited and well-prepared, but that alone does not guarantee success (Hellsten et al., 2009). The first few months for a teacher can be a handful. Since a flood of information can be overwhelming, the most efficient way to implement teacher mentorship is a gradual approach (Fowler, 2012). Different mentorship programs have differing levels of success depending upon the district. A one size fits all approach does not work when it comes to creating a mentorship program (Ralph & Walker, 2010). Mentors possess different mindsets and methodologies. Compatibility for the mentor-mentee pairing is a vital aspect for an active and successful mentorship (Hellsten et al., 2009). A partnership is doomed if mentors and mentees are not compatible (Hellsten et al., 2009).

Mentor-mentee role and relationship

Mentors and mentees must have a healthy relationship for a mentorship program to be successful (Fowler, 2012; Hellsten et al., 2009). However, a greater burden must be put on the mentor in this relationship. The mentor is the experienced one in this relationship, and he or she must be properly trained in their role for the program to be successful (Fowler, 2012). Mentorship is a social process that is all about relationships (Fowler, 2012). Mentors must demonstrate not only high-level teaching ability but also possess knowledge of how to build and maintain healthy relationships with others (Fowler, 2012). A 2009 study even suggests that giving new teachers many mentors can be more efficient than using a one to one approach

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(Hellsten et al.). Mentors serve as the foundation of a strong mentorship program and schools that have strong mentors experience many positives (Fowler, 2012; Hellsten et al., 2009).

The first trait of a successful mentor is to be approachable to their mentee (Melanson, 2013). Mentees have to feel comfortable with their mentor for the relationship to work. This is indicated in mentorship research across many fields (Melanson, 2013; Mathur, Gehrke, & Kim, 2013; Hellsten et al., 2009). Part of understanding their understudies is stepping into their shoes for perspective. Mentors have to show their mentees that they care (Melanson, 2013). Empathy is a vital characteristic of a successful mentor (Melanson, 2013). If a mentor possesses these qualities they can be of tremendous support in making new teachers feel comfortable in a new environment.

The biggest challenge for new teachers is adapting to a new environment (Hellsten et al., 2009). Teachers who have an active mentor are more likely to adjust to a new environment quicker (Hellsten et al., 2009). Mentorship training can serve as an important first step for new teachers to feel comfortable. One of the first tasks of mentors is to help new teachers feel comfortable in their new environment, after they have accomplished that there are several ways that mentors can help build strong relationships with mentees. In general, mentorship training has been seen to have a positive effect on new teachers (Porumb, 2015). If districts are looking for ways to help new teachers, teacher mentorship programs can serve as an excellent way to make this happen (Hellsten et al., 2009). While mentorship programs are positive for new teachers and students, mentors must portray certain characteristics for a strong relationship to blossom.

Having a teacher mentorship program helps create relationships amongst faculty in schools. These programs set the stage for teachers to speak with one another and reflect on their

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practice (Mathur et al., 2013). Mentees are not the only ones who can benefit from mentorship, as mentors can get a lot out of a program as well (Mathur et al., 2013). Mentors have found that a mentorship program helped with their ability to reflect on their own teaching (Mathur et al., 2013). This opportunity for reflection on professional practice, leaves veteran teachers feeling refreshed (Lafluer & White, 2010). Mentors often find the experience not only to be rewarding to them as a person but as well as for their practice as a whole (Lafleur & White, 2010). Not only do teacher mentorship programs benefit new teachers and veteran teachers, studies show there is also a benefit for students (Harris et al., 2011).

Impact of Mentorship on Students and the School Community

Mentorship programs can also be said to impact students positively. Teacher mentorship programs can serve as a way to help beginning teachers make daily decisions that can assist in creating bigger jumps in student achievement (Mathur et al., 2013). Mentorship programs can have a trickle down effect on students because these programs can help create better teachers and students learn more from stronger teachers (Mathur et al., 2013). Mentorship can have an impact on all aspects of a school.

What many schools and districts might be surprised to know is that impact of mentorship programs can extend far beyond new teachers in their individual classrooms (Harris et al., 2011). Most mentorship programs are geared first and foremost to help new teachers (Hellsten et al., 2009). Educators have a fundamental role to not only provide knowledge to students but to train faculty as well (Schnader, Westermann, Downey, & Thibodeau, 2015). This environment provides an excellent example for students. Students see first-hand how their educators treat one another. Students also benefit from teacher mentorship programs because it makes new teachers more effective in the classroom at a faster rate (Harris et al., 2011). When teachers are set up for

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success with a strong mentorship program, they are more likely to notice gains in student achievement early in their career.

Confidence is a key factor for success in many careers. Often experience breeds confidence. This was a concept found in numerous studies on mentorship (Harris et al., 2011; Mathur et al., 2013). The challenge for many new teachers is getting the type of experience that instills confidence at the beginning of their careers (Harris et al., 2011; Mathur et al., 2013). Teachers get better with more expertise in the classroom (Harris et al., 2011). Active mentorship programs can help new teachers get that experience earlier in their careers (Mathur et al., 2013)

One of the positives found in mentees involved in mentorship programs was their improved decision-making ability (Mathur et al., 2013). Teachers with a strong decision-making ability are connected with higher levels of job satisfaction (Mathur et al., 2013). This improved decision-making gives new teachers the type of positive experience they need to grow in the profession (Harris et al., 2011) More confidence is gained through experience. Mentorship helps give teachers early success and promotes a sense of happiness within the field.

