DETERMINING EFFECTIVE MENTOR DISPOSITIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MENTOR TEACHERS

KATRINA HOLLY HURDLE
Bachelor of Science, University of Lethbridge, 2011
Bachelor of Education, University of Lethbridge, 2011

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KATRINA HOLLY HURDLE

Dr. S. Pelech   Assistant Professor   Ph.D.
Project Supervisor

Dr. D. Burleigh   Assistant Professor   Ph.D.
Project Committee Member

Dedication

For my parents; Ian and Wendy

and my husband, Dustin.

Abstract

This project attempts to answer the question, what dispositions do effective mentor teachers possess? Although there is a plethora of information regarding the topic of effective mentors, it is primarily from the perspective of student teachers or university consultants. It is for this reason that current teacher mentors will be interviewed to examine the question from an alternative perspective. Ten teachers who currently teach at the high school level and have had a student teacher within the past five years will be subjected to an auditorily recorded one-on-one interview. The interviews will be analyzed through thematic analysis and the results will be mapped back to previously published research. The dispositions identified by mentor teachers during the interviews will be mapped to the dispositions previously identified in the literature. This project will demonstrate that mentor teachers do hold common beliefs and value similar dispositions when compared to student teachers and university consultants.

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Secondly, I would like to thank Lethbridge School District #51 for allowing me to solicit their teachers as potential interview candidates. Without their willingness to do so, this project would not have been possible.

Lastly, but of equal importance, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful mentors who allowed me to interview them. Their commentary and insights were extremely thoughtful and thought-provoking. Not to mention, it was refreshing to hear their views and realize that they hold the process of mentorship in high regard. For me, the highlight of this journey, was the new knowledge I gained and constructed through conversations with various mentors.

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Introduction and Rationale

In Canada, the majority, if not all, teacher education programs include two primary components: university-based coursework and school-based practicums (Falkenberg, 2010). The wide-spread implementation of this model suggests that the practicum experience is a highly-valued method for educating preservice teachers. As with most practicum experiences, experienced teachers are paired with practicum students to facilitate their transition into schools and offer supervision and support during their stay. Therefore, supervising teachers play a vital role in the development of preservice teachers and directly influence the direction and future of the teaching profession significantly. As this is the case, it is important to investigate and understand the role that mentor teachers play in the mentor-mentee relationship. A significant amount of work exists that examines the role of teacher mentors and mentorship in the development of preservice teachers (Arshayskaya, 2015; Bullough & Draper, 2004; Falkenberg, 2010; Hudson, 2013; Hirschkorn, 2009; and Mena & Clarke, 2015). Some works identify and describe attributes and skills that effective mentors possess, largely from the perspective of the practicum students and not the mentors themselves (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Hirschkorn, 2009; and Larkin, 2013). Therefore, I would like to answer the following research question: from a mentor teacher's perspective, what dispositions do effective mentor teachers value and possess?

My interest in the topic of mentorship stems from my first experience as a mentor teacher. The student teacher under my mentorship decided to leave part way through his practicum and no longer plans to become a teacher. Although he made this decision because he was underprepared and, consequently, extremely distressed during practicum,

I wonder whether I adequately fulfilled my role as a mentor teacher. Could I have done something differently to create a more nurturing environment for this individual? When asked, I agreed to be a mentor, as I feel confident and prepared for this role, and although I was slightly nervous, I felt I would be an effective mentor. After all, I have over a decade of coaching experience and I remember my own practicum experiences quite clearly, including what I perceive as favourable dispositions that my own mentor teachers possess. This approach is perhaps not so uncommon, Butler and Cuenca (2012), note that, "mentors often base their conceptualization of mentoring around their own experiences as students, student teachers, and in-service teachers" (p. 297).

As I continue to reflect and question my own mentoring experience, my attention has become focused on the complicated relationship that exists between the mentor teacher and student teacher and their respective roles within the relationship, and ultimately the school environment. Foremost I wonder, what dispositions do both mentor and student teachers require to foster a relationship that will lead to a successful practicum experience; also, how can the practicum experience allow for growth for both the practicum student and mentor teacher? However, as stated earlier, I quickly began to realize that much of the research is focused on the student teachers' viewpoint rather than that of the mentor. Most of the literature I examined, which will be discussed in more detail shortly, often defines a successful mentor teacher's dispositions from the perspective of the student teacher. Therefore, the identification of favourable dispositions is generally from one perspective. Although a very valuable perspective, it discounts another valuable perspective: that of the mentor teacher. To this end, I narrowed my focus to examine the views of mentor teachers exclusively. I am interested to discover

how similar or dissimilar the perspectives of student teachers are to the perspectives of mentor teachers. In addition to valuing mentor teachers' perspectives, I hope my work will discover commonalities amongst mentors' dispositions and beliefs surrounding mentorship, and perhaps cause them to reflect upon their own pedagogy and role as a mentor teacher.

Literature Review

After examining the literature, I narrowed my focus to encapsulate only the perspectives of mentor teachers. I made this decision for several reasons. Firstly, mentor teachers are an extremely valuable asset in teacher education programs. Arshavskaya (2015) notes, "a mentor (a more expert teacher) can play an important role in the development of a pre-service teacher's instructional expertise during a field-based practicum" (p. 3). Butler and Cuenca (2012) categorize the practicum experience as an "invaluable component" (p. 296) of preparing student teachers, as well as "an essential part of teacher learning" (p. 296), further emphasizing the enormous role mentor teachers play in teacher development. Not only do practicums allow student teachers to gain practical experience in the profession, they also serve to enhance the quality of education by providing a link between theory and practice. Mena and Clarke (2015) argue that the practical experience gained by student teachers is crucial to the ongoing development and improvement of educational practices. Falkenberg (2010) would agree that the practical experience is extremely important for student teachers and the evolution of the teaching profession but worries that there is a disconnect between theory and practice. He makes mention of, "a prominent 'washing out' effect of the university-based pre-service learning once graduates move into the in-service phase" (p. 556). Anderson and Freebody

(2012) discuss this perceived dichotomy between theory and practice and note a common conception that, "theory is delivered in university and practice is delivered in school settings" (p. 360). Throughout Anderson and Freebody's (2012) article it is apparent that they value both theoretical and practical components but recognize that if teacher preparation programs are to evolve progressively, a reconciliation between theory and practice is necessary.

This apparent disconnect between what students are learning in their university courses compared to their practicums, demonstrates that teacher mentors should play an imperative role in closing the gap between theory and practice, if they are not the ones promoting it. Bullough Jr. and Draper (2004) observe a clash of opinions between a teacher mentor and university consultant when examining the triad relationship between the student teacher, teacher mentor, and university consultant. Ultimately, the student teacher viewed the mentor teacher's feedback as, "realistic, practical and pragmatic" (p. 415) and the university consultant's advice as, "impractical and unrealistic, filled with good ideas but not for high school teaching" (p. 415). Mentors have a great deal of influence over the development and opinions of student teachers, and therefore must demonstrate, to student teachers, that theory and practice can work harmoniously, and that each is important to consider when reflecting on pedagogy. Falkenberg (2010) also points out that what happens during a student teacher's practicum experience will ultimately shape their beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and learning. Again, illustrating that the degree to which mentor teachers value or incorporate theory into their own pedagogy will influence a student teacher beliefs and pedagogy. Overall, mentor

teachers are important for teacher development and the continued growth of the teaching profession in general.

