

Mentorship: The description of the experience of a prolonged mentorship relationship.

A case study of a six-year mentorship relationship between a female educator and a female student from a single parent family.

by

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M.Ed., University of Victoria, 2013

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Abstract

Mentorship between an educator and student is a complex and enduring journey that connects two individuals in the pursuit of a dream or common goal. It is a one-on-one relationship that customizes itself to the needs of the mentee, where the wisdom of the more experienced individual is shared with the other in a supportive and encouraging manner. Genuine and meaningful mentorship, where there is a strong connection between two individuals, can impact both willing participants in numerous ways. A mentee is provided with academic and emotional support, and a mentor is provided with profound professional and personal growth. This project reflects on the personal experience of a six-year mentorship, and provides a detailed description of prolonged mentorship, the mentorship relationship, and the personal and professional growth one can obtain by voluntarily entering into the role of mentor. It will provide helpful educational insight into the multifaceted world of mentorship.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my mentee student for participating in this six-year mentorship journey with me; it is you that made it the genuine and remarkable experience that it was. This mentorship experience has brought me profound professional and personal gain, and a friendship that I will cherish forever. Thanks for allowing me to share our experience with others.

I would also like to acknowledge my parents for always supporting and encouraging my educational pursuits. Thank you for always being my number one fans.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Graduation season was fast approaching, course work deadlines looming, assignments to complete, and finals to prepare for. Each school day is a constant battle to combat the pressure of time constraints, homework completion (or lack thereof), and adequate exam scores to satisfy future tertiary admissions. The motivation wavers, frustration boils, and the finish line is difficult to navigate. At an alarming rate it all subsides as quickly as it was built, the tears roll down your cheeks, and you watch your mentee (turned friend) walk over the graduation bridge mouthing the words 'thank you' to where your seat is in the audience. Mission accomplished.

Background

After my first year of substitute teaching, I was doing my summer job as a catering attendant aboard the B.C. Ferries. My Chief Steward mentioned that she was having difficulties getting her daughter to attend school and regularly complete curriculum assignments. She asked if I might have time to meet with her Grade seven daughter once a week to help her get on track with her education and motivate her to continue on the path towards high school and graduation. The mother didn't know what else to do, her words no longer seemed to hold meaning with her daughter, and she hoped that an outside source just might break through the barrier that she couldn't. The first year of mentoring turned into two, and two turned into three, and before I knew it, it was six years later and high school graduation time. My mentee student and now my friend, was walking across the bridge at her Graduation and I was in the audience shedding more tears than I would care to mention. The mother was ecstatic in reaching this milestone, the daughter was proud to have defied the odds of her peer group, and I was bewildered

by this whirlwind journey. This six-year mentorship impacted my professional and personal life in many intricate and mysterious ways.

I first met my Chief Steward's daughter when she was twelve years old. At this pre-teenage age she was frequently skipping school (often days at a time), consuming alcohol with peers, experimenting with drugs, and rebelled against any boundaries and consequences put in place. As her mother worked shift work, it was hard to keep track of the whereabouts and daily activities of her daughter. The mother would often come home after an eight-hour evening shift to find unknown peers scattered throughout her house, contents in disarray, and her daughter in denial about any misbehavior. It was not uncommon for the mother to find money or precious personal items missing. The lies were escalating, school attendance was at a downward spiral, and the homework completion was pretty much zero. My mentee student quickly became the illustration of an 'at-risk' student, and this is where our six year journey officially began.

Educators are aware that their actions and attitudes can make a difference in the life of a student, but they often don't know how the impact surfaces. Initially, I undertook this mentorship role because I thought I could assist my Chief Steward's daughter in completing a few assignments, and do a kind favor for my workplace superior. I wasn't looking to invest a significant amount of time, and I certainly wasn't prepared for the sequence of events to follow.

The orientation of this research project will be to describe the mentorship between myself as educator and a single parent family student over a time span of six years. This research project will explore the journey of mentorship, and describe the complexity of this personal mentorship experience. This mentorship inquiry will uncover the aspects of

personal and professional growth that an educator can obtain through prolonged and meaningful mentorship.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe the experience and impact of a six-year mentorship between educator and student. At this stage in the research the mentorship will be defined as a relationship between two individuals, where one shares his/her experience and wisdom with another in a supportive and encouraging manner. The research will be conducted using narrative methodology and will focus on the professional and personal experiences of the mentor-teacher through ongoing personal reflection. The professional growth that will be described in this research includes the sequential knowledge of education, empathy and compassion for learners, and a deep understanding of student diversity and need. (Sequential knowledge of education is the ability to see how key learning concepts are expanded and built upon from one grade year to the next). The personal growth that will be described in this research study will include strengthened communication, improved confidence, a sense of need and belonging, and the desire to enhance adolescent learning. The professional and personal aspects of mentorship will be combined with the social factor of single parent families to develop a 'big picture' understanding of mentorship. The purpose of this narrative qualitative study is to depict the personal experience of mentorship, and describe personal and professional growth that can be obtained through a prolonged mentorship connection between educator and female single parent family student.

Focus of the Study

Embarking on this study helped me to focus on one central question I would not have had the time to explore otherwise: How does an educator describe her experience of a six-year mentoring relationship? To answer the central question and to facilitate my reflection and narrative story I will focus on three sub-questions: (a) How does the mentor describe the quality of relationship between student and mentor? Initially? After six years? (b) How does the mentor describe aspects of mentorship that impact the teaching practice of adolescent learners? and (c) How does the mentor describe the personal growth obtained through prolonged mentorship? I hope by exploring these questions I can add to the available mentorship information for educators who may have opportunities to engage in a mentorship experience, or are presently involved in a similar mentorship experience.

Significance

Social factors such as peer pressure, single parent families, and low academic achievement present significant challenges to female students in today's classroom environment and place them 'at-risk.' Johnson and Lampley (2010) defined at-risk children as "having one or more of the following characteristics: retention in grade level, poor attendance, behavioral problems, low socioeconomic status or poverty, violence, low achievement, substance abuse, or teenage pregnancy." Mentorship is an approach that works to alleviate these social challenges and enhance the academic achievement of individual students. Mentorship is an important tool that provides a support network for

young adolescents to fulfill their upmost potential, and to find success with their future endeavors. Researchers in this area also found that students achieved better grades, established obtainable goals, and enhanced their self-esteem when partnered with caring, supportive adults (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). This research will provide educators and professionals with the insight into a six-year mentorship that had a profound impact on both mentee and mentor. The analysis of personal and professional growth in this research study will hopefully entice other professionals in the teaching community to enter into the world of mentorship, and ideally, make a difference in the life of another adolescent student. The more educators decide to enter into the world of mentorship, the more they can maximize the academic success of at-risk adolescents. Volunteer mentorship is increasingly being advocated to promote the academic achievement of adolescents, and this research study will confirm the need to encourage mentorship among young female students (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000).

