

Chapter 105

Mentorship in Technology– Rich, 21st–Century Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

A mentorship program was established to support early career teachers in a technology-rich K-6 school. This program included scaffolding for inexperienced teachers in school cultures, pedagogically appropriate technology use, and classroom management. The program assisted early career teachers to thrive at the beginning of their career and to address perceived weaknesses in teacher education programs. As a result of this research, several early career teachers received mentorship support and successfully began their teaching careers. Additionally, many pre-service teachers were able to make decisions about their school careers through engagement in a practical and realistic teacher-training program. In theory, this research informs the literature regarding the realities of 21st-century classroom experiences and demonstrates the importance of having experienced educators provide training to the next generation of teachers. In practice, this research provides an example of how university teacher education can better prepare pre-service teachers to be successful in their future classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research was to explore an implementation of pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning to early career and pre-service teachers. Although teacher preparation has attempted to change with the times, the attrition rate of early career teachers (Greiner & Smith, 2009; Mee & Haverback, 2014) shows that more innovative practices need to be developed. In this research, mentorship in an immersive technology-rich, 21st-century classroom has been integrated with a teacher education program as an attempt to address perceived limitations in recent education graduates.

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It is no secret that society and teaching environments have changed through the years. The environment in which new teachers find themselves in has been identified throughout the literature and summarized numerous times (Buchanan, 2012). Identified environmental factors that affect early career teachers include isolation and lack of support, working conditions, and the cultural transition from pre-service to in-service. Other factors that impact success for these teachers include their contract status, the teacher evaluation process, administrative burdens, their inexperience in school settings, the predominance of teacher educators who have never or have barely been teachers themselves, and the appropriateness of their teacher training (Forret et al., 2013). The need for mentorship of early career teachers in educational pedagogy has been addressed in the literature (Steinke & Putnam, 2011). The case study for this mentorship approach identified factors in three categories: i) what the early career teachers were strong with, ii) what they were not prepared for, and iii) what they identified as overwhelming in their first year of teaching. The identified factors were then integrated into the planning and delivery of a university teacher education program.

BACKGROUND

This study took place in a large western Canadian city in two different educational environments. First, the early career mentorship took place in a K-6 school, and then the research moved to a teacher education program at a nearby university.

The setting for this research involved an International Baccalaureate and a fine arts school in an affluent area of this large urban center. The classroom consisted of 30+ students with two full-time teachers and one part-time educational assistant. The assignment of two full-time teachers was not part of the normal workplace environment in this school district—having two teachers with 30+ students was the result of extreme parental demands and opinions that their children’s educational needs were not being met with the ratio of students to teachers in the classroom. After a month of having one teacher working with the class, a second teacher was hired at the end of the first month of the school year. The newly hired second teacher had recently graduated from university, and this was her first teaching position as an early career teacher. She came to the school with high recommendations from her university professors and student teaching supervisors. The mentoring aspect of the research involved the interactions and planning that the two teachers initially worked on together.

The school environment had students from diverse cultural backgrounds, with many of them coming from affluent homes. The students in the class had varying degrees of academic abilities, but they also showed a large degree of learned helplessness and parental reliance. Another factor in the research involved the initial academic assessment that was conducted on the students before the second teacher was hired. The teacher followed a standard practice and assessed the students at the beginning of the year. The students were tested to determine where they were at academically and some major deficiencies were identified. Specifically, some curricular areas including mathematics did not appear to have been addressed during the previous year for the students. Having a class where the entire group was over a year below grade level in a core curricular subject was a new phenomenon for the experienced teacher and was a major cause for concern for an early career teacher with no previous teaching experience. This resulted in intense academic instruction, particularly in the first few months, in order for the students to meet the current year’s curricular outcomes because the students needed to be up to the appropriate

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