Recently, a mentor teacher's role has shifted. As Arshavskaya (2015) suggests, mentoring has moved from a primarily supervisory role to more of a collaborative approach with the mentor teacher as a coach. By viewing a mentor teacher as a coach, the qualities of an effective coach can be translated to the mentoring process. Coaches, like teachers, have the experience and expertise in their respective positions, and although they are working alongside either an athlete or student teacher, it is their responsibility to take the first steps in building a cooperative relationship. Perhaps the most foundational step in fostering a strong relationship is for mentor teachers to recognize that student teachers come with their own unique school experiences and therefore their own preconceived notions regarding the profession of teaching (Larkin, 2013). It is unrealistic for mentors to assume that student teachers will mirror their own teaching practices since they have their own set of prior experiences. Every aspect of how a student teacher behaves during their practical experiences is very much grounded in their past experiences with school. Falkenberg and Raus (2014) echo this sentiment with the following statement, "a teacher's self is characterised by his/her behaviour, competencies, beliefs, identity and mission" (p.104). They further affirm, "this means that teaching cannot be seen as being solely a matter of a teacher's behaviour and competency, but also a matter of his/her beliefs, identity and mission" (p. 105). Keeping this in mind, it is the mentor teacher's task to help the student teacher reflect on their past experiences and recognize that these experiences have contributed to the decisions they make as a teacher.

Mena and Clarke (2015) stress that the relationship between mentor and mentee is extremely important in activating this reflexivity and critical learning. Critical learning is described by Mena and Clarke (2015) as a process that supports student teachers in their development of skills and knowledge, as well as socialization into the teaching profession. To foster this critical thinking and learning mentors must have a positive relationship with their mentee. Additionally, they must understand their mentee's past schooling experiences and their overall teaching philosophy in order to ask focused questions that incite critical thinking through reflection. Mentors, like coaches, need not attempt to change the student teacher, but rather recognize their strengths and play to those strengths, thus allowing them to become a successful teacher.

Moreover, Mena and Clarke (2015) identify that the, "key functions of the mentoring relationship…are: challenge, motivation, and support" (p. 50). Like coaches, mentor teachers are also responsible for providing scaffolding for student teachers (ST). Mentors must recognize when it is appropriate to introduce various complexities of teaching by recognizing their student teacher's capabilities. Mena and Clarke (2015) provide some sound advice for doing so:

> In an early learning stage, such as the one where STs are immersed in the practicum setting, specific instructions, rules and procedures are needed to first engage in and move within the complexities of teaching. Once these elements are assimilated, the ST can attend more fully to higher levels of professionalization (i.e. critical reflection, sharing new ideas, feeling confident, etc.). (p. 70)

For example, being the first to engage to foster a professional relationship can help to create a comfortable environment and allow for candid discussions between the mentor and student teacher.

Outside of encouraging student teachers to actively reflect to elicit critical thinking, the relationship between a mentor teacher and student teacher is an important step in the student teacher's transition into the professional community (Malderez, 2009). Butler and Cuenca (2012) identify three major conceptions of teacher mentors – teacher mentor as: instructional coach, emotional support system and socializing agent. These conceptions share many commonalities with those already mentioned. Butler and Cuenca (2012) also provide a detailed description of the role of an instructional coach, which not surprisingly draws many parallels to coaching in other domains:

> Mentors as instructional coaches observe and evaluate instructional practice and provide constructive feedback aimed at improving the methods and techniques of preservice teachers…helping preservice teachers refine practice, deepen collegiality, increase professional dialogue, and think more deeply about their work. (p. 299)

They further mention the important role instructional coaches play in eliciting reflection within student teachers, "instructional coaches help preservice teachers look back to examine experiences, become aware of essential aspects of the experience, and help craft alternative solutions" (p. 300). Through the adoption of a coaching model, this transition can be supported. Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) further support the notion that the mentor-mentee relationship is complex by stating, "mentoring goes beyond technical advice and emotional support to help shape and develop a novice's conceptualization and thinking

about the teaching and learning process" (p.118). Mentors clearly play a vital role, not only in teacher education programs, but in the continued evolution of teaching as a profession. Therefore, understanding the intricacies of the mentor-mentee relationship is paramount.

Beyond the mentor role being a primary component in teacher development, most of the literature emphasizes the dispositions and skills of the mentor teacher more heavily than those of the student teacher. For example, Larkin (2013) provides ten tips that mentoring teachers should attempt to incorporate when mentoring a student teacher; suggesting that the mentor teacher has the greatest impact on the development of the mentor-mentee relationship, when compared to the student teacher. Another common theme in the literature is that effectiveness of a mentor teacher is based on the dispositions and skills they possess. However, these valuable skills and dispositions are considered from perspectives other than those of the mentor teachers themselves. For instance, Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) write:

> Our data suggest that student teachers want frequent, direct feedback that includes specific suggestions *and* they want high quality questions that prompt them to reflect upon their own practice, decision making, and beliefs about teaching. Given this dual desire, cooperating teachers should consider ways to balance the *type* of feedback provided as well as consider *when* to provide different types of feedback. (p. 126)

The above quotation synthesizes the work of Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) who attempted to compile a list of dispositions and skills that effective mentor teachers should have, that would contribute to a quality practicum experience for the student teacher. The work of

Bullough Jr. and Draper (2004), on the other hand, examine the relationship between the student teacher, mentor teacher and university consultant, yet their three methods of collecting data only involved the student teacher. Once more, indicating the underrepresentation of mentor teachers' perspective. Although it is important to consider the needs of practicum students, it is equally as important to consider the views of mentor teachers.

A systematic review of the literature has resulted in the following as dispositions that effective mentor teachers possess: being considerate (Larkin, 2013), being growth-oriented (Bullough Jr. & Draper, 2004), being supportive (Bullough Jr. & Draper, 2004; Larkin, 2013; Mena & Clarke, 2015; and Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012), and being amiable (Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). It is necessary to keep in mind that this list is not exhaustive and that effective mentor teachers likely possess a myriad of other beneficial dispositions. I identified these dispositions in particular because of their continued recurrence and strong representation in the literature that I reviewed. Notably, these are dispositions that are primarily valued by student teachers, university faculty, and researchers but not necessarily mentor teachers.

For the four dispositions that I identified as the most valuable, I created definitions grounded in the literature. The following section outlines a working definition of each disposition for purpose of this project.

Dispositions of Effective Mentor Teachers

    Considerate. Mentors must recognize that their experiences have shaped their pedagogy and that the student teacher will have a different set of experiences that will inform their pedagogy. Larkin (2013) reiterates this with, "student teachers also come

with their own ideas about teaching formed from their own schooling as a guide to best practice" (p. 39). Therefore, mentor teachers must be considerate of these different experiences and allow the student teacher to develop pedagogy that is meaningful to them.

Growth-oriented. Good mentor teachers considered mentoring as a part of their own professional development and view the mentoring process as an opportunity for growth, for both themselves and the student teacher. Bullough Jr. and Draper (2004) mention, "mentoring and supervision ought not be only about an intern or student teacher's growth and development but about the mentor's and supervisor's professional development as well" (p. 419). Although the mentor will have a great deal of knowledge to impart, they must recognize that new knowledge can be created through mentor-mentee collaboration. As much as the practicum experience is for the growth and development of the student teacher, mentor teachers have the capacity to learn from the experience as well. Mena and Clarke (2015), note that mentoring can generate new knowledge through critical learning as the mentor partakes in providing formative and reflective feedback to the student teacher. Mentors who consider mentorship as a process of growth for themselves, will likely be successful fostering this mindset amongst practicum students.