Research Environment

This six year mentorship case study takes place in the single parent family residence of the student, which is located in a large suburban neighborhood on Southern Vancouver Island. The mentorship interactions would occur at the convenience of the mentee, and would fluctuate and vary according to academic demands and course load. Sessions would typically occur on a scheduled weekly basis, one hour at a time, with additional sessions during final exams and semester deadlines. The six year mentorship can be divided up into three distinct timeframes. During the first three years, the mentee

was enrolled in a grade 7-9 middle school with approximately 700 students, the fourth year in a grade 10-12 high school with approximately 1100 students, and the last two years of the mentee's education was completed through online distance education.

It is important to note that mentorship can take place in any location that is convenient for both individuals involved. It is imperative to select a location where the student feels most comfortable, and this may involve mentoring relationships taking place in family homes rather than institutional buildings. From my own personal mentorship experiences, a family home location for mentorship can create a more personal and warm environment in which the student is more at ease and relaxed with their surroundings. The location is dependant upon the 'best fit' for the student, and the comfort of the mentor teacher. In this particular circumstance, the mentee was most comfortable participating in mentorship sessions at her family residence, as the student had negative views toward school and was initially concerned about interruptions and opinions from peers.

Definition of Terms

A Single Parent Family- is a family with one parent with one or more children, who is neither married, not living together with his or her partner.

Adolescent- is a young person in the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, typically defined as being around the early teenage years (12-15).

At-Risk student- is a term used to refer to students that are more vulnerable or susceptible to encountering challenges, both at home and in an educational setting. Challenges could include (but not limited to) single parent families, abuse, poverty, and low parent education levels.

Chief Steward- a Chief Steward is the senior unlicensed crew member working in the Steward's Department of a ship. In this case, this person is an individual in charge of overseeing the employees within the catering department of the B.C. Ferries.

Mentorship- is a powerful and emotional interaction between an older individual and a younger individual. It is a relationship in which the older mentor is trusted, loving, and experienced in the guidance of the younger (Johnson, 2002).

Socioeconomic Status- is the social standing of an individual or group in terms of their income, education and occupation. Socioeconomic status is typically categorized into low (poverty level), medium (working class), or high (affluent). (American Psychological Association).

CHAPTER TWO

RELATED LITERATURE

Mentorship

Researching the literature on mentorship as it pertains to this particular case study led me to formulate five dominant themes. The emergent themes in the literature include the mentorship experience itself, the nature of the mentorship relationship, the professional aspects of mentorship, the impact of mentorship on single parent families, and the use of mentorship to promote academic achievement.

The literature on mentorship experience explores the aspects and complexity of effective mentorship while the studies on the nature of the mentorship relationship describe the characteristics of the unique bond between educator and student. The research on professional aspects of mentorship highlights gains for educators participating in mentorship. The impact of mentorship on single parent families can challenge the notion that single parent family students are at disadvantage compared to their counterparts. Current research finds that students who have direct influence from two parents fair better in a school setting over those students who have influence from one parent. And the use of mentorship to promote academic achievement suggests a solution to the challenges that at-risk student face in their educational journey. These five themes pertaining to mentorship will further be explored with related literature.

Mentorship Experience

Johnson (2002) describes mentoring as a “powerful emotional interaction between an older and younger person, in a relationship in which the older mentor is trusted, loving and experienced in the guidance of the younger” (p. 88). When a mentor teacher undertakes a new mentorship relationship the mentor accepts that the mentee has value, and that the mentor believes in the full and complete ability of the mentee. Mentorship connotes a unique and distinctive relationship between two individuals, is a significant investment of time and a belief in another individual.

Educators entering into a mentorship role are drawn to the possibilities of a personal connection with another individual. According to Johnson (2002), “informal mentorships, those that develop spontaneously without formal assignment by a third party, are evaluated by both mentors and protégés as being more effective and meaningful than formal mentorships” (p.89). The informal mentorships are based on an intrinsic desire to help another person and have a potential to enhance the confidence and growth of a younger individual. The mentor will provide the support and encouragement necessary for the mentee to fulfill their educational objectives. A good mentor discerns a protégé’s personal and vocational dream, endorses this as realistic, and offers an environment conducive to facilitating this dream (Johnson, 2002).

Mentorship is complex and diverse, with no mentorship experience mirroring another. According to Goodyear (2006), “two factors appear to be most important in the decision to mentor: a sense of being able to relate to the person, and a belief that the person has potential” (p. 51). Mentors often select mentees who are similar in some way, but also respond to expressions of need from mentees who are different from them. It is a reciprocal process that is characterized by trust, openness, and commitment, and

friendship. The mentor's perception that a potential mentee is motivated and has a positive attitude can have a significant difference in the decision to mentor (Goodyear, 2006). When engaging in a mentorship relationship mentors' must believe that the time they spend with the mentee will result in positive outcomes.

Mentorship and Teacher Education

The best staff development happens in the workplace rather than in a workshop (Caskey, 2007). Mentorship can provide many valuable benefits for practicing educators. "Mentors' relationships with their mentees provide them with a greater understanding of both themselves and their discipline." (Reddick et al., 2012). Mentorship can provide insights into a mentor's own career path, allows professional knowledge to be used in different ways, and offers an opportunity to reflect on one's own personal growth. It provides an 'insider view' of the teaching profession and widespread acknowledgement and respect for one's ability. Mentorship strengthens communication and teaching skills, increases patience, and prompts expression of thoughts and feelings. It provides an avenue for professional development to occur outside of the regular classroom. A teacher can learn much through one-on-one interaction with an individual student. Important intrinsic benefits include enhanced career satisfaction, rejuvenation of creative energy from collaboration with protégés, and a sense of generativity (Johnson, 2002). Mentors also report that mentoring fulfills their desire to leave a legacy and a long lasting impact on another human being.

Mentorship Relationships

According to Johnson (2002), the mentor nourishes a dream in the student and sets the student into creative flight, tempering idealism with the wisdom of experience. The connection between mentee and mentor is a distinct personal relationship where both participants can learn from one another. The stronger the mentoring relationship is (close emotional affect and more communication), the greater the likelihood of positive effects. A close mentorship relationship influences adolescents' global self-worth, perceived scholastic competence, school value, grades, and attendance. Through a mentorship relationship the mentee receives help and direction, support, counseling, development of skills, enhancement of confidence, support, and encouragement. A prolonged mentorship experience can bring about the realization of a dream, and is an enduring and bonded relationship. A secure mentorship relationship is designed around trust, and incorporates a wide range of roles. The mentor can give the mentee acceptance and confirmation (helping the mentee see his or her value), counseling (coaching in relation to feelings), and friendship (Goodyear, 2006).

Single Parent Families

Min Lee and Kushner (2008) reveal that "children reared in single-parent families when compared to intact families consistently indicate negative effects on a child's school achievement, completion, behavior, and social development" (p. 607). Students from single-parent families are at a significant disadvantage throughout their educational journey, and thus make ideal candidates for a mentorship relationship. One important

area of a child's life that is dramatically impacted by family structure is education. A mentorship relationship can work to fill in the 'missing gaps' of single parent families by adding in another encouraging and caring adult. A close mentorship relationship does not replace a parent in a single parent family, but it works to provide additional educational support that would not be available otherwise. Family structure was the single greatest predictor of academic achievement, although parents who discussed school issues and attended school functions also contributed to the academic success of students (Lee, Kushner, & Cho, 2007). Mentorship provides a remedy to increase the academic performance of single family students.