Other than helping new teachers get acclimated to their new surroundings, mentorship programs serve no bigger purpose than helping keep teachers in education (Mathur et al., 2013). The number of educators leaving the field early in their career can be astonishing. Teacher mentorship helps give teachers a greater sense of confidence and makes them less likely to leave their field (Mathur et al., 2013). These programs can help individual teachers greatly, but when put together across an entire district it can have even better results. Districts want to have great teachers and mentorship helps develop strong teachers (Harris et al., 2011). Not only does a mentorship program contribute to creating outstanding

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teachers, but it also keeps them in the field and prevents schools from having to hire new teachers all the time (Harris et al., 2011).

Conclusion

Current research suggests that teacher mentorship programs have a positive effect on new teachers and school districts in general (Hellsten et al., 2013; Mathur et al., 2009; O'Connor et al., 2011). However, research also showcases that the quality and structure of the mentorship program has an enormous impact on the desired outcomes (Hellsten et al., 2013). In teacher mentorship training, research suggests that districts could benefit from having more helpful information available on how to set up a mentorship program (Hellsten et al., 2013). Compared to other fields, such as the nursing field, education seems to be lacking on specific aspects of mentorship research (Mathur et al., 2009). A lot of literature is available concerning designing mentorship programs for the medical field, while hardly any was available on how to develop a successful teacher mentorship program (Fowler, 2012). In the end, current research suggests that teacher mentorship programs overall are successful, but what districts need is more specific directions on how to design their mentorship programs.

Mentorship programs are popping up in districts throughout the state and country. As a whole mentorship is a generic term. School districts could benefit from further research on mentorship programs specific to education. Current studies on the topic tend to be general and not specific to certain qualities of effective teachers. In this investigation the topic will be narrowed down to look at one specific aspect of teaching. In this study, the research will be aimed at discovering if teacher mentorship programs have an effect on new teachers classroom preparedness.

Methodology

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The first step of the research process was obtaining approval from the school administration. Since the entirety of the research would be focused on staff at one school, it was necessary to first receive the permission of the administration. I held conversations with both the middle and high school principals to receive their support for administering the research project on mentorship. Once that approval had gone through, I set up a time with administration to speak at a faculty meeting to introduce my research project.

Participants in this study are both male and female and have varied prior teaching experience. Teachers volunteered to take part in the study and had the opportunity to opt out at any time. The mentees received notice (Appendix A) that nothing from the study would impact their future employment by the district.

Participating teachers were given consent forms (Appendix A) at a middle school staff meeting which provided a complete overview of the project. In this session, I gave a brief oral presentation to the teachers participating in the project as well as went over the directions of the consent form. I explained that the research period would last six weeks and would be used as a way of measuring the effects of the teacher mentorship program. Since our district is in the first year of adopting a formal mentorship program, teachers were curious to hear about the results of the study. At this meeting, participants were made aware that their participation was not required and that any information recorded in the study would not have any effect on their future employment in the district. If teachers felt uncomfortable at any time during the research period, they had the option of opting out. I emphasized that all data collected would be kept confidential. The total time requirement of the study was discussed and teachers were told that it would require no more than two total hours of participation over the six week period of research. Once this initial meeting had concluded I collected the signed consent forms

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(Appendix A) from teachers and began the formal research. All of the teachers asked to participate filled out the forms and no one opted out during the study.

The first step of the research process involved teachers completing a teacher self-evaluation form (Appendix B) via google forms. Participants were sent an email which included a link that contained directions for how to complete the self-evaluation. Data collected in this self-evaluation (Appendix B) was used as a baseline for data collection. The self-evaluation (Appendix B) contained 12 total questions ranging from ranking questions in which teachers rated their abilities in categories such as time management, classroom management, and assessment building. The evaluation also contained open-ended questions in which mentors and mentees described both their strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. Participants received an email confirmation from me once they had completed their self-evaluation and were told that they would be completing the same evaluation at the end of the research period.

At the conclusion of the initial meeting, mentees were given specific instructions about their participation in the completion of a weekly teacher time sheet (Appendix E). I made it very clear that these logs would be kept confidential and no information found in these records would be shared with the school district and have any impact on their future employment with the school. Mentees received an email from me with a link for them to click on. This link set up their own time sheet that could use throughout the study. Time entered into this log was only to include the time they spent preparing lessons and not any of the time they spent correcting student work. Confidentiality was made clear in a brief message apart of the first email the participants received. This information was also discussed at the initial research meeting. Mentees were to fill in the sheet on a daily or weekly basis. Upon the completion of a full week, they were to total their hours they spent outside of the school day planning

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lessons. Mentees were to record their data on the time sheet throughout the data collection period and were told that at the end of the research period they would be sent a reminder to share the information with me.

Upon completion of the self-evaluation, mentors and mentees set up interview times with me. Interview questions were sent in advance to both mentors (Appendix C) and mentees (Appendix D). The interviews contained similar questions for both mentors and mentees but also included questions unique to the role of mentor or mentee. The mentor interview consisted of six total questions. The mentee interview consisted of nine total questions. Once I had set up the interview with the participants, I spent ten minutes with each participant going over their answers. Participants typed in their replies to the questions prior to our meeting. Typing in answers allowed for the time to not exceed more than ten minutes. I wanted to prevent the interviews from going off on tangents and teachers fully value their prep time, so I wanted to honor that part of their commitment to the research. All participants completed their initial interview in the first two weeks of the investigation process. At the conclusion of the interview, teachers were reminded that they would be participating in another interview during the final two weeks of the research period.