Supportive. The literature has identified a few strategies that are useful for mentor teachers to provide a supportive environment. The mentor teacher can provide support by giving the student teacher logistical support, the freedom to experiment and formative feedback to cause them to reflect on their practice. Although it is important to permit student teachers the freedom to try various strategies, it is also important to

provide them with logistical support (Larkin, 2013). Teacher mentors may be supportive by providing the student teacher with long-range plans or other useful planning tools. These logistical supports are important, but they should not deter the student teacher from deviating from their mentor teacher's plan. Mentor teachers must create an environment for student teachers to experiment. By affording student teachers the freedom to experiment with a myriad of teaching strategies, they will in turn develop their own unique pedagogy suited to their personality. Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) note that student teachers value a balance between freedom and some direction, "our data reflect student teacher desire to experience both direct modeling and freedom to experiment" (p. 126). Through experimentation, student teachers will likely become reflective and alter their practice accordingly. Mentors are an important component in this reflective work as they encourage the student teacher to consider theoretical and practical knowledge stimutaneously as they reflect (Bullough Jr. & Draper, 2004; Mena & Clarke, 2015; and Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012).

   Amiable. Similarly, to creating a supportive environment, mentor teachers must also be approachable to foster a cooperative atmosphere. Amiable mentors can begin forming a professional and trusting relationship with the student teacher. The trust and professionalism that develops between the mentor and student teacher will create an environment in which open and forthright communication is possible. Larkin (2013) references the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship in fostering direct and honest communication, "the cooperating teacher and student teacher must be able to express their expectations and needs at the beginning of the student teaching experience

and keep open lines of communication throughout student teaching" (p. 42). The importance of clear and continual communication was further emphasized.

External to the above dispositions, I have also identified procedural resources and declarative resources that effective mentor teachers possess. Procedural resources refer to skills, while declarative resources denote knowledge, specifically, practical knowledge. Although these procedural and declarative resources are important for being a successful mentor, I have decided to focus on the dispositions defined above to maintain an appropriate scope of inquiry to adequately attend to and answer my research question. The dispositions I have identified are not exhaustive and I recognized that there may be an alternative set of dispositions required by teacher mentors when the practicum experience is less than ideal. By recognizing these limitations, it allowed me to identify alternative dispositions as noted by the mentor teachers during interview sessions.

Methodology

Semi-Structured Interviews

As my research was aimed at learning about the effective dispositions of mentor teachers from the perspectives of mentors, I opted for a case study approach and chose to conduct semi-structured interviews (Barriball & While, 1994) with mentor teachers. Semi-structured interviews were advantageous as is they provided me with the flexibility to explore any unplanned lines of questioning, where suitable. This benefit is further supported by Barriball and While (1994),

> They are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of
> respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable
> probing for more information and clarification of answers (p. 330).

Recognizing the complex nature of mentorship, I opted for semi-structured interviews for its flexibility when interviewing mentor teachers.

Case Study

By conducting interviews and examining the process of mentorship through the experiences of mentor teachers, the research methodology implemented was a case study approach. According to Yin (2003), a case study method allows a researcher to answer the how and why, while simultaneously considering the context. This qualitative method of conducting research allowed for detailed accounts of a complex environment; something that can be challenging to achieve through experimental research. Furthermore, it allowed me to gather and converge data from a variety of sources. In this case, the sources were the mentor teachers and the data were their experiences as mentors. Additionally, using the case study method, in conjunction with semi-structured interviews had the potential to unveil new hypotheses that can direct future research.

Despite the potential of a case study approach, an obvious draw-back of its use is that it cannot be applied to a broader population. Although I recognized this as a disadvantage, it was not a concern in the case of this project. The purpose of my research question was to discover whether mentor teachers agreed with the dispositions already identified in the literature, not how many, or whether all, mentor teachers agree. Therefore, my only concern was the views of the mentors I was interviewing and not mentor teachers as a collective.

Methods

Data Collection

Following approval from both the University of Lethbridge Ethics committee and Lethbridge School District No. 51, I emailed district high school teachers, explained my project briefly and asked them to contact me if they were interested in being interviewed on the topic of mentorship. The only parameters described in my initial email, that teachers needed to meet, were that they currently taught high school and had mentored a student teacher within the previous five years. Once participants agreed, I emailed them additional information regarding my project, the consent form and interview questions (see Appendix A). The interview questions were given in advance, allowing the participants time to consider their responses prior to the interview. Once the consent form was signed by each interviewee, each participant and I decided upon a location and time to meet. Upon meeting and prior to conducting the interview, I further explained my research to each participant. I mentioned that most of the views regarding effective mentors were generally from the perspective of student teachers and that I was hoping to gain insight from mentors. I was conscious of not sharing the dispositions that I had already identified in the research to maintain the validity of each participants' responses. Participants also chose a pseudonym to be referred to during the interview and to maintain their anonymity during the written analysis. I further explained, to each participant, that the interview questions provided in advance were a guide and that they should feel comfortable to share anything beyond the scope of the questions. The semi-structured interviews ranged from ten minutes to thirty minutes in length. This style of interview ensured that the participants were not constrained and allowed to expand on their experiences. Therefore, this method had the potential of leading to insights that had

not yet been considered in this area of research. To begin the interview, I asked some preliminary questions to provide context to each mentor's experience and to demonstrate the diversity of the participants. The questions included: the length of their teaching career, the subjects and grade levels they had taught and how many student teachers they had mentored over their careers. It was my hope that by selecting and interviewing participants with a similar context to my own, it would lead to candid interviews as the participants would feel valued and comfortable. This did in fact prove true; each participant seemed to be completely comfortable and open with me. Further reassurance was also offered to each participant, although I was recording them, I would be the only person listening to the recorded interview.

Participants

I interviewed ten high school teachers with varying years of teaching experience, subjects taught and number of times being a mentor teacher. The teaching and mentoring context of each participant is outlined below. It was important, to me, that the selected participants had different teaching contexts and backgrounds to ensure that any exhibited commonalities were not due to similar teaching contexts, but rather mentoring experiences. Therefore, the only similarities amongst the participants, known prior to the interviews, were that they all currently taught high school and had mentored a student teacher within the past five years.

Angelina. Angelina has taught for eleven years and teaches various Math courses for grades nine through twelve. To date, Angelina has mentored five student teachers.

Betsy. Betsy is in her fifteenth year of teaching and has taught a range of subjects and grade levels. Although her current focus is grade nine through twelve Social Studies,

she has also taught grades six through eight, as well as the following subjects: Science, Psychology, Computers and Interior Design. Betsy has mentored eight student teachers.

Ernie. Ernie has also taught a variety of grade levels, spanning from first grade to twelfth grade. Ernie currently teaches English Language Arts (ELA), is in her sixth year of teaching and has mentored two student teachers.

Fred. Fred, like Ernie, also teaches ELA to high school students. He has taught for twenty-one years and has mentored seven student teachers.

Karl. Karl currently teaches Social Studies to grade nine through twelve students, but similarly to Betsy has taught a variety of courses in his seventeen-year teaching career, including: ELA, English as a Second Language (ESL), Physical Education (PE), Photography, Psychology and Special Education. Karl has the most experience as a mentor teacher, having mentored twelve student teachers.

Peter. Peter was the most experienced teacher, in terms of years of teaching, having taught for twenty-four years. Over his career, he has taught a range of courses and grade levels. He has taught students from grades six through twelve, in the subject areas of: Math, Social Studies, Computers, PE and Construction Technology. Peter has mentored two student teachers.