Academic Achievement

Mentoring, as a method of sharing real-life experiences and knowledge, has been shown to be an effective intervention strategy for at-risk middle school students (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Research in this area found that students achieved better grades, established obtainable goals, and enhanced their self-esteem when partnered with caring, supportive adults. Positive one-to-one attention from an adult role model may have the potential to reduce some of the academic dangers that at-risk youth encounter (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). Current research supports mentoring as a solution to the various problems affecting youth such as alcohol use, teenage pregnancy, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance. At-risk students had a history of unexcused absences and tardiness, were significantly below average in school performance, had behavioral and disciplinary problems, had less self-confidence as a learner, had a locus of control that

was more externally oriented, and desired a more informal and non-traditional approach to learning (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). Experts in the field tend to agree that mentoring activities and close mentorship relationships can be a useful tool in reaching at-risk students and positively impacting academic achievement.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction and Background

The purpose of this narrative research project was to describe the experience of a prolonged mentorship relationship to further understand the effect of mentorship on one's life both professionally and personally. I wanted to examine the impact of mentorship on student academic learning and to illustrate the connection between mentee and mentor. Adolescent students continuously fluctuate in their ability to stay focused on academics, in addition to their emotional and social complexities. Mentorship is an approach that works to ensure that students' needs are being met, and provides the academic, emotional, and social support that is unique to an individual student. It is obvious from the literature that a close and genuine mentoring relationship between educator and student can both help the educator grow professional and personally, and facilitate the academic success of the student.

My aim through this narrative study was to uncover how prolonged mentorship is experienced by an educator, and to provide insights that could encourage other educators to participate in a mentoring relationship.

Narrative Research

I chose to use the method of narrative research for this project because as an educator-mentor I knew that the process of telling my personal story and engaging in

ongoing personal reflection would be the most authentic. A narrative research approach would yield an honest and sincere account of the meaningful six-year experience in my life.

Hendry (2010) describes narrative research as a process of meaning making that encompasses three major spheres of inquiry: “the scientific (physical), the symbolic (human experience), and the sacred (metaphysical)” (p. 72). Narrative research is about asking questions of inquiry, as well as the unique set of responses that follow. The interpretation and exploration of these questions of inquiry will then develop into personal narratives where individuals can share their ‘story’ or perspective.

Narrative research encourages educators and academics to inquire about their experiences as well as that of others, and to find a voice for these inquiries. It is a process of generating questions to make meaning of the world around us, and reformulating questions to continually challenge assumptions and knowledge bases where necessary. “Narrative has the potential to remind us of the complex and multiple ways in which humans make meaning”(Hendry, 2010, p. 73). The use of narrative as a research methodology provides an avenue for developing questions to understand human experience, and is the foundation for many other forms of inquiry.

Ethics

An ethical concern in this case study is the use of the term ‘single-parent family’ to represent this particular family unit comprising of mother and daughter. I am concerned that the use of this term in my research case study may bring preconceived

notions about single families that may be considered unfair, and may stereotype this family unit without first hand experience. Preconceived notions pertaining to this mentorship experience could include a low socioeconomic status of the single parent family, and lack of parenting by the mentee parent. Both the socioeconomic status of single parent family and poor parenting are not relevant in this mentoring relationship as the mother is in a middle socioeconomic class bracket, and has continually strived to provide a nurturing and structured environment for her daughter. In order to avoid the negative stereotyping of single-parent families I will emphasize that the parent in this case sought out the mentorship experience and was doing everything in her power to provide the best opportunity that she could for her daughter.

I have protected the anonymity of the individuals involved in my research by not utilizing any specific names or personal descriptors. I have replaced the student's name with mentee, and used the general terms of parent or mother throughout the research to prevent the participants from being identified. Prior to conducting the mentorship research the mentee and parent were also consulted to obtain permission for conducting a narrative research case study based on my personal experience.

Data Collection

I used an open-ended reflective interview process (Appendix A) with myself as participant to uncover my understandings of prolonged mentorship. The reflective process was based on my central question and three sub inquiry questions:

The Central Question guiding my inquiry was- How does an educator describe her experience of a six-year mentoring relationship?

The three sub questions were:

(a) How does the mentor describe the quality of relationship between student and mentor? Initially? After six years?

(b) How does the mentor describe aspects of mentorship that impact the teaching practice of adolescent learners?

(c) How does the mentor describe the personal growth one obtains through prolonged mentorship?

I generated these questions at the initial stages of my research. It took me sixty minutes to respond to these questions in point form format. I revisited these questions two weeks later after reviewing available research and adjusted my point form responses to include any additional discoveries. My initial responses provided an informative comparison with my latter responses, and together with available research I was able to formulate my interpretation and description of my mentorship experience.

Role of the Researcher

In this project I have been a researcher and participant. At the primary stages of this mentorship case study I was in my first year of teaching middle school, and at the end of the case study (graduation) I was finishing my sixth teaching year. Being a part of the study encouraged me to think critically about my role as mentor, and allowed an opportunity to reflect upon the six years of adolescent mentorship. The method of

Narrative as allowed me an avenue to share my personal mentorship experience with others. Frank (2002) explains:

Narrative analysis can show how, even as stories participate in conventional rhetorics, they question the assumptions of the groups whose preferred reality is expressed in these rhetorics. As stories develop their preferred rhetoric, narrative analysis can assist in the project of unpacking the assumptions embedded in that rhetoric. (p. 14)

I used a journal throughout the process to record my thoughts. Evidence was gathered through the use of reflection questions to guide the description of my experience. At the initial stages of research, I responded to the central question and three sub questions in sixty minutes to collect my ideas on my mentorship experienced. I focused on my personal narrative and worked to describe the overall experience, the nature of the mentorship relationship, the impact on my teaching practice, and the personal growth that was obtained. After reviewing the related literature I revisited my reflection responses and added in additional information that was relevant to my experience. This process enabled me to critically think about my mentorship experience and expand on the working description.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data is a critical process in any research project. Holly, Athar, and Kasten (2005) write about three crucial tools when analyzing data:

Comparing- evaluating two pieces of information and comparing them. For example, I will compare my personal reflection responses to related literature on mentorship.

Asking Questions- while comparing, we ask questions about the information seeking to clarify aspects, reactions, and confusions. For example, I ask questions to further understand the mentorship experience and what aspects make mentorship successful and life changing.

Speculating- in an attempt to answer the questions, I critically reflect on the process then make educated interpretations of the mentorship experience. For example, I could believe that prolonged mentorship (greater than 1 year) can have a more profound impact on an individual student than a short term mentorship (less than a year).

I attempted to compare, ask questions, and speculate throughout the research process while describing my mentorship relationship. Wherever there was inconsistent information between my reflections and related mentorship literature, I would question why. I would use my knowledge and experience of prolonged mentorship to guide my thinking, and being to make interpretations of the description of mentorship. The formation of these interpretations would encourage me to probe deeper into my personal experience and think critically about what made this mentorship relationship the caliber that it was. I would also generate ideas for improving and refining my future mentorship experiences. I tried to find discrepancies between my mentoring experience and that of others, but there was no significant difference.