As other participants completed their work as part of the process, I filled out a journal (Appendix F) from my personal experiences being a part of the mentorship program. All entries were time dated so that I could reference at what point in the research period my entry appeared. As someone new to the district, I too, was a participant in the study as a mentee. I completed the self-evaluation (Appendix B) and filled out the interview questions (Appendix D) during the same periods as the other participants in the study.

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When the final two weeks of the study arrived, I once again set up interview times with mentors and mentees. The same interview process was repeated. The second interview was held in less than ten minutes, and I had teachers fill in answers as I asked them the questions. Participants had the option of referencing their past interview responses if they requested.

Mentees were sent an email reminder during the final week of the study to share their teacher time sheet (Appendix E) with me. Mentees were reminded to total up their hours spent outside of the school day lesson planning and that they could round to the nearest half hour in their calculations. As I received the time sheets from other participants, I finalized the times in my sheet. These time sheets were collected and organized in google drive folder and kept anonymously.

On the Friday of the final week of the research, participants were sent the last piece of information for the research process. Participants were sent a reminder to complete the self-evaluation google form (Appendix B). The email thanked them for their participation and once again reminded them that the information they provided throughout the research process would be kept confidential.

After receiving all of the data from participants I organized the information into separate Google folders. Data was organized in folders for mentors and mentees so that the analysis of the collected data could be done seamlessly. After completing the final steps of organizing the information, I began the process of analyzing the data.

Analysis of Data

Before conducting my action research I knew that teacher mentorship programs could be impactful, but I wanted to see how much they impacted classroom preparedness specifically. To

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begin my study baseline data was collected in two forms through a self-evaluation and a teacher interview. On-going throughout the research study, mentees kept track of the time they spent outside of the school day preparing lessons. During the study, as a mentee, I also wrote down my experiences in the form of a journal. Upon the conclusion of the five-week study period, all participants took another self-evaluation and participated in a final interview. As I analyzed the data, I found data that would suggest a correlation between growth in classroom preparedness and the participation in a teacher mentorship program. The results indicated that mentorship programs have much more of an impact on mentees than mentors as far as their involvement. While the growth was not significant in all areas, it was enough to suggest that teacher mentorship programs can be effective in helping teachers feel more prepared for all of the daily tasks of teaching.

During the first week of my research period, I collected baseline data from teachers through a teacher self-evaluation (Appendix B). Teachers ranked their ability in several categories. The data displayed in figure 1 shows how teachers ranked themselves at the beginning of the study. Teachers are numbered to protect their identity. Teachers with the letter A are mentor teachers (ex: Teacher 1A), while teachers with a B (ex: Teacher 1B) are the mentee teachers in this study. Mentor teacher 1A worked with mentee teacher 1B and so on. Teachers ranked their abilities on a scale of 1-5, with '5' being an expert level of proficiency and '1' having no level of skill in that category. Figure 1 shows that no teacher ranked any of their abilities in technology use, classroom management, prep time management, or their ability to create quality lessons below a three at the beginning of the study. The high baseline score indicates that teachers came into this study with no glaring weaknesses in any of these areas. As expected the average rating for the veteran teachers was higher than that of the newer mentee

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teachers at the beginning of the study. However, the difference was not significant as mentor teachers rank themselves on average a score of 3.95, while mentees average score on the ranking system was 3.7, but the difference does reflect that mentor teachers view themselves more favorably than newer teachers. One area that mentees ranked themselves higher than mentors was in the field of technology integration. Mentees ranking greater than mentors in technology integration was not a major surprise as it is possible that many of the newer teachers have more exposure to new types of technology having just recently completed their teacher training programs at the undergraduate programs. In general, when considering growth, Figure 1 shows that mentee teachers have more for growth than their mentor counterparts.



Figure 1. Teacher Baseline Self-Evaluation Results

After collecting baseline data in the form of a teacher self-evaluation (Appendix B), I began to conduct my interviews with mentors and mentees. Mentors and mentees were given a

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copy of the questions (Appendix C and D) before the interview was carried out to help streamline the process. After completing the first round of interviews, I worked to analyze the responses of the participants.

The first group of educators examined the mentors. I wanted to see what their attitude and feelings were about teacher mentorship going into the research period. All mentors who participated in the study viewed the mentorship program favorably. One of the biggest positives that mentor teachers took away from their time working with mentee teachers was that most felt it made them more reflective in their practice. It allowed for mentor teachers to look at their teaching and reflect on changes they could make. Interactions with mentors and observations gave more chances for mentors to be reflective in their teaching abilities.

While all of the mentor teachers expressed positives about the program, one negative aspect came up over and over again in the interviews. Teachers value their prep and free time during their day. All of the mentor teachers expressed in some form that a challenge was finding time to meet. Mentors faced the problem of balancing their lesson planning and classroom responsibilities while at the same time carving out time to work with their mentee. Mentors expressed concern over having different prep times than their mentees and the difficulty that came from scheduling meetings with their mentees when they had such different schedules. While mentees expressed both positives and concerns about the mentorship program at the beginning of the process, mentees spoke mostly positively about their experiences so far. The first question mentees were asked in their interview (Appendix D) was how being in the mentorship program had affected their teaching. Participants gave a variety of responses to this question regarding specific ways the mentorship program had affected their teaching, but again as in the response to the overall subject of mentorship, one common theme of all the responses

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was that the experience had been positive. One mentee teacher responded that working with a mentor made them more aware of school district policies and procedures. Another expressed that the relationship helped build more confidence in their daily procedures and work. The answers to the initial question reflected right from the start that mentees felt more confident after their interactions with mentor teachers. This confidence may allow teachers to be more prepared when they enter the classroom as the literature review indicated a connection between confidence and preparedness.