Regina. Regina has taught for thirteen years and in this time has mentored eight student teachers. Currently, Regina teaches a variety of Math and Science courses at the high school level.

Ron. Ron, like many of the others, has taught a variety of courses, but his current focus is on Social Studies and PE at the high school level. Over his ten-year teaching career, Ron has mentored one student teacher.

Susan. Susan teaches a variety of Science courses spanning grades nine through twelve. Susan has taught within high school for her entire thirteen years of teaching and has mentored seven student teachers, three of whom are now her colleagues.

Vincent. Over the course of fifteen years, Vincent has taught nearly ever grade from kindergarten to grade twelve. Currently, Vincent teaches high school Math and has mentored six student teachers over the course of her career.

Data Analysis

Once all ten interviews were completed, I began to analyze the recordings via thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as a method for identifying patterns within data, while simultaneously organizing and describing data in detail. The detail that thematic analysis can afford is directly related to its flexibility. Braun and Clarke offered, "thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (p. 5). This inductive approach allowed me to identify common themes and patterns regarding the dispositions that mentor teachers value, along with perceived and common challenges of mentoring a student teacher. Later, I will discuss how these themes relate to those dispositions previously identified.

Initially, I listened to all the recordings. Following my initial listen, I replayed all the interviews again and began to make notes regarding the common themes that

appeared prevalent, but I also noted and considered views that were unique to each participant. I then reviewed my notes and began to create categories based on common themes amongst the recordings. The categories I created were comprised of: positive mentoring experiences, negative mentoring experiences, attributes of successful student teachers, challenges of being a mentor, dispositions of effective mentors and other points of interest. I then analyzed the interviews a third time and made note of which participants described valuable dispositions or challenges of being a mentor teacher. Their responses indicated the dispositions most highly-valued by mentor teachers. Furthermore, I continued to analyze the interviews and began to transcribe the portions of each interview that related to the dispositions of effective mentor teachers and the challenges associated with being a mentor.

Although initially I had noted other categories, including positive and negative experiences of mentorship, as well as attributes that successful student teachers possess, I decided to disregard these categories as they did not directly relate to my initial question: what dispositions do effective mentor teachers possess? Moreover, the negative and positive experiences usually related to the preparedness of student teachers or their willingness to receive feedback and therefore were dependent upon the student teacher rather than the mentor teacher.

In addition to removing these categories, I decided to keep the category related to challenges of being a mentor teacher. As I continued to analyze the interviews, it became apparent that most of the challenges that mentors identified correlated to the effective dispositions of mentor teachers. For example, most interviewees relayed that some challenges could be avoided or their likelihood of occurring diminished depending

whether a mentor teacher possessed certain dispositions. Furthermore, I thought these challenges were important to include because they were insights which I did not anticipate and could potentially direct future research. Additionally, the beauty of thematic analysis is that it allowed for new or unpredicted insights and patterns to come to light, other than those noted earlier (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In my mind, these unanticipated pieces of information are of equal importance to the reaffirmation of the already acknowledged dispositions. Thematic analysis, of each interview, allowed me to focus on the dispositions previously identified, but it also afforded me the opportunity to comment on other insights that emerged from conversations with each interviewee.

Challenges of Mentoring

Upon careful review of the interviews, it became abundantly apparent that there were some common challenges that mentor teachers faced regarding mentorship. Of the challenges described by the mentor teachers, I managed to consolidate them into four categories: having honest conversations, establishing appropriate relationships, uniqueness of each experience and encouraging a holistic view.

Establishing Clear Communication

A common theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of constant and honest communication between the mentor and student teacher. Mentors agreed that conversations with student teachers are an integral part of their development as a teacher; however, they can become challenging when having to address sensitive issues. Peter remarked with; "As a mentor, I think you have to be willing and able to say the hard things." The "hard things" that Peter is referring to are conversations surrounding a student teacher's professional behaviour generally, or perhaps their

unpreparedness, or criticisms that may be perceived as personal attacks. When I asked

Angela to reflect on her initial mentoring experience as compared to her later mentoring

experience, she recognized that now she makes a conscious effort of being as clear as

possible about her expectations. For example, she provides her student teachers with

planning deadlines prior to entering the classroom, as well as expectations for the

duration and the end of the practicum, to ensure a smooth transition for the students. If

not handled appropriately, the transitions from teacher to student teacher and back to

teacher can be overwhelming for students. Regina also recognized that it is important to

be frank with student teachers, even though some feedback may be perceived as personal.

She described that, sometimes, providing feedback that may seem hurtful is an integral

part of the practicum experience, and like anything challenging she has improved with

each successive experience.

Establishing Appropriate Relationships

Most mentor teachers interviewed identified that building appropriate

relationships could be challenging. However, of those who discussed relationships, many

regarded the challenge to be, how to encourage student teachers to build appropriate

relationships with students; but while for others the challenge was how to build

professional relationships with their assigned student teacher. Of the mentor teachers who

found it challenging to guide student teacher relationships with students, the common

situation was that student teachers could easily become too friendly with students and

therefore, be perceived as a friend by students rather than a teacher. Vincent mentioned

that from time to time a student teacher may want to be well-liked and therefore may

behave more like a friend to the students than a teacher. She notes that the challenge can

be convincing student teachers that there is a difference between being liked and being respected, as a teacher, by the students. Angelina accurately described the common feeling amongst these mentor teachers,

> Upfront and clear…I think they need to make it very clear that the students are not their friends. They can be friendly, but they need to earn their respect very early on with letting the students know their expectations.

Mentor teachers also seemed to find it challenging to balance being a mentor, a colleague or a friend to a student teacher. The mentors I spoke with felt they had a somewhat authoritative role because they were responsible for evaluating student teachers, and this could interfere, or conflict with their collegial role. The evaluative piece of mentoring only added to the complexity of establishing mentor-mentee relationships. Karl proposed that student teachers perceive mentor teachers to be in a position of power, therefore, despite the mentor teacher's best efforts, it can be challenging build collaborative relationships with student teachers.

Angelina and Ernie, both teachers under the age of thirty-five, noted that some student teachers may arrive with the preconceived notion that an instant friendship may form rather than a professional relationship. In speaking with these mentors, it was clear that they were not opposed to a friendship forming organically with their student teacher, but initially the relationship needed to be of a professional nature. During my interview with Ernie, she began to reflect on the mentor teachers she admired, "They were kind, but not my friend." This is something she has found challenging in her own mentoring roles because she had been close in age and the same gender as her student teachers: "I'm a young teacher and the mentees that I have were both young and the same gender as me,

so that line of is there a friendship here?" From these few statements, it is obvious that navigating and striking a balance between mentoring, collaboration and being friendly is a complex task.

Authenticity and the Big Picture

A third challenge and perhaps the most contentious point of nearly all the interviews, was how to ensure that student teachers were focusing on the 'big picture' of teaching and being true to themselves as a developing teacher. The central point to either of these discussions surrounded planning content and the number of resources a mentor teacher should provide their student teachers. In terms of understanding the 'big picture' both Betsy and Karl mentioned that it could be difficult to encourage student teachers to focus on areas other than curriculum. Peter even described one student teacher as being so preoccupied with checking off curricular outcomes, that she frantically rushed through the curriculum without providing students with any formative feedback. He went on to describe that by not checking for student understanding or planning later lessons around students' knowledge, the students became disengaged and consequently her command of the classroom suffered. Peter summed up the above event with the following, "She was trying to do curriculum stuff rather than teaching." Betsy also mentioned that student teachers can be so focused on delivering the content, that they forget to incorporate other important skills into their lessons and long-range planning, for instance critical thinking. There is no doubt that following and delivering the curriculum is extremely important, but what these mentors were attempting to convey is that teaching is more than delivering the curriculum. In these conversations, teaching was about understanding the curricular

objectives well enough to make them meaningful to students and incorporate other valuable skills.