Delimitations

I limited my research to reviewing North American literature from 2001-2012 to include all relevant and current information on mentorship. I narrowed the field of research to the four themes outlined in my literature review: the mentorship experience, the impact of mentorship on teacher education, the nature of the mentorship relationship, and the correlation between single parent families and academic achievement. Therefore, my research was constrained to the last eleven years of mentorship information and the four emerging themes.

Limitations

I personally know of no other teachers who engage in mentorship as defined by this study. A prolonged mentorship such as this one requires a committed educator who is willing to invest a large quantity of time to follow the adolescent until the desired objective (in this case graduation) is achieved. Therefore, this project is limited to my first hand narrative experience as a mentor educator. Mentorship experiences such as the one described in this research are personal, and may not be replicated or generalized to a broader context.

This study was conducted on the basis of a personal assumption that prolonged mentorship benefits all participants involved. This assumption is a direct result of eight years of participating in volunteer mentorship with a total of seven mentee adolescent students.

Implications of Research

There are four main implications for this mentorship research. The first is that mentorship can promote the academic achievement of students from single parent families by providing additional support, encouragement, and teachings. The second is that mentorship provides many professional benefits including compassion for learners, sequential knowledge of curriculum, and a focus on inclusion. The third is that mentorship is dependent upon the quality and nature of the mentorship relationship. Mentorship relationships that have deeper levels of trust and a closer bond will yield stronger results. The last implication is that mentorship allows opportunities for personal growth. Educators engaging in mentorship opportunities tend to improve their confidence, enhance their communication, and take pleasure from the companionship.

Educational Significance

The main educational significance of this description of mentorship is the insight into the professional and personal growth that would enhance and improve one's teaching practice. This research study will emphasize the importance of mentorship in expanding one's skills and ability both as an educator and as a caring and compassionate individual. The other educational significance from this research study is a further understanding of learning diversity and support systems to promote and improve learning. Educators are continually looking for ways to improve student learning in the classroom, and mentorship will be an effective solution for many learners.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter reports on the findings of a narrative research project I conducted on describing the experience of a prolonged six-year mentorship between mentor teacher and female student. The data were collected through ongoing personal reflection, in which I responded in point form format to my central question: How does an educator describe her experience of a six-year mentorship relationship? I also provided point form responses to three sub questions pertaining to the description of the quality of relationship, the impact of mentorship on teaching practice, and the description of personal growth obtained through mentorship. Personal reflection data were recorded in a research journal that I maintained throughout this narrative research on my mentorship experience.

A review of the data revealed a number of different themes or components related to a successful mentoring experience. These components included the characteristics necessary to the relationship between student and mentor, the aspects of mentorship that influence teaching practice, the impact of mentorship on personal growth, and the overall description of a six-year mentorship experience.

Characteristics necessary for a Mentoring Relationship

Mentorship requires a significant investment of time and energy and it may not be the best fit for everyone; much depends of the personalities of the two people involved,

and how they connect with one another in a customized learning environment. What works well in one mentoring relationship might not work well in another, as each mentorship experience has its own unique set of characteristics. The decision to be involved in a teacher-student mentoring relationship would have to be mutual, and the objectives need to be clear and agreed upon by both individuals. Both student and teacher must be willing to work together to achieve these objectives, and contribute to the ongoing growth and maintenance of the mentoring relationship. According to Lamm and Harder (2008), a good mentor is someone who cares about people, can be easily trusted, and who can and is willing to help the protégé develop to his/her fullest potential. From my mentorship experience the qualities necessary to form a heartfelt mentoring relationship include: trust, mutual respect, sincerity, nurture, friendship, and time.

Mentoring Relationship Qualities

Trust- In order to have an effective working relationship, both mentee and teacher must be able to depend and confide in one another without risk of disappointment. Establishing trust in a mentorship relationship will provide a strong foundation for future growth and engagement between the two individuals, and will establish confidence in working towards the desired agreed upon objective. Trust is fundamental to the success of a prolonged mentorship relationship. Trust became evident in my mentoring relationship when the mentee would confide personal pieces of information and knew that I would be there to support her no matter what she decided.

Mutual respect- It is important to acknowledge, appreciate, and encourage your mentee's efforts and value. This helps to build and maintain a respectful and supportive working mentoring relationship between mentee and teacher. This appreciation of your mentee's efforts will also encourage respect on the mentee's part, and will facilitate a mutually considerate learning environment. I knew the mentee student respected my assistance with academic assignments when the results were higher than prior scores, and at the same time I was respectful of my mentee student to put in additional effort that was lacking previously. I remember specifically writing an essay with my mentee student on one of the main character's (Ralph) in the novel 'Of Mice and Men.' The mentee student had never written a formal essay before, and was lost as to where to start. Together we worked through the process, wrote out ideas, and formulated a character response in distinct paragraphs. The mentee student obtained the highest mark in the class for her essay, and I was so proud of her for taking the time and effort to write a formal essay that she would not have done by herself otherwise.

Sincerity- A teacher entering into the role of mentor in another's individual's life must be genuine in his/her actions while assisting another individual in his/her journey. A sincere mentor is truthful, honest, and heartfelt in his/her intentions. A mentor wants to do everything in his/her power to help a mentee student and does this for intrinsic value rather than extrinsic rewards. As my relationship with my mentee student progressed I found myself intrinsically wanting to do more to support. When it was exam time I would prepare flashcards prior to our scheduled sessions, I would print off

materials to assist with assignments, and I would check in regularly through text and email to see how things were going.

Nurture- A mentor teacher cares for the growth and development of the mentee student. The ability to nurture is an emotional action to be constantly present for your student. A mentee student will be nurtured academically by the learning guidance, emotionally by advice and support, and physically by having another vested individual in their lives. Nurturing is demonstrated when the student feels more comfortable in their ability to succeed as a student, and is emotionally stronger with the stresses of everyday adolescent life. After the first few years of mentorship, my mentee student became more independent with the organization of course requirements and tasks. I would no longer receive emails from her teachers stating a list of missing assignments, and my mentee student would feel comfortable communicating to me what needed to be done.

Friendship- A friendship is inevitable in any sincere, genuine, and mutual prolonged mentoring experience between student and teacher. The substantial amount of time spent together working towards a common goal will bond two individuals together in a unique and special way. The mentee becomes a substantial part of the mentor's life, and both mentee and mentor's lives are enriched by the companionship that mentorship brings. According to Johnson and Lampley (2010), "the purpose of a mentoring relationship is to provide guidance, pass on knowledge, share experience, provide a background more sound judgment, and establish friendship." My mentoring student has since graduated high school in the spring of 2011 and we have continued to spend time

together despite accomplishing the mentoring goal of graduation. Every year I celebrate her birthday with her and her family, and we make time each month to see one another.