As part of the research process mentee teachers completed time logs to track how much time they spent outside the school day preparing lessons for class. The hypothesis going into this study was that there perhaps could be a correlation between more experience and less time spent outside of the school day. The data in this study found no such correlation. The data for the teacher time logs is displayed in figure 2 and suggests that no real conclusion can be drawn from the teacher time logs. Results for all of the mentees vary across the board. One mentee teacher averaged twelve hours a week of extra time. Other mentee teachers averaged less than three hours a week of time spent outside of the school day. Also, time spent varied from week to week and was most certainly not at a steady declining rate. The time logs are difficult to assess because all of the mentee teachers had such a wide range of time spent outside of the school day prepping and suggests that many factors go into how much time teachers spend preparing lessons. Time spent on preparation can vary based on the unit being taught, if an assessment occurred that week or a variety of other examples that in some way may have had an impact on the time spent outside of class. In the end, the results showed that preparedness could come in many forms and total time spent preparing lessons cannot be used as a tool to gauge teacher preparedness.

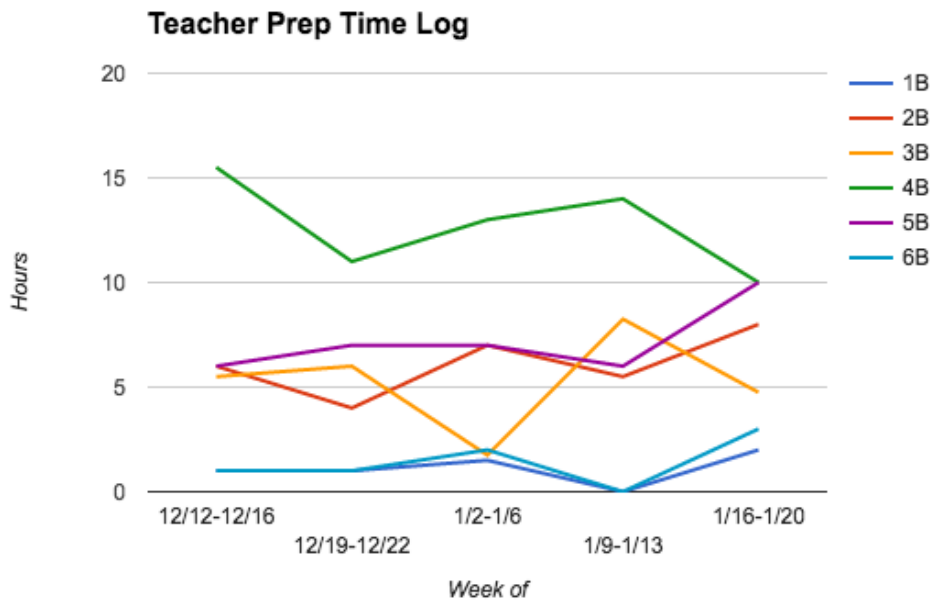


Figure 2: Teacher Prep time spent for Lessons over Research Period

Throughout the research period, I recorded my thoughts and experiences in being involved in the mentor program as a mentee in a journal (Appendix F). I was a new teacher to the school and also was part of the study. On average I spent about fifteen to twenty minutes a week interacting with my mentor. Most of those experiences came in informal settings through interactions throughout the school day. The most logged piece of information in my journal was time spent with my mentor working with the grade book. New teachers often come into a school setting with no previous experience working with the grade book software. My mentor was extremely helpful throughout the research period in providing me tips on how to use the program. Through our interactions, I was much more prepared in dealing with keeping my grades up to date and meeting the deadlines of mid-terms and quarter end dates. During the research period, we did not spend much time discussing curriculum, but my mentor did provide

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me with a variety of tools that helped me save time and thus gave me more time to plan and prepare daily lessons.

At the conclusion of the research period mentors and mentees were interviewed to discuss their overall experience of being in the mentorship program. The questions were the same as the original interview (Appendix C and Appendix D), and teachers were given a copy of the questions ahead of time. These interviews provided feedback on the idea that the program helped teachers feel more prepared for their work. Both mentors and mentees presented verbal evidence of such claims.

Most districts have mentees in mind when designing mentorship programs, but this study would suggest that mentors also benefit from their participation in a mentorship program. In the final interview of the research study (Appendix C) mentors were asked how their involvement in the program had affected their teaching ability. Two-thirds of the mentor teachers responded that the program had made them more mindful of their teaching style and ability. One participant responded that working with their mentee provided a boost to help use all of the advice they had received over the years in the profession. It was evident in all of the second interviews that mentors felt that the program helped them in their teaching and was more than just about helping out their mentee. In many ways, the program served as a form of professional growth for mentors as they learned from younger teachers about new practices and ideas in the field.

In addition to the final interviews with mentors, I also conducted final interviews with mentees. The format was the same for the mentees as it was with the mentors. These discussions provided feedback that the mentorship program had a positive influence on their

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teaching over the course of the research period. However, the growth of the mentees over the research period was not substantial and that was seen in the responses of the mentees.