Most of the mentor teachers that I interviewed agreed that the best way to ensure understanding of the curriculum and discovering personal pedagogy, came from building resources and lessons that were unique to the individual teacher. Vincent reflected on her past student teachers and classified successful student teachers as those who constructed their own resources. She attributed their success to this factor because she believes that this process led them to deeply understand the content, and as a result, they were better prepared than those who did not. Karl would likely agree with Vincent's sentiment based on an experience that he had with a student teacher. Karl told me about a student teacher that he provided with materials for an entire course. Rather than adjusting the resources to suit her teaching style, the student teacher did not make any changes to Karl's materials. Karl speculated that she must have found it easier to use something that was already prepared. He stated that when he observed the student teacher's lessons, their teaching seemed inauthentic. "Watching her teach, you could tell she wasn't totally sure why she was doing what she was doing." He further described that his materials were developed to suit the way he taught and therefore his materials did not suit his student teacher's teaching style. Ernie also admitted to grappling with the idea of how many resources she should provide her student teachers. She believes that developing resources, as a student teacher, is an important part of the practicum experience and important preparation for future teaching positions, as they may be placed in a position where creating resources is a necessity.

Furthermore, Ernie believes that as a teacher, or student teacher, you must be authentic to yourself, and what is more authentic than creating materials that embody your identity as a teacher? Ernie acknowledged that perhaps having student teachers create all their own materials is not the right answer, but neither is providing them with everything. She continues to search for the appropriate balance and admitted her continued struggle by disclosing the following,

> I didn't feel good, just handing stuff over… I struggled with not being authentic to who I was. It's not necessarily that I want them to be authentic to who I am. I want to show them what authenticity is for me, and then for them to develop their own sense of authenticity.

As we continued to discuss, Ernie concluded that the best compromise would be to give some resources at the start of the practicum, but as the student teacher progresses and becomes more comfortable with their teaching assignment, they would need to create resources that were authentic to themselves. Angelina, on the other hand, believes that mentors should insist on student teachers creating their own resources, and much like Ernie, she too stated that creating lesson materials is an integral part of the learning process. "I feel that by not giving them resources they learn how to develop them…They gain the skills that they need to teach a subject area." She specified that when she initially meets with a student teacher, she is clear about her expectation; that they have planned their content prior to teaching. She rationalized that student teachers can make minor adjustment as needed, rather than "planning as they go".

As the topic of resources continued to arise, it also became obvious that the number of resources shared by the mentor, or even the discussion surrounding resources,

can have massive potential for damaging the mentor-mentee relationship. Susan described a situation in which she felt taken advantage of by a mentee. She explained providing a practicum student with resources that she had developed once he ran out of his own. She goes on to describe that he had only planned two weeks of material for a five-week practicum. She concluded her story with the following, "he basically just used all of my stuff and didn't put in any extra effort or anything…I felt that I was kind of used a little bit." What appeared to be a contentious topic was further verified by Karl. He expressed that for the past decade his department has continually discussed the issue of how many resources mentors should provide to student teachers. His department has also discussed whether they should provide student teachers with answer keys to their materials. He defined answer keys as "an easy out", meaning that student teachers given answer keys may not learn the content well enough. The consequences of this can be problematic with respect to, the development of the student teacher's authenticity, and their ability to respond when questioned by students. Although some of what has been discussed may be viewed as mentor teachers unwilling to collaborate with student teachers, I believe that most mentor teachers truly value what can be learned from developing one's own resources. The learning perhaps occurs from slowing down and methodically thinking about how to best present information to students, or how to develop important skills such as critical thinking, while engaging with curricular objectives. I am also of the opinion that many of the teachers who discussed resource development did so because they tend to make most of their own, and therefore recognized the value of this process. From the above, it is apparent that to foster a holistic mindset, mentor teachers must clearly communicate their expectations and goals to their

student teachers. Emphasizing that communication can mitigate mentorship challenges and therefore is an extremely important facet of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Each Mentoring Experience is Unique

The challenge of determining the appropriate amount of resources to share with a student teacher relates to the next challenge of being a mentor, as identified by the mentor teachers. The final challenge that I have chosen to focus on, is the challenge of recognizing that every student teacher has a unique background, therefore, each mentoring and practicum experience will be unique. A one-size-fits all approach is illogical and thus, mentor teachers must be capable and willing to adapt to each new mentoring experience. Betsy described this very notion when speaking about how much support she has given her student teachers; "It's a case by case situation. Because if you have someone strong, I tend to give more freedom… you give them what they need." Determining what a student teacher needs can be a complicated task as several mentor teachers stated. For example, Ron mentioned that one of the roles of a mentor teacher is to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of student teachers and provide them with specific and individualized feedback. Ron revealed that mentor teachers should adapt their strategies depending on what the student teacher requires to be successful. Ron instructed, "One of the things I think with talking with other teachers, or myself, the student teachers you get are so different. You really have to be able to … adapt, I think you have to be able to adapt and go from there." In connection with this, Karl reasoned that mentors must be cautious of which areas they draw a student teacher's attention to because feedback can be perceived as a personal slight. Angelina also recognized this challenge but has learned to phrase feedback as "what do they (student teachers) want

their classroom to look like?" She claimed she has had more success in phrasing her feedback in this manner because it frames it in the way of how the student teacher would like to mold their classroom rather than a personal attack. Finally, Ernie has learned from her own experience as a mentor teacher how greatly student teachers can vary. She recounted two mentoring experiences where she felt as though she took the same approach, but the outcomes were vastly different. She described her approach as being firm but supportive and encouraged each mentee to create their own resources. At the end of the practicum, one mentee thanked her because she had discovered a lot about herself as a teacher, while the other seemed distant and resentful. These two very different outcomes demonstrated that a key challenge with mentorship is the uniqueness of every situation, and despite similar variables, each experience is unique.

Dispositions of Effective Mentors

From the synopsis of the interviews above, it is overwhelmingly apparent that mentoring is no easy task and there are several challenges from the perspective of mentors. These challenges map nicely to the dispositions possessed by effective mentor teachers, again, from the perspective of mentor teachers. For example, mentor teachers believe that effective mentors value communication, but sometimes find it challenging to have open conversations with student teachers because they do not want their criticisms to be viewed as personal attacks. Valuing communication is just one of the many dispositions that the mentor teachers identified. The interviewees also believe that mentor teachers should be confident, flexible, approachable, supportive and value the process of mentorship.

Valuing the Mentoring Process

Of the teachers I interviewed, all of them seemed to place high value on the mentoring process. Not only with the regards of developing future teachers but also for their own continued growth as a teacher. Many mentioned that they found it refreshing to witness new teaching methods or found themselves reflecting on their own pedagogy because of their conversations with student teachers. Susan stated, "I feel like it's one of the best ways as a teacher to learn yourself." She added that mentoring, and practicum experiences are vital to teacher preparation and the education system in general. Susan's statement regarding her own development as a teacher and her belief in the crucial role of practicum experiences are supported by the research of Mena and Clarke (2015), as well as Bullough Jr. & Draper (2004).