Time- Investing a significant portion of time into a mentorship experience is vital to maintaining and developing a working mentorship relationship. The longer the duration of time spent with each other, the deeper and more meaningful the connection between mentee and mentor. Mentors who are dedicated to establishing long-term relationships with teens have been effective in raising self worth and educational attainment in teens (Redd, Brooks, & McGarvey, 2002). In the initial stages of mentorship it is about getting to know each other on a surface level and working to complete various tasks and assignments. With each passing year the roots of the mentorship connection grow deeper and the lives of the mentee and mentor becoming interwoven, and the relationship progresses in unfathomable ways.

The influence of mentorship on teaching Practice

The influence of mentorship on teaching practice can be separated into three categories: knowledge of curriculum, compassion for understanding for student diversity, and improved teaching practices.

Knowledge of Curriculum

The knowledge of curriculum that a mentor teacher can obtain through prolonged and meaningful mentorship includes an understanding of the sequential nature of education, the linear connection between core curriculum concepts, and an awareness of common course requirements.

Sequential Nature of Curriculum- The sequential nature of education consists of kindergarten through grade twelve, with each grade building and expanding upon one another to further enrich student knowledge. Participating in mentorship allows you to observe how particular skills and knowledge sets learning in early adolescent years becomes the foundation for high level learning in the secondary years. One skill set in particular that comes to mind is the development of graphing. In the early adolescent years students learn to develop simple input and output tables for graphing linear lines, later to understand the specific formula ($y=mx +b$), and to expand this concept into the graphing of parabolas and quadratic formulas in the final secondary years.

Course Requirements- Mentorship that spans several school years will demonstrate course requirements of various core subject courses and common trends are likely to emerge. All courses, regardless of their field of study, will span several broad unit topics and will include a range of assignments and projects. Each unit topic will be assessed and evaluated and the student will be required to show his/her learning in several ways. Prolonged mentorship exposes you to the course requirements of all different teaching styles and expectations by witnessing the completion of the course from start to finish. This exposure to a variety of course requirements allows a mentor to

help a mentee student consistently complete tasks and assignments to a quality level to meet the expectations of all educators.

Relearning of Concepts- Working with a mentee student throughout his/her middle and secondary years exposes you to a variety of courses and topic areas. There were a few courses upon our journey where I needed to re-familiarize myself with the curriculum content. Math in the junior and senior years of high school is the best example. Math vocabulary and curriculum expectations change over time and I found a few of the chapters challenging. At times, it was necessary to review material before meeting with my mentee student to ensure that my understanding was solid enough to provide clear direction and instruction. Even though I had excelled in math in my secondary years, I forgot much of the material over time. The completion of Biology 11 and Biology 12 through distance education with my mentee student was a prime example of this. Many of the phylum classification names, specific aspects of cell activities, and the properties of the different body systems, had left my active memory.

Compassion and Understanding for Student Diversity

Empathy for student needs- Engaging in a prolonged mentorship experience allows you to step outside the role of a teacher and inside the role of a student. Mentorship provides an advantageous understanding of what students require to become engaged and successful in our ever increasingly dynamic classroom setting. It provides an understanding of how students learn differently, how students perceive their role in

learning, and how various factors can interfere with the learning process. This deepened empathy for student needs can lead to increased patience in one's teaching practice, improved emphasis on student encouragement and support, and an acknowledgement that each student is distinctively complex. In this particular mentorship case, the student needed encouragement to stay in school and ongoing support with assignment completion as her self motivation to complete tasks was minimal.

Engaging Curriculum Lessons- As students progress through their educational journey the push for an exciting 'hook' into instructional activities becomes one of the primary strategies for student attention. The educational 'hook' is the initial strategy an educator uses to capture the attention and engagement of their students. As mentorship students may be passive with their learning, especially in this particular mentorship experience, an engaging presentation of material is critical in 'selling' the desired course objectives. Through one-on-one mentorship, I have encountered too many 'textbook question and answer' assignments that leave students disinterested and bored. Designing flexible assignments that are varied in how a student shares their knowledge and that are personalized and open-ended will promote engagement among all students, especially passive students who are at-risk for not completing high school. For example, my mentee student much preferred the opportunity to develop her own project to demonstrate learning from reading a particular English novel, than answer a mundane stack of questions. In English 12 she was required to read the novel "Godfather" and she chose to demonstrate learning through a visual poster rather than a written task.

Personal Challenges- The individualized and personal nature of mentorship allows the opportunity to get to know your mentee student on many levels. In the initial stages of mentorship you get to know your student on an educational level, and, as time progresses, the mentoring relationship intensifies and personal information emerges. Mentee students may share information regarding their peers, family, and teachers. This provides a direct perspective on the challenges facing today's adolescents. The mentee student in this mentorship case struggled with peer pressure, as a number of students in her peer group had already dropped out of school and were encouraging her to do the same. My mentee student's goal throughout the entire time was to graduate on time, and the pressures of her friends to participate in late night week date parties often made this task seem difficult to obtain. The mentee student also experienced a variety of emotions pertaining to an absentee father. She was often frustrated by his lack of interest in her, and didn't understand why his decisions did not include her. By placing emphasis on study habits, interpersonal relationships, problem solving techniques, communication skills, and by encouraging positive behaviors, mentors provide the support and guidance to encourage student success (Johnson & Lampley, 2010).

Improved Teaching Practices

Ability to Interpret the Needs of Students- Students are all unique in their ability to learn and absorb material, and need to be supported. There are students who require very little support from their teacher, there are students who require a lot and can advocate for themselves, and then there is a portion of students who require more from a

teacher but either do not know how to ask for what they need or are passive.

Participating in mentorship enables a teacher to recognize what those “non-advocating” and “passive” students need to become active and involved learners. Through working one on one with students, a teacher can zone in more rapidly on individual needs and can tailor learning to better fit for individual students. In the classroom I have often encountered the same sort of resistance that I first saw when I started working with my mentee student. Mentorship has enabled me to see this resistance as a need to assist the student in understanding new ideas and demonstrating how to start, rather than as a non-compliance behavior.

Appreciation of Teaching Styles- Through the course of this mentoring relationship I was able to view and witness the teaching styles of approximately three dozen teachers from the middle and secondary schools. Each teaching style brought its own set of strengths and weaknesses, assignment preferences, expectations, course organization, assessment methods, and varying student workloads. The direct exposure to all these teaching styles has helped me to formulate my own personal teaching style, and brought about a respect and admiration for the lengths that educators will go to for their students. Through mentorship I can developed a teaching style that is more patient, understanding, and more flexible to meet the diverse learning needs of students.

Inclusive Leadership- Inclusive leadership is the ability to include any individual, regardless of ability or background, into an activity or setting. Observing a student in an individualized learning situation struggling to keep up with course demands encourages

an educator to facilitate a more inclusive learning environment in his/her classroom. Inclusive leadership works to ensure that every individual is included and is a part of the classroom community. No student is left out regardless of his/her academic ability, attendance, social challenges, or educational needs. All students enjoy being a part of the larger setting, and it takes a little energy and effort on behalf of the educator or leader to make certain that individuals on the periphery are reeled in. My mentee student had a desire to fit in with the rest of the students in the class, but due to poor attendance and lack of assignment completion felt that she didn't belong. An emphasis on inclusive leadership in her classroom may have reduced these feelings of remoteness.