One question (Appendix D, regarding what they would like to improve about their relationship with their mentor) drew responses that reflected not all parts of the program helped promote greater preparedness.. Half of the responses of mentees included the word communication as something they wished could have been improved. One mentee wished that the communication had more direction or purpose. Another said they would have benefitted more from having a mentor that taught in the same content area as they did. Responses related to communication reflected that much can go into the dynamic of matching pairs for mentorship programs. Creating relevant pairs of mentors and mentees can be a challenge for smaller districts with faculty numbers that are lower. In addition, it appears that the program could have been more effective if the communication that went on during the study had more structure. While some mentees expressed some concern with their relationship with their mentor, most of the data collected in the interviews reflected that the mentorship program helped mentees feel more prepared than they were before the start of the study.

At the beginning of the study participants completed a self-evaluation which served as a baseline for the research. At the conclusion of the study, teachers completed the same self-evaluation (Appendix B) to measure if they perceived any growth occurred. The results of the self-evaluations showed varied comparisons depending on the particular topic being measured. Some areas showed small examples of growth, but none of the results were substantial.

One area of the self-evaluation reflected negative growth. Teachers were asked about their ability and skill in using technology in the classroom. As stated earlier, teachers ranked

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their ability on a scale of 1-5. All the numbers at the beginning of the study were higher than 3 for both mentors and mentees. Figure 3 shows that not all teachers benefitted with growth in the field of technology through participation in the mentorship program. The use of technology can be seen as a way of helping teacher preparedness in the classroom, but the results showed that mentees felt less confident in their technology abilities at the end of the study. The results were not substantial, but Figure 3 shows some areas of negative growth.

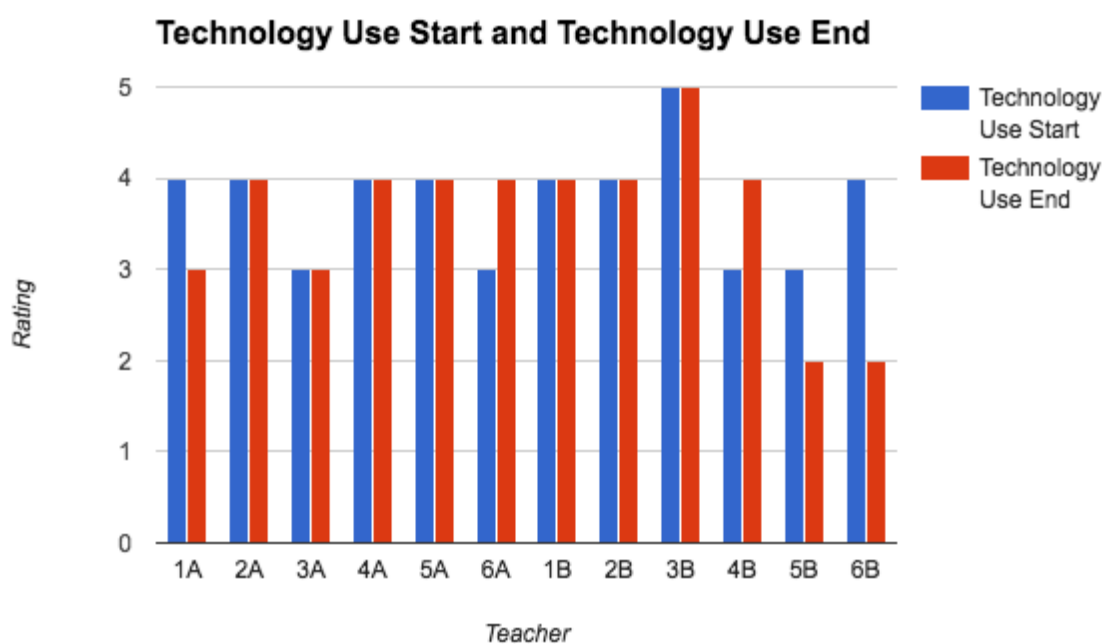


Figure 3. Teacher technology use at the beginning and end of study

This study was aimed to see if teachers felt more prepared for classroom activity through participation in a mentorship program. One of the main ways teachers can help their preparedness is through the creation of excellent lessons. On the self-evaluation (Appendix B) teachers rated their ability to create quality lessons. Figure 4 shows that some growth from mentees did occur over the course of the study. While the results were not substantial, one

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cannot help but wonder how much growth would have been reflected had the study lasted more than six weeks. One-third of the mentees showed signs of growth, while the other two-thirds of mentees results stayed the same. These numbers do not reflect a major increase, but did show small signs of growth (see Figure 4).