The mentors also conveyed that to be an effective mentor, mentors need to be fully engaged in the mentoring process. As Betsy phrased it, "Someone who is willing to put in the extra work when someone is struggling, to help them succeed as opposed to letting them crash and burn." Similarly, Peter remarked the importance of support with the following, "I don't think that student teachers should be left alone to keep failing, to keep doing the same mistakes… I don't think that's productive for anybody." Indicating that he values the mentoring process and believes that mentors need to be present to offer suitable advice. He also alluded that some teachers become mentors because they believe it is an opportunity to have a break from teaching, as student teachers are assigned some of their workload. He followed this idea with, "We have to make sure that we're being a mentor for the right reasons. Not because we don't want to be in the classroom… We need to mentor to develop teachers." This idea of becoming a mentor to provide some

reprieve, has perhaps evolved from how teachers were mentored in the past. Conceivably this laissez-fair approach is perpetuated as teachers mentor as they were mentored. Karl offered some insight by recounting his own experience as a student teacher,

> I think when I first started mentoring, I thought about what my mentor was like… I'm a mentor but I have no evaluative authority… but I think this misconception that came with that, on my part, then I don't need to be as involved and I think maybe early, I wasn't as involved as I should've been, but I thought that was the way it was. I think I was too hands-off the first time, but then again, that was the culture I came from… My mentor was almost non-existent… My administrator wrote a report at the end and I was actually a little offended because they had never stepped into my classroom… so I should've known better to be more hands-on early, because I didn't have that positive experience.

He suggested that mentors have a great deal to offer but must be present in the classroom and engaged in the mentorship process to offer anything. Ernie on the other hand, remembers her mentors fondly and because of her positive experiences views practicum experiences as an integral part of teacher development.

> You're looking at it (the role of a mentor) in terms of someone with more experience. You can always learn from someone with more experience… It's not, I know better than you, but just at this point I just know more than you because of my experience and if I can impart that on you… I like the term mentor because I think fondly of any of the mentors I have.

Regardless of the experience these mentor teachers had as student teachers, they clearly value the role of mentors in teacher development, as well as their own continued professional development.

Communicating Effectively

Beyond holding the mentorship process in high regard, mentor teachers also revere a mentor's ability to communicate effectively. They recognize that communicating and providing feedback to student teachers is not always an easy task, but a necessary task nonetheless. Angelina believes that effective mentor teachers are not afraid to have what she referred to as, "difficult conversations" with their mentee, whether the conversation is offering feedback or causing them to reflect through questioning, each is a valuable part of a practicum student's development. Karl reasoned that reflectivity can be fostered through questioning which stems from clear communication. He supported this with the following statement,

> Obviously, communication is really important… In terms of communication, you have to be able to be honest with your intern, but you have to develop a relationship so that they trust that you are doing it for their best interest. Be clear about: here's a suggestion or I *need* you to do this.

The concept of clarity came up in many of the conversations surrounding communication. Fred attributed any negative mentoring experience to miscommunication during the early stages of the practicum. He has since made a point to clearly establish his expectations, with his student teachers, at the commencement of the practicum to ensure a positive practicum experience. The idea of clear expectations and roles being established early was also mentioned by Susan, Vincent and Angelina.

Confidence

The disposition of being able to clearly communicate relates well to another disposition identified by many of the mentors interviewed; confidence. However, confidence was described dualistically: confident in their ability as a teacher and in their knowledge of subject matter. Angelina described her best mentor as extremely confident in her ability to manage a classroom, and therefore, Angelina valued any feedback related to classroom management. Ernie reflected on her own practicum experiences and described her greatest mentors as being particularly confident with curricular content and therefore capable of providing curriculum-focused feedback. Being confident with curricula was important to many of the mentors, as not only does it assist in providing feedback, but also allowed the mentor to become a substitute if a practicum student is absent. Ron and Regina described instances where their student teacher had unplanned absences, and both were required to teach the student teacher's classes. Hopefully, an unlikely scenario but it does exemplify the importance of the mentor knowing the curricular objectives well enough, to intervene with little or no advanced notice.

Flexibility

Flexibility and being open-minded are additional dispositions that were clearly identified by mentor teachers, as a necessity of being an effective mentor. Mentor teachers recognized that the practicum experience allows student teachers to explore and develop their own pedagogy. Betsy described a good mentor teacher as, "Someone who is not set in their ways.". In other words, not expecting the student teacher to mirror their mentor's teaching, but rather develop their own pedagogy. Ron further acknowledged that mentor teachers have no choice but to be flexible because every student teacher is

unique. Likewise, Ernie recognized that every student teacher is different and values the disposition of flexibility due to her own experience as a student teacher. She described her experience as being provided with all the course materials and was expected to teach like her mentor. She wished she had had the freedom to experiment during her practicum. From this experience and her own experience as teacher, she believes that student teachers need to develop their own resources to develop their own teaching style.

The disposition of flexibility is linked to the challenge previously identified: recognizing that each student teacher comes with their own entity that will ultimately guide their practice. The willingness to give student teachers freedom during their practicum experience seemed to stem from the belief amongst mentor teachers that by giving student teachers freedom they will be viewed as a teacher rather than a student teacher, thus providing them with a realistic teaching experience. Angelina expressed, "They need to figure out what works for them." She also revealed that without freedom, sometimes student teachers may be used as scapegoats by students and parents, as there is a stigma surrounding student teachers. Both Angelina and Vincent believe that if a student teacher is granted flexibility in the classroom, they will be viewed as a teacher rather than student teacher and students, along with parents, will be less likely to use them as a scapegoat. Furthermore, freedom not only allows them to experiment with pedagogy but also with how they would like to manage their classroom. Affording student teachers with the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and shortcomings. Fred rationalized that it is important for student teachers to, "Sink or swim a little bit... Sometimes being unsuccessful is a good learning experience as well." Illustrating that student teachers struggling at some points during their practicum, is important to their

development as a teacher. Fred added "a little bit", demonstrating that mentors do not want the struggle to be catastrophic and therefore mentors must know when to step in; yet another challenge as this juncture will differ with each student teacher.

Supportive and Approachable

Through providing student teachers with flexibility, it is inevitable that they will make mistakes and will require guidance and support from their mentor. Therefore, the final disposition identified by mentor teachers was support. Mentor teachers recognize that student teachers are developing their craft and although they require the freedom to do so, they also require the support and trust of the mentor teacher. This support can be fostered through building a relationship with student teachers and establishing clear communication. Ron believes that mentors must reassure student teachers that even the best laid plans do not always pan out. Something that is true for veteran teachers as well. Susan validated this sentiment by pointing out that the purpose of the practicum experience is to try new things and mistakes are unavoidable. Karl offered that his department encourages their student teachers to take risks, again demonstrating that making mistakes is part of the learning process. As a final point, he remarked that another form of support by mentor teachers is recognizing when to intervene and when to withdraw.

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Mapping Interviews to Literature Review

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When embarking on this project, I had expected mentors to identify some of the dispositions that had already been recognized by previous researchers. However, I did not expect them to highlight every disposition and describe them in a similar manner. The interviewees described each of the four effective dispositions I had identified:

considerate, growth-oriented, supportive and amiable. In addition, they elaborated on the challenges associated with each of the effective dispositions. The challenges associated with the identified dispositions I uncovered were unexpected. In retrospect it is not surprising that the most valued traits were also the most difficult to possess. Even though each of the mentors did not use the exact phrasing I used to describe the dispositions, it was clear from their interviews that the dispositions outlined were those characterized in the literature review. For example, while the interviewees did not highlight considerate as a specific disposition, it was identified by the fact that one of the difficulties with mentorship, was recognizing that each student teacher's background is unique. As mentioned by Ron, mentors have the responsibility to adapt to each mentoring scenario, in the interest of the student teacher. This idea represents the beliefs of researchers like, Larkin (2015) and Mena and Clarke (2015), who state that the student teacher must develop pedagogy that is meaningful to themselves, and what is considered meaningful to a person lies within their past experiences; or the experiences that have shaped them. When teacher mentors recognize this, they are therefore being considerate.