In my mentorship case, an inclusive leadership approach may have been effective in increasing school attendance and promoting a sense of connection in my mentee's last few years of high school. When my mentee student entered her secondary years, a number of her peers had already made the decision to leave school and pursue other options. This left my mentee student in an uncomfortable situation. She wanted to graduate, but without any peers in her classes or around the school halls she felt a large disconnect and became disengaged. This resulted in her decision to enroll in distance education for the last couple years of high school so that she did not feel vulnerable in a classroom without her friends.

Strengthened Leadership- According to Reddick et al. (2012), participation in mentoring relationships provides students with opportunities to develop leadership skills, give feedback, and implement appropriate helping skills. Mentorship is a means to strengthen and enhance one's leadership ability by taking ownership and responsibility

for another individual's educational success. Since my participation in this mentorship experience I have now undertaken an increased leadership role in the middle school setting where my position enables me to work directly with students to promote performance and achievement. This mentoring relationship has expanded and improved my professional role in the learning of adolescents.

The impact on Personal Growth

Outstanding mentors are typically experienced, confident, and competent professionals who are vitally interested in facilitating the personal and educational development of one or more well-selected protégés (Johnson, 2002). Mentorship can boost one's self-confidence, improve intrapersonal and interpersonal communication skills, and get strengthen community connections and networks.

Confidence- Engaging in mentorship can provide a sense of accomplishment in helping someone else achieve his/her objectives. It offers reassurance of a job well done when the objectives have been met. A prolonged mentorship provides a belief in one's ability as a teacher to assist another individual in their pursuits, and to make a positive and long lasting impact on one's life. In the course of mentorship, I noticed significant increase in my confidence to help another individual and renewed belief in my effectiveness as an educator. As stated by Johnson (2002), "benefits to mentors include development of professional skills, and enhancement of confidence and professional

identity.” The boost in confidence obtained through participating in this mentorship opportunity has fueled my desire to continue with the adolescent mentoring.

Communication- The ongoing dialogue between mentor and mentee rehearses language that is valuable for coaching, counseling, and both interpersonal and intrapersonal communications. Communication is improved on many levels, with interpersonal communications strengthened interactions between individuals, and intrapersonal communications providing a greater sense of self. Interpersonal communications are strengthened by the significant amount of interaction with another individual. A mentor teacher learns about communication approaches that work best with his/her mentee student, and utilizes these communications in a way that is effective in supporting and encouraging for the student. Intrapersonal communications, such as self reflection and self understanding, are strengthened by the ongoing reflection of one’s mentorship ability and influence on a student. Intrapersonal communications are also enhanced by the interpretation of non-verbal cues made by the mentee student, and formulating the best response based on your own observations. The variety of communication skills obtained through mentorship can be transferred into many other aspects of daily life such as leadership roles, colleague interactions, and personal relationships.

Community Relations- Mutual and reciprocal mentoring relationships can connect a mentor teacher to a family in a way that extends beyond the traditional teacher-parent relationship. When a mentoring relationship occurs in the family residence on a regular

basis the mentor teacher also cultivates a sincere friendship with the parent or parents. The mentor becomes a part of the functioning of the family unit, and develops trusting and separate relationships with both the parent and child. Mentorship expands a teacher's network within the community, and cultivates important community branches that help to closer connect parents to their child's learning and achievement. A mentor teacher tends to be the gateway of information between the school and home, and is frequently provided with additional information about the mentee student's learning and progress.

As a result of this mentoring experience and close relationship with the family, my mentorship role has now been expanded to include five additional adolescent students. All five adolescent students are connected to the student described in this mentorship study, and all were initiated by the mother's word of mouth referral. I never imagined how mentorship could make one teacher so interwoven into a community. This sense of belonging and attachment to this community is one of the most profound personal benefits one could obtain through mentorship.

Challenges

As with all mentoring relationships and experiences, challenges and obstacles do arise from time to time. Throughout my six years of mentorship I would often find myself putting the needs of my mentee student ahead of my own. If my mentee student notified me at the last minute about a test or exam taking place the next day, I would rearrange my schedule to accommodate an extra study or review session. My internal desire for my mentee student to excel would often outweigh my craving for some much

needed relaxation time after a long days work. Although I was happy to help my mentee student, there were times when this interfered with my leisure time and it would leave me feeling very tired. Overall, my mentee student was worth the sacrifices but it emphasized how important balance is in one's life.

One other challenge for participating in mentorship is that the mentee student can often leave out important and valuable information. I found that my mentee student was often disorganized, and would not know when certain projects and assignments were due. I had to email the teacher to ensure that the mentee student was keeping up to date with the course requirements or had regular check-ins with the parent.

In my second year of mentorship, I specifically remember receiving an email from the student's Science 9 teacher. The science teacher informed me that there was only one week left in the course and my mentee student had failed to hand in seventeen assignments! I was absolutely flabbergasted! That week I met with my mentee student everyday afterschool so complete all seventeen assignments. We put in many long hours to ensure that she was in good standing in her Science 9 so that she could proceed into Science 10 the following year. I learned that it is imperative to seek information regarding a mentee's current learning status from a variety of different sources.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides the summary of the narrative research study I conducted on a six-year mentorship experience. The purpose of the study was to describe the experience of a prolonged mentoring relationship and the impact of mentorship on the personal and professional growth of a teacher. After reviewing my personal reflection questions and journal, several themes emerged as the crux of mentorship: the importance of working with the right *mentee* student, having a meaningful *relationship*, the *integration* of mentorship benefits into teaching practice, and *reflecting* on how mentorship affects one's personal growth. All of these aspects play an important role in mentorship.

The importance of working with the right student

A genuine mentoring relationship is one that is developed through time, patience, and a desire to positively affect students. Educators wishing to enter into a mentorship experience must acknowledge that the student has potential and held a strong desire to connect with their student and help them become successful in school and in life. The mentor's perception that a potential mentee is motivated and has a positive attitude can make a significant difference in the decision to mentor (Goodyear, 2006). Teachers that engage in mentorship share a unique bond with their mentee student, and the relationship will develop beyond a working relationship if given time and effort. If both mentor and

mentee student embrace one another as a valued partner, the experience will be meaningful, rewarding, and life changing.

Therefore, finding a mentee student who is open to a mentoring relationship and who connects with you on many levels is necessary. The connection between mentee and mentor might not emerge right away, but with ongoing consistent time and energy the relationship will begin to strengthen and grow. If both mentee and mentor recognize the beneficial and influential aspects of mentorship, it won't seem like laborious work. With the right connection the relationship will naturally progress and the lives of the mentee and mentor will become positively interwoven with one another. As Johnson (2002) states in the related literature, mentorship is "a powerful emotional interaction between an older and younger person." It is the deep connection between the mentee and mentor that will ultimately yield the greatest academic and social progress.