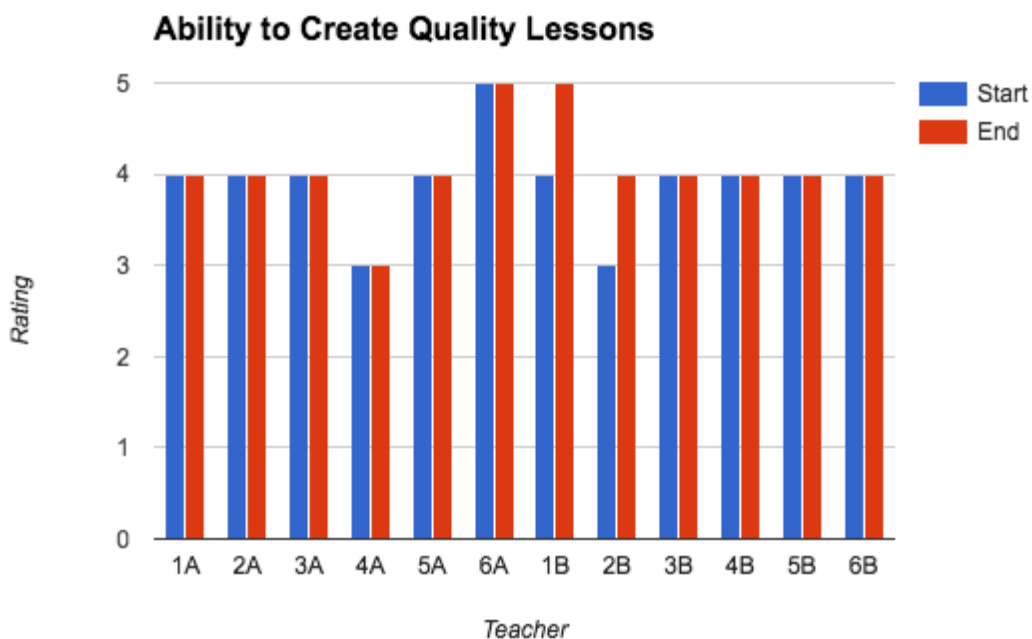


Figure 4. Teachers Ability to Create Quality Lessons at Beginning and End of Research Period

Looking at the overall results of the self-evaluations shows a mixed bag of results. Some skills in the study showed positive growth, and other skills appeared to stay steady, while others declined (see Figure 5). Overall mentors and mentees experienced growth in the areas of classroom management and ability to create quality lessons. The scores were lower the second time around for technology integration and for prep time management for both mentors and mentees. Lower technology scores possibly could be explained by the fact that teachers may not

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have remembered what they rated themselves at the beginning of the study. Figure 5 is shown below, and the orange bar reflects whether the category had positive or negative growth.

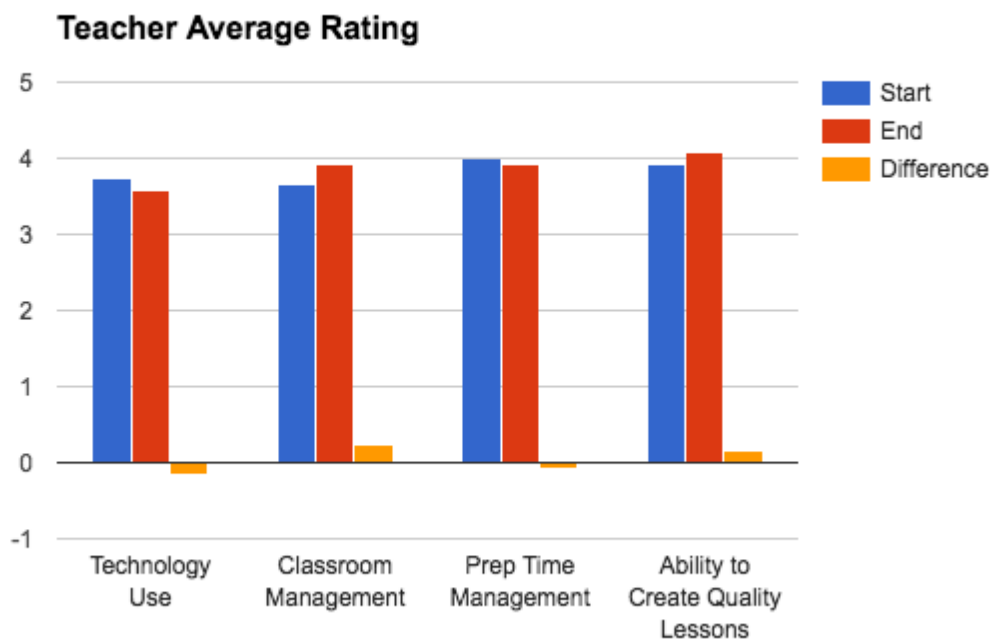


Figure 5. Teacher's Average score in particular categories at beginning and end of study

As I compared my qualitative (self-evaluation) with my quantitative (interviews and journal) the results showed overall positive growth when it comes to classroom preparedness for mentors and mentees. Not all of the qualitative data reflected positive growth, but some of the lack of growth could be because the research period covered was not long enough or did not happen early enough in the school year. By and large, the quantitative data reflected that the mentorship program had a positive impact on preparing teachers for daily work in the classroom.

Discussion

Through the course of this action research process, I was able to explore the connection between participation in a teacher mentorship program and teachers level of preparedness in the

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field. Interviews with participants suggested that the mentorship program was successful in helping in preparing new teachers in the field. However, the quantitative data found in the study did not showcase significant jumps in all abilities as a result of being in the mentor program. The results highlighted the importance of communication in a mentorship program. Data found in the study revealed how important the relationship between the mentor and mentee is to the success of a mentorship program how crucial the timing of mentorship can be in helping teachers feel prepared.

Current research suggests that teacher mentorship programs are helpful in preparing new teachers for a new role. My study reaffirmed this idea of the importance of mentorship in the teaching field. In general, this study showed that mentorship could have a positive effect on both mentors and mentees. While the aim of this study was towards mentees, it also revealed that mentors participating in mentorships program could also experience growth through the reflection of their practice.