The disposition of being considerate, also related to the flexibility of the mentor. Mentors must relinquish some control and allow the student teachers to experiment within the classroom. Early, I associated flexibility with the disposition of being supportive. The interviewees also associated flexibility with being supportive, and all seemed to be in favour of providing student teachers with the freedom to experiment. They understood that experimentation was a fundamental objective of practical experiences, with the ultimate purpose of allowing student teachers to discover their own pedagogy while being authentic to themselves. Another noteworthy point was the

extensive discussion surrounding resource development which mapped to Paulsen and Sayeski's (2012) research. Paulsen and Sayeski (2012) establish that while student teachers crave flexibility, they also want some direction or logistical supports, such as long-range plans or other useful planning materials. I found this surprising as many mentors conveyed that student teachers were expecting resources beyond planning materials, but perhaps this was because Paulsen and Sayeski's (2012) research was from the student teachers' perspective. Logistical aid would be supported by the mentor teachers interviewed, as the debate was not about providing support and some useful resources, but rather providing student teachers with an entire course that would involve little planning by the student teachers. Ernie, for example, concluded her interview session by pointing out that it would be reasonable to provide student teachers with a higher volume of resources at the commencement of the practicum, but slowly provide them with fewer as they gained confidence.

An additional form of support, also previously identified, was providing student teachers with formative feedback or having conversations which caused them to be reflexive. Bullough Jr. and Draper (2004), Mena and Clarke (2015), and Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) would all attest that mentors are an important influence in a student teacher's development as they promote reflection while also causing student teachers to consider theoretical and practical knowledge. The ability to communicate expectations and feedback was often mentioned by the mentor teachers. Many expressed that through experience they have learned the importance of establishing clear expectations at the beginning of the practicum and continued communication throughout. They also mentioned that providing feedback could be challenging, as they would like their

feedback to be recognized as helpful and not as a personal attack by student teachers. A portion of Regina's interview regarding communication left a lasting impression. She stated that she has learned to phrase feedback as, "what do they want their classroom to look like?" She has noticed that by framing feedback in this manner, student teachers perceive it as constructive and helpful, and do not become defensive. When feedback is addressed in this method, it caused the student teacher to shape their pedagogy through reflection on what they deemed most valuable. To me, this is worth noting as I believe it would be useful for all mentor teachers to approach feedback in this manner.

Even though providing feedback can sometimes be a daunting task, mentor teachers do understand its inherent value. A few even mentioned that a good way to ensure feedback was perceived as constructive was by being approachable and building a trusting relationship. The notion of being approachable corresponds with the disposition of being amiable. The mentors recognized that forming professional and trusting relationships was an important facet in being able to provide student teachers with meaningful feedback. Larkin (2013) may argue that the key to feedback is a professional and trusting relationship, as it creates an environment where open communication is possible. He also mentions, like the interviewees, that it is important to establish this type of relationship at the start of the practical experience, and that this is the responsibility of both the student teacher and mentor teacher. "The cooperating teacher and student teacher must be able to express their expectations and needs at the beginning of the student teaching experience and keep open lines of communication throughout student teaching." (Larkin, 2013, p. 42). Therefore, to provide a student teacher with useful feedback, a

relationship needs to be established initially and for a relationship to be established, the mentor teacher must be approachable.

The final disposition that I identified prior to conducting the interviews, was the notion that mentor teachers must be growth-oriented. From the interviews, there were several ideas that suggested that mentor teachers did in fact view the practicum experience as a catalyst for growth. Not only the growth of the student teacher, but also their own growth. Whether it was through collaboration, like Vincent mentioned; or as Susan said, "I feel like it's one of the best ways as a teacher to learn yourself." Susan further mentioned that it forced her to become a skeptic of her own practice through conversations with her practicum students. Another indication of mentors being growth-oriented, was that they truly valued the mentoring experience. This was demonstrated nicely by both Peter and Betsy. As Peter phrased it, "We have to make sure that we're being a mentor for the right reasons." The "right" reasons being the desire to help develop new teachers and to improve the profession, rather than having a diminished workload or a break from the classroom as student teachers assumes a portion of the mentor teacher's workload. Betsy also remarked that a mentor teacher who values the mentoring process will be involved in the student teacher's development. Their involvement manifests in their willingness to put in extra time or provide extra support to the student teacher; indicating that those who valued the process did not view mentoring as a method of reducing their workload. In fact, it is more likely to cause additional work, but they do not seem to mind as they viewed the mentoring process as a vital part of teacher preparation and a benefit to the educational system.

Future Research

As mentioned previously, I found it surprising that each of the dispositions identified prior to interviewing mentor teachers, were in fact identified and described similarly during the interviews. In this case, since the interviewees' responses match nicely with the literature, I can confirm that some mentor teachers do value the same dispositions as those identified in current and past literature surrounding the topic of mentorship. This also demonstrates that student teachers and mentor teachers do in fact value similar dispositions. Perhaps the disconnect does not lie within the dispositions but the challenges associated with the dispositions. Mentor teachers may reflect on their own practicum experiences and alter their mentoring style according to what they found valuable as student teacher; however, it is not until they experience the role of mentor that they recognize the significant challenges of embodying the desired dispositions. Therefore, although student teachers and mentor teachers value similar dispositions, only mentor teachers can recognize the challenges of being a mentor.

Additionally, the mentor teachers interviewed all have similar contexts. They are high school teachers, in the same city, and all teach within the public-school system; therefore, a case study approach is appropriate and therefore would be appropriate for similar future research. There are however some limitations of the case study methodology, as mentioned earlier. Each interviewee in this study may have volunteered because they hold the process of mentorship in high regard. Therefore, it might be expected that they would value and identify with the dispositions already identified in the research. Consequently, drawing any generalizations beyond this group is difficult. It is for this reason that further research should consider a different method for selecting

mentor teachers to be interviewed. This would possibly improve the extrapolation of any results by including a broader representation of mentor teachers.

Finally, an area that I was hoping to address, but to no avail, is the perceived divide between theoretical and practical knowledge. I would suspect that I was unable to address this question for two reasons. Firstly, those who I interviewed value their role as a mentor and therefore value the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical experiences. Secondly, and more probably, the focus of the interview was surrounding dispositions of effective mentors and the influence of mentors in bridging the gap between theory and practice was secondary. Mena and Clarke (2015) would perhaps support the second statement with the following,

> In the early learning stage… rules and procedure are needed to first engage in and move within the complexities of teaching. Once these elements are assimilated the ST can attend more fully to higher levels of professionalization (i.e. critical reflection, sharing new ideas, feeling confident, etc.) (p. 70).

This is something that the mentors recognized with their statements regarding the uniqueness of each student teacher, as well as their push towards having student teachers focus on the "big picture". The perceived disconnect between what students are learning in their university courses compared to their practicums validates that teacher mentors play an important role in addressing how theory and practice intersect and inform one another in a classroom setting. As such, research regarding the perceived gap between educational theory and practice needs to be explored further in the context of student teaching (Anderson & Freebody, 2012; Bullough Jr. and Draper, 2004; Falkenberg, 2010).