Both mentee and mentor teacher need to be engaged physically, emotionally, and psychologically so that the relationship is balanced and reciprocal. A mentoring relationship must have both individuals contributing to the success so that one does not carry more of the work load than the other. Mentor teachers have to be fully engaged to recognize and support the needs of their mentee student, and the mentee student must rely on their mentor to work through academic and emotional barriers. Mentor teachers have to allow the mentee student to take responsibility for his/her learning and success. It is essential that the mentee student is an advocate of his/her needs and shares them with the mentor so that he/she can be supported by the mentor.

As the relationship between the mentee and mentor teacher progresses, the mentor teacher will become more invested in the mentee's future and desired objectives.

Terminating the relationship before the desired objective will not seem like a plausible option because of the significant amount of time and energy that has gone into assisting the mentee student. The mentor teacher will want to achieve the set goal post just as much as the mentee student. The lives of the mentee and mentor student become interlaced on various levels and reaching the objective just simply opens up a new chapter of the relationship. From my mentorship experience, the right mentee student is one that keeps you thinking about them long after the journey has ended.

Sharing in a Meaningful Relationship

The mentee and mentor in a prolonged mentoring relationship are constantly sharing information with one another. According to Goodyear (2006), the most current research on mentoring presents a model of mentoring as a collaboration where both partners learn from and find value in the relationship. The mentor shares their knowledge and experiences with the mentee and the mentee share his/her academic and emotional challenges. The sharing of information strengthens the connection between mentee and mentor, as it promotes better understanding of each participant.

The sharing exchange between the mentor teacher and the mentee includes information relating to curriculum content and course objectives, to discussions about personal experiences. The mentor can provide additional explanations for course content, such as a different technique to solving a particular math question, and can elaborate and expand upon presented materials in the classroom. Mentee students can also benefit from the mentor teacher sharing their personal knowledge with similar life circumstances that

he/she is currently experiencing. This may be helpful to the mentee student knowing that others have felt just the same way they have, or provide some insight as to how to go about solving their particular dilemma. Has the mentor teacher ever found themselves caught in the conflict between two friends? Did the mentor teacher ever have a crush that was not reciprocated? Sharing these personal and private moments with a mentee student can help each participant in their interactions, strengthen connection and demonstrate the trust in a mentorship connection. By sharing one's own experiences and life challenges, a mentor assists in developing a deeper understanding of how to deal with situations as they arise (Lamm & Harder, 2008).

The mentee student may also share personal information about his/her life, which could help teaching at the middle school level. Through the mentee's tales of school, peers, and daily events, a teacher can gain a better understanding of life of a modern day student on the quest to graduation. Mentors and mentees share challenges, discuss mishaps, and seek advice on a regular basis. Over time, the interactions with a mentee student communicate a detailed picture to a mentor teacher about the complexities of adolescent life which may arouse a new found compassion for adolescent learning.

Integrating Mentorship Experience into Practice

According to Lamm and Harder (2008), mentoring is also a way to help people fully understand where they are currently, where they want to be, and how to get there in the best way possible. The effects of a mentoring relationship can be integrated into one's teaching practice in many significant and different ways. The overall umbrella

areas in which mentorship impacts professional practice is the enhanced knowledge of curriculum, the increased compassion and understanding of student diversity, improved teaching practices, and a push towards a more inclusive leadership approach. Mentorship contributes to the ongoing professional growth and enables educators to keep reformulating their teaching approach to deliver the best possible learning experience that they can.

Reflecting on Personal Growth

Both the mentor and the protégé should feel they are gaining personal satisfaction and are experiencing personal growth during the progress of a mentoring relationship (Lamm & Harder, 2008). Participating in a mentoring relationship influences an educator's life outside of the professional realm. Through mentorship a teacher can gain confidence in his/her ability to assist another individual, reinforce and strengthen intrapersonal and interpersonal communication skills, and build meaningful community connections. These areas of personal growth attained through mentorship create boundless opportunities for reflection and learning.

According to Johnson (2002), desirable mentors are intelligent, caring, and appropriately humorous. They are flexible, empathetic, patient, interpersonally supportive, encouraging, and poised. A good mentor will also have 'emotional intelligence'. Continually reflecting on one's mentorship experience makes one stronger in controlling his/her own emotions and those of the mentee student. Mentors are able to identify and assess the well-being of others, and can employ strategies to maintain a

positive and strong emotional level amongst themselves and the students that they work with. Mentorship is an experience which makes educators routinely reflect on their interactions and become stronger both cognitively and emotionally. The mentor will often notice aspects about themselves through their one on one mentorship experiences, and incorporate these inferences into developing a stronger sense of self.

Strong and effective communication skills are vital to being successful in any leadership position. Mentorship is a leadership avenue in which an educator can refine and enhance their communication abilities. They learn how to exchange information with a mentee student in a way that is most successful and encouraging. Mentorship forces communication to be direct, concise, supportive, and comforting. The interaction between mentee and mentor teacher allows a mentor teacher to witness what styles of communication are ineffective and not contributing to the continued growth of the relationship. A prolonged mentorship connection allows a mentor teacher to build trusting and lasting relationships with others and establishes a strong sense of self.

Advantages for Students

According to Redd, Brooks, and McGarvey (2002), mentoring programs seem to offer the greatest potential to positively influence a number of factors related to adolescents' adjustment to school. Higher school marks, better attendance, and work completion are the most noticeable advantages for students with a mentor teacher. In a study conducted by Burgstahler and Crawford (2007), 73% of students surveyed said that their mentors helped them increase achievement, and 59% of mentored students'

mentioned higher grades. Through mentorship students are provided with a secure and trusting foundation to support their academic and social needs. Mentoring relationships between teacher and student can have a significant impact on student outcomes.

Evaluating the Mentorship Experience

Mentorship is a dynamic and complex relationship between teacher and student. Every mentorship experience is unique. It could be difficult to describe or explain your connection with your mentorship student. The mentorship experience presents an opportunity to step into the shoes of an individual student and see the teaching world from a new perspective. This new perspective provides insight to one's professional role in the classroom, and how one can strive to improve future interactions and communications with students. It is a journey of professional and personal growth, all while assisting your mentee student in his/her desired objectives. As with any experience there may be frustrations and obstacles to overcome, but the achievement of the desired objective makes it all worthwhile. I cannot fully express how this mentorship experience has influenced my professional and personal life. I can only say that I was overwhelmed when I watched my new 'little sister' cross the bridge at graduation; she has become an important part of my life.

Challenges of Mentoring

As with other strategies to promote and enhance student learning, Mentorship is not perfect in its approach to helping students. There are challenges that accompany this style of student assistance. According to Johnson (2002), “a personal obstacle to optimum mentoring is the common human propensity for self-disturbance through irrational cognitions and demanding beliefs regarding one’s performance as a mentor.” Mentor teachers want to provide the best performance that they can when it comes to mentorship but the factors of finding the right student, having available time, and persisting despite set backs can interfere.

One challenge for teachers is to find the right mentee student to work with. A prolonged mentoring relationship will thrive if the two participants involved share the same desire to work with each other. Finding the right student may happen naturally as it did in my case. In some cases, it may not happen for a teacher and student to form a deep connection with one another.