I was in a unique situation conducting this research since I was also a mentee in the mentorship program studied. If anything, results of this study indicated that we as teachers are never done growing. The practice of teaching is constantly adapting and changing, and one day I may find myself in a mentorship program acting as a mentor. While serving as a mentor may be a lot of work, this study helped show that mentorship can in many ways serve as a form of professional development. In general, this action research study did have an impact on my personal teaching practice since it showed me that I can always grow as a teacher no matter how many years of experience I have.

The results of this study were not groundbreaking. A handful of studies exist that show that mentorship serves as a positive way to help prepare teachers for the classroom. What I am

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hoping my study did do for the practice of teaching is help provide another example to districts of the importance of implementing a mentorship program for new teachers. Teacher burnout rates continue to rise, and schools need to do whatever it takes to keep new teachers in the field. This study may not have shown significant quantitative data that would suggest that mentorship programs will stop teacher burnout, but the qualitative data found in this study did find that it helps a whole lot more than it hurts. The hope is that districts that do not have a formal mentorship program use this study as well as others on the subject, as proof of the importance of mentorship for new teachers.

The aim of my study measured the growth of teachers first and foremost. I did not gather any student data since I felt it would have been a challenge to find any quantitative data that would suggest a direct correlation between mentorship and student growth. What this study did show was that mentorship helps teachers feel more prepared in a variety of ways. It does not take an expert in education to see that students are more likely to learn more from a teacher who is well-prepared and confident compared to a teacher who is raw and unprepared. While my study did not link any data to the potential impact of mentorship on student learning, one cannot help but see that a well-prepared teacher is likely to have an impact on student learning.

Some potential future action research studies do exist in this topic. As suggested previously, it would be interesting to see if a link could be drawn between mentorship and student learning. How that study would take shape is difficult to say, but I'm sure many districts would be interested to see if mentorship would help student growth. It is clear that mentorship helps teachers, but little research exists on how the topic improves student learning. Perhaps a study could be done over the course of several years to see how a new teacher impacts student learning as they gain more experience in the field through the help of a mentor. The growth in learning

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could be compared to a more veteran teacher to see if the mentorship program is having an impact.

The timing of my study made it difficult to truly measure the baseline levels of new teachers abilities in the field. My study began during the second quarter of the academic grading period at the Middle and High School. I am curious to see how mentorship affects teachers at the start of the school year. Potential investigations could look at how mentorship affects teachers at the beginning of the year, but also throughout the course of an entire academic year. It would be intriguing to see if mentorship has less of an impact as the school year passes on. Is there a point where mentees can no longer grow from participation in a mentorship program? A possible study could look at the long-term effects of mentorship.

Mentorship is all about relationships. In the interviews in my study, both mentors and mentees discussed the positives and negatives of their relationship with their colleague in the mentorship program. My study attempted to measure if the mentorship program helped teachers feel more prepared for teaching. A possible research study exists in looking directly at the relationship between mentor and mentee. The study could examine what strategies should use to match up mentees with mentors. Districts could benefit from the research in setting up their mentorship programs it could have a dramatic impact on the practice.

By exploring teacher mentorship in greater detail, we can help school districts, teachers, and students. Being a new teacher can be an extremely challenging exercise. Teacher mentorship guides new teachers and helps them be more up for the challenges of teaching. The results of this study highlighted small levels of growth but did not answer all of the questions educators may have on teacher mentorship. We must continue to conduct research on teacher mentorship so that districts can have all the tools necessary to build strong mentorship

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programs. In doing so, we may help the rising levels of teacher burnout and help keep young and inexperienced teachers in the field.

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Appendix A
Teacher Consent Form

CONSENT FORM
ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

Effects of Mentorship on Teacher Classroom Preparedness at the Secondary Level

IRB Approval # 724

I am conducting a study on teacher mentorship at the secondary level. As part of conducting this study, I invite you to participate in this research. You are being selected as a possible participant because you are either a mentor to someone in the district or are in your first year in the district.

This study is being conducted by Kent Janikula as I pursue my Master's degree. The study will be conducted under the advisement of Dr. Cara Rieckenberg.

Background Information:

More and more districts are using formal teacher mentorship programs. For the most part districts have found these programs to be successful. However, the details of which parts of the mentorship are useful and effective are unclear. The aim of this study is to provide more clarity on the topic of mentorship and provide data showcasing which parts of mentorship are helpful to new teachers.

Current research suggests that teacher mentorship programs have a positive effect on new teachers and school districts in general. Additionally, research showcases that the quality and structure of the mentorship program has an enormous impact on the positive outcome produced. One of the biggest challenges with current research is that most studies suggest that teacher mentorship is not a one size fits all program. Two districts may use two entirely different programs, and both may be successful in their way. Compared to other fields, such as the nursing field, education seems to be lacking on specific aspects of mentorship research. A lot of literature is available concerning designing mentorship programs for the medical field, while hardly any was available on how to develop a successful teacher mentorship program. In the end, current research suggests that teacher mentorship programs overall are successful, but little is available to suggest which specific aspects work and what parts lag behind.

The main purpose of my research is to determine what aspects of teacher mentorship work for teachers and what parts are not effective. Data will be collected through a variety of methods including; surveys, interviews, and time sheets. In the end, the data will showcase which parts of a mentorship program are effective and which parts were not.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do some or all of the following things:

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1. Complete a self-assessment at the beginning and end of the research period. The assessment will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.
- 2) Participate in two 20 minute interviews. These interviews will be conducted at the beginning and end of the study. These interviews will be done using prescribed questions and all responses will be recorded via audio.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks to this study are limited. The reputation and employability of subjects will not be at risk since the data will be presented using pseudonyms. All information collected during the interviews will be kept confidential. Any information recorded during these interviews will be kept in a password protected drive and will be removed upon the completion of the full research project in the summer. The study is simply looking into the effects of mentorship programs on teacher classroom preparedness.