Conclusion

In the above sections, I explore the complex relationship that exists between mentor teachers and student teachers. Mentoring student teachers can be challenging but it is an integral part of teacher education programs. As it is an important facet of many teacher education programs, there has been a significant amount of research attempting to distill the dispositions that effective mentor teachers possess. Although the studies conducted thus far provide some valuable insights into the mentor-mentee relationship, there seems to be a common component missing; the perspective of mentor teachers. Therefore, I attempt to bring the perspective of mentor teachers to the forefront. Through the interviews I conducted, it is evident that mentor teachers value similar mentor dispositions to student teachers and universities, as identified by already existing research. In addition, the dispositions identified by the interviewees relate directly to the challenging features of mentoring student teachers. The challenges associated with being a mentor should be explored further as perhaps this will provide further insight into the dynamic mentor-mentee relationship. Furthermore, these interviews do not provide any significant insight into the gap between theory and practice although many researchers like, Anderson and Freebody (2012), Bullough Jr. and Draper (2004) and Falkenberg (2010), believe that mentor teachers are crucial in diminishing or closing the gap all together. Again, perhaps an examination of the challenges mentors encounter could be a key to understanding this perceived gap. In closing, regardless of the research being conducted surrounding mentorship, the perspectives of mentor teachers are imperative to consider.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter and Interview Questions

Dear potential participant:

Firstly, let me thank you for considering participating in my project. My name is Katrina Hurdle and I am a high school teacher with Lethbridge School District No. 51. Currently, I am completing my Master's degree in Education, specifically in the area of Curriculum and Assessment. As a part of my degree requirements, I've chosen to complete a project comparing the views of mentor teachers to those of practicum students with regards to practicum experiences and effective mentor teachers. To this end, I will be attempting to answer the following question: what dispositions, from the perspective of mentor teachers, do mentor teachers possess? Below is a description of the project, its purpose and what your involvement will entail.

Project Description and Purpose

This project will ask mentor teachers, at the high school level, to reflect on their current or past mentoring experiences with the hopes of answering the following question: from the perspective of mentor teachers, what dispositions do effective mentor teachers possess?

Of the research I've surveyed, regarding mentorship, much of it focusses on the perspectives of practicum students or university consultants. Although teacher mentors are mentioned as an integral part of teacher preparation programs, their perspective regarding the mentorship is minimal. Therefore, your participation in the study would allow for the perspective of mentor teachers to be considered. Your participation would include a one-on-one, voice-recorded interview not exceeding forty-five minutes in length. Your participation would be kept confidential with the option of withdrawing from the project at any time.

On the following page, you will find some useful information outlining your involvement in the project should you wish to participate. If you would like to participate, please read through and complete the Participant Consent Form and return it to me via email at katrina.hurdle@uleth.ca . If you would prefer to make other arrangements regarding the collection of your consent form, please email at the address listed above.

Sincerely,

Katrina Hurdle

Your involvement (Q & A)

What would be required of me?

A recorded, one-on-one interview with me, not exceeding forty-five minutes in length.

Where would we meet?

The interview will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon place where you feel comfortable.

What will my recording be used for? Will anyone else hear it?

No one, with the exception of myself and my supervisor, if necessary, will hear your interview. I will use your interview recording to complete a thematic analysis. The results from this analysis will be reported in my final project report, but only in writing.

How will my identity be protected?

Your identity will only be known by myself. Your consent form, interview recording, and any transcriptions made from the interview will be kept on a password-protected flash drive to which only I will know the password. I will personally complete the interview transcriptions, therefore as stated earlier only myself and supervisor will hear the interview recording.

Prior to the interview, you will select a pseudonym for yourself as a way to maintain your anonymity. This is to ensure that no personal information will be disseminated in any presentations or publications pertaining to this project.

What if I decide I no longer want to participate?

You may decide to withdraw from the project at any time with no explanation required. Should you withdraw prior to being interview there will be no record of their participation – your consent form will be destroyed immediately. However, if you withdraw during or following the interview, you will have the choice of allowing your interview to be used in the thematic analysis. If you withdraw following the submission of the project to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, Dr. Thelma Gunn, your data will no longer be excluded from the project.

What types of questions will be asked during the interview?

The main objective of the semi-structured interview is to answer the following: from the perspective of mentor teachers, what dispositions do effective mentor teachers possess? As this is a broad and complex question, I may also ask some or all of the following questions to dissect the above question. As the interview format is semi-structured, other questions or topics may emerge during the interview process, therefore the list of questions below may not be exhaustive.

1. Tell me about a positive experience you had as a mentor teacher.
2. Tell me about a negative experience you had as a mentor teacher.
3. Did you feel equipped to be a mentor teacher the first time?
4. Did you feel equipped to be a mentor teacher after your first experience as one?
5. What skills or dispositions do mentor teachers require to be effective?

Where can I learn the results of the study?

Following the submission of my final project to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, you may request a copy of my final project my emailing me directly (katrina.hurdle@uleth.ca). I would also be happy to discuss my results in person.

Appendix B

Consent Letter and Waiver

DETERMINING EFFECTIVE MENTOR DISPOSITIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MENTOR TEACHERS

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled "Determining effective mentor dispositions from the perspective of mentor teachers" that is being conducted by Katrina Hurdle. Katrina is a high school teacher employed by Lethbridge School District No. 51 and a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge. You may contact her if you have further questions by phone: 403 894-7151 or email: katrina.hurdle@uleth.ca

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Masters of Education: Curriculum and Assessment. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sharon Pelech. You may contact my supervisor at (403) 329-2446 or sharon.pelech@uleth.ca

The purpose of this research project is to determine what mentor teachers view as effective dispositions to mentor student teachers.

Research of this type is important because of the research I've surveyed; the perspective of mentor teachers is underrepresented when compared to the perspectives of student teachers and university consultants.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are or have been a mentor within the last five years and you teach at a high school level.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a one-on-one, voice-recorded interview with Katrina no longer than forty-five minutes in length, to take place at a mutually agreed upon site. Portions of your voice-recorded interview will be transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis by Katrina. Some of the transcript may be used in the final report. As such, you will have the option of reading the final draft, of the report, prior to it being submitted for review. This is to ensure that the portions of your interview that are used convey your opinions accurately and that you are not inadvertently identified by something you've disclosed. Please indicate at on the next page whether you wish to review the final report prior to submission.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including travelling to and from the interview.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include having your opinion, regarding mentorship, considered thoroughly and perhaps providing some insight into ways of improving pre-service teacher programs or practicum experiences.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you withdraw during the interview process your recording will be deleted at that time. If you do withdraw from the study following the interview but prior to the presenting of the findings, your data will be excluded and deleted. You may also choose to withdraw and but allow me to use your partial or full recording for analysis. In order to withdraw following the interview process, I may be contacted via email at katrina.hurdle@uleth.ca. Once the findings have been presented, your data can no longer be withdrawn.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, Katrina, and her supervisor, if necessary, will be only people revisiting the interview recording and for reporting purposes you will assign yourself a pseudonym.

Data from this study, including: audio recordings, transcriptions and consent forms, will be disposed of five years following the completion and final submission of the project.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of a final project submitted to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, Dr. Thelma Gunn. There is also the potential of this information being presented in future conferences or published papers.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting Office of Research Ethics at (403) 329-2747 or research.services@uleth.ca

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Contact information

Phone:

Email:

Would you like to review the final report prior to its submission?

☐ *Yes, I would like to read the report prior to submission.*
☐ *No, I would not like to read the report prior to submission.*

Signature Consent

Name of Participant	Signature

Preferred Pseudonym	Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.