Dedication and persistence can be considered challenges when it comes to mentorship. A mentor teacher must be able to dedicate his/her time and energy to consistently support and encourage their mentee student, and at time dissolve minor frustrations and obstacles. There will be times when a mentee student does not perform as well as anticipated, relays incorrect information about an exam, or forgets to hand in/complete an important assignment. A mentor teacher needs to be able to work through these obstacles with their student, and find appropriate strategies to ensure that these obstacles are minimized or avoided.

Another challenge concerns the amount of time necessary to form this kind of connection with a student. Mentorship students need consistent approach in order to

facilitate positive and long lasting changes. Such time commitment may not be feasible for a lot of teachers. Family and other extra curricular activities can make it difficult to participate in mentorship. Some teachers may be able to offer a few sessions with a student to help them complete a few missing assignments, but few teachers would be willing to commit to a student for several years. Mentorship is a time consuming activity that requires the dedication and devotion of both individuals involved.

Conclusions

I began this project focusing on three questions: (a) How does the mentor teacher describe the quality of relationship between student and mentor? (b) How does the mentor teacher describe the aspects of mentorship that impact the teaching practice of learners? and (c) How does the mentor teacher describe the personal growth one obtains through mentorship? These questions helped me to respond to my central question: How does an educator describe her experience of a six-year mentorship relationship?

In response to the first question, the mentoring relationship literature and the study both confirm that a close personal connection between mentee and mentor is crucial to the success of the mentorship. As stated by Johnson (2002), mentor teachers “consider the potential for mentoring relationship-including essential matching variables such as shared interests, personality compatibility, and synergy.” The quality of the mentoring relationship is dependant upon the connection between variables, trust, openness, a commitment, and friendship. The mentor believes in the potential of their

student, and the student believes in the ability of the teacher to help them succeed in school and in life.

As for the second question, I found that the impact of mentorship on teaching practice far exceeded the information I found in current literature. The related literature agreed that mentorship can provide a greater understanding of one's discipline, but yet it did not describe specifically how mentorship can impact one's professional practice. Lamm and Harder (2008) stated that, "mentoring is also a way to help people fully understand where they are currently in their career, where they want to be, and how to get there is the best possible way." Through this narrative study I found three main aspects of teaching practice that were significantly impacted by mentorship. The first aspect of mentorship that can impact teaching practice is the increased knowledge of curriculum. Mentorship provides a greater understanding of the linear nature of concepts, the sequential nature of curriculum, the re-familiarizing of curriculum, and an awareness of various course contents and expectations. The second aspect of mentorship that can impact teaching practice is the compassion and understanding of student diversity. Mentorship helped me develop empathy for the varying needs of students; it made me create engaging lessons to capture the interest of learners, and it helped me understand the challenges facing today's adolescent students. The third aspect of mentorship had a direct impact on my teaching practice. Through mentorship I am able to interpret the needs of students more readily, appreciate other teaching styles, and incorporate a more inclusive leadership approach in my classroom.

To answer the third question regarding my mentorship experience, I found that confidence was the primary area of personal growth obtained through mentoring. According to Lamm and Harder (2008), “both the mentor and the protégé should feel they are gaining personal satisfaction and are experiencing person growth during the progress of a mentoring relationship.” Mentorship can provide reassurance of a job well done when you observe the positive influences of your connection. The secondary connections with the literature and my findings are the improved intrapersonal and interpersonal communications. Reflection plays a large role in mentorship, and continually reflecting on your mentoring relationship and your teaching practice can elicit valuable insight as you as a person and you as an educator. There was one other finding in my research that was not in the related literature, and that was the increased community connections and networks. Participating in mentorship extends one’s ties within a community and fosters a sense of belonging and appreciation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research can investigate how mentorship impacts a student academically, emotionally, and socially. Due to the limited time to complete this project, I was unable to incorporate direct information from my mentee student. It would be interesting to add the mentee student’s perspective in order to compare the teacher and student perceptions of a mentoring relationship. I believe the results would show an improved attitude towards learning and school, and an increased confidence in becoming independent and successful.

Another study can compare experiences of other mentor teachers of adolescent students. Prolonged mentorship does not seem to be a common practice among educators, but there must be some other educators who have worked individually with students for significant periods of time. It would be interesting to learn about professional and personal growth gained from mentorship and how other teachers describe their mentoring relationship. I would be interested to see if another researcher's findings were consistent with my findings regarding professional and personal growth.

Final Thoughts

Reflecting on this mentoring relationship, I can say that it has validated the professional and personal growth I have can obtain through prolonged and meaningful mentorship. This project has also confirmed my belief that mentorship can play a significant factor in the success and achievement of an individual student, and can minimize the effects of social factors and challenges. As a participant in mentorship, I have improved my professional ability and increased my understanding of student learning. This mentoring relationship has opened up the doors to new mentorship opportunities for me, and I strongly recommend investing time into a mentoring relationship with a student that is the right 'fit' for you. The friendship and camaraderie attained in this six-year mentoring relationship will have a bearing and long lasting effect on me for the rest of my life.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Responses to Reflection Questions.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Central Question:

How does an educator describe her experience of a six-year mentorship relationship?

- Fulfilling and rewarding.
- Get so involved in the life of another person, extremely invested in their success.
- The more time that elapses, the more you become apart of their lives. Initially it was simply assignment completion and I would rely on the student to bring home required work, after time it was contact with teachers, supervision of required exams, and the completion of post-secondary applications.
- Motivating and inspiring, especially in certain moments (ie. Successful exam score, high grade on a project, graduation!).
- A weekly time that I looked forward to – fun, relaxing, and productive all at the same time.
- The mentorship becomes a huge part of your life.
- A sense of achievement.

(A) How does the mentor teacher describe the quality of relationship between student and mentor?

- The relationship increasingly developed and grew deeper as time passed.
- Extremely close, would consider the mentee a little to sister to me now.
- Trusting and honest.
- Nurturing and supportive.

- Transition from a mutual respect acquaintance into a loving friendship that will last a life time.
- Unique personal bond between two people.
- Mutual and reciprocal.

(B) How does the mentor teacher describe the aspects of mentorship that impact the teaching practice of adolescent learners?

- Understanding of the sequential nature of education.
- The linear connection between core curriculum concepts.
- Compassion for the diversity of learning.
- Empathy for the student challenges in learning.
- Appreciation of different teaching styles.
- Awareness of the variety of course expectations and requirements.
- Enhancement of knowledge of all levels of curriculum.
- Even more focused on classroom inclusion and engagement.
- Relearning of key concepts and curriculum.

(C) How does the mentor teacher describe the personal growth one obtains through prolonged mentorship?

- Improved confidence in my mentorship ability.
- Ability to interpret the needs of others, both emotionally and academically.
- Stronger ability to zone in on the needs of others.
- Patience and understanding of the challenges of others.
- Increased ability to communicate with adolescents in a positive, encouraging, and supportive manner.
- Since this experience, I have expanded my mentorship to now included five additional students. All five students are connected to one another through my teaching at a local middle school, and all have been a student in my classroom at some point in time.