I also will be participating in this research study as a subject since I am a new teacher. All information collected in this study will be kept confidential and I will not share with any other staff members. Participants in the study will all be asked to keep information confidential and not share with other staff members. Data collected in this study, as well as my impression of individual teachers will never be made available to authority who can make decisions on employment of staff members. Any responses made during interviews will only be available to me and will not be shared with any other school employee or administrator.

The direct benefits you will receive for participating include the knowledge that you are contributing to this study as well as assisting other educational systems in integrating teacher mentorship into their school.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Data will be collected using various Google Drive tools which will be password protected. Only I will have access to this information during the study. Once I have finished my complete study (summer 2017) all files will be erased.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with me, your place of employment or St. Catherine University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until November 14, 2016. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you, it will not be included in the study. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Kent Janikula. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-618-8444 or at kent.janikula@wm.k12.mn.us. You may contact my advisor, Dr. Cara Rieckenberg, at crieckenberg@stkate.edu. You may also contact the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board at 651-690-6240 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I consent to having interviews audio taped. I am at least 18 years of age.

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Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix B Teacher Self-Evaluation

Teacher Self-Assessment

What is your name?

Your answer

Are you a mentor or mentee?

How many years have you taught total?

0-5

5-10

10-20

20 plus

How would you rank your ability to create quality lessons? (1 being very low, 5 being very high)

Rank your ability to use technology in the classroom. (1 being very low, 5 being very high)

How would you rank your classroom management skills? (1 being very low, 5 being very high)

How would you rank your ability to create quality assessments? (1 being very low, 5 being very high)

How would you rank your ability to manage your prep time? (1 being very low, 5 being very high)

How would you rank the sense of community in the Middle School currently? (1 being very low, 5 being very high)

What is your greatest strength as a teacher?

What is something you need to work on to become a better teacher?

How much time on average do you spend interacting with other teachers per week?

less than 30 minutes

30 mins-1 hour

1-2 hours

2-4 hours

more than 4 hours

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How often do you interact with your mentor or mentee?

once a month

once a week

couple times a week

once a day

more than once a day

Appendix C
Teacher Interview Questions- Mentor

Mentorship Interview (Mentor)

NAME:

1. What are some of the benefits in your role as mentor?
- 2) Has my mentee taught me anything new? If so, give an example?
- 3) How has being in a mentor in this program affected your teaching?
- 4) Has leading another teacher helped promote community in the building? Explain
- 5) Has being a mentor in any way improved your own classroom instruction?
- 6) What has been the biggest positive of mentoring another teacher?
- 7) What has been the biggest negative/challenge of mentoring another teacher?

Appendix D
Teacher Interview Questions-Mentee

Mentorship Interview (Mentee)

NAME:

1. How has being in this mentorship program affected your teaching?
2. What have been some of the benefits of being a mentee in this mentorship program?
- 3) My mentor has helped me with classroom management by....
- 4) My mentor has helped me with my instruction by...
- 5) My mentor has helped use technology in the classroom by....
- 6) Has the mentorship program helped improve community in the building? Explain
- 7) I wish my mentor would help me with....
- 8) If I could improve one aspect of my relationship with my mentor it would be....
- 9) Has the mentorship program helped me become a more confident teacher?
- 10) Has the mentorship program had an impact on your future plans in teaching? Explain

Appendix F

Teacher Journal

10/4

- Spoke about finalizing mid-term grades
- talked about finding time to observe each other
- discussed kids crossing over from Ryan's class to mine
- Discussed Genalogy Project

10/5

- Discussed Minnesota A-Z Project for shared grade level
- Spoke with Middle and High School Principal to obtain permission for research

10/6

- Discussed grading procedure and finalizing mid-term grades for students
- Received permission from Principal to conduct research

10/11

- Went over conferences procedures
- Went over possibilities for 6th grade research project
- thought up ideas for personal finance ideas for 6th graders

10/19

- Discussed procedures for what happens with failing students at end of quarter

12/5

- Official start day of research
- waiting to hear back from several participants. Getting antsy if they will turn things in on time!

12/6

- Prepared talk to share at middle school staff meeting
- Went well, several teachers have gone through this process before so they were all helpful
- Sending up copies to two high school teachers participating in study
- Mentor explained that if I needed any help that I can just ask

12/8

- Have received copies of all waivers from teachers
- Spoke with my mentor on how to grade A-Z book and plan for 6th grade the rest of year

12/14

- Discussed long-term 6SS planning with mentor
 - should we include more PBL? What units should we look into adding PBL

12/16

- Downloaded Geography Bee materials and shared with mentor... began the planning phase of process

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12/22

-Discussed if either one of us needed to come in over Christmas Break.. Chatted about Geography Bee

1/4

-Sat and discussed the dates of the Geography Bee, contacted former teacher to be the speaker at the event

1/5

Picked an official date for geography bee
-set up google form for the preliminary round

1/11

-Worked to find date for Civil War speaker for 6SS
-found a few common dates, planning on how to organize units so that it matches up with this for 2nd semester

1/19

-Reviewed ways to set up gradebook to be finalized for end of quarter
-Put in scoring and weighting for next semester
-Tag teamed the creation of A-Z books for 6SS